

# European Literature

**COURSE CODE: M21EG03DE**

Postgraduate Programme in English  
Discipline Specific Elective Course



*Harlequin's Carnival, Joan Miro, 1924*



SREENARAYANAGURU  
OPEN UNIVERSITY

**SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY**

The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

# SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

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*To increase access of potential learners of all categories to higher education, research and training, and ensure equity through delivery of high quality processes and outcomes fostering inclusive educational empowerment for social advancement.*

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Access and Quality define Equity.

**European Literature**  
Course Code: M21EG03DE  
Semester - III

**Discipline Specific Elective Course**  
**Postgraduate Programme in English**  
**Self Learning Material**



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European Literature

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MA English Language and Literature



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Dear

I greet all of you with deep delight and great excitement. I welcome you to the Sreenarayanaguru Open University.

Sreenarayanaguru Open University was established in September 2020 as a state initiative for fostering higher education in open and distance mode. We shaped our dreams through a pathway defined by a dictum 'access and quality define equity'. It provides all reasons to us for the celebration of quality in the process of education. I am overwhelmed to let you know that we have resolved not to become ourselves a reason or cause a reason for the dissemination of inferior education. It sets the pace as well as the destination. The name of the University centres around the aura of Sreenarayanaguru, the great renaissance thinker of modern India. His name is a reminder for us to ensure quality in the delivery of all academic endeavours.

Sreenarayanaguru Open University rests on the practical framework of the popularly known "blended format". Learner on distance mode obviously has limitations in getting exposed to the full potential of classroom learning experience. Our pedagogical basket has three entities viz Self Learning Material, Classroom Counselling and Virtual modes. This combination is expected to provide high voltage in learning as well as teaching experiences. Care has been taken to ensure quality endeavours across all the entities. The PG programme in English Language and Literature is benchmarked with similar programmes of other state universities in Kerala. We assure you that the university student support services will closely stay with you for the redressal of your grievances during your studentship.

The University is committed to provide you stimulating learning experience. The Self Learning Materials have been drawn up with a very clear prescription. It recognizes the autonomy of an adult learner and a journey through the treasures of the curriculum structured with provisions for interactive learning, interrogative reflections on the content and didactic discussion through illustrative scenarios. The University takes a strong position that the learner is to be engaged in a dialogue with the content and the materials are shaped to elicit reflections in the form of questions. The questions of the learner are considered to be the vital milestones in the pedagogy of the system of the University as well as the trajectory of the learner's progression. I would like to request you to bestow your personal attention in generating questions after having an intense dialogue with the content, as it has connection with the internal assessment.

Feel free to write to us about anything that you feel relevant regarding the academic programme.

Wish you the best.



Regards,  
Dr. P. M. Mubarak Pasha

01.03.2024

# CONTENTS

<b>Block 01</b>	<b>Literary Movements</b>	<b>1</b>
Unit 1	From Antiquity to Enlightenment	2
Unit 2	Romanticism, Modernism and Postmodernism	20
<b>Block 02</b>	<b>Poetry</b>	<b>42</b>
Unit 1	Poetic Principles: Rhetoric, Rhapsody and Music - Helen Abbott	43
Unit 2	Poems	51
<b>Block 03</b>	<b>Drama</b>	<b>64</b>
Unit 1	“Dialectics in the Theatre” - Bertolt Brecht	65
Unit 2	Drama	75
<b>Block 04</b>	<b>Fiction</b>	<b>115</b>
Unit 1	“Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes” - Milan Kundera	116
Unit 2	Novel	130
Unit 3	Short Story	163

# Literary Movements

## BLOCK-01

### Block Content

Unit 1 : From Antiquity to Enlightenment

Unit 2 : Romanticism, Modernism and Postmodernism



# Unit 1

## From Antiquity to Enlightenment

### Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ understand the origins of European literature, tracing its roots to classical literary languages such as Latin and Greek.
- ▶ explore the evolving concept of Europe from Antiquity to the Enlightenment.
- ▶ analyze the role of major historical shifts in shaping culture, language, and literary forms, recognizing the agency of individual writers and texts as agents of change.
- ▶ understand the vernacular revolution through the emergence of Romance and Germanic languages as the medium of literary expression.
- ▶ analyze the transformative role of the printing press during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment.

### Background

European literature is a rich tapestry of literary works that has evolved over three millennia, originating from the diverse geographical and cultural regions of Europe. This body of literature spans multiple languages, including but not limited to French, Spanish, Italian, German, English, and Russian, each contributing to the vibrant mosaic that has played a pivotal role in shaping Western civilization. The definition of Europe in cultural and literary terms is nuanced, as historical exchanges among communities within the continent and with other regions, notably Asia and North Africa, have been ongoing long before the modern concept of Europe took shape.

Walter Cohen, in his insightful analysis, posits that European literature emerges from and is intricately connected to World Literature. Its historical development began in antiquity, before the birth of Europe, with the rise of classical literary languages (Latin and Greek), and progressed with the formation of various vernacular languages (French, Spanish, English, German, Italian, etc.) and their corresponding literature in the Middle Ages. This was followed by the phase of overseas expansion and imperialism beginning from early modernity, which not only led to the spread of its languages but earned it considerable literary and cultural hegemony over other world literatures.

This unit will explore the various stages of the development of European literature,

starting from Antiquity through the Middle Ages to the Renaissance and Enlightenment. The unit will unfold the historical dynamics and agents of change that have shaped the rich and diverse tapestry of European literature

## Keywords

Antiquity, Middle Ages, Vernacular Revolution, Renaissance, Humanism, Printing Press, Enlightenment

## Discussion

### 1.1.1 Stages of Development

#### ► Cohen's Five Stages Model

Walter Cohen (born 1949), a contemporary scholar of European literature, outlines the evolution of European Literature within the map of World Literature through a comprehensive framework consisting of five distinct stages.

#### ► Stage 1: Early Literacy Period

The inaugural stage is characterised by the inception of literacy roughly 5000 years ago in the Near East, followed by the subsequent development of literature half a millennium later.

#### ► Stage 2: Expansion of Literacy

In the second stage, literacy and literature ventured beyond their place of origin, with the emergence of writing around 1200 BC and the appearance of written literature two centuries later

#### ► Stage 3: Classical Period

The third stage, commencing around 550 BC with the establishment of the Persian Empire, binds Eurasia and marks the rise of classical empires, creating polities where for multiple spoken languages, there is a prominent literary language. The Greek Empire, led by Alexander the Great, subsequently supplants the Persian Empire. Roman Empire, the successor to Greek, is deeply influenced by Greek letters and draws heavily on them. As the Roman Empire expands, it re-establishes connections between West and East and is drawn to the Eastern cultures, especially Christianity. The assimilation enabled Latin to refashion itself as the language of the Church and survive the collapse of the Roman Empire in late antiquity. The roots of European literature are deeply embedded in the Greek and Roman heritage of antiquity.

The fourth stage, succeeding antiquity, witnesses the advent of the vernacular revolution—a pivotal transition from classical literary languages such as Greek and Latin to written



► Stage 4: Vernacular Revolution

vernaculars closely aligned with their spoken counterparts. This transformative phase departs from the conventional literary logic of classical empires, signifying a gradual shift from a single literary language serving multiple spoken languages to the emergence of a distinct written language for each spoken one. The ascent of Germanic (English, German, Dutch) and Romance languages (French, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Romanian) directly emanates from this trend, representing a decisive stride in the evolution of modern European literature. As vernacular languages progress concurrently, they undergo a horizontal evolution, with select vernaculars exerting influence over others. The intra-vernacular exchange, spanning from the 12th to the 18th century, significantly shapes the landscape of modern European literature. It is arguable from this perspective that the turning point in European literature comes much ahead of the Renaissance, with the High Middle Ages. During this period, literary genres, including epics inherited from antiquity, acquire distinct medieval characteristics. Genres such as Provençal lyric (love poems by troubadours) and French romance become widespread across the continent.

In the fourteenth century, literary leadership shifts to Italian, introducing a novel genre of prose fiction into the realm of serious European genres like epic and drama. In the early modern phase, Spanish ascends to join French as a dynamic literary language. Notably, it is not just the Romance languages, but those deriving from Latin, that flourish among vernaculars. English, a Germanic language that displaces Celtic and is transformed by Scandinavian and later French Norman influences, develop literary forms such as the sonnet, epic, and tragedy in a fashion that set them apart from their continental counterparts. Factors shaping Western European literature during this period extend beyond intra-vernacular exchanges to incorporating influences from Eastern literary traditions as well. The integration of vernaculars into the literary sphere is facilitated by the translation of the Bible from classical languages like Latin and Hebrew to the vernaculars, marking a significant milestone in the democratization of literary expression.

A troubadour was a composer and performer of Old Occitan lyric poetry during the High Middle Ages (1100-1350)

During this juncture, Europe embarks on a new trajectory that marks the inception of the fifth stage. This new direction is defined by overseas expansion through imperial enterprises. The

- ▶ Stage 5: Overseas Expansion and Global Hegemony

European global conquest, commencing in the 15th century, not only results in territorial dominance but also ushers in a period of literary hegemony. This monumental shift stands as the most significant factor catalysing the transformation of European vernaculars, which was previously under the sway of classical heritage. The Renaissance and, later, the Enlightenment are integral components of this major shift. The act of colonization plays a pivotal role in extending the influence of European vernaculars across vast regions of the globe. This period of exploration and conquest not only expands territorial boundaries but also elevates European literature to a position of global prominence.

- ▶ Antiquity to Vernaculars

In summary, European literature emerges from antiquity and undergoes a crystallization process, giving rise to distinct vernacular literary systems during the Middle Ages and subsequent centuries. The early modern period witnesses a pivotal shift as Europe turns its focus outward, embarking on a mission of unparalleled global expansion. The resultant global literary system is a direct consequence of this transformative exchange, where European literature, once rooted in classical traditions, becomes a dominant force shaping the literary landscapes of diverse cultures worldwide.

- ▶ Cultural Evolution

### 1.1.2 Agents of Change

Cohen contends that culture, language, writing, literary language and possibly literary forms, individual writers and individual texts are not just products of major historical shifts but are also agents of change. This agency is, in part, a result of the impact of popular culture, as exemplified by events like the Reformation, in shaping their development. Recognizing this influence can contribute to fostering a sense of shared culture that transcends traditional divisions. In the following section, we will look at each period in European literary history, shaping and being shaped by these agents of change.

- ▶ Dynamic Expansion

### 1.1.3 Periods of European Literature

#### 1.1.3.1 Antiquity

Antiquity in European literary history refers to the period prior to the Middle Ages. The ancient period, spanning from 8th century BC to 5th century CE, witnessed dynamic changes in the geographical boundaries of Europe and its surrounding regions. Emerging powers continually expanded their empires by annexing new territories, shaping a complex political, cultural, and geographical landscape. Literature from this era reflects these

shifts as new cultural hubs, such as Athens in Greece, Alexandria in Egypt, and Rome in Italy, emerged over time.

This early phase of literature saw the development of various genres and the transition from oral to written expression, as well as from poetry to prose. Authors from these evolving cultural centres responded, either directly or indirectly, to their literary predecessors. Intertextuality, the weaving of responses to earlier texts, stands out as a remarkable feature in the early stages of European literature. Ancient Greeks, for example, engaged with genres from the Near East that preceded their own, while Romans responded to Greek literary traditions. Subsequently, European literature responded to the enduring texts from Greece and Rome. Notably, during this period there was no overarching sense of shared European or national identity. Instead, individuals and communities identified primarily with their geographical regions of birth and upbringing. The sense of identity stemmed from being an Athenian or Roman rather than a broader Greek or European.

► Interconnected Responses

The foundational texts, themes, and genres of European literature can be traced back to the Greek and Roman literary heritage in antiquity, evolving through successive stages: the Archaic Greek period (800-500 BC), the Classical Greek Period (500-300 BCE), the Hellenistic Period, and Roman Republican Period (300-30 BC), and the Roman Imperial period (30 BC to 450 CE).

► Phases of Antiquity

*The Iliad* and *Odyssey* by Homer, originating in the Archaic Greek period, are the oldest surviving literary texts and narrative epics, emerging from the tradition of oral composition.

► The Archaic Greek Period (800-500 BC)

The Classical Greek period began with Greek victories over the Persian Empire, making Athens the cultural hub and fostering the creation of dramatic and rhetorical genres. Notable among these are the classical Greek tragedies and comedies staged during the Dionysian spring festival. Playwrights like Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides laid the foundation for European theatre.

► The Classical Greek Period (500-300 BC)

The subsequent shift in Greek dominance occurred with Alexander the Great's conquests, ensuing the process of Hellenization as Greeks migrated to newly occupied regions with their language and culture. This period saw the canonization of authors from the archaic and classical eras, influencing later generations.

► The Hellenistic Period, and Roman Republican Period

The transition to the Roman Empire was marked by the

► Roman Imperial period (30 BC to 450 CE)

siege of Southern Italy and Greece in the late third and early second centuries BC. The Roman Empire's multi-ethnic and multicultural climate provided fertile ground for the flourishing of art and literature, reaching its peak during Caesar Augustus's reign (27 BC-14 BC). Virgil's *Aeneid*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and Horace's odes and epistles left a lasting impact on European literary landscape.

► The Epic

The epic form emerge as the foremost genre from antiquity, focusing on narratives of foundation and succession. Virgil, in *Aeneid*, encapsulates this in the opening line, "I sing of wars and of a man." The reference is to Aeneas, the central figure, portrayed as the architect of the Roman lineage, with Augustus directly linked as his descendant. Virgil skilfully weaves in allusions to the battles depicted in Homer's *Iliad*, and Aeneas, akin to Odysseus, traces a path through the Mediterranean in pursuit of his homeland.

► Recognition of Christianity

A pivotal moment in European literature and culture occurred in 312 CE when Roman Emperor Constantine recognised Christianity as a state religion, leading to the categorisation of pre-Christian culture as pagan. Augustine, an early Christian author around 400 CE, introduced the prototype of autobiography with his *Confessions*. Alongside, biography emerged with Plutarch's *Lives* that gave account of notable Greek and Roman rulers. This would go on to be the sourcebook of Shakespeare's Roman plays. Literary forms like satire, initially part of lyrical poetry, gained distinction through the works of Horace and Juvenal. Prose, initially reserved for science, history, and philosophy, expanded into fiction.

► Genre Evolution

The Greeks and Romans laid the foundation of European literature by developing and elevating these genres to a sophisticated level. The evolution, spanning 1200 years and stretching across regions from Spain to Persia, Egypt to Britain, witnessed the introduction and significant changes in genres such as the lyric, epigrams, eclogues, fables, and epistles. The transformation extended from oral to written expression, poetry to prose, and Greek to Latin.

### 1.1.3.2 Middle Ages

The period from 500-1500 CE, situated between classical antiquity and the Renaissance, is often reductively labelled as culturally dormant or the "Dark Ages" following the fall of the Western Roman Empire. This characterization oversimplifies the dynamic developments and innovations that occurred during the Middle Ages. Contrary to the notion of cultural dormancy,

► Middle Ages  
Renaissance

this era saw significant changes laying the groundwork for the European Renaissance. Notably, the rise of vernacular languages and literature, the establishment of universities, and the emergence of the theme of literary love played key roles. Let's briefly examine these developments in the historical and cultural context of the Middle Ages.

► Middle Ages  
Fragmentation

Similar to antiquity, the concept of Europe was still evolving during the Middle Ages. The vast regions once united under the Roman Empire fragmented into smaller kingdoms after the last Roman emperor, Romulus Augustulus, conceded defeat to the German chieftain Odoacer in 476 BC. Although this marked the end of the Western Roman Empire, the Eastern Roman Empire in Byzantium persisted through the Middle Ages until the Ottomans conquered it in 1453.

► Early Middle Ages

In the next two centuries (5-6 CE), Europe witnessed mass migrations of tribes, leading to the movement of northern Germanic tribes like the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes to Britain. The dominant Anglo-Saxons brought their language, which eventually evolved into English. During their migration, they carried their stories in their native tongue, preserving them orally rather than in writing. An example is the epic of *Beowulf*, the oldest in English literature, transcribed long after the Germanic tribes settled in England. The fact that it was handed down in the vernacular rather than Latin, the language of manuscript makers, underscores the assimilation process during the early Middle Ages.

► Monastic  
Preservation

Emerging smaller kingdoms faced constant threats of Viking raids and invasions. In this politically unstable environment, Christian monasteries became cultural strongholds. Monastic scribes dedicated themselves to collecting, studying, and copying manuscripts from antiquity. This clandestine activity, away from the public eye, ensured the preservation of the religious and cultural legacy of the classical era, preventing its complete disappearance after the Germanic sieges and plunder.

Gradually, amidst the chaos of migration, France emerged as a new centre of power during Charlemagne's reign (768-814), reuniting most of Europe (excluding Britain). In 800, Charlemagne was crowned Holy Roman Emperor by the Pope. His rule saw a cultural revival known as the Carolingian Renaissance, marked by his active promotion of learning and scholarship. Carolingian schools were formed, initiating the institutionalization of knowledge and paving the way for early universities in cities like Bologna (1088), Oxford (1096), Cambridge (1209), and



▶ Carolingian Renaissance

Paris (1257). Charlemagne became a literary hero in works like the *Songs of Roland*, which celebrated his heroic deeds. The tradition of epic poetry, rooted in Homer and Virgil, persisted in the Middle Ages through these *chansons de geste* (“songs of heroic deeds”) composed by French troubadours, later evolving into chivalric romances.

▶ Holy Roman Empire

With the Carolingian Empire’s decline, the region around present-day France, Germany, and Italy became the Holy Roman Empire. Though distinct from the ancient Roman Empire due to its religious thrust, medieval rulers considered themselves heirs of the Romans. Classical Latin survived the fall of the Western Roman Empire, as it was adopted by the clergy, thus becoming the language of the Church and universities. This preserved the Roman legacy in a new context. By 1000 AD, most of Europe had embraced Christianity, and Latin became inseparable from the Christian faith.

▶ High Middle Ages

These developments propelled Europe from the Early to High Middle Ages (11th-13th centuries), characterized by the vernacular revolution. Romance languages, derived from Latin, became the medium of literary expression, with French and Italian leading among them. Simultaneously, English, a Germanic language, developed its own literary path, influenced in part by the achievements of its neighbouring languages.

▶ Dante Alighieri

Dante Alighieri emerged as a central figure in the vernacular revolution, demonstrating its literary potential with his narrative poem *Divine Comedy* (1321). Written in Italian, the work skilfully showcased the medieval Christian worldview, affirming the worthiness of the vernacular for literary expression.

▶ Chivalry and Romances

Under feudalism, steady economic growth enriched the highest social circles, fostering a new elite culture. Cultural activity shifted from monasteries to royal courts in the high Middle Ages, marking the onset of the chivalric age in France. Literature played a pivotal role, giving rise to romances—a new genre centred on court life and the nobility’s self-image. Conduct rules, known as “courtliness,” governed noblemen’s engagements, particularly with women. These narratives, focusing on love and emotional turmoil, often depicted knights pining for unattainable noble ladies, pledging loyalty, and dedicating victories.

▶ Medieval Romances

Composed by troubadours in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, romances dealt with three types of matters: Greek and Roman mythology (Matter of Rome), legends of Charlemagne (Matter of France), and King Arthur’s legends (Matter of Britain). Chretien de Troyes, a notable chivalric author, crafted



romances based on King Arthur and the Knight of the Templars. Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* is another notable medieval romance where he attempted to blend pagan with Christian themes. Derived from the epic form, the uniqueness of these romances lay in their treatment of knightly adventures within the framework of courtly love and medieval Christian thought rather than as mere military exploits. The genre found a broad readership among elite women throughout the Middle Ages, setting the stage for later prose romances.

► Female Authors

The Middle Ages also saw notable female writers like Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe from England, primarily focusing on religious themes. Christine de Pizan from France is regarded as the first professional female writer and a feminist who critiqued misogynistic texts like Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's *Romance of the Rose*—an allegorical romance and dream vision.

► Manuscripts and the Culture of Patronage

Literature production centred on the court, fostering a culture of patronage where writers composed at the behest of noble patrons. This was crucial for medieval authors in a manuscript culture with expensive parchments, limiting accessibility. The invention of the printing press was a response to this challenge.

► Late Middle Ages

As Europe transitioned into the late Middle Ages, the cultural focus gradually shifted from the royal court to urban centres. With a new audience and increased financial support, diverse forms of literature emerged in vernacular languages. Notable genres from this period include dream visions (like the *Romance of the Rose*), tale collections (such as the *Canterbury Tales*), and short farcical tales known as fabliaux. Notably, the drama was largely absent.

► Translation

Medieval authors, often bilingual and well-versed in classical and contemporary literature, engaged in cross-cultural exchange, borrowing and adopting from each other. An example is Geoffrey Chaucer, a royal diplomat proficient in Latin, French, and Italian. Familiar with classical and contemporary works from Italy and France, he translated the *Romance of the Rose* from French to English and Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* from Latin to English. His *Canterbury Tales* drew inspiration from Boccaccio's *Decameron* set against the backdrop of the Black Death (1348-49), and *Troilus and Criseyde* was modelled on Boccaccio's *Il Filastrato*. The literary craftsmanship of the age lay not in telling entirely new stories but in presenting familiar tales in a new light.

### 1.1.3.3 Renaissance

The Renaissance, spanning from the early fifteenth to the late seventeenth century in Europe, marked a shift from medieval attitudes based on the Church dogma to a more humanist perspective inspired by the rediscovery of classical Greek and Roman writings. Also known as Early Modernity, it was founded on the contrasting imagery of light and dark, symbolizing the present and past, popularized by poets like Petrarch, who lived at the cusp of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The Renaissance represented the dawn of light, deriving enlightenment from the rediscovery of classical antiquity, while the Middle Ages, associated with Germanic tribes and Vikings, were termed the Dark Ages.

► Early Modernity

A significant catalyst for the Renaissance was the fifteenth-century invention of the printing press, commercially viable for producing and disseminating ideas, thus fostering an environment for literature to flourish.

► Catalyst

The Renaissance unfolded across Europe in waves, centred in Florence, Italy, and spreading to Spain, France, England, and the Dutch regions over subsequent decades. It brought creative exuberance to various fields, including science, philosophy, art, and literature. While not a homogenous phenomenon, the movement had certain distinctive features, which are discussed below:

► Renaissance Characteristics

### 1.1.3.4 The Print Revolution

The first of the media revolutions that ushered in modernity was the printing press, introduced to Europe by German printer Johannes Gutenberg (c. 1398-1468 CE). In 1456, Gutenberg printed an edition of the Bible. The increased demand for religious books from the clergy, new universities, and grammar schools in the fifteenth century was a driving force behind the invention. Scholars who previously struggled to access books from monastic libraries now had a more accessible means. Printing made the production of books in large numbers less time-consuming and commercially viable.

► Printing Press

William Caxton brought the printing press to England in 1476, printing literary works such as *The Canterbury Tales* and medieval romances. The rise in the availability of books at reduced costs meant more readership, allowing ideas to spread rapidly. Scholars published their own works, wrote commentaries on ancient works and those of their contemporaries.

► William Caxton



► Impact of Printing Press

When Europe voyaged to the New World, printed books, including *The Bible*, catechisms, chapbooks, and novels, accompanied them. However, this also invited censorship from higher authorities, like the Catholic Church, which burned and banned certain books.

► End of Patronage

Printing marked the end of the culture of patronage, as writers no longer solely relied on royal patrons but on a broader readership. Authors could earn a living solely through writing.

► Standardisation of Vernaculars

Printing also led to the standardisation of vernaculars by fixing spelling and grammar. The rate of literacy increased as public institutions like libraries emerged in cities, offering readers a variety of reading materials, including travel guides, pamphlets, romances, and books on manners and etiquette.

► Sparked New Ideas

Printing sparked new ideas across fields like science, art, history, and religion, representing the first step towards the democratization of knowledge and ideas. A significant religious and cultural movement catalysed by the printing press was the Protestant Reformation.

### 1.1.3.5 Religious Reformation

► John Wycliffe

In the medieval society, individual and social life revolved around God, with the Church and its Pope holding sway as the sole authority on spiritual matters. The clergy acted as mediators between God and individuals, wielding significant influence over their lives. However, by the late Middle Ages, widespread allegations of corruption and excesses within the Catholic Church led to a fervent demand for reforms. In England, John Wycliffe, a forerunner of the Reformation, called for reforms in church practices and made an early attempt to translate The Bible from Latin to English.

► Splitting of the Church

The tipping point came in 1517 when Martin Luther, a German priest and theologian, expressed his outrage against church policies and published a pamphlet containing ninety-five theses on the necessary reforms. This act resulted in the division of the church into two groups: one loyal to the Pope and the other critical of the Pope, known as the Protestants. This event irreversibly transformed Europe's social, political, cultural, and religious landscape, dividing Western Europe along religious lines. While southern European nation-states, like Spain and France, remained loyal to the Catholic Church, other European regions, like Germany and England, turned Protestant.

Protestantism emphasised the primacy of the individual in matters of faith and sought to abolish the authority of the clergy.

► Protestantism

They rejected rituals and practices deviating from the Bible, asserting the primacy of scripture over church practices. To achieve this, they advocated translating *The Bible*, previously available only in Latin and Hebrew, into vernacular languages. This move broke the monopoly of classical languages like Latin, establishing vernacular languages as the preferred medium for disseminating knowledge and ideas.

► Popular Cultural Phenomenon

Recent scholarship highlights the Reformation as a popular cultural phenomenon. Martin Luther and his followers propagated Protestant teachings through book illustrations, picture books, and woodcut images printed in popular broadsheets, satirizing the Pope and the clergy. Oral communication played a crucial role as pamphlets were read aloud and sung in public spaces like pubs, sparking discussions about the new faith. The Reformation's legacies, including individualism, civil rights, scepticism, and modern democracy, would go on to define modernity.

► Man as centre of the Universe

### 1.1.3.6 Humanism and the Birth of the Modern Self

Early Modernity is characterised by the emergence of the modern self. In the Middle Ages, individuals were perceived as integral parts of a collective, such as family, religion, and region. Their existence found meaning in connection to God, who occupied the centre stage in the cosmos. However, the Renaissance altered this perception, replacing God with Man as the centre. For example, in Pico Della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486), human beings are portrayed as the focal point of the universe, positioned between the divine and material spheres. Man is no longer considered merely a being condemned to earthly existence before gaining entrance into the heavenly realm. Instead, he is recognised as a being with a distinct mind, possessing the potential for thought, reason, and understanding of the universe. Rene Descartes's famous line, "I think, therefore I am," echoed this perspective. Such ideas were widely shared among humanists, a group of scholars dedicated to studying classical Greek and Roman texts and learning Latin.

► Humanism

Humanists assigned a place of dignity and centrality to human beings in the universe. They advocated for education and emphasized the importance of studying classical literary and philosophical texts for a rounded development of the individual's diverse physical, mental, artistic, and moral aspects. Renaissance humanists adopted concepts and ideals from classical Greek and Roman philosophers, integrating them into Christian thought and creating a synthesis of classical and Christian perspectives. This synthesis is evident in authors like Petrarch and Montaigne, who



used subjective experience as starting points in their writings. In Montaigne's *Essais* (1580), the focus shifts to the individual's private feelings and outlook.

### 1.1.3.7 Travel, Exploration and Conquest

Early modernity witnessed a surge in geographical and cultural exploration, with nation-states such as Portugal and Spain taking the lead in voyages for discovering new continents and establishing the first plantation colonies overseas. In 1492, Columbus reached the American shores, referred to as the "New World" by Europeans, while Vasco da Gama found the sea route to India in 1498. Subsequently, the Dutch and British East India Companies followed suit, establishing trading posts in these territories and bringing them into contact with native populations. The establishment of settler colonies in the New World resulted in the enslavement and transportation of millions from Africa to Europe and America for plantation labour. The interactions with people of diverse races, cultures, and languages marked a pivotal moment in European history, shaping its self-definition. Europe constructed its self-image in relation to these non-white races, eventually fostering a collective European identity, although its political realization was still far ahead in the future. Meanwhile, struggles between European nation-states persisted on issues like religion, territory, and trade relations beyond its shores.

► Emergence of European Identity

### 1.1.3.8 Literature of the Renaissance

The Renaissance, originating in Florence, Italy, during the fourteenth century, radiated across Europe in successive waves over the following three centuries. Petrarch (1304–1374), a scholar, poet, and humanist, is recognised as a trailblazer in Italy's Renaissance movement. Despite living in the Middle Ages, he catalysed the Renaissance spirit. Writing in both Latin and Italian, Petrarch advocated reading classical texts in their original languages with the motto *ad fontes* — "back to the sources." He is most renowned for his sonnets composed in the Italian vernacular, exemplified by *Canzoniere*, a collection of love sonnets dedicated to his unrequited love, Laura. Sir Thomas Wyatt translated his sonnets into English, introducing the lyric form to England, where Shakespeare later mastered it. Another notable Italian figure was Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), a philosopher, politician, and humanist regarded as the founder of political science for his notable work *The Prince*, a treatise on effective statecraft.

► Renaissance

The invention of the printing press made it easier to cater for a vernacular audience. Popular demand for books was already



► Birth of Modern Novel Form

fuelled by tale collections from Boccaccio and Chaucer. From these and romances, the modern novel emerged, gradually supplanting the epic form that had dominated European literature. Readers embraced the humorous stories of French prose writer Francois Rabelais (1483-1553), known for the satirical adventures of Gargantua and Pantagruel. Miguel de Cervantes continued this tradition in *Don Quixote* (1605), a work that not only marked the peak of the Golden Age of Spanish literature but also inaugurated the modern novel form. It was more than a parody, presenting its eponymous knight not as a ideal hero but as all too human.

► Elizabethan

The Golden Age of English Literature found its zenith in theatre and poetry. Playwrights like Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Ben Jonson contributed tragedies, comedies, and history plays. Shakespeare departed from classical Greek norms by writing tragi-comedies. In poetry, the Shakespearean sonnet emerged as a counterpart to the Italian Petrarchan sonnet. Poets like Edmund Spenser and John Milton continued to work with the epic form.

► Vernacularisation

In France, key Renaissance figures included philosopher and mathematician Rene Descartes (1596-1650) and Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592). The latter developed the prose form of *essai* (essay) in French, dealing with short subjective pieces on various topics concerning human nature. Philosopher Francis Bacon (1561-1626), drawing inspiration, articulated his scientific and philosophical ideas in the essay form. Another notable humanist was Erasmus, who represented the Dutch Renaissance.

► Chivalry and Romances

As literature flourished, vernacularisation surged at an accelerated pace in Europe. This was further spurred by the translation of *The Bible* into vernacular languages and by the growing national consciousness within European nation-states, driven by heightened political conflicts in the competitive race for colonies.

► Enlightenment

### 1.1.3.9 Enlightenment

The Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason, succeeded the Renaissance and spanned the entire eighteenth century. While its origins can be traced back to Renaissance scholars like Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes, Galileo, Johannes Kepler, and Leibniz, the true pioneers were figures such as Isaac Newton and John Locke. These thinkers laid the groundwork for the Enlightenment movement. Other influential contributors included David Hume, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Denis Diderot, Immanuel Kant, and Mary Wollstonecraft.

► Rationality

Characterised by a scientific and rational temperament, the Enlightenment sought to challenge traditional authority, asserting that progress could be achieved through reason and rationality. It posited that the universe could be systematically explained and catalogued. While the Enlightenment unfolded differently across Europe with diverse approaches, a common thread was the emphasis on rational inquiry and progress through dialogue.

► Intellectual exchange

This era placed significant importance on the classification and dissemination of ideas facilitated by the media revolution, leading to the establishment of the “Republic of Letters” — an international community of intellectuals corresponding through letters. It facilitated discussions on various topics, sparking new theories and philosophies across multiple fields. This spirit fostered the growth of the book industry, scientific journals, and the emergence of encyclopaedias, dictionaries, journals, newspapers, and periodicals across Europe. French philosopher Denise Diderot published the first Encyclopaedia in 1751, and Dr Samuel Johnson brought out the first English language Dictionary in 1755. In religion, attempts were made to align Christianity along rational lines, while new religions like Deism emerged, challenging traditional beliefs by asserting that the universe operated without divine intervention. This marked the rise of secular thought. This improved means of communication eventually led to the emergence of the “public sphere”, like Coffee Houses, an intermediate realm between state institutions and public domain, where open debates thrived.

► Rise of the Novel

In literature, Enlightenment writers drew inspiration from the classical age to master the craft of poetic expression. English poets like John Dryden and Alexander Pope prioritized adherence to compositional rules over inventiveness. As Renaissance theatre waned by the end of the seventeenth century, prose narrative took centre stage. The modern novel, born in Spain with Don Quixote, re-emerged in England with Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe in 1711, followed by contemporaries Samuel Richardson, Laurence Sterne, and Henry Fielding. These writers sought to depict believable characters using vivid descriptions, injecting a degree of realism into their works.

► Satirical critique

The Enlightenment era is also recognized as the Age of Satire. Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels and Voltaire’s Candide satirised the anthropocentrism and excessive optimism of Enlightenment philosophers. In French literature, theatre dominated, owing much to classical models. Jean Racine and Pierre Corneille adhered to Greek drama rules, but the comedy of manners by Molière gained popularity, poking fun at the

French literary scene and societal conventions.

► Literary criticism

The period also marked the inception of literary criticism and the emergence of literary critics like Dr Samuel Johnson and Voltaire who reacted to and commented on literary works from both earlier and contemporary periods. This process ultimately contributed to the formation of literary canons.

► Transition

In conclusion, the evolution of European literature, spanning from Antiquity through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment, is inseparable from the broader socio-political changes that shaped each era. The advent of the media revolution and the opening of the public sphere during the Enlightenment played a pivotal role in challenging traditional orthodoxy. As new theories emerged, emphasizing individualism and secularism, a transformative period unfolded, culminating in a series of revolutions—such as the American Revolution in 1776 and the French Revolution in 1789—marked by the ideals of democracy and the rejection of monarchical rule. The Enlightenment's emphasis on reason, however, would eventually encounter a counterforce in the form of the wild passion of Romanticism. This shift heralded a new chapter in European literature, challenging the Enlightenment's rational ideals and embracing the subjective and emotional dimensions of human experience.

## Summarised Overview

This unit overviews the dynamic evolution of European literature across different epochs, starting from Antiquity and progressing through the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Enlightenment. It scrutinizes the genesis of diverse literary genres and trends in European literature, such as the epic and courtly romances, while also delving into the socio-cultural influences that mould them. Notably, the advent of the printing press assumes paramount importance, triggering a vernacular revolution in European literature and catalysing the European Renaissance and Enlightenment.

## Assignments

1. What are the key stages, according to Cohen, in the evolution of European literature?
2. Discusses the phases of the Middle Ages.
3. Assess the role of the printing press as a shaping force of Early Modernity?
4. The transition from classical to vernacular languages is a turning point in European literature. Discuss.
5. What are the features of the European Renaissance?
6. What are the key trends in the literature of the Enlightenment?

## Suggested Reading

1. Cohen, Walter. *A History of European Literature: The West and the World from Antiquity to the Present*. Oxford University Press, 2017.
2. Pourcq, Martin De, and Sophie Levie (ed.). *European Literary History: An Introduction*. Routledge, London. 2018.
3. Curtius, Ernst Robert. *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. Translated by Willard R. Trask. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990.

## Reference

1. Cohen, Walter. *A History of European Literature: The West and the World from Antiquity to the Present*. Oxford University Press, 2017.
2. Pourcq, Martin De, and Sophie Levie (ed.). *European Literary History: An Introduction*. Routledge, London. 2018.

## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



## Unit 2

# Romanticism, Modernism and Postmodernism

### Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ articulate defining characteristics of Romanticism, Modernism, and Postmodernism in European literature, showcasing a nuanced understanding of each period's distinct features.
- ▶ gain a contextual understanding of the emergence of these movements, recognizing the impact of political events, technological advancements, and societal shifts on the literary landscape.
- ▶ analyse stylistic innovations in Romantic, Modernist, and Postmodern literatures, connecting them to broader artistic and intellectual movements of the respective periods.
- ▶ critically explore recurring themes in Romantic, Modernist, and Postmodern literatures.

### Background

As Europe entered the 19th century, the ideals of Enlightenment propelled it towards a vision of progress rooted in science and reason. The principles of individualism and liberty instigated revolutions like the American War of Independence and French Revolution. Despite social upheavals, industrialization surged, primarily fuelled by colonial resources, particularly in Britain. This transformative era saw the rise of factories and cities, marking the advent of modern urban landscapes.

While Romanticism responded to industrialization by embracing nature and intuition over reason, the later Realist and Naturalist traditions confronted the harsh realities of growing inequality and the plight of the poor and working classes. However, by the century's end, the social activism inherent in literature gave way to Aestheticism, which celebrated "art for art's sake," devoid of social or moral obligations.

The early 20th century, with its *fin de siècle* spirit, witnessed the irreversible shattering of ideals in the wake of the catastrophic World Wars and conflicts. The horrifying impact left the age disillusioned, stripping away faith in Enlightenment ideals. This pervasive sense of disillusionment and alienation found expression in modernist literature. Weary of the traditions of realism and naturalism, modernists sought new modes and styles to

capture the transformed reality. The theories of Sigmund Freud and Friedrich Nietzsche on the human mind and reality spurred experimentation, led by Avant-garde movements.

While modernism grappled with the loss of a unified vision, the post-1945 era, known as postmodernism, witnessed a further abandonment of the quest for meaning. The horrors of the Holocaust and atomic bombings left Europeans despondent, giving rise to Existentialism and the Theatre of the Absurd. Postmodernists, characterized by scepticism towards claims of centre, meaning, and origin, embraced disorder and meaninglessness. This led to a celebration of literary “play,” employing techniques like fragmentation, metafiction, unreliable narration, parody, and pastiche, with the *Nouveau Roman* in France initiating this trend.

The unit aims to intricately map these trends in European literature as it traverses from the 19th to the 20th century, exploring the nuances of the romantic, modernist, and postmodern phases.

## Keywords

Romanticism, Aestheticism, Decadence, Symbolism, Modernism, Expressionism, Surrealism, Dadaism, Postmodernism, Nouveau Roman

## Discussion

### 1.2.1 Long Nineteenth Century

The long nineteenth century, spanning from the 1770s to the 1900s, was a period marked by a complex interplay of wars, revolutions, and intellectual shifts brought on by ideas of Enlightenment. Simultaneously, a reaction against Enlightenment rationalism emerged, exemplified by the cult of sensibility, which prioritized emotions over reason and laid the groundwork for the Romantic movement. Throughout this era, known as the Age of the Empire, European nation-states engaged in intense competition for dominance within and beyond the continent. Notably, countries such as Britain and France expanded their colonial territories, utilising imported resources to propel the Industrial Revolution.

► Age of Empire

► Industrialisation and literature

The Industrial Revolution brought about a profound transformation in Europe’s landscape and way of life, ushering in the age of capitalism. Literary works of the time often reflected concerns stemming from rural decline and the rapid growth of urban centres. The literature also captured



a growing awareness of persistent inequalities exacerbated by unprecedented changes, prompting civil protests and advocacy for reforms. To gain a deeper understanding of how the socio-political context of the nineteenth century influenced literary movements, it is crucial to examine key aspects of this transformative period.

### 1.2.2 Historical Context

The shift from the Age of Reason to Romanticism in the late eighteenth century was characterized by a series of revolutions and uprisings, notably the American War of Independence (1776) and the French Revolution (1789). The former saw thirteen British colonies fighting for independent rule, while the latter marked a revolt by the emerging middle class against the French monarchy. Both movements were fuelled by Enlightenment ideals of equality and freedom. Despite the French Revolution eventually devolving to Napoleon Bonaparte's autocratic regime, it left an indelible mark on Europe's cultural and political landscape

► Political Revolutions

Napoleon Bonaparte's reign in France (1804-1815) significantly influenced the rise of nationalism among European nation-states. His quest for empire brought him into clash with Britain and other European nations, culminating in the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, where Britain halted his expansionist ambitions. Post-Waterloo, major powers such as Britain and Russia collaborated to shape Europe's future, seeking a balance of power to ensure stability. The patriotic fervour instilled during the French threat continued to grow in the post-Napoleonic era.

► Spirit of Nationalism

In literature, the intra-European conflicts found expression in fiction. Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) unfolded against the backdrop of the French Revolution, while Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1869) featured Napoleon and his army as characters. Cultural nationalism influenced art and literature, leading to the rise of historical novels, pioneered by Walter Scott. These novels, like *Ivanhoe* (1819), delved into local legends and traditions, reflecting a fascination with medievalism and feudal virtues.

► Historical Novel

Cultural nationalism was also revealed in the burgeoning interest in folk and fairy tales during the 19th century, marked by the efforts of notable figures such as the Grimm Brothers in Germany and Hans Christian Andersen in Denmark. Both indulged in collecting and documenting a rich tapestry of fairy tales and folk narratives that were deeply rooted in regional

and cultural contexts. This period also witnessed language emancipation movements across Europe, driven by the zeal to establish each nation's tradition as the best.

#### ▶ Transitional Alliances

Despite the rise of national states, transitional alliances were being formed, notably during the Greek War of Independence (1821-1832) against the Ottoman Turks. This conflict saw Europeans uniting, and the English poet Lord Byron, who fought and died for the Greeks, was hailed as a martyr. However, in the later part of the century, the Ottomans allied with the French and British to defend against the Russians in the Crimean Peninsula.

#### ▶ Age of Empire

Throughout the nineteenth century, Europe experienced constant geopolitical shifts, leading to a fluid state of borders and a porous landscape due to colonial expansion. Imperial states left their mark beyond national boundaries, contributing to a diverse ethnic and cultural populace in urban cities. England, emerging as the largest empire, saw the influence of colonial plantations and officers in novels such as *Jane Austen's Mansfield Park* (1814), Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847), and William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848). Simultaneously, literature also delved into narratives set within the colonies.

#### ▶ Industrial Revolution

The first Industrial Revolution (1760-1840), fuelled by scientific advancements and colonial wealth, brought about profound changes in Europe's economic and social fabric. The mechanization of labour in burgeoning factories resulted in rural depopulation as people sought better opportunities in overcrowded cities. Poets like Oliver Goldsmith mourned the vanishing countryside in "The Deserted Village" (1770), while William Blake depicted the harsh realities of urban life in his work *Songs of Experience* (1794).

#### ▶ Age of Reforms

Despite the ideals of democracy, liberty, and equality celebrated during the French Revolution, the nineteenth century revealed stark inequalities arising from industrialization and colonialism. The abolitionist movement, gaining momentum in the early 1800s, aimed at ending slavery both in Europe and its colonies. The working class faced deteriorating conditions, characterised by long hours of work and low wages, prompting widespread calls for reforms. Movements like Chartism in Britain and Fourierists in France championed socialist ideals. The publication of the Communist Manifesto (1848) by German thinkers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels called for class struggle and socialist revolution against

industrial capitalism, influencing later movements such as the women's suffrage in England and France in the later part of the nineteenth century.

▶ Travelling Literature and Literary Tourism

Advancements in printing technology during the nineteenth century facilitated the rapid dissemination of books, transcending national borders either through original publications or translations. The historical novel, a transnational genre, gained popularity across Europe, influencing writers in countries like Sweden, Spain, and Russia who drew inspiration from the style and Scottish themes introduced by Sir Walter Scott. The rise of periodicals in the eighteenth century continued into the nineteenth century, becoming a prominent platform for literature. Serialized novels became a trend, with publications like Charles Dickens' *Household Words* (1850-59) and *All Year Round* (1859-1895) featuring serialized novels, short stories, and essays. These periodicals played a transnational role by introducing foreign authors, such as Honoré de Balzac, to regional audiences. Genres like detective fiction, ghost stories, and novels of sensation gained popularity, addressing societal issues while entertaining a broader audience.

▶ Literary Journeys

The influence of literature extended beyond genres and styles; authors and readers also embarked on journeys. Writers like Hans Christian Andersen and Charles Dickens toured Europe, engaging with foreign writers and conducting public readings. Readers, in turn, visited the homes of their favourite authors or locations featured in novels, marking the inception of literary tourism.

### 1.2.3 Literary Developments

#### 1.2.3.1 Sturm and Drang

▶ Sturm and Drang

Translated as 'Storm and Stress' into English, the Sturm and Drang emerged in the 1770s Germany as a proto-romantic movement in response to Enlightenment ideals that overemphasized reason. Reacting against the rigid conventions of European aristocratic society, the proponents of this movement emphasized individual emotions over formal decorum. Originating in Weimar, Germany, it took its name from Maximilian Klinger's 1776 play set against the American War of Independence.

▶ Literary Rebellion

Led by German intellectuals Christopher Martin Wieland, Johann Gottfried Herder, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, and Friedrich Schiller, the movement broke away from Enlightenment literary traditions. Goethe and Schiller, in particular, championed

the expression of authentic emotions, viewing literature as a conduit for connecting with primal instincts.

An exemplary work of this movement is Goethe's epistolary novel, *The Sorrow of Young Werther* (1774), featuring a contemplative young protagonist who becomes enamoured with a married woman, succumbing to intense emotional extremes that ultimately drive him to a tragic end by his own hand. The novel's popularity across Europe sparked imitative behaviour, prompting calls for its ban due to its perceived influence on real-life suicides. In England, this phenomenon influenced the trend of sentimental novels, exemplified by Henry Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* (1771).

► The Sorrow of Young Werther

In theatre, Friedrich Schiller's play *Die Rauber (The Robbers)* (1781) laid the groundwork for melodrama. The Sturm and Drang movement's influence paved the way for Romanticism in the nineteenth century, fostering the cult of sensibility where a hero's emotions took precedence over actions.

► The Robbers

### 1.2.3.2 Romanticism

Romanticism, a literary and cultural movement spanning from approximately 1800 to 1850 across Europe, emerged as a reaction to the Enlightenment, rising industrialisation, and urbanization. While it originated in German and English literatures, its influence extended to Russian, Italian, and French literary traditions, marking the golden age of Russian literature.

► Romantic Reaction

Emphasising individualism, Romanticism delved into subjective feelings and emotions. The French Revolution inspired early Romantic poets like William Wordsworth, who celebrated the dawn of an era, describing it as a blissful time to be alive. The Romantic hero, often an anti-establishment figure embodying rebellion, was exemplified in Shelley's play *Prometheus Unbound*, where the protagonist, Prometheus, symbolises defiance against authority

► Romantic Individualism

The Byronic hero, named after Lord Byron, offered a moody and cynical variation of the Romantic hero, as seen in Byron's work *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812). In Russian literature, the concept of the 'superfluous man' emerged, referring to individuals perceived as misfits in society, a theme explored by Alexander Pushkin and Ivan Turgenev.

► Byronic hero

As a reaction against industrialisation, Romantics turned to nature, idealising simple country life. Nature, often described as 'sublime' by Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant, became a source of powerful emotions. Romantic poetry explored the



► Nature and sublime

sensations that unspoilt natural landscapes inspired in the poet's mind. With a focus on subjective responses, it favoured the lyric form. Imagination played a significant role in Romanticism, with poetry defined by Wordsworth as a "spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions recollected in tranquillity."

► Nationalistic nostalgia

The Romantics also looked to their regional pasts, especially as a form of nationalism. Medieval history, folklore, and traditions were venerated, forming the basis for national identity. This historical fascination, coupled with a glorification of the past as a time of innocence, found expression in the historical novels of Walter Scott, gaining popularity across Europe.

► Gothic Literature

A darker expression of this fascination with the past was manifested in Gothic literature. This Romantic sub-genre explored morbid emotions and immoral passions, acknowledging the dark side of nature capable of destruction and terror. Notable examples include Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764), Goethe's *Faust* (1808) and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). The Gothic narrative typically unfolded in exotic locations with virtuous characters facing villains or monstrous figures, engaged with taboo subjects and the supernatural. While the genre thrived in England, Russia, and Germany, it faced limited popularity in southern Europe probably due to its anti-Catholic bias.

### 1.2.3.3 Realism

► Realism movement

The cultural movement of realism, which originated in the visual arts before transitioning to literature during the mid-nineteenth century, extended from 1855 to 1900. This shift was partly prompted by the challenges of urbanisation and the rapidly changing dynamics of modern city life. Additionally, realism emerged as a response to the idealisation and excessive focus on emotions, nature, and heroism found in romantic literature. It marked another step in the ongoing democratization of literature that had commenced in the eighteenth century.

► Middle class novels

As novels gained prominence in the eighteenth century, the literary focus shifted from the elites to the lives of ordinary people, especially those from the middle and working classes. By the mid-nineteenth century, novels had firmly established themselves as a dominant genre, driven by a significant demand for new stories in fiction. With a substantial readership from the middle class, there was a preference for stories set in their social environment, reflecting their own lives.

Realism as a literary style aimed to provide detailed, often

► Realistic portrayals

graphic, and extensive descriptions of characters, situations, and settings, creating a sense of proximity to reality. The goal was to render these elements believable and lifelike by portraying familiar scenes and characters with accuracy. Blurring the lines between journalism and fiction, literary realism originated in the works of French writers Honoré de Balzac and Gustave Flaubert. Balzac's ambitious *La Comédie Humaine* (The Human Comedy, 1829-48) was a multi-volume endeavour offering a detailed portrait of French society gripped by capitalism, revealing both the ugly and the vulgar. However, the most celebrated example of literary realism is Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856), exploring the tragic story of the eponymous heroine struggling to reconcile her romantic fantasies with the reality of married life in a French provincial town.

► Global realism

The realist style quickly spread to other parts of Europe, including England, Russia, and the United States. Various narrative strategies were employed to achieve authenticity, such as the use of an omniscient narrator, allowing authors to provide vivid and detailed accounts of characters' thoughts and feelings. Another technique was blending real-life events and characters into fiction, exemplified in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* set during the Napoleonic Era and the 1812 French invasion of Russia.

► Psychological realism

The focus on the inner workings of characters' minds led to the sub-genre of psychological realism, as seen in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866), where the author delves into the thoughts and motivations of the protagonist, Raskolnikov.

► Urban realism

In their pursuit of authenticity, novelists increasingly turned their attention to the squalor and challenges of cities, urban slums, and the everyday struggles of the working class. Works like Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862), George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-72), and Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854) provided verbal snapshots of life in provincial and industrial towns, portraying the stark realities of the poor and marginalised. These novels, depicting the lives of the less privileged, became powerful forms of social and political commentary on the age.

#### 1.2.3.4 Naturalism

The literary movement of Naturalism, which closely followed Realism in the mid-19th century France, emerged in response to the idealized sentiments of Romanticism. Like

- ▶ Naturalistic evolution

Realism, Naturalism directed its focus toward the lowest social strata, delving into the harsh conditions of their existence. Unlike realism though, naturalism rooted itself in scientific principles, particularly drawing inspiration from Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory. It sought to explore how heredity and environment shaped characters and their actions. This style adopted a quasi-scientific objectivity and an impersonal tone when describing characters and situations, emphasizing the predetermined destiny of its characters. It's noteworthy that while all Naturalistic novels are realistic, the reverse is not necessarily true.

- ▶ Zola's Naturalism

A prominent figure in this literary style was Emile Zola, whose thirteenth novel, *Germinal* (1885), within a twenty-volume series, serves as a prime example of naturalistic writing. This detailed study portrays the harsh and oppressive life within a community of coal miners in Northern France, illustrating how heredity and an unforgiving environment influence the lives of the impoverished workers. Although the movement had a relatively short lifespan in Europe, with a few other practitioners like Thomas Hardy, its impact was substantial.

### 1.2.3.5 Aestheticism

- ▶ Art for art's sake

Aestheticism, an artistic and literary movement that surfaced in the late 19th century in Europe, arose in reaction to the increasing dominance of scientific thinking and the middle-class perception of art as carrying moral commitment and social responsibility. In essence, Aestheticism posits that art's purpose is solely to exist in its formal perfection, which constitutes its beauty. Its objective is not to bring about social change; rather, it exists for its own sake. The movement's rallying cry was 'art for art's sake.'

- ▶ Useless beauty

Rooted in philosopher Immanuel Kant's notion of aesthetic experience—contemplating an object for its own sake, irrespective of its relation to external reality—the movement found early expression in Theophile Gautier's declaration in the preface to his novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835) that "Nothing is really beautiful unless it is useless; everything useful is ugly..."

- ▶ Aesthetic expansion

Originating in France with Charles Baudelaire as a proponent, aestheticism swiftly expanded to England. Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, and Algernon Swinburne championed the movement in England, celebrating the cult of beauty. They asserted that art and beauty were not confined to paintings and sculptures alone but permeated every aspect of life. Their style embraced

high artifice, showcased a preference for the elaborate and extravagant, and exhibited a taste for the exotic and outlandish. Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) epitomizes the philosophical tenets of aestheticism in literature.

► Decadence

Towards the end of the 19th century, at the fin de siècle moment, artists such as Baudelaire and Wilde pushed the boundaries of aestheticism, giving rise to another movement called Decadence. In this context, art was viewed as divorced from nature, representing the antithesis of the natural and organic. Adhering to this principle, its practitioners embraced high artifice in both art and life, gaining notoriety for flamboyant fashion and experiments with sexuality.

### 1.2.3.6 Symbolism

► Symbolist rebellion

The symbolist movement, akin to aestheticism, emerged as a response to the prevailing scientism, materialism, and utilitarianism of its time. In literature, it served as a counterforce to the prevailing trends of realism and naturalism, which focused on presenting an objective reality and explicit expression of ideas and emotions. Symbolism championed subjective experience and the expression of ideas over realistic description

► French symbolism

Originating in France, the term 'symbolism' was coined by Jean Moréas in a literary manifesto published in *Le Figaro* in 1886. Influential figures associated with the movement included Arthur Rimbaud, Stephen Mallarme, and Paul Verlaine, with Charles Baudelaire regarded as its most influential figure. Although it began as a literary movement, symbolism quickly extended its influence to the visual arts.

► Beauty over utility

Symbolists aligned themselves with the philosophy of 'art for art's sake,' prioritizing beauty over utility. They argued that poetic language should speak independently, free from concerns about external reality. Instead of representing a thing plainly, Symbolists aimed to produce a certain effect through indirection and suggestion. The movement sought to synthesize form and feeling, marrying external reality with the inner subjectivity of the poem. Symbolists employed symbols, metaphors, and imagery to communicate emotions or moods, rejecting plain description and rhetoric. They expressed subjective moods through complex symbols, often private and esoteric. However, viewing the movement merely as a use of poetic symbols would be a distortion

The symbolist movement is often considered a bridge between

► Transitional subjectivity

► Precursor to modernism

► End of an era

► Modernist discontent

romanticism and modernism. Rejecting the sentimentalism and idealism of the romantics, symbolism embraced subjectivity. By rejecting objective reality, symbolist poetry turned to dreams, mysticism, mythology, and spirituality in its quest for higher truths through the ‘systematic derangement of the senses’ (Arthur Rimbaud). Modernists like T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats drew inspiration from symbolism. Eliot’s concept of the ‘objective correlative’ aligns with the symbolists’ use of symbols to evoke emotion.

The symbolist movement left a lasting impact on French and English literatures, later branching into distinct regional movements such as German Symbolism and Russian Symbolism. Movements like aestheticism, symbolism, and decadence, reacting against the dominant cultural tendencies of 19th-century realism and naturalism, marked the onset of the spirit of modernism in the subsequent century.

### 1.2.3.7 Modernism

In the early years of the twentieth century, Europe experienced a transformative period characterized by the fin de siècle celebration embraced by aestheticists and decadents. The tangible fruits of industrialization and empire-building were evident, creating a cultural atmosphere infused with the promise of a more equitable society. However, these optimistic dreams were shattered by a series of catastrophic wars and conflicts that unfolded across European soil in the ensuing three decades. Witnessing the horrors of war and death, writers and intellectuals found their faith in building a society based on Enlightenment ideals irreversibly shattered

From this discontent and sense of loss emerged the literary and artistic movement known as modernism, spreading across Europe and the United States in the first half of the twentieth century. While modernism exhibited various hues and shades within different experimental groups of artists and writers, a common thread among them was a profound distrust and rejection of the realistic and naturalistic traditions that characterized the nineteenth century. Modernists perceived their age as engulfed in turbulence, not only due to the devastating World Wars but also owing to advancements in science and technology challenging their convictions regarding self, space, time, language, and reality. A prevailing sense of alienation, displacement, and fragmentation dominated their experiences. Faced with an altered sense of reality, earlier modes of representation were deemed inadequate, prompting a deliberate quest for new forms and styles of expression to

capture this transformed reality. Let's explore the factors that contributed to this unease among the modernists and drove their spirit of innovation.

### 1.2.3.8 Historical Context

Europe in the twentieth century was a tumultuous landscape marked by an array of wars and conflicts. Notable events include the Russian Revolution (1917-1918), World War I (1914-18), World War II (1939-45), and the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). These upheavals were either sparked by populations rebelling against oppressive regimes or the culmination of long-standing regional and national tensions. The great war involved every nation on the continent, with some conflicts extending beyond Europe. The aftermath of World War I witnessed the rise of political extremism, exemplified by the emergence of fascism and totalitarian regimes in Italy under Mussolini (1921), Russia under Stalin's Communist rule (1929), and Germany under Hitler's Nazism (1933), eventually leading to World War II.

► Wars, Revolutions and Conflicts

A generation of writers, initially spurred by nationalist fervour during the war, found themselves disillusioned and devastated in its aftermath. They mourned the disintegration of Europe and sought to recover the ideal of European civilization. Literature, in this context, was envisioned as a unifying force capable of connecting readers and authors across different nationalities and languages.

► Post-War Disillusionment

Modernists were profoundly influenced by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, whose ideas on morality, God, and the individual struck at the very foundation of Christianity. Nietzsche boldly declared the death of God and the absence of an objective reality. He equally rejected Christian morality, asserting that in a world without God, individuals create their subjective reality driven primarily by their "will to power." Nietzsche's emphasis on the subjective nature of reality became a central concern in modernist works. Novelists, departing from the objective reality pursued by the realist tradition, favoured exploring subjective experiences. The impact of Nietzschean philosophy is evident in the works of Franz Kafka and anticipates the Existential school of thought in the post-war era.

► New Scientific and Philosophical Theories

Another influential figure was Sigmund Freud from Vienna, whose exploration of the human psyche challenged the concept of a unified self. Freud proposed that the human self is shaped not so much by the conscious mind but by the hidden realm of the unconscious, where all feelings and desires deemed inappropriate or immoral get sedimented. While inaccessible to

► Psychological Revolution

the conscious self, Freud argued that the unconscious surfaces in dreams and writings, exerting influence over thoughts and actions. Freud's theory of the unconscious introduced the concept of a fractured and fragmented self, which modernists sought to capture in novels through stylistic techniques such as stream of consciousness, as exemplified in the works of Marcel Proust, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf. Albert Einstein's theory of relativity and Henri Bergson's philosophical exploration of the experience of the passage of time further reinforced the idea of a fluid and subjective experience of reality.

► Technological Revolution

The advent of modern technology in every aspect of life profoundly altered the perception of time, space, and reality for the average European. The introduction of radio and television accelerated communication and information sharing, making it faster and more accessible. New modes of transportation increased the pace of mobility, and the transition from gas lamps to electricity brought drastic changes in how people lived and worked. The emergence of cinema, a new art form reliant on modern technology, took off in the 20th century and left a significant impact on modernist literature.

► Technological Warfare

However, technology also revealed its destructive side, amplifying the lethality and impact of wars. World War I, in particular, showcased the use of heavy artillery, tanks, machine guns, lethal explosives, chemical weapons, airplanes, field radios, and telephones. The Holocaust, with its gas chambers implemented by the Nazi regime, and the deployment of atomic bombs by the USA further underscored how modern technology had become a potential Frankenstein monster capable of wiping out humanity and the planet. Science fiction and dystopian narratives explored and prophesied the dangers of indiscriminate technological use, serving as cautionary tales.

► Rise of Modern Cities

In the twentieth century, cultural and literary life was predominantly centered around cities, serving as hubs that brought together writers, artists, and intellectuals from across Europe and the United States. Cities such as Paris, Berlin, London, Vienna, and Dublin became vibrant backdrops for numerous modernist writings. Marcel Proust chose Paris as the setting for his novels, while James Joyce captured the bustling activity of Dublin in *Ulysses* (1922). Many writers of the era embraced a nomadic or exiled existence. For example, the poet Ezra Pound, originally American, lived in London and later Italy. Similarly, T. S. Eliot moved from America to settle in London.

► Urban Intellectual Hubs

Cafes and theatres emerged as central gathering spaces for writers, providing venues for discussions and debates on the latest literary and intellectual ideas. Authors sought feedback for their innovative poetry and novels not so much from the reading public but from their fellow writers, who were well-versed in the contemporary literary scene. Even as cities inspired modernist artists, they were equally attuned to the noise, disorder, and fast pace of urban life, elements that would come to define the modern experience itself.

### 1.2.4 Literary Movements

► Avant-garde Innovation

Modernism's defining characteristic was its departure from tradition and established standards of artistic taste and appreciation, a quality epitomized by the cultural phenomenon of Avant-garde. Adopted from military discourse, the French term *avant-garde*, meaning 'advance guard,' collectively referred to the youthful cultural formations by the contemporary artistic intelligentsia. These groups engaged in genre-defying experiments across various art forms and literature, driven by the ambition to transcend objective realism and challenge existing social systems. Their goal was to develop a radically fresh artistic and literary language capable of capturing contemporary reality.

► Avant-garde Manifestos

While some of these movements were perceived as purely stylistic experiments, detached from social concerns, others were deeply tied to social, political, or cultural agendas. The avant-garde participants often worked in small, close-knit groups and articulated their identity through manifestos, outlining a clearly defined set of aims and purposes for their work. Notable avant-garde movements included Impressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Imagism, Vorticism, Expressionism, Dadaism, and Surrealism. The discussion below focuses on a few of these movements.

#### 1.2.4.1 Expressionism

► German Expressionism

Expressionism emerged in Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century, partly inspired by the symbolist movement. Drawing philosophical influences from psychoanalysis and Nietzsche, it arose in response to the pomposity of Imperial Germany and the confusion and anxiety engendered by modern urban civilization. As a visual style, expressionism developed anti-naturalistic techniques challenging both the artistic conventions of the previous century and aspects of modern society deemed repressive, materialistic, and corrupt.

Expressionist painters employed vibrant colours and lines



► Emotive Aesthetics

believed to be innately expressive of emotions and feelings, with a perceived spiritual effect. In literature, its most notable expression was found in the epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht and the novels of Franz Kafka. Kafka's works, such as *The Metamorphosis*, *The Castle*, and *The Trial*, presented nightmarish visions of individuals trapped in family, bureaucratic, and mechanized existence. Expressionist literature utilized subversive satire and disconcertingly apocalyptic visions to comment on humanity's discordant relationship with the modern world.

#### 1.2.4.2 Dadaism

► Anti-Bourgeois Rebellion

Dadaism, initiated in 1916 during World War I, was spearheaded by a group of artists and writers, mainly refugees from various countries, in Zurich, Switzerland. Key figures included Tristan Tzara, Hugo Ball, Richard Huelsenbeck, Hans Arp, Hannah Höch, and Marcel Duchamp. In the Dadaist manifesto of 1918, Tzara articulated the movement's disdain for bourgeois society, particularly its associations with scientific progress, material achievements, rationalism, and morality. Dadaism critiqued the nationalist agenda, which was seen as a primary instigator of World War I, favouring irrationality, intuition, and nonsense over reason and logic.

► Subversive Art

Inspired by avant-garde movements like cubism, expressionism, and futurism, Dadaists devised unconventional artistic methods to subvert bourgeois aesthetic sensibilities and challenge the notion of 'high' art. Their aim was not to create aesthetically pleasing art but to provoke questions about the purpose of art and the role of artists in modern society. They transformed everyday objects into artifacts by making slight modifications, as seen in Marcel Duchamp's readymade sculpture *The Fountain*, crafted from an inverted urinal with a fictitious sign. Another example is Hannah Höch's photomontage *Cut with Kitchen Knife Dada*, which assembles seemingly random images. These artistic productions positioned them as anti-art, reflecting their irreverence towards high art culture.

► Dadaist Poetry

In literature, dadaism found its most prominent expression in poetry, where conventional poetic structures were discarded in favour of fragmented imagery and syntactically fractured lines. The influence of Dadaism can be discerned in the poetry of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Over time, the movement dissipated with the advent of surrealism in 1924.

### 1.2.4.3 Surrealism

#### ► Surrealist Rebellion

The anarchism and irreverent attitude of the Dadaists served as an inspirational force for the surrealist movement in France. Similar to the Dadaists, the surrealists rebelled against the overt rationalism prevailing in French and European society. As an antidote to this, the surrealists turned inward, emphasising the supremacy of dreams and the unconscious. They were deeply influenced by psychoanalysis, with its key exponent André Breton even declaring surrealism as a form of artistic psychoanalysis. By analysing dreams, fostering random associations, exploring hypnotic outpourings, and practicing automatic writing, they sought to free the imagination to reveal deeper truths

#### ► Surrealist Influence

The impact of surrealism was evident in visual art, cinema, and literature. In literature, its influence was particularly discernible in the early works of W. H. Auden and the Spanish poet and playwright Federico García Lorca. In theatre, surrealism found expression in Antonin Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty.' Rejecting the conventions of traditional theatre, Artaud utilized sound, light, darkness, screams, and words to shock the audience. Critiquing modern civilization for transforming humanity into sick and repressed beings, Artaud argued that the purpose of theatre was to liberate humanity from the shackles of repression and unleash instinctual energy.

#### ► Relation to Tradition

The avant-garde movements played a significant role in shaping modernism, and their influence was evident in nearly all modernist writers. However, poets like T.S. Eliot sought to reconcile the spirit of innovation that propelled these movements with a commitment to tradition. In his essay titled "Tradition and Individual Talent" (1919), Eliot argued that novelty has only relative value, not absolute value. Writers must assess themselves by placing their works within the vast literary tradition, encompassing 'the entire literature of Europe from Homer,' and, within that, the entirety of the literature of the poet's own country. Eliot emphasized the poet's continual awareness of this tradition, labelling it the 'mind of Europe,' as essential for crafting new works that resonate within this rich cultural lineage.

Sandwiched between the two World Wars, Modernism reached its pinnacle in 1922, also known as its *annus mirabilis* (miracle year), marked by the publication of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, and Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies*. The Waste

► High Modernism

Land captured the disillusionment of the age, described by Eliot himself as ‘just a piece of rhythmic grumbling.’ *Ulysses*, written in the style of stream of consciousness, mapped the complexity and subtlety of mental processes, while *Jacob’s Room* presented the life of Jacob Flanders entirely from the perspective of other characters. *Duino Elegies* offered a profound meditation on human existence, dwelling on its limitations, insufficiency, and fractured consciousness.

► Modernist Transformation

In essence, the advent of modernism ushered in a transformative era that compelled writers to grapple with flexible definitions of the self, re-evaluate the relationship between language and consciousness, and adopt novel attitudes towards the relativity of time and temporality. There was a heightened awareness of the mechanics and processes of writing, and recognition that language was no longer a passive reflector but rather the very medium through which the world is made. While the avant-garde movements propelled modernism to new heights, poets like T.S. Eliot struck a delicate balance between innovation and a profound respect for literary tradition.

#### 1.2.4.4 Postmodernism

► Post-War Literary Shift

Post-World War II, European Literature entered the postmodern era (1945 onwards), departing from the weighty ideologies of the 1930s and 1940s and the grandeur of mainstream modernists. While both modernist and postmodernist writers acknowledged reality as subjective and fragmented, they differed in their attitude. Modernists mourned the loss of unified reality, undertaking a quest for meaning in art and literature, while postmodernists celebrated the fragmentation. Modernists were hopeful of rediscovering meaning, whereas postmodernists abandoned this quest, embracing meaningless and disorder. Both aimed for depth, but postmodernism embraced a more accessible and modest approach, rejecting the seriousness of earlier twentieth-century writing and embodying a playful literary attitude, characterized by the ludic spirit.

#### *Historical Context*

► Omnipresence of Technology and Globalisation

The postmodern attitude was significantly shaped by socio-political and intellectual forces, notably the omnipresence of technology and the dominance of information-sharing systems through digitalization. Concurrently, globalization led to a substantial increase in the global mobility of people and goods, intensifying the urgency of questioning a common experience of reality.

► Political Tensions and Conflicts

Political tensions and conflicts continued to cast a shadow over Europe, including the Cold War between Russia and the USA spanning decades, the Hungarian Uprising (1956), the Prague Spring (1968), the Paris student protests causing civil unrest (1968), and the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) leading to the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union. These events had a profound impact across Europe, fostering a growing distrust towards political establishments and state powers.

► Influence of Post-structuralism

Postmodernism was not just a term describing a post-war literary phase, but a theoretical approach that drew strength from structuralist and poststructuralist thought in the 60s and 70s. Postmodern writings exhibit heightened awareness of language, deliberately rejecting the traditional relationship between author, text, and reader. This shift was influenced by poststructuralists like Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, challenging the notion of a cohesive, singular reality and perceiving the world as torn and fragmented. They rejected the idea of a single guiding principle underlying existence. Barthes, notably, advocated for the 'death of the author', proposing that a text should be viewed as a multidimensional space where works from different authors and time periods interact and collide. In this paradigm, the role of the reader becomes more crucial than that of the author.

► Language Liberation

Postmodernism valued the polysemic and connotative agency of language, encouraging the assertion of these nuanced aspects against the more straightforward denotative use of language.

► Existentialism and Theatre of the Absurd

Another philosophical school that influenced early postmodern literature is Existentialism that originated in France in the 1940s. Drawing on the philosophy of Nietzsche, existentialists argued that constructing a universal view or theory of the world through language and literature was impossible. Postmodern literature, aligned with this scepticism, rejected grand metaphysical projections and political ideologies. Existential philosophers like Albert Camus, in works such as *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) and *The Rebel* (1951), delved into the absurdity of seeking absolute meaning in a seemingly meaningless world. This metaphysical scepticism found resonance in playwrights of the 'Theatre of the Absurd,' including Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, and later Harold Pinter. While their plays differed politically and theatrically, they shared a common goal of freeing the spectators from our mundane existence, from routine and mental sluggishness, which hide from them the strangeness of the world. To achieve this, the

absurdist employed farce, black humour, and mock realism in their plays.

### *Nouveau Roman*

Postmodernism's most notable impact was observed in new poetics of fiction that emerged in the 1950s known as the French Nouveau Roman or the New French Novel. Writers such as Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute, Michel Butor, Marguerite Duras, and Claude Simon aimed to challenge the dominance of traditional Realist novels. Their goal was to break away from the confident and straightforward narratives of realist novels, which they deemed too simplistic in portraying the world. These writers argued that traditional novels created an illusion of a stable and fully understandable universe rooted in human experiences. The New Novel, as explained by Robbe-Grillet, sought to depict the world without illusions, rejecting ready-made meanings and dismissing essentialist ideas about humanity. In this innovative approach, objects were portrayed as they are, devoid of hidden depths, remaining unchangeable and mocking attempts to impose meaning upon them. The writers aimed to capture the unadorned reality of the world, free from the comforting illusions offered by traditional literature.

► New Novel Movement

Postmodern novelists, acutely aware of the disparity between reality and its representation, rejected the pursuit of unity and absolute meaning found in realist fiction. Instead, they consistently emphasized the text's narrative artifice and constructed nature. This self-reflective quality in postmodern novels is termed metafiction. Other employed strategies include the use of an unreliable narrator, multiple endings, irony, parody, word-play, intertextuality, and the erasure of boundaries between high and low literature, historical facts and fiction, and genres. These strategies find notable expression in the works of writers such as Vladimir Nabokov (*Pale Fire*, 1962), Italo Calvino (*If On a Winter's Night a Traveller*, 1970), Angela Carter (*Nights at the Circus*, 1984), Milan Kundera (*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 1984), and Umberto Eco (*Foucault's Pendulum*, 1988).

► Metafiction

Another stylistic technique in vogue was magical realism, exemplified in the works of Gabriel Garcia Marquez (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 1967), Gunter Grass (*The Tin Drum*, 1981) and Michel Tournier (*The Erl-King*, 1970). Magical realism collapses the distinctions between fantasy and normalcy, the supernatural and the natural, and the objective and subjective, embodying the fluid boundaries of postmodern experience.

► Magical Realism



► Post-War Literary Transition

In summary, in the aftermath of the second World War, European literature underwent a profound transformation, ushering in the era of postmodernism. This period, shaped by the technological boom, globalization, and the continuing spectre of conflicts, saw writers grappling with a new set of challenges and philosophical inquiries as exemplified by the school of existentialism. Postmodernism, while sharing some concerns with its modernist predecessors, adopted a playful approach, rejecting the gravity of earlier twentieth-century writing. The influence of poststructuralist thought, particularly the ideas of Barthes and Foucault, led to a heightened awareness of language and a rejection of traditional author-reader dynamics. The Nouveau Roman in France exemplified a departure from traditional realism, seeking to depict the world without illusions. Postmodern novels in Europe unfolded in various directions, embracing metafiction and magic realism. This period marked a departure from the certainties of the past, inviting readers to engage with a fragmented and multilayered reality, reflecting the complexities of the post-war world.

## Summarised Overview

This unit explores the evolution of European Literature across the periods of Romanticism, Modernism, and Postmodernism. It examines the influence of social, political, and cultural factors on literary movements, highlighting diverse trends and their philosophical underpinnings. The emergence of these movements often stemmed from a perceived inadequacy in existing artistic expressions to depict contemporary reality, fostering a rich tradition of experimentation in European literature, particularly in form and technique, showcasing its dynamic nature.

## Assignments

1. How did the Sturm und Drang movement in 1770s Germany serve as a precursor to Romanticism in the nineteenth century, and what key elements of the movement influenced later literary and theatrical developments?
2. In what ways did Romanticism as a literary and cultural movement respond to the social and cultural changes brought about by the Enlightenment, rising industrialization, and urbanization?



3. How did the cultural movement of realism and naturalism in literature during the mid-nineteenth century respond to the challenges of urbanization and changing dynamics of modern city life?
4. How did movements like aestheticism and symbolism challenge the prevailing views of the late 19th century regarding the role and purpose of art?
5. Discuss the role of avant-garde movements in challenging the established standards and traditions in art and literature during the early 20th century.
6. What are the key characteristics of French Nouveau Roman ?

## Suggested Reading

1. Cohen, Walter. *A History of European Literature: The West and the World from Antiquity to the Present*. Oxford University Press, 2017.
2. Pourcq, Martin De, and Sophie Levie (ed.). *European Literary History: An Introduction*. Routledge, London. 2018.
3. Travers, Martin (ed.). *European Literature from Romanticism to Postmodernism*. Continuum, New York. 2001.

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SGOU



# Poetry

## BLOCK-02

### Block Content

Unit 1 : “Poetic Principles: Rhetoric, Rhapsody and Music”: Helen Abbott

Unit 2 : Poems

## Unit 1

# Poetic Principles: Rhetoric, Rhapsody and Music - Helen Abbott

## Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ acquire a holistic understanding of the innovative techniques in European poetry.
- ▶ analyse the interplay of classical and modern literary traditions to comprehend how ancient poetical conventions influence European poetry.
- ▶ critically discuss the cross-cultural influences in poetry in the background of international poets Rainer Maria Rilke and Anna Akhmatova.
- ▶ draw comparisons, distinctions, and interrelationships between various cultures and periods.

## Background

Modern European poetry, which mainly features translational poems including the works of popular poets Charles Baudelaire, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Anna Akhmatova, leads to a radical departure from traditional themes and poetic forms. Literary translations may reflect the socio-cultural, and political context of the creation of a work. It communicates a culture from one language to the other. Confronting challenges in several aspects, including linguistic, aesthetic, and semantic expressions. The translator also serves as a creator. Hence translational poetry played a significant role in preserving European Literary traditions and cultural exchange.

The current unit systematically examines modern European poetry against the backdrop of canonical works like *The Odyssey*. The kaleidoscopic view of the modern human experience and socio-cultural and personal themes in the prescribed poems provide a unique literary experience for the readers. By synthesizing elements of symbolism, romanticism, imagism, and existentialism, they forged a unique poetic language that resonates across cultures and generations. This unit takes on a compelling journey through the diverse influences that shaped the poetic visions of these luminaries. It underscores the intricate groundbreaking techniques and profound explorations that characterize modern poetry. In addition, the unit delves into the concept of social order within the realm of modern poetry, shedding light on its relevance and nuanced interpretations.



## Keywords

Modern Poetry, Poetic Devices, Rhetoric, Literary Canon

## Discussion

► Transformation

► Revolution

► Influences on  
European poetry

### 2.1.1 Contextual Foundations

The dynamic evolution of European poetry signifies an intrinsic departure from traditional poetic forms and techniques. Socio-political upheavals, globalisation, rejection of traditional forms, technological advancements, the proliferation of literary magazines, and the publication industry are some of the factors that shaped modern European poetry. It led to a global impact and delimited the contours of poetry in terms of regionalism.

The structural innovation, varied themes, innovative literary techniques, and vivid imagery of European poetry decided its influence on modern literature. Moreover, the interrelationship of language, rhetoric, and music of modern European poetry with the classical times gained critical attention in the contemporary literary scenario. All these resulted in the emergence of a poetical style which gave a significant voice to the poet to brought a radical transformation in the genre of poetry.

The literary contributions of Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, and their modern counterparts have a remarkable role in contemporary literature. Their renowned poetic compositions are deeply rooted in philosophical insights and ethical values. Engaging in a critical reading of European poetry instigates a greater poetic sensibility and aesthetic sense among the readers. It demands an understanding of the structural beauty of poetry added by the diverse poetic techniques.

### 2.1.2 Dissenting Voices In Modern French Poetry

French poetry underwent a paradigm shift in the 19th century with the writings of pioneering figures of Charles Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarmé. They paved the way for experimental and intuitive verse forms to liberate the realm of poetry from the confines of classical structure. In the early period of the nineties, French poetry preferred poetical forms like sonnets

► Transformation

and odes but the later period is considered as an age against Romanticism. Moreover, during this period pioneering figure Baudelaire adopted Realism in poetical works to address the harsh realities of society and Mallarmé, suggested Symbolism, to deal with the existential ambiguities of human experiences. All these revolutionary shifts herald the radical restructuring of European poetry.

### 2.1.3 Between Baudelaire and Mallarmé Voice, Conversation and Music

Helen Abbott, a Senior Lecturer in French at the School of Languages and Cultures, critically analysed the aesthetic proficiency of the poetic compositions of Charles Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarmé. Her work, “Between Baudelaire and Mallarme: Voice, Conversation and Music,” gives an insightful analysis of the poetical experiments of Baudelaire and Mallarme in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which showed the rise of music in poetry. Her study also focuses on the prevalent prosody and rhetorical conventions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Also, it discusses the advantages of adopting the various dimensions of voice, music, and rhetorical elements.

► Critique

Helen Abbott sheds light on the paramount role of the “aesthetic value of voice” in shaping the structure of poetry. According to Abbott, the poems of both Baudelaire and Mallarmé possessed the resonance of music in their poetry. Their mastery of poetic devices elicited aesthetic emotions in readers. The skillful deployment of rhyme, rhythm, and repetition in poetry aids in deeper understanding and memorisation of the lines.

► Harmony

### 2.1.4 Transcending the Canon

Baudelaire and Mallarmé contested the traditional practices in poetry in all its forms. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with certain ambiguities, they started to use figurative devices in poetry. They employed futuristic elements in poetry including symbolism, existentialism, urbanisation, and human alienation in the context of modernisation. Free verse, enjambment, rhyme, and inventive metrical forms are featured in their poems. All these prompted the readers to probe into deeper layers of the meaning of poetry. Also, the use of apostrophes, dialogic forms, and extended registers, encourages increased role readers in poetical appreciation.

► Innovation

### 2.1.5 Rhetorical Exploration Of Poetry

Helen Abbot comments that through the analysis of



► Exploration

underlying rules or norms guiding the language use of Baudelaire and Mallarmé, the reader has to focus on the notion of ‘voice’ in their works. In the writings of Charles Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarmé, the concept of “voice” emerges as a significant force, essential for expressing their aesthetic visions. Writing during a period marked by uncertainty surrounding the role of poetry, they attempted to bring a new face to the genre of poetry through their unique artistic expressions. By the mid-nineteenth century, notably through the works of Baudelaire and later Mallarmé, an augmenting scepticism arose regarding the efficacy of figurative literary devices in securing a profound poetic response.

► Connection

### 2.1.6 Role of Reader

Both Baudelaire and Mallarmé pioneered innovative approaches to poetry that speak for the poet’s voice and that of the reader. They tried to create a direct, unfiltered connection between poetry and the reader’s sensibilities. Through these unconventional ways of poetic techniques, they aimed to instigate authentic and immediate emotional reactions from their readers.

► Re-evaluation

They start to question and reevaluate the established norms, propounding new poetic techniques that highlight the voices of both the poet and the reader. To encourage the reader’s participation these poets, focus on the strategic use of voice to add a more direct and engaging interaction. They were conscious of relying on figurative language and poetic devices to achieve a certain impact in poetry.

► Rhetoric

### 2.1.7 Rhetoric in Poetry

During Baudelaire and Mallarmé’s early years, rhetoric played a pivotal role in poetry. The modern era witnessed the blurring of distinctions between terms such as ‘rhetoric,’ ‘prosody,’ ‘eloquence,’ and ‘versification,’ driven by the belief that language possessed inherent musical qualities. This belief led to the development of regulations rooted in principles of auditory perception. Rhetorical and prosodic theories serve a dual purpose for poets, validating their poetic language. Figures like Baudelaire and Mallarmé argue that versification rules, especially concerning the alexandrine meter, naturally arise from the inherent rhythms of the French language.

### 2.1.8 Prosody

Prosody, the study of poetry’s rhythm and structure, can

► Prosody

seem mysterious and not easily understood and this complexity makes it interesting and sophisticated. Hence Baudelaire avoided explaining his poetry in detail; he liked the idea of keeping some things mysterious. In his writings about poetry, he embraced this sense of mystery, making his work more intriguing and thought-provoking.

### 2.1.9 Music

► Music

Music has a specific framework to assess the appealing aspects of sounds which bring immediate results in a reader than the linguistic devices and figurative language. According to Abbot, through their effective use of music, Baudelaire and Mallarmé reformed the conventional poetic principles to prioritise sensual elements in poetry. Baudelaire believed that prosodic rules are not just about poetry but also a fundamental aspect of human life, and he emphasises how this quality extends to music as well. Both Baudelaire's and Mallarmé's poetry is deeply infused with the idea of music, which became a common theme in art throughout the nineteenth century.

### 2.1.10 Poetry and Music

► Poetry and music

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, there was a surge in theoretical discussions about the relationship between poetry and music. Music was employed to validate poetry, working alongside carefully crafted rhetorical and prosodic techniques to cultivate the audience's ability to appreciate poetry from a musical perspective. This integration of music into poetry challenged the idea that reading poetry is a purely solitary and silent activity, emphasising the importance of engaging with poetry as a multisensory and communal experience.

### 2.1.11 Transforming Poetry in an Era of Modernity

The poetical contributions of Baudelaire and Mallarmé inspired generations and reshaped the poetical conventions of poetry in the modern epoch. Their experiments with subjective verse forms share the intellectual and emotional landscape of the poet and opened greater poetical inventions in the subsequent periods. Hence the indomitable role of these poets in the domains of modern French poetry brought radical shifts in the modern and the subsequent post-modern poetical forms and content. Both Baudelaire and Mallarmé urged generations to perceive and experience poetry unconventionally.

## Summarised Overview

This unit gives an in-depth analysis of the poetical inventions of Baudelaire and Mallarme, based on Helen Abbot's critical work, "Between Baudelaire and Mallarme: Voice, Conversation, and Music." It details how the voice and music featured in the poetry of these revolutionary poets and how they encourage the poet's direct engagement with readers.

Abbot analyses the effectiveness of rhetorical elements in their poetry and the aesthetic impacts they bring in the domains of poetry to craft a unique experience for the reader. The theoretical concepts of diverse academic disciplines such as language philosophies, linguistics, post-structuralism, and phenomenology, deeply informed the analysis of Helen Abbot to give an expert analysis of the poetical inventions of Baudelaire and Mallarme.

## Assignments

1. Baudelaire and Mallarmé's poetic compositions differ from traditional 19th-century French poetry in terms of rhetorical and prosodic techniques. Comment.
2. Consider Baudelaire and Mallarmé's appreciation for voice's aesthetic value in poetry, influenced by music and oratory.
3. Evaluate the voice-related elements in Baudelaire's and Mallarmé's poetry that influence modern poetry.

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2. Neff, Emery. *A Revolution in European Poetry, 1660-1900*. Hippocrene Books, 1974.
3. Taylor, John. *Into the Heart of European Poetry*. Routledge Publishers, 2017.

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### Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ analyse the significance of Homer's *The Odyssey* in the Western canon
- ▶ assess the influence of Charles Baudelaire's surrealist elements on modern poetry
- ▶ examine Anna Akhmatova's "Requiem" as a modernist response to the oppressive regime in Soviet Russia
- ▶ interpret the use of literary devices to explore themes of beauty, transcendence, and the transformative power of art

### Background

*The Odyssey* commands a prominent position in the literary canon. It is one of two major ancient Greek epic poems attributed to Homer, composed in the 8th or 7th century BC. It remains one of the oldest extant works of literature still widely read today. The poem is divided into 24 books and follows the Greek hero Odysseus, King of Ithaca, on his journey home after the ten-year-long Trojan War. His return from Troy to Ithaca, spanning ten additional years, is marked by numerous perils, leading to the death of all his crew. Richmond Lattimore's translation of this work is highly praised for both its readability and faithfulness to the original Greek text.

European poetry, as characterised by the works of Charles Baudelaire, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Anna Akhmatova, deals with a radical withdrawal from traditional poetic forms. These poets revolutionized the art of verse during the last decades of the 19th century. An in-depth analysis of their poems will give a profound understanding of how modern European poetry redefined poetic expression, structure, and content. Baudelaire's structured rhymed verses, Rilke's exposition of free verse, and Akhmatova's dexterous formation of rhyme and metre marked the structural innovations of European poetry. Enjambed lines, stanzaic designs, and line breaks are the features of contemporary European poetry that give a unique poetic experience to the reader. On the whole, it is evident that with the interplay of thematic contents and stanzaic experiments modern poets redefined the boundaries of poetic expression.

## Keywords

Classic, Trojan War, Tradition and Modernity, Surrealism, Symbolism, Metaphor

## Discussion

### Poem 1

#### Book VIII. *The Odyssey*: Homer. Trans Richmond Lattimore

*The Odyssey*, an epic poem, originated in ancient Greece and was created by Homer. It is estimated to have been composed during the 8th or 7th century BC in the Greek language known as Homeric Greek. *The Odyssey*, as it exists today, consists of over twelve thousand lines and, much like *The Iliad*, is traditionally organised into twenty-four books. *The Odyssey* is a significant work in the Western canon, exploring themes and characters, including women and slaves, with more prominence compared to *The Iliad*, which focuses on soldiers and kings during the Trojan War. It has been translated into various languages since the 16th century and continues to inspire adaptations in various media.

► Classic



Fig. 2.2.1 Representative images of the characters in *The Odyssey*

### 2.2.1.1 Summary of the Poem

#### ► Odyssey

Odysseus dedicated ten years to active participation in the Trojan War, followed by an additional decade marked by a prolonged journey to return to his homeland. Throughout this extended period, his family remained uninformed of his whereabouts, and he suffered the loss of his naval fleet, crew, and the accumulated spoils from the Trojan War. His return to Ithaca, which occurred in the tenth year of his absence, was executed covertly and in solitude, owing to the assistance provided by the Phaiakians of Scheria, the ultimate destination on his extensive voyage. Before departing for Troy, Odysseus left his wife, Penelope, and their young son, Telemachus, in Ithaca. In the years leading up to his return, Penelope faced persistent advances from suitors from neighbouring islands but skilfully evaded their proposals, maintaining hope for Odysseus' eventual return without committing herself to a remarriage.

#### ► Reunion

The suitors, having intruded as unwelcome guests, took up residence within Odysseus' palace. In the period immediately preceding Odysseus' return, Telemachus embarked on a journey to the mainland to gather intelligence concerning his father's whereabouts. Menelaus provided him with information that confirmed Odysseus' existence but also conveyed his detainment on the island of Kalypso, with no apparent means of repatriation. Upon Telemachus' return to Ithaca, he narrowly avoided an ambush set by the suitors, coincidentally arriving shortly after his father had made his way back home. The respective journeys of Telemachus, Odysseus' reappearance, and the subsequent recognition and reunion of the father and son were all arranged under the vigilant aegis of Athena.

#### ► Resolution

In a strategic endeavour, father and son collaborated to devise the downfall of the suitors. Disguised, Odysseus infiltrated his own domicile unobserved, assimilating among the suitors and engaging in discourse with Penelope. Bolstered by the support of two steadfast attendants (and the divine intervention of Athena), they ensnared the suitors in an unarmed state, leading to the murder of the entire contingent numbering 108. Penelope remained oblivious to this covert stratagem, and Odysseus disclosed his true identity to her only after the conflict. Subsequently, the kin of the deceased suitors launched an assault on the estate of Laertes, the father of Odysseus, instigating a skirmish. Yet, this attack was expeditiously curtailed through the intercession of Zeus and Athena, culminating in a hastily brokered reconciliation.

► Influence

The poem inspired many modern poets to write poems drawing elements from classical texts like the “Odyssey”. It also allows the reader to compare the elements of literary landscapes and the enduring relevance of classical narratives in contemporary artistic expression.

► Relevance

### 2.2.1.2 Exploration Of Universal Themes:

Including universal themes like journey, identity, and competition, the poem speaks for their relevance in contemporary poetry to give an enduring representation of human life. These themes feather modern poets with a timeless framework through which to explore contemporary cultural situations and dilemmas. The poem provides a deeper understanding of the historical and social factors that shaped classical literature.

► Integration of tradition and modernity

### 2.2.1.3 Interplay of Tradition and Modernity

Insisting on the essence of modernism, Richmond Lattimore’s translation of *The Odyssey* Book VIII contributes to modern poetry through its integration of the legacy of the classical age with contemporary sensibilities. Through rigorous linguistic definitude, it maintains the epic’s integrity while elevating its poetic quality. The poem deals with themes such as hospitality, identity, and storytelling, echoing modern poetry’s exploration of timeless human experiences. Additionally, it offers cultural richness by enchanting readers with the ancient Greek context, bringing up a deeper understanding of ancient customs and values. Additionally, it encourages comparative literary analysis, through intertextual dialogues between Homer’s epic and contemporary poetry, thus enhancing the modern poetic landscape with the discernment of the classical past and the vitality of the present.

## Poem 2

► Baudelaire

### “Beauty”: Charles Baudelaire

Charles Baudelaire was a 19th-century French poet, essayist, and art critic, best known for his collection of poetry titled *Les Fleurs du mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*). These two poems, “Beauty” and “The Ideal,” are part of this collection. Baudelaire’s work is characterised by its exploration of decadence, beauty, and the darker aspects of human nature. In *The Flowers of Evil*, Baudelaire reflects on themes of desire, sensuality, and the quest for an unattainable ideal amidst the complexities of modern life.

### 2.2.2.1 Baudelaire's Influences on Modern Poetry



Fig 2.2.2 Charles Baudelaire

Baudelaire's poems recurrently engage with the socio-political turmoil of France in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Convoluting the doctrines of Romanticism, Symbolism, and Existentialism Baudelaire inspired later poets like Rilke and Akhmatova. All of them paved the way for new poetical genres that reflect the complexities of the modern world and its chaotic spiritual and cultural conventions.

► Modern poetry

### 2.2.2.2 Imagination and Innovation

Modern poetry encourages readers to explore new realms, question the constraints of human experience, and engage with the subconscious mind. Surrealism and magic realism, two influential literary movements in modern European poetry, share a fascination with the fantastical and the subconscious.

► Use of surrealism by Baudelaire

Charles Baudelaire, a prominent figure in European poetry, utilises surrealistic elements in his poems to explore the irrational elements, thoughts, and dream elements in the human psyche. He uses surrealism in his poems to delve into the depths of the human mind while grounding their narratives in a recognisable world, creating verses that challenge reality, evoke mystery, and explore the complexity of the human experience.

► Surreal ambience

If we consider the pomes, "Beauty" and "The Ideal", Baudelaire creates a surreal ambience by intertwining the realms of the real and the imaginary. His desire to add sleep and dream hints at the surrealist fascination to expound a world of creativity to the reader. In his poem "Beauty" the poet deals with the interplay of beauty and reality to reveal the transience of external beauty.

On a throne in the sky, a mysterious sphinx,  
I join a heart of snow to the whiteness of swans;  
Pure mirrors that make all things more beautiful.

These lines are also remarkable for their surrealistic elements

- ▶ Surrealistic elements

here the poet introduces a “mysterious sphinx” on a throne in the sky. Here he uses mythology and fantasy to add elements of surrealism to the poem.

- ▶ Symbolism

### 2.2.2.3 Rhetorical Elements in the Poem

“I am fair, O mortals! like a dream carved in stone” - The comparison of the speaker (or the statue) to a dream carved in stone highlights the exquisite beauty of the subject. In this line, the poet uses a simile to convey the transcendental nature of poetry. In the following lines “My breast where each one, in turn, has bruised himself / Is made to inspire in the poet a love / As eternal and silent as matter” - The speaker’s breast is metaphorically described as a source of inspiration for poets, emphasising its enduring nature. “I hate movement for it displaces lines”. Here movement is personified as something that disrupts the statue’s perfect lines and form.

- ▶ Symbolism

“never do I weep and never do I laugh” – The elements of antithesis contrasts the statue’s immobility and emotional detachment. “Pure mirrors that make all things more beautiful” - The repetition of the “m” sound (alliterations) in “mirrors” and “more” creates a pleasing rhythm and draws attention to the idea of beauty. The statue symbolises timeless beauty and inspiration. The mention of a sphinx and swans adds further layers of symbolism, as both creatures are associated with mystery and beauty in various mythologies. Additionally, the poem is rich in visual imagery, describing the statue’s appearance, the sky, and the poet’s imagined response to it. The descriptions help create a vivid mental picture for the reader.

- ▶ Use of rhetorical devices

Overall, Baudelaire uses various rhetorical devices to convey the idea of an inspiring beauty embodied in a statue, while also exploring the role of art and the muse in the lives of poets.

## Poem 3

- ▶ Discontent with conventional beauty

### “The Ideal” : Charles Baudelaire

In this poem, the speaker expresses his discontent with conventional beauty as depicted in old prints and art. He expels the depictions of dainty ladies with castanets, which he considers irrelevant and unable to satisfy his profound desires. The speaker rejects the depictions of artist Gavarni, known for illustrating pale and sickly-looking beauties.

Instead, the speaker desires more complex and unconventional forms of beauty. He refers to Lady Macbeth,

- ▶ Complex and unconventional forms of beauty

- ▶ Surrealistic Beauty

- ▶ Metaphor and symbolism

## Poem 4.

- ▶ Rainer Maria Rilke

- ▶ Transformative power of art

a character known for her moral ambiguity and involvement in dark deeds, as a representation of the kind of beauty he desires. He also mentions Michelangelo's artistic creation that captivates him with its mysterious beauty.

Baudelaire explores Beauty through the lens of surrealism and presents it as an elusive entity floating perpetually in an abyss. The personification of Beauty as cold and native to the North adds surrealistic elements to the poem. Most of his poems feature his mastery of infusing surrealistic elements to bring about complex emotions and challenge conventional reality. Also, these poems are marked by the dexterous incorporation of allusions, images, and symbols from canonical texts. Hence by integrating intertextuality, the poet brings various layers to the poem.

### 2.2.3.1 Devices in the Poem

In order to express his dispositions on beauty and various art forms, Baudelaire employs several metaphorical expressions in the poem. "Ivory vignettes," "puppet-like figures," and "worthless age" are metaphors for traditional concepts of beauty, while Lady Macbeth and Michelangelo's "Night" represent more complex beauty. In the poem, the poet alludes to complex and intense characters to break the conventional poetical forms. Baudelaire uses vivid imagery to contrast the pale, demised beauty with the more vibrant and morally ambiguous beauty he craves. It helps the poet to convey inner feelings. The use of symbols like "scarlet ideal" and "Titan's mouth" adds depth to the poem, suggesting a longing for intense and daring experiences in art and beauty.

### "Archaic Torso Of Apollo": Rainer Maria Rilke

Rainer Maria Rilke, an Austrian poet, and novelist, was known for his Symbolist and Modernist poetry. He wrote poetry in both German and French, showcasing his versatility. He significantly influenced modern poets and his exploration of spirituality resonates with the readers.

"Archaic Torso of Apollo" by Rainer Maria Rilke deals with the transformative power of art. The poem explores the beauty and impact of a damaged sculpture of Apollo, missing its head and legs. The poem opens by emphasizing the mistrial setting of the missing head, with the speaker and the reader. They suspect a majestic background to the statue which still maintains an artistic perfection and brilliance, with the enduring power of art.



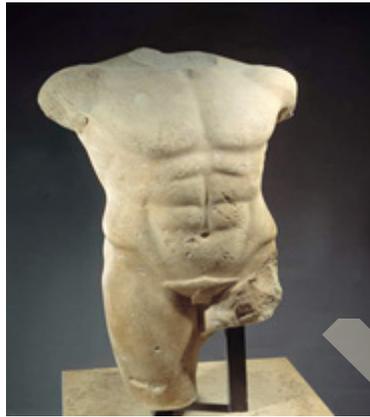


Fig. 2.2.3 Archaic Torso of Apollo

### 2.2.4.1 Techniques and Poetic Devices

#### ► Literary devices

Rainer Maria Rilke's "Archaic Torso of Apollo" utilises various literary devices such as simile, personification, imagery, symbolism, alliteration, and hyperbole to convey the transformative power of art and the profound impact it can have on the viewer.

#### ► Poetic devices

The poem uses metaphor immensely to describe the statue of Apollo. To foreground the divine and radiant quality of the sculpture the poet uses metaphors like the head with "eyes like ripening fruit" and the torso "still suffused with brilliance from inside, like a lamp." The poem also employs simile, comparing the gaze of the statue to a lamp, stating, "like a lamp, in which his gaze, now turned to low." This simile emphasises the enduring power and presence of the statue's gaze. Personification is used when the poem attributes human qualities to the statue, and the suggestion that "procreation flared" at the statue's centre. Also, the poem employs hyperbole, or deliberate exaggeration, in the lines "burst like a star: for here there is no place / that does not see you." This hyperbolic statement emphasizes the all-encompassing impact of encountering great art and its ability to be seen and felt everywhere.

#### ► Challenging traditional notions of beauty

The poem emphasises that even without a complete physical form, the sculpture possesses a captivating beauty, challenging traditional notions of beauty. In conclusion, "Archaic Torso of Apollo" speaks about the eternal and transcending beauty of art.

## Poem 5

► Rendering humanistic emotions

### “Requiem” : Anna Akhmatova



Fig.2.2.4 Anna Akhmatova

Ann Andreyevna Gorenko well known as Anna Akhmatova (1889-1966), was one of the prominent figures in 20th-century Russian poetry. Influenced by the Symbolist movement, her early poetry explored themes of love, mysticism, and beauty, exemplified in collections like *Evening* and *Rosary*. Akhmatova’s concise and emotionally charged poetry delves into the Russian psyche

and the universal human experience. Posthumously, she is recognised as a symbol of artistic resilience and the enduring power of poetry.

#### 2.2.5.1 Summary of the Poem

The prologue portrays a brief picture of the era, marked by oppression and isolation. Throughout the poem, there is a sense of helplessness and ambiguity with the overwhelming despair that the poet underwent at the time of tyrannical rule in Russia. The poem closes with an epilogue where the poet vows to remember those who endured with her, during the time of suffering. “Requiem” is a poignant composition that serves as a reminder of the perseverance of individuals during a dark period in Russian history.

► Resilience

This emotional poem reflects the poet’s experiences during the Yezhov terror in Soviet Russia. It begins with the poet bearing witness to the suffering of the times and her psychological trauma. The poem then details the poet’s own experiences waiting outside a prison in Leningrad for seventeen months, where she is recognised by a woman in the crowd, leading to a moment of connection.

► Psychological poem

#### 2.2.5.2 Features of the Poem

Anna Akhmatova employs various literary devices in her poem “Requiem.” In the poem, she explores the agnostic atmosphere of humanity under a despotic reign, where emotions and experiences are disfigured. Through her resonant language and stirring imagery, she draws the readers’ attention to empathise with the suffering of people. In this way, modernism

- ▶ Traumatic memories

serves as a vehicle in the poem for a deeper, more nuanced exploration of history and human suffering. In “Requiem,” Akhmatova presents not only the Stalinist repression but also the profound emotional ramifications it had on the people. The entire poem reflects the traumatic memories of a community during a distressing period in Russian history.

The following are some lines that speak about the anxiety and fear of people:

- ▶ Narrative perspective and reader interpretation

The sun declined, the Neva blurred,  
and hope sang always from afar.  
Where are they now, my nameless friends  
from those two years I spent in hell?

As a modernist poem, the “Requiem” with its innovative perspectives invites the reader’s interpretation to interpret the emotional complexities of a generation. The poem underpins the modernist notions of engaging readers in a dialogue about the text’s meaning and significance.

### 2.2.5.3 Literary Devices in the Poem

- ▶ Poetic devices

In the poem, the poet uses “Black Marias” (prison transport vehicles) to represent oppression and the “iron bars” to symbolize imprisonment and alienation. The phrase “faces fall to bone” is an example of a metaphor for the physical and emotional toll of suffering. The poem vividly depicts the scenes and emotions, such as “the vault of heaven was dissolved in fire” and “glossy black or ash-fair locks turn overnight to tarnished silver.” This imagery evokes a sense of transformation and loss in the reader. The repetition of “Mother” throughout the poem emphasises the universal suffering and grief experienced by mothers who lost loved ones during this period. The poem alludes to religious themes, with references to Mary Magdalene, the crucifixion of Christ, and the image of a “prison dove.” These allusions add a profound depth to the poem’s themes of suffering and redemption. The poem employs irony in lines like “the one who would toss her pretty mane and say, ‘It’s just like coming home again,’” to highlight the stark contrast between the speaker’s memories and the brutal reality of the times. The use of enjambed lines in the poem creates a deeper sense of continuous reflection. These poetic devices work together to convey the profound emotions and experiences of the poet who stands for a generation.

## Summarised Overview

Richmond Lattimore, a renowned American poet is well known for his translation of Homer's epic *The Odyssey*. The poem deals with the challenging journey of Odysseus as he strives to return home to Ithaca after the Trojan War and details the struggles, temptations, and victory of Odysseus on his way back to Ithaca. Lattimore vividly portrays legendary heroes, mythical creatures, redemption in the human mind, and divine interventions to contemporary audiences.

In his poem "Beauty" Baudelaire critiques the preoccupation of poets with the elements of transient beauty in a materialistic world. He comments on the attempts of a woman who poses as a statue to bring poetical inspiration. The poet contrasts this in his poem "The Ideal," where the poet himself relishes in the unattainable beauty ideals. Both poems discuss the human obsession with unrealistic beauty in a utilitarian world. The poet addresses these issues in his poems to encourage the readers to value the innate beauty of humanity.

"Archaic Torso of Apollo" by Rainer Maria Rilke shows the poet's interest in artistic forms. Rilke's belief in the ability of art to convey human experiences and emotions is described in the poem. The sensuous imageries in the poem suggest the power of artistic forms to appeal the human emotions rather than intellect. The poem enables the reader to understand the mysteries of spirituality and its relation to human existence in the world.

The poem "Requiem" is a personal testimony of Anna Akhmatova one of the renowned poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Religion, collective suffering, political unrest, and personal grief are the major themes discussed by the poet. The uncertain periods of Stalin's regime and the constant struggle of generations against the authorities are poetically discussed in the poem. The elements of the shared suffering of a population and the identity crisis of the poet herself define the autobiographical elements in the poem.

## Assignments

1. Comment on the significance of homecoming for various characters in *The Odyssey* and how it shapes their identities and motivations throughout the epic.
2. Explore the broader significance of divine intervention in ancient Greek literature.
3. Conduct a character analysis of Penelope in *The Odyssey*. Examine her resilience, wit, and emotional development throughout the narrative.
4. Analyse the use of surrealistic imagery in "The Ideal" and "Beauty." How do



- surreal elements contribute to the overall message and impact of the poems?
5. Identify and discuss the key themes in the poem “Beauty”. Consider concepts like the eternal nature of beauty, the detachment of the poetic persona, and the role of art in capturing beauty.
  6. Explore the recurring motifs and symbols in the poem “The Ideal”.
  7. Write a critical analysis of Rainer Maria Rilke’s poem “Archaic Torso of Apollo.” Explore the poem’s themes, structure, and literary devices.
  8. Discuss the metaphorical significance of the missing head in both the poem and the sculpture. How does this theme resonate with broader artistic and philosophical ideas?
  9. Analyse how Rilke conveys the idea that encountering great art can be transformative.
  10. Analyse the psychological complexities in Anna Akhmatova’s “Requiem.” How does the poem convey the emotional and psychological toll of historical trauma?
  11. Examine the use of vivid imagery and symbolism in “Requiem.”
  12. What are the predominant emotions expressed by the speaker in the poem “Requiem.”, and how do they evolve throughout the poem?

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## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



# Drama

## BLOCK-03

### **Block Content**

Unit 1 : “Dialectics in the Theater”: Peter Brooker

Unit 2 : Drama

## Unit 1

# “Dialectics in the Theatre” - Bertolt Brecht

## Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ familiarise themselves with the works of Bertolt Brecht.
- ▶ understand the idea of dialectics in theatre.
- ▶ appreciate the various types of dramatic techniques employed.
- ▶ make a comparison between dramas produced during different periods in literature.

## Background

German playwright, producer, and director Bertolt Brecht was well-known for his Marxist views. A renowned playwright, he wrote extensively about dramatic theory. A Marxist who spent most of his productive years in East Germany following World War II, Brecht was born in Augsburg, Germany. Brecht began writing when he was still in school, often contributing to the school magazine. His first work appeared in the local newspaper when he was sixteen. In 1922, his first play *Drums in the Night* opened in Munich. He was granted the Kleist Prize, which recognizes young dramatists, for this play.

Brecht believed that the theatre ought to be didactic or morally enlightening (*Lehrstücke*). He expressed his contempt for the bourgeois and capitalistic society at large through his plays. Through his plays, he hoped to educate or persuade the audience that a Marxist society should take the place of the capitalist one. Brecht aimed to provoke the audience through his plays. He was frequently disappointed that his plays gave the audience a different impression from what he intended. His *Threepenny Opera* was taken as a happy, sentimental opera rather than the parody that he had intended it to be. Many of his plays had this effect on audiences, much to his dismay.

## Keywords

Dialectics, Epic theatre, De-familiarisation, Theatrical experience, Dialectical Thinking



## Discussion

### ► V-effect

Bertolt Brecht was among the most important playwrights of the twentieth century. He collaborated with the composer Kurt Weill on acclaimed plays such as *The Threepenny Opera* (1928), *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1941), *The Good Person of Szechwan* (1943), and *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (1958). Brecht followed a unique style of writing and stage direction. He would write scenes in between scenes during rehearsals to aid in the actors' rehearsal process. However, those scenes would not be included in the play's final performance. He was attempting to produce the "V-effect" (*Verfremdungseffekt*). This was intended to produce the feeling of strangeness. Certain events and situations are presented in his plays in a surprising manner that makes one perceive it differently. Also, Brecht insisted that all stage directions be verbalized during rehearsals. Dialogue during rehearsals was given in third person rather than first person. This was meant to assist the actors in relaxing and becoming aware of the audience. Brecht wrote detailed notes for scenes but rarely referred to these notes in rehearsals.

Brecht was deported twice during World War II, first to Finland and then to Los Angeles, where he reunited with other exiled Germans, including Max Horkheimer, Thomas Mann, Arnold Schönberg, and Theodor W. Adorno. Prior to his return to Germany he was called before the congressional committee investigating communists and subversive activities within the United States.

### ► Non-Aristotelian plays and stage techniques

Brecht used what is known as "gestus" from the actors because his plays lacked many sets or stage scenery. Gestus is an exaggerated type of body language used to enhance the conversation. Schiller and Goethe's Aristotelian theatre in particular did not sit well with Brecht. Since his plays lacked dramatic poetics (Three unities and elements of Aristotelian drama), he referred to them as "*Nicht Aristotelisches*," or "non-Aristotelian." Another technique specific to Brecht was the use of placards during performances. His stage settings were very meagre and placards were used to introduce events within the plays. Brecht also employed "expressionism." This technique uses symbolism and unrealistic speech. It deploys unnaturalistic sequences of time, place and action. Many of Brecht's plays before World War II use these techniques. Brecht's stages were very well lit. He actually likened his sets

► Epic theatre

to well-lit boxing rings, and forbade the use of coloured lighting or dimming. Brecht's plan was to keep things straightforward and depend on the performers to keep the play or performance moving. He did make extensive use of music in a variety of forms. Similar to how he used body language, he used "gestic" music.

His "epic" plays were meticulously recorded, capturing every aspect of a production. In addition to taking detailed notes about each set, he took photos of the sets. Brecht was very much influenced by Luther's German translation of *The Bible* with many quotes showing up in his plays. Specifically, he used biblical quotes in *Mother Courage and Her Children*. Brecht was also more interested in reality and facts than in escapism and thought that classical approaches to theatre were escapist. Instead of trying to establish a neat plot and story, epic theatre leaves problems unanswered, posing sometimes uncomfortable questions to the audience. The dramatic action of his plays was episodic - a disconnected montage of scenes, non-representational staging, and the 'alienation effect'. In this medium, actors did not strive to make their characters realistic. Instead, each character represented a different side of an argument. Multiple points of view were presented in Brecht's "Epic Theatre," and the audience was then free to make their own decisions. Toward the end of his career, Brecht favoured the term "dialectical theatre" to characterize the type of theatre he invented. Later on, in his opinion, the term "epic theatre" had become too formal to be useful.

### 3.1.1 Dialectic Theatre

► Dialectic method

The term "dialectic theatre" is most closely linked to Bertolt Brecht's ideas and methods. It insists on specific perspectives on reality that oppose the naturalization and universalization of human behaviour and cognition. The term "dialectic," also referred to as the "dialectic method," originally described a conversation between individuals with opposing viewpoints who nevertheless wanted to reach a rational conclusion. A thesis is an idea or statement that serves as the foundation of the dialectical method. This is pitted against or contrasted with the antithesis, which is its opposite. We can identify the inconsistencies between the thesis and antithesis by contrasting and evaluating them.

Brecht created the combined theory and practice of his "Epic theatre", aiming to alter society and politics by using logic rather than emotion. Although epic theatre had been around for

- ▶ Epic theatre as platform for social reform

a while, Brecht saw its potential to expose social injustices and inspire audiences to take action. He also saw the theatre's potential to serve as a platform for political discourse and the development of a critical aesthetics of dialectical materialism. Epic Theatre proposed that a play should not cause the spectator to identify emotionally with the characters or action before him or her, but should instead provoke rational self-reflection and a critical view of the action on the stage. Brecht believed that an audience becomes complacent after experiencing a climactic catharsis of emotion. Rather, he aimed to instil a critical mindset in his audience, enabling them to identify instances of social injustice and exploitation, feeling inspired to leave the theatre and bring about positive changes in the outside world. Brecht used these techniques to remind the audience that the play is a representation of reality rather than reality itself in order to achieve this goal. Brecht sought to convey that the audience's reality was also created and, therefore, malleable, by emphasizing the theatrical event's manufactured nature.

- ▶ Alienation effect

One of Brecht's most important principles was what he called the *Verfremdungseffekt* (translated as "defamiliarization effect", "distancing effect", or "estrangement effect", and often mistranslated as "alienation effect"). This meant, according to Brecht, "stripping the event of its self-evident, familiar, obvious quality and creating a sense of astonishment and curiosity about them." Brecht used a variety of strategies to achieve this, including the actor addressing the audience directly, harsh and bright stage lighting, singing to break up the action, explanatory placards, text in rehearsal being changed to the past tense or third person, characters breaking the fourth wall by speaking directly to the audience and speaking stage directions aloud. Brecht frequently made political and historical allusions in his plays by utilizing sarcasm, humour and parody. His play uses a delivery style that blends speaking and singing to convey a political message or moral lesson to the audience while also heightening the emotional impact. The dialogue in Brecht's plays frequently aims to instruct the audience rather than just move the plot forward. The performers used a clear gesture or other body language to portray feelings, ideas, the character's attitude or the situation.

### 3.1.2 "Dialectics in the Theatre" – Peter Brooker

In the essay, Peter Brooker, a literary critic, examines a series of nine articles conceived of by Bertolt Brecht under the general heading of "Dialectics in the Theatre." Brooker

► Overview

suggests that these articles are clearly related to Brecht's main theme and have appeared in his published *Collected Works*, along with several others. They convey intellectual discussions or reports on discussions involving Brecht and members of the Berliner Ensemble (theatre group established by Helene Weigel and Brecht). Brecht's dramatic theory focuses on the triple concepts of "epic theatre," *Verfremdung*, and *Gestus*, and describe the techniques of staging, acting and the intended social function of his work in these terms. The articles present the need for an informed historical sense, based in dialectical materialism. This emerges, not only as Brecht's belief, but also as a common principle and approach amongst those who take part in the intellectual discussions in the essays. The aim of the writings appears to be to propagate lessons on class conflict, division and oppression.

► Theoretical approach

The essays show that Brecht's principled habit within the Berliner Ensemble company was to seek out and foreground contradiction in the solution to practical problems, such as interpretation, staging and acting. These problems involve matters of interpretation, staging and acting and their treatment confirms his long-standing opposition to theatrical inducements to empathy or the need to historicize characters and narrative. The essays refer to performances by Helene Weigel, who did not theorise her acting style but is consistently praised by Brecht as the successful embodiment of his theory. While the essays are not examples of theoretical arguments, they are examples of theory in practice, consistent with Brecht's conscious reorientation in the last phase of his work. In the example "Another case of applied dialectics," theory does not organize practice in an *a priori* sense; rather, the process of discussion confirms the merits of a dialectical procedure afresh. In the dialogue on Coriolanus, theory is introduced from the outside to explain class relations and movements in the play, representing an addition to Brecht's canon of Marxist classics and evidence of the extension and revision his theory was undergoing.

► Development and change

In this phase, Brecht was acting and preparing to publish according to the principles of collaborative work established on his return to Europe with the Berliner Ensemble. The act of creation had become a collective creative process, a continuum of a dialectical sort in which the original invention lost much of its importance. Brecht began to make model books of certain productions but did not introduce models with the view of fixing an "ideal" version of a production. The emphasis was on development, with changes being provoked and made

perceptible. Brecht and the Berliner Ensemble saw it as a major task to address a contemporary audience that had experienced life under Hitler or under an earlier form of capitalism, reconstitute the theatrical repertory, bring new techniques and a historical sense to the theatrical record of the past, and free it and the public of the “drosses” (*den Schlacken*) of class society.

► Cooperative work and social transformation

The Berliner Ensemble, a group of artists and intellectuals, played a crucial role in the political climate of post-war Berlin. Brecht’s work, including essays on dialectical theatre, was seen as contributing to social change and the making of socialism in the interests of a genuinely social collectivity. He aimed to renew the cooperative working style of the ensemble and to incorporate social and intellectual changes necessary for the achievement of socialism. Brecht’s commitment to dialectical materialism and genuine collectivism did not mean he was unequivocally committed to the emergent form of socialism in the GDR. Instead, the Berliner Ensemble engaged in its own dialectical relationship with the East German regime, both of which sustained, but were critical of each other. Brecht saw his work as a contribution to socialism, performing a pedagogic or anticipatory function, but not as the sole means to or guarantee of social transformation. The group’s cooperative work took the form of mutual reinforcement and self-criticism. The essays on “Dialectics in the Theatre” acknowledge past and present problems, errors and achievements and show how later productions and working principles were set together in a dialogic process.

► Marxist philosophy

Many of Brecht’s most interesting works were unfinished or not published in a final form in his lifetime. Brecht’s work was consciously held open to revision, sometimes as a matter of calculated expediency but more often as a matter of principle. His belief in the indisputable fact of change fuelled his attempts to help engender and anticipate the conditions of social and political revolution. There would be little dispute amongst critics and commentators on the general fact of Brecht’s debt to Marxism or his intention to apply it to the theatre. However, there is often debate over the degree of his loyalty to Soviet-style communism in its Stalinist phase or in its East German form and the corrupting or liberating effect of this political commentary on his art. Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Brecht consistently argued against any such conception of Marxism as either “dogma” or “the final truth.” He believed that changing the world meant being open to change and engaging in an unfinished dialectical process of teaching and learning, solving and bequeathing problems. Brecht’s “Marxist classics” serve as echoes of this thinking, with Engels writing in

► Significance of dialectical philosophy

Ludwig Feurebach and the End of Classical German Philosophy, which emphasizes the importance of the process of cognition and the development of science.

Dialectical philosophy posits that every stage is necessary and justified for its time and conditions, but as it evolves, it loses its validity and justification. It acknowledges that definite stages of knowledge and society are justified for their time and circumstances, but only so far. Dialectical materialism is committed to change, including the revision of its own form, and is committed to the relativity of events and ideas caught in a process of unceasing and progressive change. Dialectical materialism is committed to a belief in the relativity of events and ideas, caught in a process of unceasing and progressive change. Brecht, in his work “Versuche,” titled his published works “Experiments” (Experiments) from 1930 onwards, stating that works should be judged according to their “use” rather than their “completion.” Many of these works, including essays on dialectical theatre, were often “unfinished” or “makeshift” and foreshadowed new developments, indicating their openness to change and adherence to Brecht’s materialist criterion of value.

## Summarised Overview

“Dialectics in the Theatre” by Peter Brooker, is an essay that explores the concept of dialectics within the realm of theatre through the theoretical lens of Bertolt Brecht’s essays. Dialectics is a philosophical method that involves examining and reconciling opposing ideas or contradictions to arrive at a deeper understanding of truth. In the context of the theatre, the essay discusses how dialectical thinking can be applied to various elements of theatrical production, including character development, plot structure, and the interaction between actors and the audience.

The essay emphasizes that dialectical thinking in theatre involves the tension and interplay of conflicting forces or ideas, which can create a more dynamic and engaging theatrical experience. It encourages playwrights, directors, and actors to embrace contradiction and conflict within their work to stimulate critical thinking and provoke emotional responses from the audience. Overall, the essay “Dialectics in the Theatre” underscores the importance of incorporating dialectical principles into the creative process of theatre, enriching the artistic and intellectual dimensions of the medium.



## Assignments

1. What is Brecht's style of theatre known as, and how does it differ from other traditional forms?
2. Comment on the various dramatic techniques employed by Brecht.
3. Why, in Brecht's opinion, can conflicting forces or ideas create a more dynamic and engaging theatrical experience?
4. Which three concepts are the focus of Brecht's dramatic theory? Explain in detail.
5. How does Bertolt Brecht approach the concept of societal transformation in relation to dialectical or epic theatre, according to Peter Brooker?
6. Examine the significance of cooperative work as conceived by Bertolt Brecht.

## Suggested Reading

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1. Barnett, David. *Brecht in Practice: Theatre, Theory and Performance*. Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, London, 2015.
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5. Jameson, Fredric. *Brecht and Method*. Verso, London, 1998.
6. Willett, John. *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A Study from Eight Aspects*. 3rd edn. Methuen, London, 1967.

## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



SGOU

### Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ gain awareness of the features of European drama
- ▶ understand the plays of Sophocles and understand Greek tragedies
- ▶ become capable of using different critical apparatus while reading works of literature
- ▶ demonstrate knowledge of the major references made by Sophocles in his plays and make a critical commentary on them

### Background

Drama that is written and presented in Europe is typically referred to as European drama. It starts with ancient Greece in 600 BCE and goes up to the present age, covering a variety of genres, subjects, and time periods. In fact, the words “drama” and “theatre” have Greek roots. The theatre was a major part of many aspects of ancient Greek culture, especially in Athens. Here, the essential dramatic subgenres of comedy and tragedy were developed, and some of the earliest dramatists, such as Aeschylus (525-456 BCE), Sophocles (495-406 BCE), and Euripides (480-406 BCE), started producing plays. The earliest theoretical works on play were also written in ancient Greece, most notably Aristotle’s (384–322 BCE) much-studied *Poetics* (335 BCE).

A majority of the theatres in the Medieval Age were made up of roaming troupes of entertainers, such as jesters, acrobats, storytellers, and more. However, there was not much in the way of staged productions, and the Church frowned upon these nomadic performers. By the early Middle Ages, the Church began to control a large portion of the era’s theatrical activity. Liturgical plays and church services that included dramatizations of biblical stories became popular. By the twelfth century, theatre had begun to spread outside of the Church, and certain works were translated into vernacular language and performed by common people. Of particular importance were the cycles of so-called Mystery plays. These cycles consisted of sometimes dozens of plays, still biblical in nature and inspiration, but with more entertainment value, including comedy and villains within their stories.

Another essential theatrical form in the Middle Ages was morality plays. In morality plays, the protagonist generally represents humanity as a whole and interacts with personified vices and virtues to impart moral lessons. The best-known of these morality plays, called *Everyman*, dates from the 16th century. The title character, 'Everyman', who represents all of humanity, meets Death on his judgment day and learns that one friend can accompany him into the afterlife. Throughout the play, Everyman encounters a variety of characters, including Fellowship, Kindred, Goods, and Beauty, and asks them to join him. However, only Good Deeds agrees to go with Everyman on his final journey.

At the end of the Middle Ages and the start of the Renaissance, the European play saw significant changes. The Renaissance, which started in Italy in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and gradually extended throughout Europe, was characterized by a rise in interest in classical literature and philosophy, especially Greek tragedy. As a result of the Protestant Reformation and the Counter-Reformation that followed, drama became more secular. One important development was the *Commedia dell'arte* in Italy. *Commedia dell'arte* troupes travelled across Europe, improvising popular shows for hundreds of years and included some of European theatre's first professional female actors. During the Renaissance, drama also exploded in importance in Spain and France, and Queen Elizabeth I's appreciation for theatre fuelled a proliferation of dramatic activity in Elizabethan England. However, Puritan aversion to theatrical performances was a problem for Britain as well. The Puritan Church outlawed all theatrical activities in London in 1642. This ban lasted for eighteen years until the Restoration. When the Restoration period began in 1660, 'racy' comedies, known now as Restoration comedies, grew in popularity.

Drama was popular by the 19th century all over Europe. In the early 20th century, melodrama and romanticism were the most widely used theatrical genres. These types of drama generally relied on elaborate staging effects to impress audiences and appeal to the various classes in growing urban populations. By the mid-19th century, Realism flourished, starting in Russian theatre, and spreading throughout Europe. Realist playwrights rejected the theatrical conventions of the past in favour of realistic settings and costumes and the use of everyday language. This was a significant departure from the theatre of the past, and the work of playwrights such as Norwegian Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), Swedish August Strindberg (1849-1912), and Russian Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) marked a huge turning point in European drama. Their work was deeply psychological and explored various themes previously unheard of on the stage.

As the 20th century and modernity arrived, the literary movements of naturalism and realism still had a big impact on European drama. But when modernism arrived, theatre shows started to branch out into different sub-movements and grew increasingly experimental. These included Symbolism, with playwrights such as Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949), and Expressionism, popularized by the Swedish August Strindberg (1849-1912). The end of World War II in 1945 marked the beginning of the contemporary literary period. Drama continued to function primarily as a form of social analysis and critique while becoming more experimental and employing new dramatic techniques.

In France, Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) became a significant figure in the Theatre of

Cruelty movement. This theatrical form intended to shock and stress audiences with an onslaught of movement, light, and sound. Artaud's work and theories influenced several other European playwrights, including the German Peter Weiss (1916-1982) and his play *The Investigation* (1965), which examined the aftermath of the Holocaust. A significant movement in European drama following World War II was known as "Theatre of the Absurd," so named by Martin Esslin (1918-2002) in 1961. The *Theatre of the Absurd* employed nonsensical language and nonlinear storylines to convey the idea that life is fundamentally absurd and meaningless, while also tackling existentialist themes. This movement was exemplified by the plays of the Irish Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), particularly his modern classic *Waiting for Godot* (1953).

Moving into the 21st century, European drama has continued to diversify and embrace experimentation. The world of theatre has become more globalized and international, resulting in a greater variety of voices and experiences while continuing the trend of theatre as social commentary. Modern drama has also been influenced by changing technology, with many playwrights utilizing audio and video innovations to change the theatrical experience.

## Keywords

European Drama, Greek Drama, Tragedies, Sophocles, Antigone

## Discussion

### Section 1 'Antigone'

- Sophocles

- ▶ The Dionysian origins of drama

Greek tragedy was a well-known and influential genre of ancient Greek theatre that dates to the late 6th century BCE. The most well-known writers in this genre were Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides; many of their plays are being performed centuries after they were first produced. Greek tragedy gave rise to Greek comedy, and these two genres together laid the groundwork for all contemporary theatre. Scholars disagree on the precise origins of tragedy, which emerged in Athens. According to some academics, the lyrical performance of epic poetry, an earlier art form, is what gave rise to this genre. Others suggest a strong link with the rituals performed in the worship of Dionysus such as the sacrifice of



goats - a song ritual called *trag-ōdia* - and the wearing of masks. Indeed, Dionysus became known as the god of theatre and perhaps there is another connection - the drinking rites which resulted in the worshipper losing full control of their emotions and in effect becoming another person, much as actors (*hupokritai*) hope to do when performing. The music and dance of the Dionysiac ritual was most evident in the role of the chorus and the music provided by an aulos player, but rhythmic elements were also preserved in the use of trochaic tetrameter and iambic trimeter in the delivery of the spoken words.

► Content of tragedies and comedies

Tragedies were usually presented in outdoor theatres in Athens. It was available to every man in the population (women's presence is disputed). Tragedies typically have plots that are based on stories from Greek mythology, which was frequently a component of Greek religion. Character deaths had to be announced offstage rather than seen, because of the serious nature of the subject matter, which frequently dealt with moral rights and wrongs. Similarly, at least in the early stages of the genre, the poet could not make comments or political statements through the play, and the more direct treatment of contemporary events had to wait for the arrival of the less austere and conventional genre, Greek comedy.

► Origin of stage elements

In the early tragedies, there was only one performer who would dress up and don a mask, giving the impression that he was a god. Later, the performer frequently addressed the captain of the chorus, a group of up to 15 actors who sang and danced but did not speak. This innovation is credited to Thespis in c. 520 BCE. The actor also changed costumes during the performance (using a small tent behind the stage, which would later develop into a monumental façade) and so break the play into distinct episodes. Phrynichos is credited with the idea of splitting the chorus into different groups to represent men, women, elders, etc. (although all actors on the stage were in fact male). However, a play could have as many non-speaking performers as required, so, no doubt, plays with greater financial backing could put on a more spectacular production with finer costumes and sets. Finally, Agathon is credited with adding musical interludes unconnected with the story itself.

Plays were specifically commissioned to compete at religious festivals as well as other events. The most well-known competition for tragic performances took place during the 'Dionysus Eleuthereus' spring festival, also known as the 'City

► Drama and religious festivals

Dionysia' in Athens. Aeschylus (C. 525-456 BCE), Euripides (C. 484-407 BCE), and Sophocles (C. 496/495-406/405 BCE) were the three great Greek tragedians. Typically, their pieces were presented during religious celebrations. The best plays were even published in written form for public reading, preserved as official state records for future generations, and taught as part of the required Greek education. The plays were frequently staged again in smaller theatres throughout Greece.

► Sophocles as renowned dramatist

During the period of 496–406 BCE, Sophocles emerged as one of the most renowned and acclaimed dramatists in ancient Greece. Similar to other Greek playwrights, Sophocles' writing provides an invaluable window into a range of political and social aspects of classical Greece, including family dynamics and the intricacies of Greek religion. In addition, it documents Greek theatre. Furthermore, Sophocles' theatrical innovations laid the groundwork for most subsequent Western dramatic performances, and his plays are still performed in drama theatres today all over the world. His surviving works, written throughout the 5th century BCE, include classics as *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone*, and *Women of Trachis*. Sophocles had an exceptionally long career. His first competition entry was in 468 BCE and his last (whilst still alive) was in 406 BCE when he was 90. At least 20 festival contests were won by Sophocles, including 18 at the City Dionysia. Sophocles was therefore the most successful of the three great tragedians.

► Sophocles' early life

Sophocles was born in Colonus, a village outside of Athens, circa 496 B.C.E. His father, Sophillus, was a prominent citizen and a prosperous weaponry manufacturer. Sophocles studied poetry, music, dance, and gymnastics, just as other wealthy Greek boys did. These subjects were thought to be the cornerstones of a well-rounded education for a citizen. His early education equipped him for leadership roles in the arts, foreign policy, the military, and other spheres of public life. The youthful Sophocles demonstrated exceptional musical and dance ability. During the Classical Period (500–400 B.C.E), Sophocles lived in Greece during a period of transition where political and cultural developments were reshaping and influencing Athens' culture. Sophocles, a dramatist, made a significant contribution to the development of this civilization by drawing inspiration from Homer's first work of Greek epic poetry as well as from earlier customs and practices. His great Greek Epics - *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* profoundly influenced Sophocles. Sophocles probably also studied under the Greek playwright, Aeschylus.

► Cultural significance

Sophocles actively participated in Athens' political and cultural life. Apart from his career as a playwright, Sophocles was a diplomat, a general, and a priest of Asclepius, a minor god of healing. Even though some of his public service may seem to have gone beyond his training as a dramatist, Athens' democracy nevertheless required its citizens to participate in all facets of governance. Despite all his public service, though, Sophocles remained first and last a dramatist. His death in 406 B.C.E. inspired a national cult that worshipped him as a cultural hero at a shrine dedicated to his memory. In total, Sophocles wrote about 120 plays, but only a few of them have been preserved in their entirety. There are seven complete tragedies of Sophocles that are extant today: *Antigone* (c. 442 BCE), *Oedipus Rex* (429 - 420 BCE), *Philoctetes* (409 BCE), *Oedipus at Colonus* (401 BCE), *Ajax*, *Electra* (Date unknown), *Women of Trachis* (Date unknown).

► Narrative of *Antigone*

Sophocles' play *Antigone* tells the story of the tragic demise of Antigone, Oedipus' daughter. The play debuted in 411 BCE at the Festival of Dionysus, a significant theatre festival in ancient Athens. Antigone pays the ultimate price for burying her brother Polynices against the wishes of King Creon of Thebes. This is a classic trope in the genre of tragedy – the political right of denying burial rites to the traitor Polynices is contrasted against the moral right of a sister to lay her brother to rest. The situation is one where the opposing characters (Antigone and Creon) are both righteous in their own way. The major characters in the play also misinterpret events, only to realise the truth when tragedy strikes. This is a theme that recurs throughout Sophocles' plays.

### 3.2.1.1 Main Characters

#### Antigone

Antigone is Oedipus's daughter (and half-sister), Ismene's sister, Creon's niece, and Haemon's fiancée. She disobeys Creon's order that no Theban citizen may properly bury her brother Polynices under threat of execution after Polynices dies while attacking Thebes. She believes the burial rituals are the unwritten rules of the gods and must be obeyed regardless of a ruler's political whims. She is bold in her defiance, believes firmly that she is right, and at times seems eager to die for the cause of burying her brother.

► Protagonist

- ▶ Torn between family and duty

- ▶ Firm authoritarian

- ▶ Seer

- ▶ Interprets the play

- ▶ Backdrop of dramatic conflict

### Ismene

Ismene is Antigone's sister. She begs Antigone not to disobey the city's laws and not to bring more tragedy to their unfortunate family. Ismene tries to share the blame when Creon sentences Antigone to death, and then she begs Creon to reconsider and show mercy to Antigone.

### Creon

Creon is the brother-in-law of Oedipus. He becomes King of Thebes when Oedipus's two sons die battling each other for control of the city. Creon believes in the rule of law and the authority of the state above all else. In his opinion, bending the rules leads to anarchy and anarchy is worse than anything. Creon's stubborn refusal to honour Antigone's desire to bury her brother and to acknowledge the opinions of the Theban people, his son Haemon, and the seer Tiresias, leads to the deaths of his wife Eurydice, Haemon, and Antigone.

### Tiresias

Tiresias is the blind prophet or seer who cautions Creon against killing Antigone and against being overly adamant about his choice to forbid Polynices' burial. The seer claims that the gods will punish Creon for the death of Antigone by taking the life of his child.

### The Chorus

In Antigone, the chorus represents the elder citizens of Thebes. Sophocles's choruses react to the events of the play. The chorus speaks as one voice, or sometimes through the voice of its leader. It praises, condemns, cowers in fear, asks or offers advice, and generally helps the audience interpret the play.

## 3.2.1.2 Detailed Summary

### Lines 1-416

Night has fallen in Thebes. An Argosian army that was invading has been routed by the Thebans. The two sons of Oedipus, Polynices and Eteocles, have perished in the fighting, having killed each other while fighting for opposing causes. The elder brother, Polynices, led the Argosian army in a bid to reclaim the Theban throne, which he had previously lost to Eteocles. Now that both brothers have died, their uncle, Creon, is king of Thebes. Oedipus's two daughters, Antigone and Ismene,

discuss their grief in the palace. The outraged Antigone tells Ismene that Creon has decreed that the slain attackers will not be given proper burial rites. Eteocles, who defended Thebes, will be buried with military honours, but Creon has ordered that Polynices's body will be left unburied for animals to eat. In addition, Creon has commanded that anyone who attempts to bury Polynices's body will be put to death.

► Antigone's defiance

Antigone, full of anger and defiance, asks Ismene to assist her in burying their brother, Polynices. Ismene is terrified of her sister's careless remarks as well as Creon's command. She implores Antigone to consider all the misery that has already befallen their family and to acknowledge that, as women, they have less authority than men, especially the king. She says that they must obey Creon's law. Antigone responds that she won't let Ismene join in the glory of burying their brother even if Ismene changes her mind. Though Ismene reminds Antigone that she would be defying the laws of the city by burying Polynices, Antigone argues that the laws of the *Gods* demand that her brother be given a proper burial. She declares that she will not allow Ismene to join in the glory of burying their brother even if Ismene changes her mind.

► Creon's insistence on punishment

The chorus enters. They are the senior citizens of Thebes. They tell the story of the battle in which Thebes vanquished Polynices and his army of attackers from Argos while offering a chant to the rising sun. They invoke the god of dance, Dionysus, to celebrate their victory after speaking of Zeus (who they believe assisted in defending Thebes) and the goddess Victory. Creon enters and addresses the chorus. Creon explains that, after the death of Oedipus's two sons, *he* is now king, and the "ship of state is safe." He gives a speech about the character of a leader—a leader must make the soundest policies and put nothing above the good of the state. He declares that Eteocles will receive a burial with military honours, but that the body of the traitorous Polynices will not be dignified with a burial, but will instead be left out to rot, "an obscenity for the citizens to behold!"

► Creon's order disregarded

A sentry enters. He's reluctant to speak because he has bad news to share and worries about Creon's response, but eventually he's talked into sharing what he knows. The sentries have found out that burial rites have been administered to Polynices's corpse. The body isn't fully buried, but it is covered with a sprinkling of dry earth. The leader of the chorus suggests that this might be the work of the gods.

This idea sends Creon into a rage. He accuses the sentry of having been bribed to allow the burial rites to take place. He threatens to torture the sentry if the sentry doesn't find the man who buried Polynices. Creon exits.

► The sentry's escape

The sentry considers he's had a lucky escape, and swears he'll never come back to Thebes. The Chorus, all by themselves on stage, chants about the nature of man. Humans may overcome all challenges, with the exception of death, through diligence and creativity. An individual can achieve greatness and see his city flourish when he creates laws and combines them with the justice of the gods. However, he will become an outcast if he disobeys the laws of the land and the gods.

### Lines 417-704

► Antigone's defiance

Returning, the sentry escorts Antigone. He summons Creon and accuses Antigone of breaking the law by burying Polynices with proper rites. Creon is unsure. The sentry describes how he and his colleagues cleaned the body of dirt before waiting patiently. As they watched, a sudden whirlwind lifted a cloud of dust. When the dust settled, they saw Antigone standing over the body, screaming because she saw that it was bare. She then poured handfuls of dirt on the body as the sentries came down and seized her.

► Creon's sentencing of Antigone and Ismene

Antigone does not refute this accusation. After telling the sentry to leave, Creon asks Antigone if she knew that he had ordered that no one should bury Polynices. She claims to have known full well. Creon wonders why she would dare to break the law. The gods of death and burial, whose laws constitute unwritten, age-old traditions, are the source of Antigone's claim that Creon's law was not the law of the underworld. She would not break the laws of the gods to appease a man. Antigone says she knows she must die. Since she has already known so much sadness in her life, she says, she welcomes death and is not afraid of it. But she could not bear to leave her brother to rot. And if Creon thinks she is acting stupidly, she says, that is because Creon is a fool. The leader of the chorus notes that Antigone is as passionate and stubborn as her father. Creon responds that he will break her stubbornness, and that he refuses to let her go free, which would make it appear that he had been defeated by a woman. He declares that Antigone and her sister, whom he also believes is guilty, will suffer a terrible death.

Remaining unfazed, Antigone declares that she will be crowned by dying to honour her brother. She continues by

- ▶ Antigone's defence of her actions

saying that if Thebes' residents weren't terrified of Creon, they would support her and speak out in her favour. She calls him a tyrant. Creon asks how Antigone can honour Polynices, who killed her other brother, the patriotic Eteocles. Antigone responds that all people must be given the same death rites as commanded by the Gods. To Creon's argument that the patriot and the traitor should be treated differently, Antigone says that, because they were her brothers, she loved both equally. Creon says she can love them in Hades.

- ▶ Ismene's attempts to save Antigone

Ismene sobs as she enters and offers to share Antigone's guilt, but Antigone angrily forbids Ismene from experiencing the joy of dying for this cause. Ismene implores Antigone to permit their shared demise. Antigone—harshly at first, and then more gently—continues to refuse to let Ismene claim guilt for defying Creon. Ismene returns to Creon and asks him if he would kill his son Haemon's intended bride (Antigone is Haemon's fiancée). Creon says his son can find someone new. Ismene pleads that the two are in love. Creon says that the thought of his son in love with a traitor repels him. He breaks off the marriage. Ismene continues to plead for Antigone. Creon tells the leader of the chorus that Antigone must die. Guards take Antigone and Ismene away. The chorus delivers a lyrical chant about the tragedy and ruin of the house of Oedipus. The chant then turns to the power of Zeus (king of the gods) to lay waste to fortunes and ruin the lives of great mortals. Despite their best efforts, humans are still at the mercy of the gods. When Haemon walks in crying, the chant stops.

### Lines 705-1090

- ▶ Reasons for punishing Antigone

Haemon is asked by Creon if he comes out of obedience or rage. Haemon vows to follow Creon's orders. Feeling happy, Creon gives a speech about how a son should obey his father and control themselves in the presence of women. Haemon asks Creon to release Antigone. Creon says that had he not punished Antigone's defiance of the rule of law, it would be like inviting anarchy to destroy the city. The fact that Antigone is a woman, Creon adds, is a further reason why she must not be allowed to defy him. The leader of the chorus says that this sounds sensible.

Haemon tells Creon that it's not his place to correct the king, but that the rumours in the street are that the people are sympathetic to Antigone. The people are afraid of Creon, but they believe Antigone should be allowed to bury her brother. Haemon asks his father to realize that he may have made a

► Haemon's warning

mistake. He begs his father to soften up on the rigidity. Creon becomes enraged upon hearing his son's advice. He labels Antigone a traitor once more. Theban people, according to Haemon, do not see it that way. "And is Thebes about to tell me how to rule?" Creon replies. "Am I to rule this land for myself, or for others?" The king and his son continue to argue. Creon accuses Haemon of supporting Antigone against his father. Haemon responds that he is trying to keep his father from committing an injustice. The argument grows more heated and Creon hurls stronger and stronger insults at his son. Haemon threatens that Antigone's death will cause another death. At last, Haemon rushes away, saying that Creon will never see him again.

► Antigone's plight

The leader of the chorus worries that Haemon may do something violent. Creon doesn't care. He decides to spare Ismene but says that he will take Antigone into the wilderness and enclose her in a vault with just a bit of food. Either the god she seems to love—Death—will save her, or "she may learn at last... what a waste of breath it is to worship Death." The chorus offers a chant about love, a force that can't be conquered, that taunts people and makes them do crazy things. The Guards bring Antigone from the palace. The chorus is heartbroken at the sight of her.

► Will and passion as Antigone's downfall

Antigone grieves her plight in life and the fact that she will never know the pleasures of matrimony. She laments the terror of her impending death even more. The chorus tells her that her protests were excessive and questions whether she is still suffering as a result of her father Oedipus's mistakes. The mention of her father and his fate stirs Antigone to more intense mourning. The chorus tells Antigone, "Your own blind will, your passion has destroyed you." Creon enters, and tells the guards to interrupt her lament, to take her away, build a tomb, and place her in it.

► Antigone's death is inevitable

Antigone continues to mourn her life and death. She says that she would not have done what she did—disobey the laws to bury her brother—for a husband or a child, because one may find another husband or have another child. But because her parents are dead, she'll never have another brother. As she's led away, Antigone calls out that she is being punished for her devotion to the gods. She then begs the gods to punish Creon as terribly as he is punishing her if they agree with her that Creon has defied their laws. The chorus chants about other figures of mythology who were entombed alive. All of them were kings

or children of gods, yet even they could not escape their fates, just as Antigone cannot escape hers.

### Lines 1091-1470

#### ► Tiresias's curse

The blind prophet Tiresias enters, escorted by a small child. Creon promises to heed Tiresias's counsel. In order to placate the gods and spare Thebes from their wrath, Tiresias informs Creon that Polynices's body needs to be buried. Creon is advised by Tiresias not to be so obstinate in his refusal to bury Polynices. Instead, he should see himself as only human and capable of making mistakes. Creon flies into a rage, cursing Tiresias and swearing that the body will never be buried. He accuses Tiresias of false prophecy and of accepting bribes. He curses all prophets as power-hungry. Tiresias now reveals the full secret he knows. He says that the gods alone hold sway over the dead, and that mortals may rule over the living. He says that as punishment for burying Antigone alive, the gods and the Furies will soon take the life of Creon's own child. In addition, the hatred of all those whose dead loved ones have not been buried will rise against Creon. Then, Tiresias exits. The prophet's words shake Creon, but he is hesitant to reverse his decision. He approaches the chorus leader for guidance. He is instructed by the leader to swiftly bury Polynices and release Antigone. Fearful, Creon gives in. He rushes off to free Antigone himself. The chorus prays to the god Dionysus, asking him to protect and heal the people of Thebes.

#### ► Haemon's suicide

Horrible news arrives from a messenger: Haemon committed suicide. Haemon's mother Eurydice hears the disturbance and requests that the messenger explain what transpired. The messenger claims that he and Creon went to bury Polynices. Once they had finished, they heard a cry at Antigone's tomb that sounded like Haemon's voice and rushed over. At the tomb, they found Antigone hanged and Haemon hysterical with grief for her. When Haemon saw them, he lunged at Creon with his sword, missed, and then used the sword to kill himself. Eurydice exits without a word, followed by the messenger.

Creon walks in with his entourage. Creon, who is nearly insane with grief, is carrying Haemon's body. Calling himself his son's murderer and his son the victim of his ignorance, Creon berates himself. As Creon weeps, the messenger returns with the news that Eurydice, the queen, has killed herself.

► Creon's suffering

The messenger says she killed herself at an altar, while cursing Creon and his pride for causing the death of their son. Creon calls for his attendants to take him away. He says, "I don't even exist—I'm no one. Nothing." He prays for death. The leader of the chorus tells Creon that he must endure his suffering. Creon says that he has murdered his son and his wife. He's led offstage by his attendants. The chorus ends by remarking that the proud are laid low by fate, and wisdom is gained through suffering.

### 3.2.1.3 Themes

► Metaphor of sight

a). **Blindness vs. Sight:** When Oedipus ridicules the blindness of the seer Tiresias in *Oedipus Rex*, Tiresias tells Oedipus that he is blind to the corruption in his own life and that he will soon become literally blind as well. The same fundamental tension exists in *Antigone*, though it isn't as evident with regard to blindness and sight issues. Tiresias gives the current king, Creon, a warning, and the king is unable to see the wisdom of the seer's words. Creon is blinded by pride—his unwillingness to compromise, to listen to the opinions of his people, or to appear to be defeated by a woman. The blind Tiresias can see that the gods are angry and that tragedy will strike if Creon doesn't rethink his decision and change his mind. Creon lacks the insight to see this. In that sense, metaphorically, he is blind. Even though he eventually repents and realizes the folly of his stubbornness, it is too late; the events have taken a turn beyond his control, and he now must watch as his family is destroyed.

► Law as derived from human and natural sources

b) **Natural Law:** As the ruler of Thebes and head of state, Creon is a firm believer in abiding by the laws created by humans. However, Antigone invokes a different set of rules—what is sometimes referred to as "natural law"—in defying Creon's order that no one bury Polynices. Whether its source is in nature or in divine order, natural law states that there are standards for right and wrong that are more fundamental and universal than the laws of any particular society. Antigone believes that the gods have commanded humans to give the dead a proper burial. She also believes she has a greater loyalty to her brother in performing his burial rites than she does to the law of the city of Thebes that bans her from doing so. The wishes of the gods and her sense of duty to her brother are both examples of natural law. These, in Antigone's opinion, transcend human laws. Sophocles examines this conflict in *Antigone* and seems to be implying that state laws shouldn't



conflict with natural laws through Antigone's martyrdom, the people's compassion, and Creon's downfall.

► Choice between family and state

**c) Citizenship vs. Family Loyalty:** In the fifth century B.C.E., Athens—the city where Sophocles lived and where *Antigone* was originally performed—saw intense discussion and debate surrounding the idea of citizenship and the obligations that citizens had to the state. Antigone and Creon present diametrically opposed views as to where a city's citizenry should place their allegiance. In the play, Creon has a strict definition of citizenship that calls for the state to come first: "...whoever places a friend / above the good of his country, he is nothing: / I have no use for him." From Creon's perspective, Polynices has forfeited the right to a proper burial as a citizen of Thebes because he has attacked the city. In attacking Thebes, he has shown his disloyalty to the state and has ceased to be a citizen. In fact, Creon is more devoted to his laws than he is to even his own son Haemon's happiness, refusing to pardon Antigone for burying Polynices even though she is Haemon's fiancée. In contrast, Antigone prioritizes her family's traditions and allegiance over deference to the city or its ruler. By doing this, she argues that a person's allegiance to their family and to the gods can take precedence over their allegiance to a city.

► Moral right

**d) Civil Disobedience:** The laws made by the city's leader, according to Creon, "must be obeyed, large and small, / right and wrong." In other words, Creon is arguing that there cannot be an unjust law because the law is the basis of justice. Contrarily, Antigone feels that there are unjust laws and that it is her moral obligation to break any laws that go against her moral convictions. This is particularly the case when the law of the city contradicts the customs of the people and the traditional laws of the gods. Therefore, Antigone's choice to defy Creon's order to bury Polynices improperly represents a case of civil disobedience—the moral refusal to obey the law.

► Power to choose one's own fate

**e) Fate vs. Free Will:** The gods of the ancient Greeks were thought to be able to see into the future and certain individuals were thought to have access to this knowledge. Independent prophets known as "seers" perceived future events in visions. Oracles, priests who resided at the temples of gods—such as the oracle to Apollo at Delphi—were also believed to be able to interpret the gods' visions and give prophecies to people who sought to know the future. Oracles were an accepted part of Greek life—famous leaders and common people alike

consulted them for help with making all kinds of decisions. Long before the beginning of *Antigone*, Oedipus, Antigone's father, fulfilled one of the most famous prophecies in world literature—that he would kill his father and marry his mother (these events are covered in detail in Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*). Despite his efforts to avoid this terrible fate, it came to pass. When Oedipus learned what he had inadvertently done, he gouged out his own eyes and was banished from Thebes. Prior to his passing, he foresaw that his two sons, Eteocles and Polynices, would murder one another in the conflict for Thebes. This also happens. Yet when the prophet Tiresias visits Creon in *Antigone*, he comes to deliver a warning, not an unavoidable prophecy. He says that Creon has made a bad decision, but that he can redeem himself. "Once the wrong is done," Tiresias says, "a man can turn his back on folly, misfortune, too, if he tries to make amends, however low he's fallen, and stops his bullnecked ways." In this scenario, Creon appears to have more free will than Oedipus, who is destined to fail and never has a choice. But he decides to hold on to his stubbornness until it's too late and he finds himself ensnared in a horrible destiny from which he cannot free himself.

### 3.2.1.4 *Antigone* as a Greek Tragedy

Aristotle, the philosopher, listed four components of a tragic play's plot in his *Poetics*. The first is hamartia, which is more accurately translated as "fatal mistake", but is sometimes translated as "fatal flaw." A tragedy's hamartia is an early play action taken by the main character that determines their fate. Peripeteia is the second stage of a tragedy, which is a sudden and abrupt turn of events. This is the point at which the tragic hero's circumstances worsen. The final two stages, the catharsis, in which emotions are released, and the anagnorisis, which is the realization of what has transpired, should occur nearly simultaneously. In essence, catharsis is a psychological process that allows a person to express or let go of negative feelings like fear and sympathy, ultimately resulting in a feeling of renewal. Catharsis, being a way of creating emotional levity and relief, is generally viewed as positive even though the emotions expressed during it are typically negative.

**Hamartia:** Antigone's blind will and passion in carrying out the burial rites of her brother in opposition to Creon's decree, may be viewed as an example of Hamartia. Antigone set herself above the established Law of Creon and proved the tenacity of her character and the steadfastness of her ideal. One

► Components of Greek tragedy



► Tragic Flaw

of Antigone's flaws was that she disobeyed the King. She had two obligations: one to the religion and the gods, and another to the King or the State. She fulfilled one obligation and fell short of another. Similarly, Creon was unaware that he had engaged in impious behaviour. However, he consistently declared with pride that he was defending the law. He was truth-blind because of his conceit and haughtiness. He acted arrogantly and proudly around Antigone. He was equally arrogant and conceited toward his son Haemon. Out of pride and a fit of wrath, he wanted to punish Ismene too, even though she was innocent in most cases.

► Turn of events

**Peripeteia:** Creon wanted to punish Antigone. But eventually it was he who was punished. Creon did not care to understand the divine laws Antigone stood for. It was a fatal error in judgment, and he had to pay a price for it. Creon is punished by the death of his son and by the death of his wife.

► Realisation

**Anagnorisis:** Creon in *Antigone* was blinded by egotism, pride, and passion and was unable to recognize the foolishness he was doing. He believed that the edict he had issued was untouchable. For this reason, he was unwilling to accept Antigone's perspective. Pride was the besetting sin of Creon, which brought about his downfall. He could not realize that Antigone was in the right, and he was absolutely in the wrong.

► Release of pity and fear

**Catharsis in *Antigone*:** The play's conclusion has multiple deaths, all of which elicit sympathy and terror in the audience. Of course, there is disagreement over who the true hero of this tragedy is. The two main characters, Creon and Antigone, are worthy of our admiration.

► Plot driven by conflict

**Conflict:** There can be no tragedy that lacks both internal and external conflict. The conflict between Antigone and Creon is the sole focal point of the play *Antigone*. Creon is a representation of the laws of man, while Antigone stands for justice, piety, and unwritten laws. No compromise was possible between the two strong wills and, therefore, the tragedy was precipitated. As Creon's conflict with Haemon escalated, his obstinacy proved to be a flaw. Through his encounter with Tiresias, he felt that his own arguments were hardly tenable. His postponement of the resolution, freeing Antigone, proved to be the cause of his loss of Eurydice and Haemon. Enraged by his conceit and haughtiness, the gods desired to punish him. By the play's conclusion, Creon had undergone a total transformation. He was anguished by the fact

that he was to for his wife and son's deaths. Antigone struggles as she experiences the fear of death for the first time when she is escorted away to be buried alive. The nearly romantic love of death had vanished. She felt that her nerves were giving out, even though she had once decided to die a martyr's death for the sake of justice, piety, and truth.

► Divine retribution

**Nemesis:** Divine vengeance, or Nemesis, follows guilt in any Greek tragedy. Creon committed a serious wrong by rejecting the authority of divine law, justice, and piety. For this, he was penalized with the death of his wife and son, and the knowledge that he was to be blamed for their demise. This he left him feeling humbled and powerless. Antigone, a representation of virtue and virtuous femininity, also faced her adversary. Antigone died because of her pride and blind will, which the Chorus blamed her for.

## Assignments

1. Discuss the origins and evolution of Greek drama?
2. *Antigone* represents the ever present struggle between free will and fate. In your opinion, which of these elements determine the tragic consequences of Antigone's and Creon's actions?
3. Detail the role of the chorus in *Antigone*, referencing apt instances from the play.
4. Why does Creon decree that Polynices is to be left unburied?
5. What arguments does Ismene and Haemon present before Creon to save Antigone from punishment?
6. Analyse *Antigone* as a tragedy that deploys Aristotelian components in its plot.

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## Section 2

### Mother Courage and Her Children

- Bertolt Brecht

#### Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, learners will be able to

- ▶ gain awareness on the features of modern European drama
- ▶ acquire broad insights into the play *Mother Courage and her Children* by Bertolt Brecht and learn the dramas of 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- ▶ become capable of using different critical apparatus while reading works of literature
- ▶ demonstrate knowledge of the major references made by Brecht in his plays and make a critical commentary on them

#### Background

Bertolt Brecht, one of the most influential playwrights of the 20th century, has produced masterful plays such as *The Threepenny Opera* (1928) with composer Kurt Weill, *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1941), *The Good Person of Szechwan* (1943), and *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (1958). Born in Augsburg, Bavaria, in 1898, his life and dramatic career would be directly affected by the two world wars. In the 1930s in Germany, his plays were outlawed and he was forced to flee the country. However, having settled in the United States of America, he was investigated by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Despite his ability to refute accusations of Communist affiliation, he relocated to Switzerland following the hearings.

In 1949, he moved to East Berlin, where he managed the theatre group Berliner Ensemble. As a director, he promoted the “alienation effect” in acting, a strategy meant to prevent viewers from feeling a connection to the characters’ suffering. *Poems 1913-1956* (1997) and *Poetry and Prose: Bertolt Brecht* (2003) are collections of Brecht’s poetry. He composed a vast range of poetry, including sporadic poems, poems that he performed with music, songs and poems for his plays and political and personal poems that captured his thoughts and anecdotes.

## Keywords

European Drama, Modern European Drama, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, Realism, War, Alienation effect

## Discussion

### 3.2.2.1 Historical Context

*Mother Courage and Her Children* is set twelve years into the devastating Thirty Years War (1618–1648), which claimed the lives of up to half of Central Europe’s population and involved all of Europe’s major powers. The war began in the Holy Roman Empire, which was a complex collection of smaller states, towns and landholdings where the official religion (either Lutheranism or Catholicism) was determined by the individual rulers. When Ferdinand II, an ardent and devout Catholic, was crowned king of Bohemia (modern-day Czech Republic), the war broke out. Other European leaders started to pour money and soldiers into the conflict after Protestant nobles rose in uprising and established an opposition government. These leaders formed intricate alliances based on a combination of religion, family ties and—above all—political and financial opportunism.

Christian IV of Denmark entered the war to defend Protestants after the Catholic alliance had taken control of Bohemia and the surrounding regions by 1625. When his intervention proved ineffective, King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden followed Christian IV in 1630. The Swedish intervention turned the war in the Protestants’ favour, but at great cost. Not only did King Gustavus die in battle in 1632, but the 1630s were one of the most miserable periods in history for Europeans, with starvation, plague and massacres ravaging modern-day Germany in particular.

The second half of Brecht’s play focuses on this period, as *Mother Courage* accompanies the Swedish army around Bavaria. However, the play’s first act takes place in the final five years of the Polish-Swedish War, which lasted from 1600 to 1629. *Mother Courage* has been managing the Swedish army canteen for ten years or more at the start of the play. Her children have only ever known war, so when they relocate from Poland to Germany in 1630, not much changes. (And the

► Setting

► Cost of war

► Anti-war message



war will last for another twelve years after it ends, in 1636.) Indeed, this is Brecht's way of emphasizing that war is similar, regardless of the time, place and formal reason for the conflict. After all, he wrote this play directly after the Nazi invasion of Poland launched World War II.

### 3.2.2.2 Characters

#### Mother Courage

In the words of Walter Benjamin, Mother Courage (Anna Fierling) is the play's "untragic heroine." She is a war parasite who travels with the armies of the Thirty Years War, using her canteen wagon to provide for her family. She makes her name by opportunistically focusing on surviving and pushing a cart full of bread through a city under siege. When times are good, Courage works nonstop, negotiating, dealing and enjoying the war as her source of income. She is a wise woman, delivering shrewd commentary on the war throughout the play. She understands that virtues in wartime are deadly to those who possess them.

► Protagonist

Ironically, Courage will witness her children's deaths right away, predicting their demise in Scene One. The wisdom of Solomon, possessed by Courage, does not empower her to oppose the war. Courage will lose each of her children in the course of conducting business, and this is the price the war will exact from her life. Even so, Courage would fiercely defend them, even to the point of demanding that only her children survive the conflict. Once more, what gives her courage is her will to live; a will that frequently necessitates cowardice. Courage, as opposed to Kattrin, will sing the song of surrender. For example, in Scene Four, she depravedly teaches a soldier to submit to unjust authority and then bitterly she herself learns from her song, withdrawing a complaint she herself planned to lodge. She abandons her executed son's body to the carrion pit in the previous scene, refusing to acknowledge it.

► Pragmatism

#### Kattrin

Kattrin, the silent daughter of Courage, stands out as the character who is most obviously affected by the wounds of war. Since the war disfigures her and takes away her voice when she was a child, she carries these traumas on her body. She plays a helpless witness to the war for the most of the play, unable to prevent her brother Eilif from being recruited or Swiss Cheese from being taken advantage of by Catholic spies. She will support Courage later on when she declines to identify

► Symbolic of kindness and pity

Swiss Cheese's body. As Courage continually notes, Katrin suffers from the virtues of kindness and pity, remaining unable to brook the loss of life around her. This kindness manifests itself in particular with regard to children; Katrin's maternal impulses perhaps standing against Courage's relentless dealing and her resulting failure in protecting her children.

- ▶ Katrin's sexual desires

In the end, Katrin will "speak," giving her life to protect the Halle children, and it is fitting that the play makes an implicit comparison between her and Saint Martin, the martyr. Particularly, the war affects Katrin's sexuality. She must stay hidden and wait for peacetime before considering marriage, as Courage points out, since she is always in risk of becoming a "whore"—that is, a victim of rape. In an attempt to gain acceptance as a sexual being, Katrin will covertly "play the whore" by disguising herself as Yvette, the camp prostitute. Notably, her disfigurement will prevent her from getting married in the end.

### The Chaplain

- ▶ Loyalty to authority

The Chaplain, one of the two characters who rely on Mother Courage as their "feedbag," comes across as a cynical, wooden character at first. Even though he cannot help but notice the horrors around him—such as his response to Eilif's raid—he nevertheless maintains his loyalty to the Swedish monarchy and views the campaign as a religious war. After the unexpected Catholic attack, which upends his social standing and leaves him dangerously reliant on Courage's wagon, he becomes even more cynical. The Chaplain will bitterly suggest to Courage that he purchase fresh supplies. Only the war will win. After all, it meets all of the most basic human needs—eating, drinking, screwing, and sleeping—despite being degrading. It will always find a way to continue, just like love.

- ▶ Affected by war

More sympathetic traits are also displayed by the Chaplain, especially when he opposes Courage and tries to help the local peasants during the Battle of Magdeburg. He still comes out as a bit of an outsider at this point, not wanting to get involved in Courage's activities for fear of losing his job. At Magdeburg, the *Model Book* shows him recalling a sense of his former importance and understanding himself as someone oppressed by the war. Indeed, as he will tell the Cook, his life as a tramp makes it impossible for him to return to the priesthood and all its attendant beliefs. Eventually the Chaplain falls for Courage. She ignores him because she is preoccupied with surviving,

defying his requests that she lower her guard and allow her emotions to flow. There will be competition for Courage's affections and bread after the Cook arrives. Remembering their good times together in the Swedish Commander's service, both men feel that Courage has rejected them. It seems that, like Courage, they have not gained much insight from their ordeal during the conflict.

### The Cook

The Cook, the Chaplain's adversary for Courage's affections and bread, is an elderly Don Juan who has long since moved on from his days as the handsome Peter Piper who wooed women like Yvette. Ironically, he sees the war as just another big profit scheme, constantly exposing the military campaign that is inspired by God as nothing more than business as usual. He has no allegiance to the authorities who would take advantage of him because he recognizes his place in society. He informs the Chaplain that he bakes the King's bread instead of eating it. He comes to Mother Courage when penniless, their courtship consisting of their accounts of their respective ruin.

► Lack of allegiance

### 3.2.2.3 Overview

In the midst of the Thirty Years War, in the spring of 1624, *Mother Courage and Her Children* opens in Dalarna. For the Swedish campaign in Poland, a recruiting officer and a sergeant are looking for soldiers. The notorious Mother Courage, her silent daughter Kattrin, and her sons Schweizerkas (Swiss Cheese) and Eilif are seen riding in a canteen wagon. Eilif is being seduced by the recruiting officer to enlist in the army. He must leave her children alone. The Sergeant objects, stating that it is unfair for Courage to expect anything in return since she thrives on conflict. When Eilif acknowledges that he wants to enlist, Courage predicts what will happen to her kids: Eilif will perish for his courage, Swiss Cheese for his integrity, and Kattrin for her generosity. Courage readies to leave. The Recruiting Officer presses the Sergeant to stop them. While the Sergeant feigns to buy one of Courage's belts, the Recruiting Officer takes Eilif away.

► Mother Courage's relationship with war

In 1626, Courage appears beside the tent of the Swedish Commander, arguing with the Cook over the sale of a capon. The Commander, a Chaplain and Eilif enter the tent, the Commander lauding his brave soldier for raiding the local peasants. Courage remarks that trouble must be afoot. If the campaign was any good, he would not need brave soldiers. Courage reunites with

► Failing campaign

her son. Three years later, Courage and Kattrin appear folding washing on a cannon with Swiss Cheese, now a paymaster, and Yvette Pottier, the camp prostitute, look on. Yvette recounts the story of her lost beau, Peter Piper.

► Swiss's crime

The Chaplain and Cook appear and they talk about politics. The Cook remarks ironically that their king is lucky to have his campaign justified by God, otherwise, he could be accused of seeking profit alone. Suddenly cannons explode; the Catholics have launched a surprise attack. The Cook departs for the Commander. Swiss arrives and hides his regiment's cash box in the wagon. Three days later, the remaining characters sit eating anxiously. When Courage and the Chaplain go to town, Swiss departs to return the cash box unaware that enemies are lurking about to arrest him. When Courage and the Chaplain return, two men bring in Swiss. But Mother and son pretend to not know each other.

► Refusal to identify son's body

That evening, Kattrin and the Chaplain appear rinsing glasses. An excited Courage enters, declaring that they can buy Swiss's freedom. Yvette has picked up an old Colonel who will buy the canteen; Courage only plans to pawn and reclaim it after two weeks with the money from the cash box. Thanking God for corruption, Courage sends Yvette to bribe One Eye with the 200 guilders. Yvette reports that the enemy has agreed. Swiss, however, has thrown the cash box into the river. Courage hesitates, thinking that she will not be able to reclaim the wagon. Courage proposes a new offer, 120 guilders. Yvette returns, saying that they rejected it, and Swiss' execution is imminent. Drums roll in the distance. Two men enter with a stretcher, asking Courage if she can identify Swiss Cheese's body. Courage shakes her head, consigning the body to the carrion pit. Courage then appears outside an officer's tent, planning to file a complaint over the destruction of her merchandise. A Young Soldier enters, threatening the captain's murder. Apparently he has stolen his reward for rescuing the Colonel's horse. Courage tells him to quiet down, since his rage will not last. Defeated, the soldier leaves, and Courage follows.

► Casualties of war

Two years pass, and the wagon stands in a war-ravaged village. The Chaplain staggers in; there is another wounded family of peasants in the farmhouse. He needs linen. Courage refuses, as she will not sacrifice her officers' shirts. The Chaplain lifts her off the wagon and takes the shirts. The canteen sits before the funeral of Commander Tilly in 1632.

Mother Courage and Kattrin take inventory inside the canteen tent. Courage asks the Chaplain if the war will end—she needs to know if she should buy more supplies. The Chaplain responds that war always finds a way. Courage resolves to buy new supplies, and sends Kattrin to town. Kattrin returns with a wound across her eye and forehead, as she was attacked *en route*. Counting the scattered merchandise, Courage curses the war.

- ▶ Taking advantage of conflict

Immediately afterwards she appears at the height of prosperity, dragging her new wares along a highway. She celebrates war as her breadwinner. A year later, voices announce that peace has been declared. Suddenly the Cook arrives, bedraggled and penniless. Courage and Cook flirt as they recount their respective ruin. The Chaplain emerges, and the men begin to argue, fighting for the feedbag. When Courage defends the Cook, the Chaplain calls her a “hyena of the battlefield.” Courage suggests they part company. Suddenly an older, fatter and heavily powdered Yvette enters. The widow of a colonel, she has come to visit Courage. When she sees the Cook, she unmasks him as the Peter Piper that ruined her years ago. Courage calms her and takes her to town. Now, both men firmly believe they are lost. Then Eilif appears in handcuffs. He has come to see his mother one last time before being executed for yet another raid. Cannons roar as the soldiers drag him off. Breathless, Courage emerges. They have to take the wagon and flee, the war having resumed three days ago. She invites the Cook to join her, hoping that she will see Eilif soon.

- ▶ The Cook’s offer

It is autumn of 1634. An early hard winter is upon them. In front of a parsonage, Courage and the Cook appear in rags. The Cook abruptly tells her that he has a letter from Utrecht stating that his mother has passed away and has left the family inn to him. She is invited to go there with him. But they have to part from Kattrin. Kattrin overhears their conversation. Calling to the parsonage, the Cook then sings “The Song of the Great Souls of the Earth” for food. It recounts how the great souls meet their dark fates on account of their respective virtues—wisdom, bravery, honesty, and kindness. Courage decides she cannot leave her daughter. Kattrin climbs out of the wagon, planning to flee, but Courage stops her. They depart.

The wagon is parked close to a farmhouse outside of Halle in January 1636. Her mother has gone to town to get supplies, so Kattrin is inside. A Catholic Lieutenant and three soldiers emerge from the woods, looking for a guide to the town. The

► The business of war

regiment of Catholics prepares for an ambush. Persuaded that there is nothing left to do, the peasants start praying. In silence, Kattrin scales the roof and starts to drum. The soldiers shoot Kattrin. Her final drumbeats mingle with the thunder of a cannon. She has saved the town. Toward morning, Courage sits by Kattrin's body in front of the wagon. Courage sings Kattrin a lullaby. She is awakened by the peasants, who also offer to bury her daughter. Bravery compensates them and fastens herself to the cart. She decides, "I have to get back into business," and she follows the regiment.

► War as mobilising force

### 3.2.2.4 Detailed Summary

#### Scene One

The setting is Dalarna, in the spring of 1624. In Poland, a recruiting officer and a sergeant are gathering soldiers for the Swedish campaign. They are standing outside of a town on a highway, shivering. The officer bemoans the difficulty in enlisting soldiers from among the dubious villagers. The people, the Sergeant says, could use a good war. There can be no organization without war.

► Profiting from war

A canteen wagon pulls up onstage, and there is the sound of a harmonica. The infamous Mother Courage sits on it with her silent daughter, Kattrin, and her sons, Eilif and Swiss Cheese pull it along. Introducing herself to the officers, she sings her trademark song. A "sales pitch" of sorts, it markets the wares that will help the soldiers march to their deaths. She calls the soldiers to wake: "Let all of you who still survive / Get out of bed and look alive!"

► Intermixed family genealogy

The Sergeant asks to view her driver's license. Pulling out several papers, Courage makes fun of his request. He asks for the names of the group and laments the army's lack of discipline once more. Her children, each of whom is the progeny of a different, and possibly forgotten, father of a different nationality, demonstrate Courage's family's colourful genealogy. As the two officers make fun of her, Eilif makes a threat to strike them. She offers the men her wares and silences him with courage.

The Recruiting Officer reveals his intentions and attempts to lure Eilif into the army. Courage demands that he leave her children alone, ultimately drawing her knife. Sergeant objects, retorting whether since Courage is dependent on the war, it did not have a right to demand anything from her. He has not suffered any harm from the war. Looking ahead, Courage is

► Prophecy

not convinced. The Sergeant is like a dead man on furlough to her. She asks the Sergeant to select his fate in order to validate her prophecy. Courage inserts two parchment strips into his helmet, marking one with a black cross. He draws while she blends them. The Sergeant has chosen to die, which horrifies him.

► Foreshadowing plot development

The Recruiting Officer has continued to pursue Eilif, without Courage's knowledge. Courage predicts the fate of her children in a similar manner when Eilif acknowledges that he would like to enlist. Each draw the black cross as well. She laments their fate. Eilif will die for his excessive bravery, Swiss Cheese for his honesty, and Kattrin for her kindness. With sorrow, she gets ready to go. The Sergeant is pressed to stop them by the Recruiting Officer. After checking one of Courage's belts, the Sergeant leads her behind the wagon. The recruiting officer whisks Eilif away for a drink at the same moment. Screaming, a horrified Kattrin jumps off the wagon. When courage appears, she realizes she has lost her child and stops. The family departs bitterly. The Sergeant, who is watching over them, makes his own epigrammatic prediction: "When a war gives you everything you earn, one day it might demand something in return!"

► Attempting to sell the capon

### Scene Two

Mother Courage travels through Poland with the Swedish army in 1625–1626. The action starts outside the besieged town of Wallhof in the Swedish Commander's tent and the nearby kitchen. The Cook and Courage are debating the sale of a castrated rooster called a capon. She cries that the soldiers are starving, chasing after field rats and drooling over boiled leather — no food is left. If the Cook does not buy the capon, the Commander will take his head. Nonplussed, the Cook begins to prepare an old cut of beef.

► Eilif's raid

The Commander, a Chaplain, and Eilif enter the tent, the Commander lauding the young man for a recent raid on the local peasants. He cries out for meat. After hearing the exchange, Courage, ecstatic to see her son again, puts the capon on the Cook in exchange for a nice sum of money. Eilif recounts the raid. When he learned that the peasants had hidden their oxen, he began depriving his men of their meat rations, the goal being to drive them into a state of extreme hunger. However, his group found out that the peasants outnumbered them when they launched an attack. Eilif was cornered by four men. He bid on the oxen to confuse them. Then laughing, he grabbed his sword and hacked them to pieces. He laughs, "Necessity

knows no law, huh?”

- ▶ Doubts about the success of the campaign

The Commander asks the Chaplain what he thinks of the tale. Cynically, the Chaplain notes that Jesus told men to love their neighbour at a time when their bellies were full, but this was no longer the case. The Commander says, “Any act done for the least of God’s children is done for God,” and that Eilif got his men some meat. Calling Eilif “Julius Caesar,” he praises his valour and says the man ought to be brought before the king. Courage says there must be trouble. The Commander would not require valiant soldiers if his campaign was successful.

- ▶ Courage comforts her son

According to the Commander, Eilif’s father had to have been a formidable fighter. The boy apologizes and begins to sing “The Song of the Wise Woman and the Soldier,” a song that Courage taught him as a warning. It is the story of a soldier who, defying the counsel of a wise woman, enlists in the military and perishes, disappearing like smoke, leaving behind only valiant acts that bring no comfort to the living. Picking up the song from the kitchen, Courage uses a spoon to beat on a pan. Eilif comes in and gives her a hug. She gives him a hard earful for not giving up when the peasants attacked him.

### Scene Three

- ▶ Sale of ammunition

Mother Courage and Katrin fold laundry on a cannon three years later. Concurrently, Courage haggles over a bag of ammunition with an Ordinance Officer. Swiss Cheese, dressed as a paymaster now, and camp prostitute Yvette Pottier watch. Nearby, Yvette’s red boots are visible. The officer is reprimanded by Courage for selling ammunition when his soldiers have nothing to shoot with, and she declares that she will not purchase military property. The policeman advises Courage to sell the bullets to another region after she buys them. Courage hands over Swiss Cheese’s underwear and tells her son to balance the regimental books. The books need to balance even in the absence of seasonal changes. He departs alongside the officer.

- ▶ Yvette’s lover

Courage tells Yvette that as more nations become involved in the conflict, her chances of getting a job also increase. Rumours that Yvette is sick and that none of the men will touch her have driven her to despair. She begins by telling a well-known tale about her Dutch army beau, Peter, who went by the nickname “Piper” because he always had a pipe in his mouth. The tale ought to harden Katrin’s heart against love. Yvette sings it in “The Fraternization Song,” telling of his arrival,



their affair, and his departure. She has spent the past five years in a futile search for her lover. She moves behind the wagon, and Courage warns her daughter against military affairs.

The Cook and Chaplain show up. Courage gives some of the money that Eilif has requested to the Chaplain, reprimanding her son. She is too harsh, the Cook claims, since her son could pass away any time. The Chaplain rejoins that to fall in a war of religion is a blessing to his sceptical interlocutors. The three move behind the cart, talking of politics. The Swedish King has paid a heavy price for this campaign. The Kaiser was forced to subjugate the Poles and the Germans because neither group desired to be freed from his rule. He has received nothing but trouble for his military exploits, forcing him to impose an unpopular salt tax at home. Regardless, his conscience was unclouded by his divine justification. He might be accused of pursuing profit alone in the absence of it.

► Political state

When their friend betrays them by eating the king's bread, Courage and the Chaplain chastise him for his betrayal. The Cook disagrees; he bakes his bread instead of eating it. As the trio engages in conversation, Katrin puts on Yvette's boots and mimics her confident gait. Suddenly cannons, shots and drums explode. The Catholics have launched a surprise attack. The Ordnance Officer and a Soldier enter and attempt to move the cannon and the regiment cash box in the wagon. They quickly take down the regiment flag. The Cook leaves his pipe behind and heads over to see the Commander. The Chaplain stays behind, wringing a cloak out of the reticent Courage to hide his identity. When Courage finds Katrin, she rips off the boots and smears dirt all over her face. Another whore enters the world when a soldier sees a clean face. She is horrified when Swiss Cheese shows up and foolishly conceals the regimental cash box inside the wagon. The regimental flag is swiftly removed by them.

► Ambush attack and consequences

After a span of three days, the surviving characters are seen eating nervously. The Chaplain laments that he has no one to preach to and Swiss Cheese frets that his sergeant is curious about the cash box. As a practicing Catholic, Mother Courage has vowed to protect the canteen. Swiss Cheese is asked by the Chaplain what he intends to do with the cash box. There are spies everywhere; the Chaplain even came across a one-eyed man who was sniffing his waste. Her son is also told by Courage to leave the cash box where it is. After she and the chaplain depart, Katrin does the dishwashing. Swiss Cheese,

► Swiss Cheese's deception

thinking about his sergeant's reaction, decides to return the cash box.

- ▶ Swiss Cheese is apprehended

Two men - an enemy Sergeant and the Man with the Bandage over his eye — confront Kattrin. They ask if she has seen a man from the Second Protestant Regiment and she flees in terror. The men withdraw after seeing Swiss Cheese. Unaware of the impending threat, Swiss Cheese gets ready to go. Despite her best efforts, Kattrin is unable to warn him. Kattrin tells her mother what has happened in a desperate manner as soon as Courage and the Chaplain return. Abruptly, the pair of men introduce a struggling Swiss cheese. Son and mother act as though they have never met. Still, Courage is adamant that Swiss Cheese surrender the cash box. The men take him away and Courage follows.

- ▶ Scheming to make the best of the situation

Kattrin and the Chaplain show up that evening, wiping knives and washing glasses. The song “The Song of the Hours,” which describes Christ’s suffering, is sung by the Chaplain. A jubilant Courage steps in, saying they have to purchase the freedom of Swiss Cheese. Yvette has discovered an elderly Colonel who may purchase the canteen from her. After two weeks, Courage intends to pawn the wagon and retrieve it using the cash from the cash box. The Colonel is duped into making the purchase by Yvette. He leaves. As she counts the goods, Courage stops her and instructs Yvette to bribe One Eye with the 200 guilders. She gives God praise for the corruptibility of men, since it is their only hope. Yvette returns and reports that One Eye has agreed. She also relates that Swiss Cheese confessed under thumbscrews that he threw the cash box into the river when he was near capture. Courage hesitates and decides that she will not be able to reclaim the wagon. She asks Yvette to return with a new offer of 120 guilders.

- ▶ Death of Swiss Cheese

Courage sits to help polish the knives. She muses that they will get Swiss Cheese back, that the war will never end and that she was once offered 500 guilders for her wagon. Kattrin flees, sobbing behind the wagon. Yvette returns, One Eye rejected her offer, and Swiss Cheese’s execution is imminent. Courage begs Yvette to tell him that she will pay 200 out of desperation. She mumbles, “I think — that I’ve haggled too long.” Out in the distance, drums roll. When Yvette shows up, Swiss Cheese is riddled with eleven bullets. The army is still of the opinion that they are concealing the cash box. The sheet placed over the stretcher carrying Swiss Cheese’s body is lifted. The Sergeant asks Courage to identify the body by

raising the sheet. Courage shakes her head. “He has no one that knows him,” the Sergeant commands, directing the body to be thrown into the carrion pit.

#### Scene Four

Mother Courage shows up outside of an officer’s tent and complains to the clerk about her goods being destroyed by the army and that she is being fined illegally. She intends to lodge a grievance against the captain. In response, the clerk tells her to be thankful they allowed her to continue running her business. A young soldier walks in and makes threats to kill the captain. It seems that the captain has pilfered his reward for saving the Colonel’s horse and spent it on booze, food and sex. He is hungry and wants to eat. The Commander ordered the army into the fields the previous year, not thinking that they would remain in the same area. The soldiers ruined the crops, resulting in a famine.

- Consequences of reckless violence

An Older Soldier tries to calm the younger one. Courage tells him to quiet down, saying that the screamers never last long. His rage will not last. He speculates as to how long it will take in the stocks for him to come to terms with injustice. Abruptly, the Clerk tells everyone to sit down as the captain is about to arrive. Courage comments that it is preferable to not rise again as they follow. And with that, Courage begins to sing “The Song of the Great Capitulation.” It tells the story of a proud man who joined the army and soon learned to submit to its rules. The clerk tells Courage she can see the captain as the soldier departs and she too leaves.

- Dangers of speaking up

#### Scene Five

The wagon journeys through Poland, Moravia, Bavaria, Italy, and Bavaria once more after two years. After Tilly’s victory at Magdeburg, it stops at a village that was destroyed by war in 1631. At the counter, Mother Courage and Kattrin tend to two soldiers. One has a fur coat that was stolen from a woman. Throughout the scene, triumphant marches are played. The men protest that their “humane” commander was bought off and that they were only given an hour to plunder as Courage demands that they pay. There is another family of peasants in the farmhouse when the Chaplain stumbles in. An ecstatic Kattrin tries to persuade her mother to get some linen because he needs it. Courage declines since she will not give up her officer’s shirts and has sold all of her bandages. A wounded woman and a peasant who stayed behind to defend their farm are brought in by the chaplain. Everyone looks to

- Refusal to part with goods in an emergency

the unwavering Courage. Kattrin brandishes a board at her. Courage is lifted off the wagon by the Chaplain, who then removes the shirts and starts to rip them into strips. A child's anguished cry is heard coming from the house. Kattrin runs into the crumbling building.

- ▶ Rescue as loss of money for Mother Courage

Ripped between two worlds, Courage watches nervously for Kattrin while cautioning the Chaplain not to handle her linen too roughly. Kattrin triumphantly reappears with a baby. She must return it to its mother. While rocking the infant, Kattrin hums a lullaby. The victory marches must end for Courage; they have only cost her money. She snatches his fur coat in exchange for a bottle of schnapps that she witnesses a soldier attempting to steal. Someone is still left in the farmhouse.

### Scene Six

- ▶ Eternal nature of war

In 1632, the canteen sits before the Bavarian city of Ingolstadt during the funeral of Commander Tilly. Mother Courage and Kattrin take inventory while the Chaplain and a Clerk play draughts. It is raining outside as they sit inside the canteen tent. Courage counts her belongings while thinking about Tilly's passing. Courage acknowledges her sympathy for the Commander, saying that men of his calibre surely leave special plans unfulfilled — something that should be memorialized. The "littleness" of the people who should carry out these plans always ruins them. The Chaplain chuckles at her slightly provocative remarks. She wants to know if she needs to buy more supplies, so she asks him if he thinks the war will end. In response, the Chaplain says that although the war may not be perfect, someone will always manage to pull it out of the pit and that heroes do indeed grow on trees. A Soldier at the counter begins singing a cynical call to battle.

- ▶ Kattrin's plight

Scandalized, the Clerk asks the Chaplain what he thinks of peace. The Chaplain responds that war has its islands of peace. Moreover, it satisfies all human needs. 'You can take a crap, drink, screw, nap and march onward. War is like love — it always finds a way'. Courage resolves to buy new supplies. Kattrin bangs a basket of glasses on the ground and runs out, distraught. Courage has promised her a husband, come peacetime. Returning, Courage comforts her daughter. She then dispatches the Clerk and her to the town to pick up some supplies, and they depart. The Chaplain gives Courage props for her bravery. The impoverished, she responds, require it in order to face each other, raise their children, wake up in the morning, till their fields during times of war and put up with leaders who could endanger their lives. She asks the Chaplain

to chop her some wood while she sits and smokes her pipe. He remarks about the pipe. When he finds out that the Cook is the source, he jealously attacks the person's integrity, putting his axe down angrily on the cutting board. Courage warns him against breaking the block. The Chaplain laments that he has no talent for physical labour. He is a great preacher, rousing his listeners out of their senses and providing them with warmth. Courage responds that she needs her senses, and that firewood provides warmth best. The Chaplain pursues his courtship with an axe in hand, hoping to strengthen his relationship with Courage. Fearlessly, Courage turns him down. Abruptly, Katrin walks in, dragging the supplies behind her, with cuts across her forehead and eye. She was assaulted and left with lasting damage. Courage gives her Yvette's boots in an attempt to comfort her. Katrin gets into the wagon and steps out of the boots. With a bitter curse on the war, Courage counts the strewn merchandise.

### Scene Seven

Courage appears at the height of prosperity, dragging the wagon and its new wares along a highway with the Chaplain and Katrin. She wears a necklace of silver coins. She declares that she will not let "you" spoil the war for her; war feeds its people. She sings "The Song of Mother Courage" anew.

- ▶ Successful business during wartime

### Scene Eight

The year is 1632. One summer morning, an old woman and her son appear in front of the wagon, pulling a bag of bedding. They try to convince an unwilling Courage of it. Unexpectedly, bells begin to ring, and announcements of Gustavus Adolphus's defeat at the Battle of Lützen are heard from behind. Peace is declared. Courage curses as she has recently bought new supplies. The Chaplain crawls out of the wagon and chooses to put on his pastor's coat. Suddenly, the Cook shows up, dishevelled and broke. Eilif could arrive at any time. Courage calls Katrin from the wagon, but after her disfigurement, she now fears the light. Courage and Cook sit and chat, flirting as they recount their respective ruin.

- ▶ Announcement of Peace

The Chaplain emerges wearing his coat, and the Cook chastises him for urging Courage to buy new supplies. They begin to argue. As the *Courage Model Book* indicates, they are engaged in a "fight for the feedbag." When Courage defends the Cook, the Chaplain calls her a "hyena of the battlefield," a war profiteer who has no respect for peace. Courage observes that the Chaplain has been living off her with little complaint

- ▶ The aftermath of war profiteering

and suggests that they part company. Upon the Cook's suggestion, Courage rushes off to town to sell as much as she can. The Cook takes off his boots and his foot coverings. With poignancy, the priest implores the Cook to keep him in place. Abruptly, a more mature, plumper, and heavily powdered Yvette appears, accompanied by a servant. She is visiting Courage; she is a colonel's widow now. She reveals the Cook to be the Peter Piper who abandoned her years prior, alerting Courage about his past. She is calmed and taken to town by Courage.

Now, both men firmly believe they are lost. They remember better times spent working for the Commander. Then two soldiers and Eilif, now a well-dressed lieutenant, enter in handcuffs. He has come to see his mother for the last time. He has been arrested for another of his acts of plundering, now criminal under the new peace, one that left the wife of a peasant dead. He has no message for his mother. The soldiers take him away and the Chaplain follows, instructing the Cook to defer telling Courage for now. Uneasily, the Cook approaches the wagon, asking Katrin for food. A cannon thunders. Courage appears, panting, holding her treasures in her arms. Three days ago, the war started again. They have to take the wagon and run; she hopes to see Eilif soon and wants the Cook to come too. With the Cook and Katrin in the harness, Courage sings triumphantly: "Report today to your headquarters! If it's to last, this war needs you!"

### Scene Nine

By the autumn of 1634, the war has killed about half of Germany's population. The winter season is full of death, destruction, and famine. Courage and the Cook are impoverished, dressed in rags, as they ring at the door of a half-ruined parsonage in Fichtelgebirge. When there is no answer, Courage suggests that they sing for their food and alms. Suddenly, the Cook tells her that he has received a letter saying his mother has died of cholera and left him the family inn. Recounting the woes of the land, Courage confesses that she is tired of wandering. "The world's dying out" the Cook responds, inviting her to join him at the inn. She must, however, decide whether she will join him immediately. She must however leave Katrin behind with the wagon as there is no room for her, and the customers do not like to look upon disfigured mutes. Courage does not know what to do; Katrin overhears the conversation.

- ▶ Possibility of escape from the war

- ▶ Courage decides not to leave Kattrin

The Cook sings “The Song of the Great Souls of the Earth” which recounts the fates of Solomon, Julius Caesar, Socrates, and Saint Martin, all of whom meet their tragedies on account of their respective virtues—wisdom, bravery, honesty, and pity. Thus, a man is better off without such qualities. A voice calls them inside. Courage decides she cannot leave her daughter, and they enter the parsonage. Kattrin decides to leave but is stopped by Courage. They abandon the Cook and throw out his belongings from the wagon. They depart.

### Scene Ten

- ▶ Prosperity

During 1635, Courage and Kattrin follow the ever more defeated armies from central Germany. They come upon a prosperous farmhouse on the highway. A voice inside sings of the house’s prosperity through the seasons. Courage and Kattrin stop to listen and then start out anew.

### Scene Eleven

- ▶ Surprise attack

In January 1636, the wagon stands near a farmhouse outside the Protestant town of Halle. It is night-time. A Catholic Lieutenant and three soldiers in full armour have come to the town and the Lieutenant orders to kill anyone who makes a sound. They knock and seize the Old Peasant Woman who answers. The soldiers bring out an Old Peasant and his son. Kattrin appears on the wagon and her mother has gone to town to buy supplies because the shopkeepers are fleeing and selling cheap. The soldiers demand a guide; the son refuses, even upon the threat of death. The soldiers then threaten to destroy their cattle. The son complies and exits with the soldiers. The Old Peasant climbs on the roof and discovers a Catholic regiment, which is prepared for a surprise attack on the town. Convinced there is nothing they can do, the Peasant Woman begins to pray, asking God to protect their family members in the town.

- ▶ Kattrin’s selfless act

When she learns that the Peasant Woman has grandchildren in town, Kattrin quietly climbs on the roof. She withdraws a drum from under her apron and begins to beat it. The peasants command her to stop, threatening to stone her. The soldiers return, threatening to kill them all. The First Soldier promises Kattrin that they will spare her mother if she stops and accompanies them to town. She ignores them, as she does not beat for her mother alone. The soldiers consider setting the farm on fire. Kattrin listens and laughs. Enraged, the Lieutenant orders his men to bring a musket. The Peasant Woman suggests

that they smash the wagon. The Young Peasant deal it a few blows; Kattrin pauses in distress but continues. Suddenly he cheers her on and the soldier beats him with his pike. The second soldier returns and shoots the weeping Kattrin. Her final drum-beats mingle with the thunder of a cannon. She has saved the town.

### Scene Twelve

In the morning, Mother Courage sits by Kattrin's body in front of the wagon. The drums and pipes of the marching troops can be heard. The peasants orders Courage away. She must follow her regiment. Courage responds that Kattrin is asleep and sings her a lullaby. The peasants bring her to her senses. Courage covers the body with a sheet from the wagon. She plans to go to Eilif. The peasants offer to bury her. Courage pays them and harnesses herself to the wagon. She is confident she can manage: "I must get back into business" she decides. As she calls to the passing regiment, the soldiers sing her signature song.

- Price of involvement in war

#### 3.2.2.5 Themes

**a) War as Business:** According to Brecht, the play views war as a "continuation of business by other means," as stated in the *Courage Model Book*. War is not merely a break in civilization or a result of some supernatural force; rather, it is one of the prerequisites and inevitable outcomes of civilization. In this way, numerous conversations — the most overt of which occurs in Scene 3 — present war as just another business venture for Europe's greatest leaders. The main character of the play is Mother Courage, a small businesswoman who uses her canteen wagon to parasitically survive the war. *The Model Book* notes that "little people do not make big profits." Her children will suffer as a result of Courage's dedication to the war effort; the war will reclaim the physical resources it has given her.

- Economic opportunity at the cost of war

**b) Virtue in Wartime:** According to Brecht's *Courage Model Book*, war "makes the human virtues fatal even to their possessors." Beginning with the play's opening scene, this "lesson" foreshadows Mother Courage and her children's destiny. As she reads the fortunes of her children, Courage will invoke the virtues of bravery, honesty, and kindness to bring about each child's death. This lesson will be practiced later by The Cook in "The Song of the Great Souls of the Earth." As we will see, Brecht ironically attributes these qualities to his

- Virtue as fatal flaw during wartime



characters. For example, Courage is frequently a coward, and Eilif is more of a killer than a valiant hero.

► Submission to power

**c) Capitulation:** Written during the height of Nazi terror, *Mother Courage* would inspire readers to reject war. It has several instances of surrender that serve as object lessons in this regard, including the surrender of the peasants in Scene 11 and the departure of Courage and the Young Soldier from the captain's tent in Scene 4. *Mother Courage* highlights the ceremonial nature of submission. The people have been trapped in unchanging patterns of lamentation and surrender due to years of war. Opposing these capitulations is Kattrin, a woman scarred and rendered speechless by the war trauma she continuously witnesses, who risks her life and livelihood to defend a town under attack.

► Clash between materialism and maternity

**d) Maternity:** The play pits Kattrin against Mother Courage, a mother who neglects to shield her kids. Her maternal instincts clash with her heartless business acumen. According to Brecht's *Courage Model Book*, Kattrin's war booty is the children she saves, while Courage's is the booty she can scavenge. Notably, the children of Halle are saved by her valiant intervention, which breaks her stony silence.

### 3.2.2.6 Symbols

► Wagon as a symbol for destiny/reality

**a) Wagon:** The play's central symbol, Mother Courage's wagon, serves many different purposes, all of which Brecht's audiences, readers and performers are free to interpret. However, one of its most obvious uses is as a metaphor for the weight of fate. To put it succinctly, Mother Courage's bond with her wagon stands for the inevitable reality that circumstances outside of our control shape our lives and that we must adapt to them. The wagon serves as Mother Courage's home and business, but it is also her vehicle for travelling around Europe and her shield during battles along the way. Mother Courage's final act in the play is to hitch herself to the wagon, alone and determined, and trudge onward into an uncertain future. The play's opening line describes the wagon, which is onstage for almost the entire performance. She bears the physical burden of pulling the wagon, the financial burden of having all her wealth locked up in it, and the spiritual burden of having her children die and her living a violent, unstable life as a result of the wagon. However, she never thinks about giving it up because she accepts that this is her fate and must continue pulling it. It is, after all, what she has always lived from and, in a sense, what makes her who she is. Interestingly, Brecht is not complimenting her tenacity

and bravery in bearing her name. As a matter of fact, he was renowned for wanting people to find fault with her rather than feel sympathy for her. Mother Courage may have, like the Germans on the eve of World War II, chosen a different path and abandoned her wagon, instead of accepting her inevitable demise and aiding in the devastation of Europe.

**b) Alcohol:** Alcohol is a symbol for the senselessness and humiliation of war. In an attempt to forget the atrocities they have seen, soldiers risk their lives for a meagre pay during the play, then blow the entire amount on Mother Courage's brandy. When they actually go through war, they come to the realization that it is not worth it, but it is too late to turn back, so they choose to drink instead. This is evident from the opening lines of the play, where Mother Courage offers an imaginary army captain the chance to "drink before they die" while singing to his men. She points out that, if the captain gets his men drunk, they might be willing to do what is asked of them in war — which presumably includes taking on dangerous tasks or even losing their lives. In this way, Mother Courage describes alcohol as a trick to grease the wheels of war: not only does it get smart men to do stupid things in a pointless war that does not benefit them, but it also helps them forget what they have done and seen. Most soldiers are dead or broke by the time they finish their service, and alcohol has helped with both. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Mother Courage's most popular product appears to be alcohol based on the events of the play. Nevertheless, she continues this pointless cycle, making money in the short run but losing out in the long run on a personal and financial level. She also ends the play broke and desperate.

► Alcohol as symbolic of trickery

**c) Red Boots:** The striking red boots worn by Yvette Pottier symbolize Kattrin's longing for love and independence. When Kattrin tries them on in the third scene, Mother Courage reacts by telling her that she looks like a sex worker (like Yvette), taking the items away, and indicating that she intends to sell them. In a later scene, after soldiers attack Kattrin, Mother Courage tries to gift Kattrin the boots as a token of goodwill, but Kattrin refuses them. Moments like these provide rare and valuable insight into Kattrin's true desires, complex feelings about men, and relationship with her mother because she does not speak. She assumes that by acting out a vision of feminine beauty when she first takes Yvette's boots, she will be able to find the man whose love can protect her from the horrors of war. Even though Mother Courage understands that Kattrin

► Red Boots as symbolic of Kattrin's desire for love and independence

can only find love as a sex worker, such desires are quite normal for a young woman coming of age. Kattrin's greatest wish in life, according to Mother Courage, is to get married, but this will not be possible until the war is over. She removes the boots for this reason. However, she also finds it impossible to resist the need to sell them to make money, even if doing so would mean reducing Kattrin's emblem of her dreams to the status of just another commodity. It is already too late when Mother Courage later regrets and tries to return the boots because Kattrin has a scar from the attack that will prevent any man from marrying her. Perhaps Kattrin does not want Mother Courage to decide when and how she can feel free and independent or she does not want the boots because she knows that men will not save her from her life with Mother Courage.

## Summarised Overview

Bertolt Brecht's modernist play, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, is unique in that it deviates from certain expectations of drama. Instead, the play focuses less on action and events, conveying a powerful message about war, human conflict, and human nature. The play comes across as a series of allegorical tales over a thirty-year span, that presents behaviours and beliefs that Brecht believes are detrimental to the world at large. In his typical fashion, the audience are exposed to the characters and actions of the play in a way that minimizes levels of excitement and degrees of audience sympathy. The play offers a lesson that audience members can carry in to their peacetime lives. The ravages of war may not be a universal phenomenon that every audience member can identify with, but, according to Brecht, capitalism forces people to make the same cruel choices that Mother Courage and her children had to make. It creates a situation where the security of capitalist gains and wealth are privileged over human need. The play's end goal, perhaps, is simply to convey that, unlike with Mother Courage's final reflections after the death of her last child—the purpose of life is not solely to “get back into business.”

## Assignments

1. Consider *Mother Courage and Her Children* as an anti-war play.
2. Discuss the trope of maternity in *Mother Courage*, emphasising the protagonist's conception of motherhood and maternal responsibilities.
3. Examine the character Kattrin as the antithesis of Mother Courage.
4. Detail the symbolic function of the Red Boots in the play.
5. Write a short note on the major themes explored in the play *Mother Courage*

*and Her Children.*

6. What is the social and historical context of Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*?
7. In your opinion, why does Mother Courage resolve to return "back to business" at the end of the play?

## Suggested Reading

1. Arthur. G. N., Sara F. C. *Intimacy and Alienation: Forms of Estrangement in Female / Male Relationships*, New York: Garland Publishing, 2000.
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6. Gascoigne, Bamber. *Twentieth Century Drama*, Hutchinson University Library, London, 1974.



## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

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SGOU

# Fiction

## BLOCK-04

### Block Content

Unit 1 : “The Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes”: Milan Kundera

Unit 2 : Novel

Unit 3 : Short Story



## Unit 1

# Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes - Milan Kundera

### Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ gain a deep understanding of Milan Kundera's insights into the nature and spirit of the novel, specifically focusing on its role in the Modern Era.
- ▶ contextualize the history of the novel, recognizing its parallel development with the broader history of the Modern Era.
- ▶ identify and map the overarching themes that have played a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of the novel, with a particular emphasis on themes related to adventure and war.
- ▶ critically analyze Milan Kundera's perspectives on claims about the death of the novel.
- ▶ understand the potential future directions the novel may take according to Kundera's vision.

### Background

The essay "Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes" by Milan Kundera, written in 1983, serves as his 'manifesto' on the novel genre. In it, Kundera articulates his views on the nature and essence of the novel, particularly within the context of the European novel that emerged alongside the Modern Era. He sees the novel as having a unique role in exploring the question of human existence, a task previously undertaken by disciplines like philosophy and science but neglected in the early Modern Era.

Kundera posits that the novel's purpose is to uncover hidden dimensions of the lived experience, and traces the history of the European novel through its successive discoveries into human nature. Commenting on the logic of the novel, Kundera says that unlike the absolutism of modern science, the novel operates on ambiguity and relativity, celebrating diverse and heterogeneous perspectives.

At a time when many debated the death of the novel, Kundera argues that its

disappearance would result not from exhausting its potential but from departing from its historical commitment to the “sequence of discovery”. He attributes the novel’s demise to bans, censorship, and ideological conformity under totalitarian regimes rather than to the exhaustion of its possibilities. In today’s mass media-dominated society, the survival and relevance of the novel hinges on its ability to resist reductionism and align itself with the enduring legacy of Miguel de Cervantes, the first European novelist to cast a lasting light on the forgotten being.

This unit will delve into Milan Kundera’s insights from the essay “Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes” regarding the art and aesthetics of the novel genre, showing its inseparable connection with its historical context.

## Keywords

European novel, Themes of novel, Terminal paradoxes, Sequence of discoveries, Spirit of novel

## Discussion

### 4.1.1 About the Author

Milan Kundera, a Czech-born novelist, essayist, translator, and poet, stands as one of the eminent authors of the Post-War era in European literature. Born in 1929 into a middle-class family, Kundera was raised by his father, a musicologist, and his mother, an educator. His early exposure to music, through piano lessons taught by his father, left an indelible mark on his literary works.

► Czech Origin

In his youth, Kundera was drawn to Communist ideology and became a member of the party. He embarked on his literary journey as a poet, penning verses that echoed solidarity with the party and its leaders. His support for the Communist takeover in 1948 and the subsequent Stalinization of Czechoslovakia marked his initial political stance. During this period, he delved into the study of films, nurturing a passion that would later influence his narrative style. After completing his university education, Kundera started teaching world literature at the Prague Film Academy in 1952.

► Supporter of Communism

Despite his initial fervent support, Kundera’s disillusionment with communism grew rapidly as he witnessed its suppression of freedom of expression and individual rights under the Soviet Union. Expelled from the party twice, first in 1950 and later in



► Disillusionment with Communism

1970, Kundera emerged as a vocal critic following the Prague Spring of 1968—a brief period marked by widespread demands for the liberation of Czechoslovakia from Soviet control. His active participation in advocating for freedom during this tumultuous time solidified his reputation as a prominent dissenting voice. Throughout his career, Kundera’s experiences with political upheaval and ideological shifts have profoundly shaped his literary oeuvre

► Major Works

Kundera’s first novel, *The Joke* (1967), took a critical stance against the communist regime, and consequently was banned in his country. He faced further repercussions, including expulsion from the party and loss of his teaching position. Undeterred, he found solace and creative expression as a jazz trumpeter in a small-town cabaret.

► Other Works

His subsequent works, including the novel *Life is Elsewhere* (1973) and the collection of stories *Laughable Loves* (1969), met a similar fate, banned for their non-conformity with accepted political narrative and social norms.

► Political Revolutions

In 1975, Kundera made the decision to leave Czechoslovakia, and move to Paris. Four years later, in 1979, his Czech citizenship was revoked, marking a definitive break with his homeland. Undeterred by these challenges, Kundera’s literary career flourished in Paris, marked by the publication of three seminal works: *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1979), *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984), and *Immortality* (1988). These works, which he aptly termed ‘thinking novels,’ delved into philosophical themes, intertwining narrative with extended authorial reflections.

► Switch to French language

In a bold move, Kundera transitioned to writing in French, producing notable novels like *Slowness* (1995), *Identity* (1997), and *Ignorance* (2000). His final literary offering, *The Festival of Insignificance*, was published in 2014, showcasing his life-long commitment to exploring the intricacies of the human experience.

► Essay Collections

As Milan Kundera crafted his novels, he engaged in deliberate reflections on their essence and significance within the modern world, articulating his insights through a series of illuminating essays. Two notable collections, *The Art of the Novel* (1986) and *Testaments Betrayed: An Essay in Nine Parts* (1993), serve as repositories of his views on the genre and its historical evolution.



► Influences

Kundera's exploration of the novel form is deeply enriched by the intellectual currents of thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, José Ortega y Gasset, Martin Heidegger, Russian Formalists, and French existentialists. Their ideas permeate his writings, infusing his outlook with philosophical depth and complexity.

► Literary Luminary

Milan Kundera's legacy as a literary luminary lives on, transcending borders and languages. His indelible imprint on the literary landscape continues to inspire generations of readers, cementing his status as one of the most influential voices of the 20th century. He passed away in Paris in 2023, leaving behind a rich tapestry of works that illuminate the complexities of modern existence with unparalleled depth and insight.

### 4.1.2 The Art of the Novel

► Overview

The Art of the Novel, a collection of Kundera's essays published in 1986, is an exploration of the aesthetics and craft of novel writing. Kundera himself describes these essays as "no theoretical statements" but "simply a practitioner's confession."

► Seven Parts

Divided into seven parts, the collection begins with the essay "Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes," penned in 1983. Here, Kundera presents his personal conception of the European novel, providing a sweeping history that spans across four centuries starting from Miguel de Cervantes.

► Interview

In an interview titled "Dialogue on the Art of the Novel," conducted by The Paris Review in the same year, Kundera extrapolates on the insights shared in the opening essay and the piece serves as supplement to it.

► The Collection

The collection further delves into critical analyses of specific literary works, including essays on Herman Broch's "The Sleepwalkers" and Franz Kafka's novels.

► Craft of Novel Writing

In "Dialogue on the Art of Composition," Kundera employs examples from his own novels to dissect the craft of novel writing, shedding light on the complex interplay of form and content.

► Uniqueness

Additionally, "Sixty-three Words" (1986) presents concise entries on key words that recur throughout Kundera's novels, providing insight into his unique aesthetics and philosophical preoccupations.

► Jerusalem Prize

The collection culminates with "Jerusalem Address: The Novel and Europe," a speech delivered upon Kundera's receipt of the Jerusalem Prize. Here, he shares his reflections on the novel and Europe.



### 4.1.3 Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes

The essay, divided into ten parts, presents Kundera's consolidated perspective on the birth, evolution, and alleged demise of the European novel. He delves into the essence and ethos of the novel, exploring its distinctive role in the Modern Era. In doing so, he also traces the lineage of European novelists to which he pledges allegiance. The discussion below will follow the key themes raised by Kundera in the essay.

► Ten Parts

#### 4.1.3.1 Modern Era and the Crisis of European Humanity [Part 1]

Kundera begins the essay with a reference to philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who articulated the state of “crisis” facing European humanity in his 1935 Vienna lectures. This crisis, Kundera notes, has its roots being traced back to the dawn of the Modern Era, notably with figures such as Galileo (1564–1642) and Descartes (1596-1650), heralding the birth of modern science.

► Crisis of European Humanity

Husserl regards the “European” as a spiritual identity that originates in ancient Greek philosophy, characterised by a genuine quest to comprehend the world in its entirety. This pursuit, driven by a “passion to know,” sought understanding for its own sake, transcending practical considerations.

► “European”

However, as the Modern Era unfolded, Kundera observes, the rise of scientific disciplines ushered in an era marked by a singular focus on technical and mathematical investigation. The utopian quest for mastery over nature relegated the world to a mere object of study, neglecting what Husserl termed as *die Lebenswelt* or the “Life-World”—the realm of individual human experience.

► Birth of Modern Science

Despite rapid advancements in knowledge, Kundera notes a paradoxical consequence.

► A Paradoxical Consequence

*The more he advanced in knowledge, the less clearly could he see either the world as a whole or his own self, and he plunged further into... ‘the forgetting of being’ (3-4).*

► Forgetting of Being

This trajectory, he suggests, has reduced humanity from a state of mastery to that of being governed by impersonal forces of technology, politics, and history, leading to the neglect of individual existence.

► Spiritual Crisis

In essence, Kundera articulates the spiritual crisis facing European humanity—a crisis rooted in the neglect of the

individual's concrete being amidst the relentless pursuit of scientific progress and technological advancement.

### 4.1.3.2 Modern Era and the Birth of the Novel [Part 2]

#### ► Birth of the Novel

Kundera, however, posits that the scenario elucidated by Husserl merely underscores the ambiguity inherent in the Modern era, which is marked by simultaneous progress and decline. Moreover, the Modern era, along with the birth of science (in Rene Descartes), saw the birth of the modern novel (in Miguel de Cervantes) as well, one that directed its focus precisely towards what scientific disciplines had overlooked: the investigation of the forgotten being. In this regard, Kundera asserts:

*If it is true that philosophy and science have forgotten about man's being, it emerges all the more plainly that with Cervantes, a great European art took shape that is nothing other than the investigation of this forgotten being (4-5).*

#### ► The Trajectory ► Task of the Novel

Kundera contends that over four centuries, the European novel, starting from Cervantes's Don Quixote, has been dedicated to exploring existential themes overlooked by European science. Cervantes delved into the nature of adventure, while Samuel Richardson scrutinised the inner lives of his characters. Gustave Flaubert delved into mundane existence, while Leo Tolstoy examined the role of irrationality in human behaviour. Marcel Proust unravelled the enigmatic past, while James Joyce illuminated the elusive present. With Thomas Mann, the novel probed the influence of ancient myths on contemporary life. The trajectory of the novel thus parallels the path of modernity.

Essentially, the "passion to know" that Husserl regarded as the essence of European spirituality had seized the novel. It undertook the task of examining the "man's concrete life" neglected by science, thus safeguarding it against the "forgetting of being."

#### ► Sequence of Discoveries

Kundera asserts that the novel's purpose is to uncover previously uncharted terrains of existence. He argues that a novel failing to do so is morally deficient. He further claims that the novel is a distinctly European creation, and its history constitutes a sequence of discoveries into human existence. The term "sequence" holds significance as these discoveries unfold not randomly but in a deliberate progression.

### 4.1.3.3 Novel's Wisdom [Part 3]

Kundera then speaks of the wisdom inherent in the novel—



- ▶ Wisdom of Uncertainty

- ▶ Cervantes' Heroic Ambiguity

- ▶ Language of Relativity & Ambiguity

- ▶ Wisdom of Uncertainty

- ▶ What happens to the grand theme of adventure?

the *wisdom of uncertainty*. As Europe transitioned from the Medieval era— where God occupied a central role governing and guiding existence— to the Modern Era where man assumed the central position, the once-unified world of absolute truth fragmented into a multitude of relative truths, each sourced from human perspectives.

Hegel hailed Descartes as heroic for confronting this fragmented world alone, anchoring his faith on the thinking self. However, Kundera regards Cervantes as even more heroic, for he embraced the ambiguity of the world, portraying characters entangled in a web of contradictory truths. For Cervantes, Kundera says, certainty lay solely in the wisdom of uncertainty.

But modern science, rooted in Cartesian rationalism, pursues objective knowledge of the material realm. Similarly, religious and political ideologies seek objective moral truths, dividing the world neatly into categories of good and evil. Using the same logic, they tend to translate the novel's language of relativity and ambiguity within the confines of their binary worldview.

In such a milieu, the novel's wisdom of uncertainty often eludes comprehension. Kundera encapsulates this difficulty, thus:

*This 'either-or' encapsulates an inability to tolerate the essential relativity of things human, an inability to look squarely at the absence of the Supreme Judge. This inability makes the novel's wisdom (the wisdom of uncertainty) hard to accept and decipher. (7)*

#### 4.1.3.4 Terminal Paradoxes - [Part 4, 5 & 6]

Commenting on the history of the novel, Kundera says that “the path of the novel emerges as a parallel history of modern era” and “it winds up in a paradox” (9). He explicates this by mapping the grand theme of adventure as it evolves across four centuries of the novel. It commences with the dawn of the modern era, when the horizon of the world appeared boundless, devoid of religious certainties. Don Quixote delves into the journey of the eponymous hero in such a limitless world that promised limitless possibilities for the soul. However, within a mere half-century, novels by Diderot and Balzac portray a world where the limitless horizon is constrained by the structures of modernity. Characters encounter social institutions such as the police, law, wealth, crime, and the State. In Balzac's narratives, time ceases to idle, becoming firmly anchored in history, and characters' adventures unfold against the backdrop of historical

progression. The horizon almost constricts into a barrier for Flaubert's Emma Bovary who, ensnared in the monotony of daily life, seeks adventure beyond it in a realm of daydreams and fantasies. By the time Kafka presents his protagonist K., history emerges as a trap devoid of promises of fame or fortune, overpowering individual thoughts and emotions. Each novel thus contributes to the sequence of discoveries surrounding the grand theme of adventure, ultimately exposing Europe's greatest illusion: the distinctness of the modern individual. As Kundera summarises, "the dream of soul's infinity loses its magic when History takes hold of man... The infinity of the soul—if it ever existed—has become a nearly useless appendage."

► Trajectory of the Novel

Kundera thus shows how the trajectory of the novel mirrors the unfolding narrative of the modern era. From Don Quixote to K., the evolution of the modern individual is showcased. Initially, in the guise of Don Quixote, the individual actively seeks adventure. Yet, centuries later, as seen in K., adventure is thrust upon him, embodying a poignant irony where the grand theme of adventure becomes its own caricature. Consequently, the modern man's journey culminates in a paradoxical twist.

► What happens to the grand theme of war?

Similar paradox manifests in another pivotal theme of the novel: War. While in Homer's epics and Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1868), wars were waged in the name of honour and nation, by the time Jaroslav Hašek presents *The Good Soldier Schweik* (1921), the soldier ventures into battle devoid of purpose or reason. A novel concerning war transforms into a great comedy. Kundera notes, "The aggressivity of force is thoroughly disinterested; unmotivated; it wills only its own will; it is pure irrationality." (10)

► Central European Novelists

Central European novelists of the 20th century, such as Jaroslav Hašek (1883–1923) and Franz Kafka (1883–1924), along with Robert Musil (1880–1942) and Hermann Broch (1886–1951) thus confront us with a profound paradox of the Modern Era:

*In the course of the Modern Era, Cartesian rationality has corroded, one after another, all values inherited from the Middle Ages. But just when reason wins a total victory, pure irrationality (force willing only its will) seizes the world stage, unimpeded by any universally accepted system of values. (10)*

► Period of Terminal Paradoxes

These novelists, just after World War I, saw that the idealism of modernity was in crisis, and the utopian dreams of modern humanity had materialised into nightmares. Modern European aspirations of unifying disparate civilizations into a single grand

civilization under perpetual peace had, paradoxically, resulted in a state of perpetual war. Kundera dubs this era as the period of “terminal paradoxes” of the modern world.

*...they demonstrate how, under the conditions of the “terminal paradoxes,” all existential categories [adventure, future, crime, private and public] suddenly change their meaning. (12)*

This is an existential condition that only the novel could have discovered.

Speaking on the periods of the novel’s history, Kundera says that it is not contingent upon shifts in literary styles or trends but rather on the particular facets of existence that the novel delves into. From this perspective, the period of terminal paradoxes, inaugurated by these Central European novelists, for Kundera, is far from over. He aligns his own fiction with this period.

► Novel’s History

#### 4.1.3.5 Death of the Novel [Part 7]

Kundera wrote this essay during a period marked by widespread discussions about the demise of the novel. Avant-garde movements like the futurists and surrealists had heralded the irrelevance of the novel in a radically transformed future. Yet, Kundera rebuts this notion by asserting that since the novel emerged alongside the Modern Era, its demise along with its legacy would signify the conclusion of the era itself, which, however, is far from the case.

► Novel’s Enduring Relevance

However, he notes that the novel can indeed be and has been put to death through bans, censorship, and ideological coercion, particularly evident in totalitarian regimes with which he is intimately familiar. He further notes:

► Totalitarian Suppression

*As a model of this Western world, grounded in relativity and ambiguity of things human, the novel is incompatible with the totalitarian universe... Totalitarian Truth excludes relativity, doubt, and questioning; it can never accommodate what I would term the spirit of the novel (14).*

► Communist Novels dismissed

But what about the plethora of novels published and widely consumed in Communist Russia? Kundera dismisses them, asserting that they hold no significance as they do not contribute to the sequence of discoveries. He contends:

*They discover no new segment of existence; they only confirm what has already been said; furthermore; in confirming what everyone says (what everyone must say), they fulfil their purpose...By discovering nothing, they fail to participate in the*

*sequence of discoveries that for me constitutes the history of the novel; they place themselves outside that history, or, if you like: they are novels that come after the history of the novel* (14).

When Kundera discusses the death of the novel, it is therefore not attributed to the genre having exhausted its possibilities or having become irrelevant. Instead, its demise occurs either through capitulation to state ideology or through attempts by totalitarian regimes to suppress it through bans and censorship.

▶ Death of the Novel

#### **4.1.3.6 Cemetery of Missed Opportunities: Four Appeals [Part 8]**

Kundera asserts that the novel has not exhausted its possibilities. However, it has certainly not paid sufficient heed to opportunities that have come its way. He identifies four such appeals that can shape the future course of the novel.

▶ Unexplored Novel Potentials

The first is the appeal of play, showcased in novels like Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759) and Denis Diderot's *Jacques le Fataliste* (1785). These works were celebrated for their playful spirit, a feature that wasn't fully explored as the novel in the nineteenth century became tethered to the demands of verisimilitude, realistic settings, and chronological order.

▶ Appeal of Play

The second is the appeal of dream, as exemplified in Franz Kafka's novels where he remarkably fuses dream and reality.

▶ Appeal of Dream

The third is the appeal of thought, where a novel harnesses all the available means—rational and irrational, narrative and contemplative to illuminate the man's being. This approach is embodied in the works of Robert Musil and Hermann Broch, achieving an intellectual synthesis between storytelling and philosophical reflection—a path Kundera's own novels align with.

▶ Appeal of Thought

The fourth appeal is of time, where the novelist transcends the Proustian time of personal memory to embrace the collective time of Europe.

▶ Appeal of Time

While Kundera refrains from predicting the future path of the novel, he affirms that its disappearance won't be due to exhaustion of possibilities, but rather because it exists in a world that has become increasingly estranged from it.

▶ Novel's Estrangement from Modern World

#### **4.1.3.7 Spirit of the Novel [Part 9]**

The scourge of the modern world lies in its pursuit of unification, which is accompanied by a pervasive process of reductionism.



► Threat of Reductionism

*[Modern society] reduces man's life to its social function; the history of a people to a small set of events, that are themselves reduced to tendentious interpretations; social life is reduced to political struggle, and that in turn to the confrontation of just two dominant global powers. Man is caught in a veritable whirlpool of reduction, where Husserl's 'world of life' is tragically obscured, and being is forgotten (17).*

► Reductionism

The novel, too, has fallen prey to the erosive effects of reductionism, primarily at the hands of mass media, whose aim is to homogenise and unify the planet. Kundera exposes this reductionism in mass media:

► Spirit of the Novel

*...the media amplify and channel the reduction process; they distribute throughout the world the same simplifications and stereotypes easily acceptable by the greatest number, by everyone, by all mankind. And it doesn't much matter that different political interests appear in the various organs of the media. Behind these surface differences reigns a common spirit...they all have the same view of life,... the same vocabulary, and the same style and same artistic tastes... This common spirit of mass media, camouflaged by political diversity, is the spirit of our time. And this spirit seems to me contrary to the spirit of the novel. (18)*

According to Kundera, the truth of the novel lies in its spirit of complexity. This is the ancient wisdom of the novel, first embodied by Cervantes, who conveyed "the difficulty of knowing and the elusiveness of truth." (18)

► Lost Continuity in Modernity

Furthermore, the novel embodies a spirit of continuity, where each narrative responds to its predecessors, and the collective experiences of past novels are encapsulated within each new work. However, in the modern era, fixated on the present moment, this continuity is lost. Under such circumstances, the novel ceases to be a timeless creation bridging the past and the future; instead, it becomes just another fleeting event among many.

► Novel's Existential Conflict

#### 4.1.3.8 Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes [Part 10]

In conclusion, Kundera says that the novel, dedicated to uncovering the yet undiscovered, cannot coexist peacefully with the modern world and its reductionist ethos: "to go on progressing as the novel, it can do so only against the progress of the world." (19)

Put differently, the progression of the novel cannot align

► Novel's Paradoxical Stance

with any notion of social progress, as the latter is one-sided in nature, while the former thrives on ambiguity and revels in contradiction. Kundera aligns himself with the latter, with this undervalued legacy of Cervantes.

## Summarised Overview

In his essay “The Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes,” Kundera articulates his perspectives on the intertwined nature of the art and history of the European novel and discusses its possible future course. He posits that the essence of the novel lies in its perpetual illumination of the question of being and its exploration of the hidden facets of human existence. A novel that fails to accomplish this task is immoral and falls outside the trajectory of the novel's history. In delving into the “world of life,” the novel does not seek to pass judgment but rather to understand. Hence, the language of the novel is based not on “either-or” but on relativity and ambiguity.

The most serious threat to the novel's existence does not stem from the exhaustion of its possibilities but rather from mass media and totalitarian regimes, both of which are characterised by a reductionist spirit—a spirit that the novel itself has to some extent succumbed to. This reductionism is fundamentally antithetical to the essence of the novel, which is grounded in complexity and continuity. Therefore, if the novel has to progress, Kundera says, it can only do so by embracing the legacy rooted in the quest for being, inherited from Cervantes and four centuries of European novelistic tradition, a legacy to which Kundera pledges his strong commitment.

## Assignments

1. What is the crisis facing European humanity according to Husserl?
2. What according to Kundera is the quintessential task of the novel?
3. How is the wisdom of the novel different from that of science?
4. In the history of the novel which is the period of terminal paradoxes?
5. How does Kundera respond to the predictions about the death of the novel?
6. What are possible future pathways for the novel laid out by Kundera?
7. Explain the title of the essay.



## Suggested Reading

1. Kundera, Milan. *The Art of the Novel*. Faber and Faber Limited, London, 1988.
2. Bell, Michael. Editor. *The Cambridge Companion to European Novelists*. Cambridge University Press, UK, 2012.
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### Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ analyse and interpret key themes, motifs, and literary techniques employed in the novels *Zorba the Greek* and *Madame Bovary*.
- ▶ assess the historical, cultural, and philosophical contexts that shaped the creation and reception of both novels.
- ▶ compare and contrast the portrayal of gender roles, societal norms, and individual freedom in *Zorba the Greek* and *Madame Bovary*.
- ▶ interpret the significance of narrative techniques in both novels, and their role in developing themes and characters' inner lives.

### Background

Gustave Flaubert and Nikos Kazantzakis are two renowned novelists whose works hold significant places in European literature. Flaubert, born in 1821 in France, is celebrated for his meticulous attention to detail and uncompromising realism. His seminal work, *Madame Bovary*, published in 1856, is a landmark of literary realism that revolutionized the novel form. Set in provincial France, the novel exposes the tragic consequences of Emma Bovary's relentless pursuit of romantic ideals in a mundane and stifling bourgeois society. Flaubert's masterful prose and incisive critique of bourgeois morality lay bare the complexities of human desire, pretensions of provincial life and the inevitable clash between romantic idealization and plain reality.

On the other hand, Nikos Kazantzakis, a Greek writer born in 1883, is renowned for his philosophical depth and exploration of the human condition. His magnum opus, *Zorba the Greek*, published in 1946, remains a seminal work that delves into themes of existentialism, freedom, and the pursuit of life's true meaning. Set on the island of Crete, the novel follows the transformative journey of the intellectual narrator alongside Zorba, a passionate and exuberant character who epitomizes the essence of life through his wild zest for living. Kazantzakis' narrative captivates readers with its vivid portrayal of Greek

culture, spirituality, and the eternal struggle between the rational mind and the untamed spirit.

The unit will undertake an in depth study of *Madame Bovary* and *Zorba the Greek* as representative texts of the European novel.

## Keywords

Realism, Bourgeois society, Romanticism, Adultery, Irony, Existentialism, Passion, Freedom, Greek culture

## Discussion

### Section 1 Madame Bovary

-Gustave Flaubert

#### 4.2.1.1 About the Author

Gustave Flaubert, born in Rouen, France, on December 12, 1821, grew up in the household of his father, who served as the chief surgeon at the main hospital. While still attending school, Flaubert began to pursue his passion for writing. However, in 1841, he relocated to Paris to study law. At the age of 22, he suffered from a nervous disorder, which led him to abandon his legal studies and focus entirely on writing. Tragedy struck in 1846 with the deaths of his father and sister Caroline. Flaubert, along with his mother and niece, subsequently moved to Croisset near Rouen, where he spent the rest of his life. Despite never marrying, he engaged in a decade-long affair with the poet Louise Colet.

► Early years

► Literary journey

Flaubert's literary journey began with the publication of his novella *November* in 1842, which was a semi-autobiographical coming-of-age story. He completed his initial novel, *The Temptations of Saint Augustine*, in 1849. Flaubert read this work aloud to his friends Louis Bouilhet and Maxime du Camp over four days without allowing any interruption in between, but their critical reaction, especially towards its vein of romanticism, led



him to shelve the manuscript temporarily. He revised it multiple times before finally publishing it in 1874.

► Writing Madame Bovary

At the suggestion of his friends, Flaubert shifted his focus to the emerging trend of realism in French literature, which centred on the experiences of ordinary middle-class individuals trapped in mundane and routine lives. He embarked on his first realist work, *Madame Bovary*, in 1851, completing it five years later. The prolonged duration was due to Flaubert's meticulous research that went into the writing of the novel. Though the novel upon release stirred controversy with its frank portrayal of adultery and societal critique, his writing style, characterised by meticulous detail, vivid imagery and psychological depth, revolutionised the French literary landscape. In 1857, he travelled to the Middle East, an experience that inspired his subsequent novel, *Salammbô* (1862), set in ancient Carthage, which took him four years to complete. His final major novel, *Sentimental Education*, published in 1869, was a realistic critique of urban life, revealing the moral decay beneath the sophistication of Parisian society.

► Three Tales

In 1877, Flaubert released a collection titled *Three Tales*, which included "A Simple Heart," "The Legend of St. Julian the Hospitaller," and "Herodias." At the time of his death in 1880, Flaubert was engaged in composing *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, a project he was deeply committed to. But none of his works before or after attained the level of acclaim achieved by *Madame Bovary*.

#### 4.2.1.2 About the Novel

► Based on true incident

In *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert aimed to explore a contemporary subject, departing from his previous unsuccessful attempt at writing a novel set in the past. He drew inspiration from a true story that garnered attention in 1848: the tragic suicide of Delphine Delamare, the wife of a provincial doctor, and an adulteress. Delamare's story mirrored that of Emma Bovary, involving adultery with a law clerk and a local squire, excessive spending, and eventual suicide due to mounting debts.

► Emma Bovary's Tragic Fantasy

The novel's plot revolves around Emma Bovary, trapped in an unhappy marriage with the unremarkable Dr. Charles Bovary in the provincial region of Normandy. Emma, educated in a convent, harbours unrealistic expectations and romantic fantasies derived from her readings of romantic novels. Her relentless pursuit of these illusions leads to tragic consequences for herself and her family.

► Setting

While the storyline is straightforward, it delves deeply into 19th-century provincial France, depicting the lives of the petit bourgeoisie with sharp insight. Flaubert closely researched the setting, focusing on the Rouen region where he spent much of his life. The villages portrayed in the novel, such as Tostes and Yonville, were meticulously crafted based on real country towns Flaubert explored on foot, ensuring geographical accuracy.

► Flaubert's Objective Descriptions

Flaubert aimed for perfection in his descriptions, labouring over each sentence to achieve absolute objectivity without any subjective bias or authorial reflection.

► Publication

Initially serialised in *Revue de Paris*, the novel sparked controversy, leading to Flaubert, his printer, and his manager being tried for obscenity. Critics found the novel's treatment of adultery and its stark realism shocking. However, Flaubert and his associates were eventually acquitted, and the novel was published as a book in 1857 to widespread acclaim. It marked a turning point for French literature.

► Legacy

*Madame Bovary* had a profound influence, inspiring works like Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, exploring similar themes of adultery and societal constraints on women. It also paved the way for a genre of adultery novel in the nineteenth century reflecting on women's roles in marriage and paving way for the New Woman novel. It further contributed to the decline of romantic sentimentalism in literature and influenced generations of writers.

► Structure

#### 4.2.1.3 Plot Summary

Emma Bovary's narrative spans twenty-seven chapters, nestled within the framework of her husband, Charles Bovary's story, which consists of five chapters at the beginning and three at the end. The novel narrated from a third person point of view is divided into three parts. In this section we will look at the summary of the text.

#### Part 1

► Meeting and Marriage to Emma Bovary

The opening chapters of *Madame Bovary* focus on the life of Charles Bovary unveiling his upbringing and early experiences. Neglected by his alcoholic father and overindulged by his mother, Charles looks inferior among his peers for his passive demeanour and lack of assertiveness. Despite his initial failures, Charles eventually finds a semblance of success in his professional life as a Public Health Service officer. His arranged marriage to the much older, unpleasant Héloïse Dubuc, chosen by his mother

leads to tensions and accusations, exacerbated by his growing feelings for Emma Rouault, whom he meets during a medical visit. Financial troubles plague his wife, culminating in her death and allowing Charles to formally court Emma. However, their inherent incompatibility becomes evident as Emma feels disillusioned with her marriage, grappling with the disparity between her romantic ideals and reality. A flashback to Emma's convent education reveals her inclination towards sensuality and romance fed by her reading of romance novels. Emma's dissatisfaction leads her to seek temporary escape at a ball, where she experiences a moment of enchantment. Yet, as time passes, she sinks into depression and convinces Charles into relocating to Yonville. Part one ends with a strikingly brief sentence informing us about Emma's pregnancy.

## Part 2

Part 2 begins with the Bovarys' arrival in Yonville, a region characterized as nondescript and unremarkable. As they settle down, Emma and Charles encounter Homais, the pharmacist, who eagerly befriends them. Leon, a young law clerk, is drawn to Emma, sensing a connection with her as they share romantic sentiments and penchant for novelty. Charles, despite having few patients, finds joy in Emma's pregnancy, but her disappointment grows when they have a daughter instead of a son, whom they name Berthe. Emma becomes infatuated with Leon and distances herself from Charles; yet, she does not acknowledge her passion for him. Leon, weary of waiting, leaves for Paris for further studies. Emma struggles with memories of Leon and falls into despair, indulging in frivolous purchases and abandoning reading projects.

- ▶ First meeting with Leon

- ▶ Emma's affair with Rodolphe and abandonment

- ▶ Rising financial strain

Emma next engages in an affair with Rodolphe Boulanger, a wealthy landowner, an experienced seducer, who recognizes Emma's boredom and sexual frustration and resolves to seduce her during the county fair. She becomes fixated on the idea of running away with him, but Rodolphe doesn't share her enthusiasm. On the eve of their planned departure, he abruptly ends the relationship by leaving a letter hidden at the bottom of a basket of apricots delivered to Emma. The news devastates Emma, plunging her into despair.

Meanwhile, Charles is forced to borrow money from Lheureux due to accumulating expenses, leading to financial strain. Emma's health deteriorates, and Homais suggests a distraction by taking her to Rouen for an opera night. Charles and Emma go to the opera where she is enraptured by the

romantic themes reminding her of her youthful readings. There they unexpectedly encounter Leon, who has returned from Paris after two years.

### Part 3

- ▶ Emma's affair with Leon

Emma rekindles her affair with Leon, who has grown more confident and experienced in Paris. However, their relationship becomes strained as Emma becomes increasingly possessive and demands more of Leon's attention. Emma falls into debt by indulging in luxury purchases from the merchant Lheureux, who manipulates her into obtaining power of attorney over Charles' estate.

- ▶ Rising debt and Bovarys' tragic end

When Lheureux demands repayment, Emma's pleas for help are met with rejection. In desperation, she consumes arsenic and dies a painful death. Charles, devastated, withdraws from life and sells off their belongings to survive. After Charles's death, their daughter Berthe is left in the care of her grandmother, who soon passes away. Berthe eventually ends up working in a cotton mill and probably meets an early death due to her poor health.

- ▶ Homais is rewarded

The novel concludes with the pharmacist Homais, rising in prominence in Yonville. He is awarded the Legion of Honour for his distinguished public service, symbolizing the triumph of opportunism and mediocrity and the ruthless pursuit of personal gain in a world devoid of genuine compassion or morality.

#### 4.2.1.4 Characters

##### Emma Bovary

Emma Bovary, the central character of the novel, is a complex and intriguing woman whose life unfolds against the backdrop of nineteenth century French provincial world. Born and raised in isolation on a farm, Emma's childhood was marked by loneliness and a yearning for something more. This longing intensified during her time at a Catholic convent school, where she immersed herself in romantic novels, forming unrealistic ideals of love and passion.

Emma's character embodies the consequences of indulging in romantic fantasies and attempting to impose them on reality. Critic Harry Levin described her as "the female Quixote." Despite her intelligence and energy, she finds herself trapped in a mundane existence, disillusioned with her marriage to the well-meaning but dull Charles Bovary. Her dissatisfaction with her surroundings and her yearning for excitement lead her down a path of reckless behaviour and infidelity.

While some readers view Emma as a sensual and intelligent woman driven by imagination and passion, others see her as fundamentally mediocre, unable to grasp the complexities of life beyond her romantic fantasies. Her constant pursuit of material possessions and her inability to reconcile her dreams with reality ultimately lead to her downfall.

Viewed from another perspective, despite her infidelities and disillusionments, Emma remains committed to her dreams and ideals, refusing to compromise even in the face of financial hardship. Ultimately, her relentless pursuit of a romanticized life leads to her downfall, as she finds herself betrayed and unfulfilled. In her death, Emma remains true to her vision of something greater than herself, choosing to cling to her dreams rather than compromise her beliefs. Thus, Emma Bovary is characterized as a complex figure driven by an unyielding desire for passion and fulfilment, even at the cost of her own well-being.

Emma's character is a fascinating study in contradictions—she is both extraordinary and ordinary, passionate yet detached, longing for fulfilment yet unable to find it.

### **Charles Bovary**

Charles Bovary emerges as a character marked by a combination of unfortunate circumstances and weak personal qualities that shape his trajectory in life. Initially introduced through the lens of anonymous schoolboys, Charles is portrayed as a figure of pity and ridicule. His upbringing under his overbearing father and possessive mother sets the stage for a life marked without direction. As a result, he finds himself ill-prepared for the challenges he faces.

In his adulthood we find him as a well-meaning yet ineffectual character. He is a country doctor who lacks ambition and is often overshadowed by the strong personalities around him: early on by his mother and first wife and later his wife, Emma Bovary.

Charles is characterised by his naivety, simplicity, and blind devotion to Emma. He is crafted to be the antithesis of Emma, lacking in excitement and imagination. This is evinced in the Opera scene where he is unable to follow the story and irritates Emma with his ignorant questions.

As a medical practitioner, Charles is not particularly skilled or ambitious in his career, content with his modest practice in the rural town of Yonville. His incompetence as a doctor is revealed in the botched case of club-foot operation.

Emotionally, Charles is deeply devoted to Emma, whom he idealises and idolises throughout their marriage. He is blind to her flaws and shortcomings, choosing to see only the best in her despite there is evidence of her infidelity and deceit. Charles's unwavering love for Emma blinds him to the reality of their deteriorating relationship and her dissatisfaction with their life together.

Throughout the novel, Charles's character undergoes little development, remaining largely static in his passive acceptance of the events unfolding around him. He is a tragic figure, ultimately undone by his inability to see beyond his idealised image of Emma and his own lack of agency in shaping his destiny.

### **Homais**

Homais is a multifaceted character in Flaubert's novel, serving as a focal point for the author's critique of societal values and individual ambition. As a pharmacist, shopkeeper, and journalist, he presents himself as a model citizen, devoted to his profession and family. However, beneath this facade lies a man consumed by his own vanity and ambition.

His obsession with self-image is evident in his ostentatious displays, such as the inscriptions plastered throughout his house and the gilt letters spelling out his name on his shop sign. Flaubert portrays him as a pompous clown, ridiculing his pretentious demeanour and inflated sense of importance.

Despite his professed dedication to social and scientific progress, Homais's knowledge is often superficial, filled with pseudo-scientific language and half-baked information. He speaks in an elevated style but expresses himself in skewed logic and clichés, rendering his speeches ridiculous and exposing his intellectual shortcomings.

Homais's ambition knows no bounds, driving him to manipulate situations and individuals to further his own agenda. He is willing to exploit others, such as the naive Charles and the blind beggar, to achieve social recognition and success. Flaubert depicts him as the embodiment of unscrupulous mediocrity, rising to prominence at the expense of others.

In an ironic twist, Homais ultimately receives the Legion of Honour award for public service, highlighting the corrupt nature of contemporary society and the prevalence of individuals like him who prioritise personal gain over ethical considerations.

Through Homais, Flaubert offers a scathing critique of the moral decay and hypocrisy cankering societal values.

### **Leon Dupuis**

Leon Dupuis is portrayed by Flaubert as a character who undergoes a transformation from a timid youth to a somewhat disillusioned bourgeois individual. Initially introduced as a young solicitor's clerk in provincial Yonville, Leon is depicted as being bored of country life and yearning for the excitement and glamour of Paris, much like Emma. He is a dreamer who romanticises his own existence and is drawn to the ideals of Romantic literature. Leon's first encounter with Emma is characterised by Flaubert as a parody of Romantic themes, where they discuss the futility of life and the search for the infinite.

Despite his initial timidity, Leon's return from Paris after two years marks a change in his demeanour. He has acquired superficial sophistication and sexual experience, which emboldens him to pursue Emma. However, as their affair progresses, Leon becomes increasingly aware of Emma's recklessness and demands, which alarm him and lead him to resent her domination. He begins to suspect the depth of corruption in Emma due to her expertise in love-making. Bourgeois caution eventually asserts itself, and under the influence of his mother and employer, Leon decides to break off his relationship with Emma to protect his career prospects.

Following Emma's death, Leon marries another woman, showcasing his conformity to societal norms and his willingness to move on from his past indiscretions. In Flaubert's portrayal, Leon serves as a satirical depiction of bourgeois small-mindedness, highlighting the limitations and compromises of individuals within the societal framework of the time.

### **Rodolphe Boulanger**

Rodolphe is portrayed by Flaubert as a local squire and Emma's first lover. He is unattached, opportunistic, cynical and an experienced womaniser. Upon first seeing Emma, Rodolphe immediately assesses her as a potential conquest, expressing thoughts of desire and contemplating the complications of getting rid of her afterwards.

Rodolphe demonstrates keen insight into Emma's boredom and sexual frustration, which he manipulates to his advantage in his pursuit of her. He employs clichés of romantic love to

seduce her, recognizing and exploiting her vulnerabilities to achieve his own ends.

The farewell letter that Rodolphe composes is depicted as a masterpiece of hypocrisy, revealing his duplicitous and insincere character. Flaubert portrays Rodolphe's thoughts while writing the letter, highlighting the contrast between his outward expressions of affection and his true intentions.

### **Lheureux**

Lheureux is a draper and seller of fancy goods, characterised by his cunning, manipulative nature, and relentless pursuit of profit. He flatters and cajoles Emma into purchasing items beyond her means, taking advantage of her vulnerability and desire for luxury. He calculates his moves carefully, anticipating Emma's tendency to extract additional funds from her lovers with a view to exploiting her precarious financial situation for his gain.

Lheureux insinuates himself into Emma's financial affairs during times of crisis, suggesting that she obtain power of attorney to manage Charles's finances, ultimately enabling him to exert control over her and exploit her financial resources.

As Emma's expenses escalate, Lheureux capitalises on her desperation by lending her money and charging exorbitant interest rates. He preys on her inability to repay, resorting to seizing her possessions when she falls into debt. Flaubert portrays Lheureux as a habitual moneylender who profits from the misfortunes of others, exemplified by his previous victim, Père Tellier of the Cafe Francais.

Lheureux's ambitions extend beyond mere financial exploitation, as he seeks to monopolise Yonville's transport business. He emerges as a shrewd and unscrupulous character driven solely by greed and self-interest. He represents the predatory nature of capitalism, preying on the vulnerabilities of others to enrich himself, without regard for the consequences of his actions on those he exploits.

### **Justine**

Justine is Homais's apprentice, a young orphan, and a distant relative of the Homais family. He develops an adolescent passion for Emma Bovary. He is heartbroken at her death, especially since she used him to get arsenic. Justine's perspective adds pathos to Emma's death.

### 4.2.1.5 Realism

The rise of the Realist movement in the nineteenth-century literature was influenced by the wider cultural context of Europe during that time. In England and France, there was a shift towards a realistic approach to the world, driven by factors such as industrialization, advancements in science, and the growing influence of the middle class. This shift was marked by an emphasis on empirical knowledge and objective observation, with the entire world viewed as a laboratory for scientific study. Realism rejected idealised interpretations of reality in favour of portraying things as they truly are, without embellishment or symbolism.

#### ► Context

Realist literature gained popularity as readers sought narratives that focused on the ordinary and unheroic aspects of life, reflecting the socio-historical context of the time. Critics of the genre accused realist authors of dwelling too much on the sordid aspects of human existence, but for realists, depicting the reality of their society was a means of uncovering deeper truths about human life. They employed scientific precision in their writing to create objective representations of the world, which became a defining characteristic of the realist movement.

#### ► Ordinary Life Unveiled

Rene Wellek, in his examination of literary movements, outlined four main aspects of realism: truthful representation of the world without stylization, focus on contemporary subjects, meticulous attention to detail, and maintenance of a dispassionate distance between author and subject matter. Similarly, George J. Becker emphasised the importance of objectivity and detailed physical descriptions in realist literature, suggesting that authors should present their subjects without imposing judgement or philosophical interpretation.

#### ► Four aims of realism

*Madame Bovary*, Gustave Flaubert's first novel, stands as a masterpiece and a quintessential example of the realist movement, despite Flaubert's discomfort with being hailed as a realist writer. Émile Zola, while conflating realism and naturalism, acknowledges Flaubert's pivotal role in solidifying the realistic formula.

#### ► Realist masterpiece

In *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert employs a narrative strategy that emphasises the characters' experiences and emotions over his own, aligning with the realist principle of authorial detachment. Flaubert skilfully positions the narrator in relation to the characters, allowing their perspectives to drive the narrative.

#### ► Authorial Detachment

► Collective Narrative Scrutiny

For instance, the novel begins with a first person collective narrator “We” in a boys’ school, creating a sense of shared observation and judgement among the students. This collective voice dominates the initial pages of the novel, introducing Charles Bovary as a subject of scrutiny. Through the collective lens, Charles is depicted as a country boy, shy and slow, highlighting the subjective impressions of the observing students.

► Narrative shift

As the narrative progresses, the collective voice gradually recedes, allowing for a shift to a third person narrator who provides more detailed insights into Charles’s upbringing and early life. Despite the initial assertion that “None of us now can remember anything about him,” a distinct voice emerges to recount Charles’s experiences at school, demonstrating a blend of objective observation and personal recollection.

► Free indirect discourse

Flaubert employs another narrative technique called free indirect discourse to evoke emotion in readers, particularly towards the central character, Emma. Free indirect discourse allows the narrator to seamlessly blend the character’s thoughts and actions with the narrative, blurring the distinction between character and narrator.

► Direct insight into Emma’s psyche

This allows the reader to gain insight into Emma’s inner thoughts and emotions, providing a complex portrayal of her character. For example, when Emma reminisces about her youthful dreams of romantic love, the narrator channels her thoughts directly to the reader, conveying her longing and disillusionment.

► Empathy-inducing narrative perspective

This narrative technique serves to create empathy in readers towards Emma, as they can understand and relate to her experiences on a deeper level.

► Verisimilitude

Flaubert’s commitment to realism is further evident in his thorough research and meticulous attention to detail, creating a sense of verisimilitude. Flaubert’s description captures both the picturesque, capturing and mundane elements. These details, alongside extensive descriptions seemingly unrelated to plot or theme, imbue the novel with a palpable sense of reality, reinforcing Roland Barthes’s notion of the “effect of reality.”

#### 4.2.1.6 Themes

##### *Adultery*

Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* delves into the theme of adultery with remarkable depth and complexity, presenting it as

- ▶ Adultery as Central Theme

a central motif that drives the narrative forward and shapes the fate of its characters. Through the protagonist Emma Bovary's extramarital affairs, Flaubert offers a poignant exploration of the consequences of passion, desire, and moral transgression in 19th-century provincial France.

- ▶ Emma's quest for fulfilment through adultery

From the outset, Flaubert introduces Emma as a woman dissatisfied with the monotony of her bourgeois existence and yearning for something more. Her marriage to Charles Bovary fails to fulfil her romantic fantasies, leading her to seek solace in illicit relationships. Emma's first affair is with Rodolphe, a wealthy landowner who embodies the excitement and sophistication she craves. Their passionate liaison offers Emma a temporary escape from the boredom of her provincial life, but ultimately ends in betrayal and disillusionment.

- ▶ Nuanced exploration of Emma's infidelity

Flaubert's portrayal of Emma's adultery is both nuanced and provocative. He delves into the psychological complexities of her character, exploring the motivations behind her actions and the emotional turmoil she experiences as a result. Emma's infidelity is not simply a matter of physical gratification, but a desperate attempt to find meaning and fulfilment in a world that denies her agency and autonomy.

- ▶ Critique of societal norms through Emma's rebellion

Moreover, Flaubert uses Emma's adultery to critique the oppressive social norms and gender roles of 19th-century France. Emma's inability to pursue her desires within the confines of her marriage reflects the limited options available to women in a patriarchal society. Her rebellion against societal expectations is both radical and tragic, as it ultimately leads to her downfall and tragic death.

- ▶ Exploration of fleeting passion with Léon

In addition to Emma's affair with Rodolphe, Flaubert also explores the theme of adultery through her relationship with Léon, a young clerk who mirrors her unfulfilled romantic aspirations. Their secret trysts serve as a commentary on the ephemeral nature of passion and the destructive power of desire.

- ▶ Emma's cautionary tale of temptation and moral ambiguity

From the thrill of forbidden love to the agony of betrayal and despair, Emma's journey serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of succumbing to temptation and the moral ambiguity underlying human existence.

### ***Provincial Life***

The novel's full title in French, *Madame Bovary Mœurs de province*, or *Madame Bovary: Provincial Manners*,

► Examination of provincial life

immediately sets the stage for its examination of provincial life in Normandy that Flaubert was closely familiar with. Flaubert meticulously depicts the mundane routines, speech patterns, and attire of his characters, revealing the stifling monotony and hypocrisy prevalent in small-town existence.

► Timeless portrayal of provincial life

Notably, Flaubert's depiction of provincial life is marked by a lack of significant historical markers, creating a sense of timeless repetition and sameness. Instead of direct chronological indicators, the novel relies on moments and seasons to convey the passage of time. This absence of clear historical context contributes to the novel's exploration of the stifling permanence of bourgeois existence within provincial society.

► Critique of middle-class dominance

Central to the novel's social commentary is the portrayal of the middle class as the dominant social order, characterized by its pursuit of material wealth and social status. Flaubert exposes the pervasive influence of industrial and financial capital in the middle class world. Against this backdrop, marginalized individuals such as laborers, servants, and the socially excluded are relegated to the fringes of society, overlooked and exploited.

► Financial struggles as pervasive theme

Flaubert intertwines financial failures and economic hardships with the characters' lives, highlighting the all-encompassing importance of monetary concerns in provincial society.

► Emma's materialistic downfall

Emma Bovary epitomizes this provincialism through her relentless pursuit of material possessions. Her constant acquisition of objects reflects her desire to escape the monotony of everyday life and attain a sense of fulfilment. However, her insatiable longing for luxury items ultimately leads to financial ruin, symbolizing the superficiality and emptiness inherent in provincial existence.

► Satirical portrayal of bourgeois hypocrisy

Flaubert also critiques provincialism through his satirical portrayal of the bourgeoisie, who are depicted as petty, hypocritical, and morally bankrupt. Characters like Homais, Lheureux, and Rudolphe embody the shallow materialism and moral complacency of provincial society, prioritising social status and financial gain over integrity and authenticity. Through their actions and interactions, Flaubert exposes the moral bankruptcy and cultural stagnation inherent in nineteenth century middle-class society.

### ***Clash Between Realism and Romanticism***

At the heart of *Madame Bovary* lies the clash between realism and romanticism. Set against the backdrop of 19th-century



provincial France, the novel juxtaposes the mundane realities of everyday life with the protagonist Emma Bovary's fervent desires for passion and romance.

- ▶ Realist portrayal of provincial banality

At its core, *Madame Bovary* presents a cast of characters mired in the drudgeries of provincial existence. Flaubert employs realist techniques to meticulously depict the minutiae of daily life, from country fairs to mundane conversations. Through this lens, Flaubert exposes the banality and pettiness of bourgeois society, portraying characters who are bound by convention and constrained by their social status.

- ▶ Emma's Romantic yearnings

In this social order, Flaubert places Emma Bovary, whose inner world is steeped in the ideals of Romanticism. Emma yearns for excitement, passion, and fulfilment. Her disillusionment with the constraints of bourgeois life leads her to seek refuge in romantic fantasies, fuelled by her consumption of second-rate romantic literature.

- ▶ Emma's tragic pursuit of passion

Flaubert's juxtaposition of Emma's Romantic aspirations with the stark realities of her surroundings creates a tension that drives the narrative forward. Emma's pursuit of passion ultimately leads to her downfall, as she becomes ensnared in extramarital affairs and reckless spending, oblivious to the consequences of her actions. Through Emma's tragic trajectory, Flaubert critiques the romanticised ideals of the individual against the backdrop of a society governed by practicality and convention.

### *Use of Irony and Satire*

- ▶ Flaubert's masterful exploration of human nature

Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* stands as a testament to his meticulous craftsmanship and profound insight into human nature, expressed through his adept use of irony and satire. Through the characters and their experiences, Flaubert explores themes of romantic idealism, societal constraints, and the consequences of pursuing unrealistic desires.

- ▶ Emma's pursuit of perfection and downfall

One of the central figures in Flaubert's critique is Emma Bovary, whose relentless pursuit of romantic fantasies and luxury serves as a focal point for the novel's ironic commentary. While Flaubert himself was a perfectionist, striving for the most flawless form of art, Emma's pursuit of perfection leads only to her downfall. Flaubert's portrayal of Emma's unrealistic desires and her inability to recognize their folly serves as a critique of romantic idealism, highlighting the dangers of living a life governed by unattainable fantasies.

- ▶ Irony of Emma's aspirations and reality

Flaubert employs irony to contrast Emma's dreams of sophistication and cosmopolitanism with the reality of her provincial existence. Unlike Flaubert, who moved in the highest literary circles of Paris, Emma's social aspirations are thwarted by her humble origins and constrained by the narrow-mindedness of bourgeois society. While Emma's dissatisfaction with her bourgeois surroundings may be justified to some extent, her attempt to escape her circumstances through adultery and deception ultimately leads to her ruin.

- ▶ Flaubert's critique of gender roles and misogyny

Moreover, Flaubert's portrayal of Emma as a woman trapped by societal expectations and limited opportunities underscores the broader critique of gender roles and misogyny in 19th-century France. Emma's only power over men is through her sexuality, and even her attempt to take her own life is contingent upon her ability to manipulate others through sexual means. Flaubert exposes the inherent misogyny of society, where women like Emma are relegated to passive roles and denied agency over their own lives.

- ▶ Critique of bourgeois hypocrisy.

Through Emma's experiences, Flaubert also critiques the hypocrisy and moral bankruptcy of bourgeois society. Characters like Monsieur Homais and Monsieur Lheureux exemplify the shallowness and greed that pervade the bourgeoisie, while Emma's descent into moral decay serves as a cautionary tale against the dangers of unchecked ambition and desire.

- ▶ Juxtaposition of social contrast.

One of the key techniques Flaubert employs is the juxtaposition of contrasting scenes, such as the rustic wedding of the Bovarys and the extravagant ball hosted by the Marquis. These scenes serve to underscore the stark differences in social class and lifestyle, while also illuminating the characters' reactions and motivations. The contrast between these two events emphasises the disparity between Emma's romantic fantasies and the harsh reality of her bourgeois existence.

- ▶ Satirical critique of bourgeois hypocrisy

Flaubert also uses satire to skewer the pretensions and superficiality of bourgeois society. For example, the speeches delivered by the Prefect's representative and Rodolphe at the Agricultural Show highlight the empty rhetoric and self-serving agendas of those in positions of authority.

## Summarised Overview

*Madame Bovary* is a quintessential realist novel that explores the intricacies of provincial life in 19th-century France. Through the lens of Emma Bovary, Flaubert delves into the disillusionment and discontentment that can arise from the constraints of bourgeois society. Emma's constant pursuit of romantic ideals clashes with the mundane realities of her existence, leading to her eventual downfall. Flaubert employs irony and satire to critique societal norms and the hypocrisy of the characters, highlighting the absurdity of their actions and beliefs. The novel serves as a poignant commentary on the human condition, depicting the consequences of unchecked desires and the complexities of navigating the gap between reality and fantasy in a world governed by social expectations.

## Assignments

1. How does Flaubert use Emma Bovary's romantic ideals to critique the societal norms and expectations of 19th-century France?
2. In what ways does Emma's pursuit of passion and luxury lead to her downfall, and how does Flaubert portray the consequences of her actions?
3. Discuss the significance of Flaubert's narrative style, particularly his use of free indirect discourse, in portraying Emma's inner thoughts and emotions.
4. Analyse the role of Madame Bovary's provincial setting in highlighting the themes of boredom, yearning, and the desire for escape throughout the novel.

## Suggested Reading

1. Bell. *The Cambridge Companion to European Novelists*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.
2. Lloyd, Rosemary. *Madame Bovary*. Routledge, 2016.
3. Porter, Laurence M., and Eugene F. Gray. *Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary: A Reference Guide*. Greenwood Press, 2002.

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### Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



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# Discussion

## Section 2 Zorba the Greek

**-Nikos Kazantzakis**

### 4.2.2.1 About the Author

#### ▶ Nikos Kazantzakis

Nikos Kazantzakis (1883-1957) was a Greek novelist, poet, dramatist, and traveller whose life and works are marked by a profound exploration of existential questions, spirituality, and the human condition.

#### ▶ Formative years

Born in 1883 in Heraklion, Crete, Kazantzakis was deeply influenced by the history of his homeland, which had long been under foreign rule. Raised in a family with a strong martial tradition, he was the first to eschew the path of the warrior in favour of intellectual pursuits, becoming a prolific writer instead.

#### ▶ Captain Michalis

Kazantzakis's father, Captain Michalis, was renowned for his bravery, and tales of his heroism left a lasting impression on the young Nikos. Despite his admiration for the man of action, Kazantzakis was torn between the life of contemplation and the call to revolution.

#### ▶ Influence of Bergson and Nietzsche

Kazantzakis pursued education, earning a law degree from the University of Athens and a degree in philosophy from Paris. There, he encountered the philosophies of Bergson and Nietzsche, whose ideas of vitalism and existentialism profoundly influenced his worldview. Nietzsche's emphasis on the will to power and the overcoming of traditional beliefs had a profound impact on Kazantzakis, leading him to question established dogmas and embrace a more existential outlook.

#### ▶ Literary pursuits

Kazantzakis's writings encompassed a wide range of genres, from philosophical treatises to travelogues, plays, and novels. His first writings included numerous philosophical and literary essays as well as translations of foreign works. He gained mastery over multiple languages and produced translations of notable thinkers such as Bergson, Darwin, Nietzsche, and Plato.

Throughout his life, Kazantzakis travelled extensively, drawing inspiration from diverse cultures and experiences. His monumental epic, *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel* (1938), stands

► Odyssey reinterpretation

► Spiritual Resilience

► Major Works

► Controversial author

► Cretan Vitality

► Prolific Writer

as a testament to his grand vision and literary prowess. In this epic sequel, Kazantzakis continues Odysseus's journey from where Homer had left off, offering a modern reinterpretation of the journey that reflects his own philosophical and existential concerns.

In his later years, Kazantzakis grappled with political disillusionment, briefly aligning with communism before ultimately rejecting its materialistic emphasis. Despite facing opposition from various quarters, he remained steadfast in his pursuit of spiritual transformation and the elevation of humanity's collective consciousness.

His novels, including *Freedom or Death* (1936), *Zorba the Greek* (1942), *The Greek Passion* (1948), *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1951), and *Saint Francis* (1953), tackled themes of freedom, passion, religious doubt, and the search for meaning. *Zorba the Greek*, among his most famous works, tells the story of the free-spirited Zorba and the reserved narrator, exploring the tension between passion and restraint.

Despite his literary acclaim, Kazantzakis faced criticism and controversy throughout his life, particularly for his portrayals of religious figures. Kazantzakis's audacious reinterpretations of historical and religious figures, notably in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, stirred both admiration and condemnation. The novel caused uproar among religious communities for its unconventional depiction of Jesus Christ.

Kazantzakis remained deeply connected to his Cretan roots, infusing his works with the raw vitality of his homeland. His novels, including *Freedom or Death* and *The Greek Passion*, sparked controversy for their unflinching portrayal of societal injustices and religious dogma. His use of colloquial Greek, the language of the peasants, further challenged traditional norms, earning him both praise and censure. Despite these challenges, Kazantzakis remained committed to his vision of exploring the depths of human experience and the search for spiritual truth.

In his later years, Kazantzakis continued to write prolifically, settling in Antibes on the French Riviera. He received multiple Nobel Prize nominations and gained recognition across Europe for his profound insights into the human condition. Nikos Kazantzakis died on October 26, 1957, in Germany on way back from a journey to China. He was suffering from Leukaemia.

### 4.2.2.2 About the Novel

#### ► Context

Nikos Kazantzakis wrote *Zorba the Greek* during the severe famine of 1941-1942 against the tumultuous backdrop of World War II. Kazantzakis, facing scarcity and danger, found refuge in crafting the character of Alexis Zorba, a bold and spontaneous hero who defied societal conventions and embraced his emotional passions. The novel was published in 1946 in Greece titled *Life and Times of Alexis Zorbas* and the subsequent French and English translations appeared in 1947 and 1952 respectively. The novel gained popularity because it encouraged American and European intellectuals to explore aspects of themselves that they had repressed. In other words, it provided Westerners with a model of liberation. Readers were captivated by the idea of transcending the ego, a promise often associated with the East.

#### ► Film Adaptation

The novel's popularity soared even further with the release of the 1964 film adaptation, directed by Michael Cacoyiannis starring Anthony Quinn. The film's depiction of Zorba's dance, symbolic of Greek spirit and freedom, left a lasting impression on audiences worldwide. The success of the novel as both a novel and a film can be attributed to its portrayal of the Mediterranean ethos, which offered a refreshing departure from the logic and abundance of Western society. Kazantzakis's portrayal of Zorba, with his zest for life and rejection of societal norms, captivated Western audiences, providing them with a glimpse into a world of spontaneity and emotional authenticity.

#### ► The narrator

### 4.2.2.3 Plot Summary

The novel commences in a post- World War I time, in a café in Piraeus, Greece where we meet the narrator. Disheartened by the parting words of his friend Stavridakis, who departed to assist persecuted Greeks, the narrator, a young Greek intellectual, resolves to take a hiatus from his scholarly pursuits. He embarks on a journey to Crete with the intention of reopening an abandoned lignite mine and immersing himself in the world of peasants and workers.

#### ► Meeting Alexis Zorba

At the café as he prepares to delve into Dante's *Divine Comedy*, he senses a gaze upon him and discovers a man approximately sixty years old observing him through the café's glass door. This man, Alexis Zorba, presents himself as a versatile individual skilled in cooking, mining, and playing the musical instrument, *santouri*. Intrigued by Zorba's lively manner and bold opinions, the narrator hires him as a foreman. During their voyage to Crete, their discussions cover a range of topics, with Zorba's monologues setting the tone for much of the narrative.

► Arrival at Crete

Upon arrival, they decline the hospitality of the café owner and, at Zorba's suggestion, settle at Madame Hortense's makeshift hotel comprising old bathing huts. Circumstances compel them to share a hut, and the narrator spends Sunday exploring the island's landscape, while indulging in Dante's work. Upon returning for dinner, they engage Madame Hortense in conversation about her past as a courtesan, with Zorba endearingly nicknaming her "Bouboulina" and adopting the moniker "Canavaro" himself.

► Work at lignite mine

The following day marks the commencement of work at the mine. Despite the narrator's socialist ideals prompting him to connect with the workers, Zorba advises maintaining a distance, citing the harsh reality of human nature. Zorba's immersion in work reflects his characteristic dedication, often toiling long hours without interruption. Through their extensive conversations, the narrator gains profound insights into life, religion, and the human condition from Zorba, enriching his perspective beyond the confines of scholarship.

► Tragedy and parting

While the narrator finds renewed vitality through his experiences with Zorba and others, his stay on Crete is tainted by adversity and tragedy. A fleeting liaison with a passionate widow ends in her public execution. Financial loss from a failed mining project compounds his doubts and uncertainty. Overcoming personal obstacles and sensing the death of his far away friend Stavridakis, the narrator bids a poignant farewell to Zorba.

► Zorba's Legacy

Although they never reunite, Zorba's correspondence keeps the narrator informed of his adventures, including his marriage to a younger woman. Despite numerous invitations, the narrator never visits. Upon receiving news of Zorba's passing, conveyed by his widow, the narrator is reminded of Zorba's last thoughts of him. In accordance with Zorba's wishes, the narrator accepts the invitation to visit and receives Zorba's santouri, a tangible reminder of their enduring bond.

#### 4.2.2.4 Characters

##### Alexis Zorba

Zorba, a lively 65-year-old dancer, lover, and storyteller, shines as a memorable figure in modern literature. Tasked with overseeing a mine, he quickly becomes a mentor, showing his employer how to enjoy life, laugh, pursue love, and see the world with fresh eyes. He's undoubtedly the main source of

humour in the novel. His wild tales from the past entertains the narrator. Zorba's behaviour ranges from mischievous to comical, demonstrating the importance of embracing life's follies and breaking free from conventions when others would apply caution.

His witty remarks, like "Life is trouble; death isn't," and his direct questions, in contrast to the Boss's philosophical ponderings, get straight to the point with humor: "How do you expect to get the better of a devil, boss, if you don't turn into a devil-and-a-half yourself?" He sees daytime as masculine, night time as feminine, and imagines God using a big sponge to wipe away sins.

Zorba loves weaving myths, such as his grandfather's journey to heaven propelled by bouncing in rubber shoes. Unlike the intellectual Boss, Zorba is connected to primal origins, the depths of the earth, and the mysteries of the subconscious. Described by the Boss as "a living heart, a large voracious mouth, a great brute soul, not yet severed from mother earth," Zorba embodies energy, passion, folly, and a disdain for societal norms and religious dogma. He's seen as a prime example of Nietzsche's influence on Kazantzakis's work.

### **Boss (Narrator)**

The narrator, known as Boss, stands as one of the central figures in the novel, juxtaposed against the vibrant personality of Zorba. Quiet, introspective, and deeply engrossed in his studies of Buddha, Boss embarks on a transformative journey by partnering with Zorba to manage a lignite mine.

Boss's defining traits include his internal conflict and his persistent efforts to reconcile this inner divide. Despite his intellectual prowess, his language often wanders in search of meaning, oscillating between admiration for Buddha and admiration for Zorba, between fear and desire, and between appreciation for action and self-reproach for his perceived passivity as a "pen-pusher." Throughout the narrative, he grapples with life's inherent contradictions and paradoxes, a theme that pervades his interactions and reflections.

While Zorba's influence on Boss is profound, it remains confined within certain boundaries. Ultimately, Boss does not fully embrace the "Zorbatic" way of life. Instead, he channels his talents as a writer to immortalise Zorba's essence in a novel, a testament to the profound impact Zorba has had on his life.

## Yannis Stavridaki

Boss's friend Stavridaki plays a significant role in the novel, despite being absent from the direct action. He is depicted as away in the Caucasus, engaged in the noble task of rescuing his fellow Greeks from the Kurds. Throughout the story, Boss often reflects on his relationship with Stavridaki and maintains correspondence with him, underscoring the depth of their bond. Their connection is highlighted by the psychic warnings Boss receives regarding Stavridaki's impending demise, adding a layer of emotional intensity to their friendship.

## Sourmelina, the Widow

Seldom directly involved in the unfolding events, Sourmelina is described as alluring and possessing a captivating musky fragrance. She captivates the hearts of men, igniting intense emotions and actions. Pavli's tragic demise by drowning, driven by his love for her, underscores the depth of her allure. Meanwhile, the men of the village are consumed by desire for her, unable to resist her magnetic charm.

For Boss, a night spent with Sourmelina marks a pivotal moment, inspiring him to finally end his Buddha manuscript. Her presence becomes a catalyst for his personal transformation, marking a pivotal moment in the narrative.

However, Sourmelina's fate takes a dark turn when she becomes the victim of Pavli's vengeful father, resulting in her tragic demise. Her untimely death serves as a grim reminder of the village's collective guilt, with Sourmelina bearing the brunt as their scapegoat.

### 4.2.2.5 Style

Kazantzakis employs a distinctive narrative style and various techniques to craft the compelling tale of Zorba the Greek. The story unfolds primarily through the perspective of the protagonist, Boss, who serves as the first-person narrator. Boss's penchant for speculating about others' motives occasionally grants the reader insights that only an omniscient observer could possess, adding depth to the narrative.

Despite Boss's narrative dominance, Kazantzakis skilfully incorporates elements of myth, fairy tale, and legend into the storytelling. Characters, apart from the vibrant Zorba, initially appear two-dimensional, resembling archetypes rather than fully developed individuals. However, as the narrative progresses,

► Narrative innovation

► Mythic character development

these characters come to life through vivid dialogue, extensive anecdotes, and philosophical discussions that range from the mundane to the profound.

The narrative unfolds gradually, with a notable absence of surface plot and direct action. Instead, the story immerses readers in a myth-like world where images and sensations interweave with philosophical musings. The flexible narrative time allows for lengthy discussions between Boss and Zorba to span days, while pivotal events such as the murder of the widow and the collapse of the cable line unfold in quick succession.

One of the novel's standout features is its apparently straightforward storyline, narrated in a direct and deceptively simple style. Kazantzakis's poetic prose not only conveys the tale effectively but also elevates the reading experience, offering readers a provocatively fresh perspective on the human condition.

#### 4.2.2.6 Motif & Themes

##### *Journey as a Motif*

In Kazantzakis's novel, *Zorba the Greek*, the motif of the journey serves as a central theme, echoing the timeless narrative structure found in ancient epics like Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The protagonist, an intellectual narrator deeply engrossed in books, embarks on a journey that extends far beyond mere physical travel, delving into the realms of psychological and spiritual exploration.

The journey begins symbolically in Piraeus, the bustling port city near Athens, where the narrator finds himself surrounded by weathered sailors and the vast expanse of the sea. From this urban setting, the journey unfolds both physically and metaphorically, as the narrator sets sail for Crete alongside his enigmatic companion, Alexis Zorba. Throughout their travels, Zorba's captivating tales and anecdotes become integral to the narrative.

While the characters traverse physical landscapes, it is their inner journey that takes precedence. The journey becomes a vehicle for self-discovery and epiphany, leading the characters towards a deeper understanding of the human condition.

Even after parting ways, the journey continues for both protagonists. The narrator's return to Greece and eventual settlement in Aegina mirrors the cyclical nature of the journey,

► Philosophical immersion

► Poetic simplicity

► Physical and spiritual journey

► Journey from Piraeus

► Inner voyage of self-discovery



▶ Eternal journey

bringing him back to where it all began. Meanwhile, Zorba's restless spirit leads him on a perpetual quest for new experiences, symbolizing humanity's inherent drive towards exploration and self-discovery. Ultimately, the motif of the journey in Zorba the Greek reflects the existential concept of "homo viator" – humans as eternal travellers, constantly moving towards enlightenment and understanding.

▶ A study in human dichotomies

### *Dualities in Human Experience*

Within the pages of Zorba the Greek, Kazantzakis masterfully delves into the intricate tapestry of human existence, highlighting the profound dualities that define our nature. Much like the universe itself reflects the clash between descending matter and ascending spirit, individuals grapple with a tension of opposites that shape their very being.

▶ Body vs Mind

At the core of Kazantzakis' exploration lies the dichotomy between body and mind, action and contemplation. This dichotomy is embodied in the characters of Boss and Zorba, each representing distinct facets of the human experience. Boss, with his intellectual pursuits and contemplative nature, symbolises the realm of the mind, while Zorba, with his primal instincts and zest for life, embodies the physical realm.

▶ Duality in Life

Throughout the narrative, numerous dualities emerge, each serving as a thematic thread weaving through the fabric of the story. From the juxtaposition of dancing and writing to the contrast between real and ideal, Kazantzakis paints a vivid picture of life's inherent contradictions. The interplay between death and birth, night and day, light and dark further underscores the complexity of human existence.

▶ Dionysian celebration

Central to Kazantzakis's vision is the celebration of "Zorbatic" or Dionysiac qualities, embodied in the enigmatic Zorba. In ancient Greek mythology, Dionysus, also known as Bacchus, held sway as the deity presiding over various realms of human experience. He reigned as the god associated with wine, instinct, suffering, passion, joy, drama, dance, and music. Zorba embodies the Dionysian forces of instinct, passion, and primal joy. In a world dominated by Apollonian solemnity and order, Kazantzakis advocates for a synthesis of Dionysian and Apollonian qualities, envisioning a civilization that embraces the richness of both (Ref to section 2.6.4).

Boss, echoing Kazantzakis's own search for synthesis, yearns for a harmonious union of flesh and spirit, heaven and earth. Yet,

► Yearning for synthesis

► Quest for Synthesis

► Depiction of Women

► Misogynism

► Zorba's View of Women

► Complexity of Zorba

as the narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that achieving such synthesis is a lofty ideal, rarely realised in its entirety. While Zorba and Boss may embody opposing forces, they ultimately represent complementary aspects of the human experience, forming a symbiotic relationship that mirrors the complexity of life itself.

In essence, *Zorba the Greek* serves as a profound exploration of the myriad dualities that define human existence, inviting readers to contemplate the delicate balance between opposing forces and the quest for synthesis amidst life's contradictions.

### ***Women in Zorba the Greek***

*Zorba the Greek*, has remained controversial for its portrayal of women, with some suggesting that even a casual reader could find numerous derogatory remarks about women throughout the novel.

Zorba himself is the primary source of these chauvinistic views. According to him, marriage is foolish, and women are perpetually engaged in trapping men, whom he perceives as foolish enough to fall for their schemes. He believes that God should have endowed men with more sense to resist women's wiles, but since they lack it, men may as well indulge in the pleasures offered by "hussies." Zorba describes "honest marriages" as tasteless and asserts that women are weak, incomprehensible beings who provide only temporary pleasure. He even suggests that women are not fully human, and thus, men should hold no grudges against them.

One anecdote involves Zorba's encounter with Noussa, a woman who left him for a sailor. Despite her actions, Zorba claims he cannot hold a grudge because "woman is a creature with no strength." This conclusion overlooks the strength and individuality Noussa displayed, indicating Zorba's disregard for women's capabilities. Instead, he fondly reminisces about the pleasure these women provided him with viewing them as sources of his own vitality and life force.

However, Zorba cannot be simply dismissed as a crude misogynist. His concerns about aging lead him to recount his sexual exploits as a means of reaffirming his vitality. His anecdotes about women are, in essence, stories about his own zest for life. While some female readers may struggle to perceive him in a positive light, Zorba approaches women with a genuine fondness and appreciation. He sees them as conduits

for his own sensual pleasure, embodying an innocent pagan spirit that revels in the joys of life. Despite his flaws, Zorba authentically values the women he encounters, as evidenced by the mutual enjoyment he shares with figures like “Bouboulina.” Through their interactions, it becomes clear that Zorba derives both pleasure and fulfilment from his relationships with women, underscoring the complexity of his character and challenging simplistic interpretations of his attitudes towards the opposite sex.

- ▶ Persistent Gender Bias

Although Zorba’s anecdotes about women range from amusing to appalling, they consistently emphasise themes of female inferiority. His repetitive remarks about “poor women,” “weak women,” and “the female of the species” become cloying as they echo throughout the novel.

- ▶ Limited Female Characterization

In terms of character development, Dame Hortense, often referred to as Zorba’s “Bouboulina,” stands out as the only woman in the novel to receive any significant development. The other women, including the widow, make fleeting appearances and serve as archetypes and symbols. The alluring Widow Sourmelina, is portrayed as a seductress who leads men to their demise. Other female characters in the novel include the greedy mourners who steal from Dame Hortense, Crazy Katerina who passionately urges men to seek vengeance, and a Mother Superior who calmly discusses the nature of time with the Boss. Maroulia, Uncle Anagnosti’s silent and submissive wife, is present as a mere atmosphere in their home. Additionally, there are convent nuns, timid girls, and an elderly woman whose husband bitterly reminisces about her lost beauty, all briefly glimpsed but not heard.

- ▶ Nietzschean Thought

#### 4.2.2.7 Nietzsche and Existentialism in *Zorba the Greek*

*Zorba the Greek* is profoundly influenced by Nietzschean philosophy, evident in the depiction of the characters, thematic exploration, and narrative structure. To comprehend Nietzsche’s influence deeply, it’s crucial to examine key Nietzschean themes such as the contrast between Apollo and Dionysus, the birth of tragedy, and the concept of the synthesis.

- ▶ Dionysus and Apollo

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche delineates the dichotomy between the Apollonian and Dionysian aspects of classical art. Apollo represents qualities of discretion, moderation, and rationality, while Dionysus embodies instinct, ecstasy, and irrationality. Kazantzakis embraces Nietzsche’s thesis,

portraying the union of Apollo and Dionysus as a friendship where neither dominates the other. This synthesis reflects a broader philosophical dichotomy between Western individuation and Eastern oneness, with Western thought prioritizing reason and individualism, and Eastern thought seeking dissolution of the ego.

► Zorba's Legacy

Kazantzakis laments the decline of Greek tragedy under the influence of rational analysis, echoing Nietzsche's critique of Socrates and his dialectics. Both Kazantzakis and Nietzsche yearn for the resurgence of the Dionysiac element in life, hoping for a revival of "tragic civilization" through the transformative power of music and dance. They envision these art forms as means to transcend the superficiality of existence and reconnect with primal, contradictory truths.

► Zorba as an embodiment of Nietzschean principles

The concept of Dionysiac nihilism is central to both Nietzsche's and Kazantzakis's worldview. They reject traditional religious comforts in favour of embracing life's inherent absurdity and confronting the abyss of existential despair. Kazantzakis portrays the "tragic man," like Zorba, as one who dances on the edge of the abyss, affirming life's vitality despite its inherent meaninglessness. This affirmation, characterized by "tragic joy," represents a Nietzschean embrace of life's contradictions and uncertainties.

► Nietzschean Superman

In the novel, Zorba emerges as the quintessential embodiment of Nietzschean principles. His passionate, irrational nature, coupled with his acceptance of life's absurdity and his instinctual embrace of the present moment, mirrors Nietzsche's ideal of the superman. Zorba's impulsive excesses illustrate Nietzsche's dictum that instinct is the driving force of truly productive individuals. His ecstatic dances and disregard for bourgeois virtues exemplify the Dionysiac qualities elaborated in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

► Nietzschean Vitality

Many critics recognize Zorba as a manifestation of Nietzschean philosophy, especially in his affirmation of life in the face of death's tragic absurdity. Zorba's sheer exuberance, reckless abandon, and instinctual frenzy symbolize Nietzsche's celebration of vitality and the human spirit.

## Summarised Overview

In *Zorba the Greek*, Nikos Kazantzakis crafts a narrative that delves deep into the complexities of human existence through various thematic explorations. The motif of life as a journey serves as a central theme, drawing parallels to ancient epics and symbolizing the characters' inner quests for self-discovery and understanding. Through their travels, the protagonists navigate physical landscapes while undergoing profound psychological and spiritual transformations, ultimately reflecting the existential concept of humanity as eternal travellers in pursuit of enlightenment.

Kazantzakis also explores the dualities inherent in human experience, highlighting the tension between body and mind, action and contemplation. The characters of Boss and Zorba embody contrasting facets of the human condition, illustrating the perpetual struggle between opposing forces. Central to this exploration is the celebration of Dionysiac qualities, embodied by the enigmatic Zorba, and the quest for synthesis between the Apollonian and Dionysian aspects of life.

Moreover, the portrayal of women in the novel sparks controversy, with Zorba's chauvinistic views drawing criticism. While Zorba's anecdotes about women emphasize themes of female inferiority, his genuine fondness and appreciation for women challenge simplistic interpretations of his attitudes towards the opposite sex. The complex relationships between the characters underscore the intricacies of human interaction and the quest for fulfilment amidst life's contradictions.

Throughout the narrative, Nietzschean philosophy exerts a profound influence, particularly evident in Zorba's character and the thematic exploration of existential concepts. Zorba emerges as a quintessential embodiment of Nietzschean principles, celebrating life's vitality and embracing its inherent absurdity. Through Zorba's character and the novel's thematic depth, Kazantzakis offers profound insights into the human condition, inviting readers to contemplate the delicate balance between reason and passion, action and contemplation.

## Assignments

1. Discuss the significance of Greek culture and tradition in shaping the events and characters in *Zorba the Greek*.
2. Analyse the relationship between Zorba and the narrator, focusing on how their contrasting personalities contribute to the novel's themes.
3. Explore the role of existentialism in *Zorba the Greek*, examining how characters confront questions of meaning and purpose.

4. Discuss the portrayal of masculinity in the novel, paying particular attention to Zorba's attitudes and actions towards women.
5. Analyse the significance of music and dance in *Zorba the Greek* and how they contribute to the overall themes and mood of the novel.

## Suggested Reading

1. Bien, Peter. "Zorba the Greek, Nietzsche, and the perennial Greek predicament." *The Antioch Review*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1965, p. 147, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4610670>.
2. Kim, Uk-tong. *Kazantzakis's Zorba the Greek: Five Readings*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019.
3. Levitt, Morton P. "The Companions of Kazantzakis: Nietzsche, Bergson and Zorba the Greek." *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 14, no. 4, Dec. 1977, pp. 360–380, <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/40245912>.

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## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

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## Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of Tolstoy’s “How Much Land Does a Man Need?”.
- ▶ analyse Kafka’s “Metamorphosis” to identify and interpret complex themes.
- ▶ compare and contrast the narrative styles and literary techniques employed by Tolstoy and Kafka in their respective short stories.
- ▶ evaluate the socio-political and cultural contexts of Tolstoy’s and Kafka’s works.

## Background

Leo Tolstoy, born in 1828 in Russia, is one of the most celebrated and influential writers in European literature. His works, including *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, are renowned for their epic scope, profound insight into human nature, and meticulous portrayal of Russian society. Tolstoy’s writing style often combines realism with philosophical inquiry, exploring themes such as morality, spirituality, and the search for meaning in life. His contributions to European literature extend beyond fiction, encompassing essays, letters, and philosophical treatises that have left an indelible mark on intellectual discourse. Tolstoy’s commitment to social reform and his embrace of pacifism and Christian anarchism further enriched his literary legacy, making him a towering figure in the canon of European literature.

The short story “How Much Land Does a Man Need?” is a compelling moral parable that explores the destructive consequences of human greed and mindless pursuit of material wealth.

Franz Kafka, born in 1883 in Prague, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, is renowned for his enigmatic and existentialist works that have profoundly influenced European literature and thought. Despite his relatively small body of work, Kafka’s

impact on 20th-century literature is immense. His writing is characterized by a sense of absurdity, alienation, and psychological introspection, often depicting protagonists caught in surreal and nightmarish situations. Kafka's themes of bureaucracy, existential angst, and the struggle for autonomy resonate deeply with readers, reflecting the anxieties and uncertainties of modern life. Although Kafka's works were initially met with limited recognition during his lifetime, posthumous publications and critical acclaim have solidified his status as one of the most important literary figures of the 20th century, shaping the development of European literature and influencing generations of writers and thinkers.

In "Metamorphosis," Kafka portrays the protagonist, Gregor Samsa, undergoing a surreal transformation into a giant insect, serving as a potent metaphor for the alienation and existential anguish experienced by individuals in a hostile and incomprehensible modern world. Through Gregor's plight, Kafka illuminates the profound sense of isolation and estrangement felt by modern individuals grappling with their own identity and place within society.

## Keywords

Greed, Land Ownership, Ambition, Parable, Absurdity, Alienation, Existential angst, Expressionism

## Discussion

### Section 1

### How Much Land Does a Man Need?

- Leo Tolstoy

#### 4.3.1.1 About the Author

Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) is renowned as a novelist and short-story writer, but in the later part of his literary career, he gained global recognition as a moral, religious, and philosophical visionary. While acclaimed for his realism and pioneering war narratives in literary circles, he was also notable as a pacifist, vegetarian, and staunch opponent of private property.

► Writer, thinker and visionary

Born into a wealthy aristocratic family in Russia, Tolstoy experienced early tragedy with the loss of both parents before the age of ten. Despite this, he fondly recalled his childhood spent with his brother and close relatives, a period he detailed in his debut work *Childhood* (1852).

► Aristocratic lineage

► Self-educated

Struggling academically, Tolstoy left university and moved to his estate to self-educate himself, focusing on literature and ethics. He began keeping a detailed diary documenting his experiments with self-development.

► Interest in Education

In 1851, Tolstoy enlisted in the army and served during the Crimean War (1853-56). Afterward, he briefly visited Paris but returned after gambling away his money. Convinced of his calling in education, he established a school for peasant children on his estate. To deepen his understanding of pedagogical theory, he travelled extensively across Western Europe and later published a journal on the subject. Concurrently, his literary career flourished, with subsequent works including *Boyhood* (1854) and *Youth* (1857).

► Tryst with Christianity

In 1862, Leo Tolstoy (34) married Sofya Andreyevna Bers (18), with whom he had thirteen children, three of whom died in infancy. Shortly after their marriage, Tolstoy embarked on a prolific period of novel writing. He immersed himself in the creation of his first monumental work, *War and Peace* (1865-69), followed by his second major novel, *Anna Karenina* (1875-77). However, following the completion of *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy experienced existential despair, recorded in *My Confession* (1884). Feeling the futility of all action in the face of death, he turned to faith for solace, deeply influenced by Christ's message while denouncing institutional religion. His subsequent novel, *Resurrection*, published in 1899, sharply criticised the institutionalised church, leading to his excommunication from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1901. During this period, Tolstoy shifted his focus to writing religious essays and tracts, becoming a prominent pacifist figure who inspired individuals such as Mahatma Gandhi, with whom he corresponded through letters.

► Writing Short Story

From 1880 onward, Tolstoy's fiction writing took two distinct paths. He penned numerous moral tales such as "Where Love Is, God Is" (1885), "What People Live By" (1882), and "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" (1885), targeting common people as his audience. Simultaneously, he crafted novellas for educated readers, including "The Death of Ivan Ilyich" (1886) and "Father Sergius" (1898). Additionally, Tolstoy authored essays such as "What Is Art?" (1898) and plays like *The Living Corpse* (1900) and *The Power of Darkness* (1886).

Tolstoy's later years were marked by personal hardships, including a troubled marriage and inner conflicts arising from his struggle to reconcile his life with his principles. In 1910,

► Final years

he left home incognito after a bitter quarrel with his wife but was soon discovered by the press. His final days were a highly publicised media event culminating in his death from pneumonia at a remote Russian railway station.

### 4.3.1.2 Narrative Style and Technique

Leo Tolstoy, celebrated as one of the greatest novelists of all time, distinguished himself through a unique blend of realism and innovative narrative techniques. His works, notably *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, are often regarded not merely as works of art but as intricate portrayals of life itself. Tolstoy's realism is unparalleled, as he meticulously renders the Russian reality with a keen eye for detail. However, what sets Tolstoy apart is his ability to infuse seemingly mundane details with profound significance, thereby imbuing his narratives with layers of meaning. Central to Tolstoy's artistic technique is defamiliarization, a technique later championed by Russian critic Viktor Shklovsky, which involves presenting familiar aspects of life in a fresh and unfamiliar manner, thereby prompting readers to perceive them anew. Moreover, Tolstoy's mastery lies in his unparalleled skill in depicting the inner lives of his characters. From his early works like *Childhood* and the *Sevastopol Sketches* to the intricate portrayal of *Anna Karenina's* consciousness in her final moments, Tolstoy delves deep into the psyche of his characters, offering readers profound insights into the human condition. Tolstoy's narratives often eschew traditional plot structures, opting instead for a continuous vein of thought that mirrors the perpetual flow of life itself. This departure from conventional storytelling influenced a generation of Modernist novelists, including Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and William Faulkner, who sought to emulate Tolstoy's ability to capture the essence of life in its raw complexity.

► Realism

### 4.3.1.3 About the Story

“How Much Land Does a Man Need?” written in 1886 is hailed as one of Leo Tolstoy's finest short stories, with James Joyce acclaiming it as “the greatest story that the literature of the world knows.” Inspired by a Russian folktale, Tolstoy crafted the narrative as a parable aimed at a common audience. The story thematizes into the relentless pursuit of happiness and security through land acquisition, ultimately revealing the moral consequences of greed. Beyond individual morality, it also addresses sociological themes such as the implications of private land ownership and wealth accumulation. Tolstoy's personal struggle with these issues stemmed from his aristocratic background and vast landholdings, leading him to

► Publication

wrestle with conflicting desires: the urge to acquire more land against his sympathy for Russian peasants who advocated for communal land ownership. In this sense, the story takes on an “autopsychological” dimension, reflecting Tolstoy’s inner conflicts and philosophical inquiries.

#### 4.3.1.4 Plot Summary

The story opens with a conversation between two sisters: the elder, married to a tradesman in town, and the younger, married to a peasant in the village. They debate the merits of city versus country life, with the elder extolling the virtues of urban living and the younger advocating for rural life. Pahom, husband of the younger sister, overhears their discussion and partly agrees with his wife but believes their peasant life is difficult due to lack of independently owned land. He privately muses, “If I had plenty of land, I shouldn’t fear the Devil himself.” Unbeknownst to him, the Devil overhears Pahom’s boast and decides to challenge him.

- ▶ Pahom’s boast and the devil’s Challenge

Pahom works as a peasant on the estate of a landlady whose new steward imposes fines on the peasants, making their lives difficult. When they hear that the landlady plans to sell the estate, Pahom and his fellow peasants attempt to buy it for their commune. However, their plan fails due to the Devil sowing discord among them. They then decide to individually purchase the land, and after much struggle, Pahom acquires forty acres for himself. Despite the challenges, he achieves a bountiful crop and quickly pays off his debts, becoming a landowner. Pahom finds great joy and contentment in his newfound status.

- ▶ Pahom buys his first piece of land

However, his contentment is short-lived as neighbouring peasants begin trespassing on his property. Initially tolerant, Pahom soon engages in conflicts with them, attracting more enemies who threaten to destroy his land and belongings. He finds no satisfaction in his landholding anymore. Simultaneously, rumours spread of villagers relocating to new settlements. Initially hesitant to leave, Pahom considers expanding his estates by purchasing land from departing villagers. However, a meeting with a peasant from beyond the Volga River, extolling the opportunities there, convinces Pahom to sell his land and relocate. Within a year, he sells all his property for profit, renounces his membership in the commune, and moves to the new settlement.

- ▶ Short-lived happiness

After joining the new commune, Pahom and his sons receive 125 acres of communal land, which proves fertile and greatly improves their fortunes. However, his satisfaction is short-lived as he soon desires more land. He wishes for freehold land with



► Desire of freehold land with homestead

a homestead instead of the distant communal land. Engaging in disputes with other peasants and experiencing labour losses only intensify his longing for private land. Around this time, Pahom hears from a passing land dealer about the Bashkirs, who owned vast expanses of land available at low prices. He cancels a nearly finalized land deal and decides to pursue land from the Bashkirs instead.

► Meeting the Bashkirs

Pahom seeks out the Bashkirs, simple and kind-hearted people living in tents on the steppes. They are Turkish and speak no Russian, so Pahom communicates with them through an interpreter. He wins their favour with gifts and explains the purpose of his visit. Impressed by Pahom, the Bashkirs agree to give him as much land as he desires.

► The condition

Pahom meets with the chief, who informs him that they sell land by the day: for one thousand roubles, Pahom can purchase all the land he can cover on foot in a single day. However, the chief warns him that if he fails to return to his starting point before sunset, he will lose all the money. Delighted by the opportunity, Pahom resolves to begin early the next morning.

► The dream

The entire night, Pahom remains awake, consumed by thoughts of the land. Just before dawn, as his eyes close, he has a dream. In it, he sees the chief laughing outside the tent, followed by the face of the dealer, a dead peasant, and finally, the devil himself. Before the devil, he witnesses a dead man, who turns out to be none other than himself. Though horrified by the dream, Pahom fails to decipher its meaning. Instead, he immediately gets up, prepares himself for the pivotal day, and sets off to meet the Bashkirs.

► Pahom's downfall

Welcoming him warmly, the Bashkirs lead Pahom to the steppes and guide him to a hillock, revealing the vast expanse of land at their disposal. Fuelled by greed for untouched land, Pahom sets off, determined to cover as much ground as possible. As he walks, his desire for land only grows, despite the scorching heat and his bare feet. Though exhausted and longing for rest, he knows he must return to his starting point before sunset. Anxiety gnaws at him as he fears he may not make it back in time, driving him to desperation. Discarding his coat and tools, he runs frantically, his mouth parched and his shirt drenched in sweat, toward the waiting Bashkirs at the hillock.

► Greed's Consequences

As he runs, Pahom realises he has been consumed by greed and may have overreached, risking his life to acquire more land. Miraculously, he reaches the starting point just before sunset, but as he collapses, reaching for his cap, those around him discover

him dead, blood flowing from his mouth.

► How much land does a man need?

The Bashkirs express their pity at Pahom's death, and his servant uses a spade to dig a six-foot grave to accommodate his body, ironically answering the question posed in the title.

#### 4.3.1.5 Themes and Analysis

##### *Greed and Materialism*

"How Much Land Does a Man Need?" serves as a cautionary parable about the dangers of greed and excessive materialism. Pahom's insatiable desire for more land ultimately leads to his downfall, illustrating how relentless pursuit of wealth and property can lead to self-destruction. The story highlights the insatiable nature of desire, which, if unchecked, can consume a person entirely, as seen in Pahom's case. As the narrative unfolds, Pahom's craving for land grows stronger until it overwhelms him completely. Even when he realises he has acquired too much, he is unable to restrain himself, becoming a tragic victim of his own desires.

► Tragic Lesson

##### *Hubris*

Pahom's tragic flaw is his hubris, evident from his boast that "If I had plenty of land, I shouldn't fear the Devil himself." This arrogance, believing himself immune to temptations symbolised by the Devil, reveals his lack of self-awareness. He is so blinded by his own perceived strengths that he fails to recognize his weaknesses. Even when he sees in a dream the Devil and his own dead body at the Bashkirs, he fails to read the warning in it for him. His downfall serves as a reminder of the consequences of arrogance and overreach.

► Consequences

##### *The Illusion of Ownership*

Through Pahom's story, Tolstoy exposes the modern myth that ownership and accumulating material possessions will bring happiness. Pahom believes that owning land will free him from the troubles of his peasant life and grant him everlasting happiness. However, upon becoming a landowner, he becomes insecure and suspicious of his neighbours, constantly picking fights with them over trespassing. He convinces himself that his lack of independent landholding is the root cause of his troubles. Instead of finding contentment with what he has, he continually compares himself to others and falsely believes that acquiring more land will bring satisfaction. Despite amassing vast amounts of land, Pahom remains unsatisfied and ultimately loses everything.

► Disillusionment



## *Social Critique*

- ▶ Critique of materialistic society

Through the story, Tolstoy critiques the social and economic structures of his time, highlighting the inequalities and injustices inherent in a system that prioritises wealth and land ownership. This critique is evident from the outset, as two sisters discuss the merits of city and country lives. The elder sister, residing in the city, boasts of her comfortable lifestyle, fine clothes, and various entertainments, while belittling the rural life as coarse and full of drudgery. This conversation reflects a societal mindset that equates happiness and contentment with material riches, fostering unhealthy competition and constant comparison of one's life with those of others.

- ▶ Materialistic shift

This materialistic mindset, once confined to the cities, spreads to rural areas, as seen in Pahom's belief that happiness lies in owning land. This shift impacts the relationship between individuals and the land they inhabit. Initially, Pahom works within a commune where land is commonly owned and shared. However, he later resigns from the commune to pursue private land ownership. His quest for more land at cheaper prices eventually becomes an act of conquest, as evidenced in the final scene where Pahom greedily seeks to acquire maximum land.

- ▶ Critique of capitalism's environmental impact

Tolstoy thus critiques the capitalist philosophy of private property and wealth accumulation, revealing its detrimental effects on the relationship between individuals and the land. The narrative also comments on the environmental implications of human greed and expansion. Pahom's relentless pursuit of land can be interpreted as a metaphor for the destructive impact of human activity on the natural world.

## Summarised Overview

In "How Much Land Does a Man Need?," Tolstoy critiques the societal emphasis on wealth and material possessions, illustrating the consequences of greed and the pursuit of land ownership. Through the characters' conversations and actions, Tolstoy highlights the detrimental effects of a materialistic mindset, which fosters competition and dissatisfaction. Pahom's journey from communal land ownership to a relentless pursuit of private property reflects Tolstoy's criticism of capitalist ideals and their impact on human relationships with the land. Ultimately, the story serves as a warning against the destructive consequences of unchecked greed and exploitation of natural resources.

## Assignments

1. How does Tolstoy critique the societal emphasis on wealth and material possessions in “How Much Land Does a Man Need?”
2. What does the story reveal about the relationship between humans and the natural world, particularly in terms of environmental implications?
3. How does Tolstoy use symbolism, such as the Devil and Pahom’s dream, to convey deeper themes and messages?
4. Discuss the significance of the title “How Much Land Does a Man Need?” and its relevance to the story’s themes.
5. Analyse the role of social and economic inequality in shaping Pahom’s actions and decisions.

## Suggested Reading

1. Knapp, Liza. *Leo Tolstoy: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2019.
2. Orwin, Donna Tussing. ‘Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910): Art and Truth.’ *The Cambridge Companion to European Novelists*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2012, pp. 277–293.

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1. Knapp, Liza. *Leo Tolstoy: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2019.
2. Orwin, Donna Tussing. ‘Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910): Art and Truth.’ *The Cambridge Companion to European Novelists*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2012, pp. 277–293.



## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU

## Section 2 Metamorphosis

- Franz Kafka

### 4.3.2.1 About the Author

#### ► Early years

Born in 1883 in Prague, Franz Kafka was the eldest of six children born to German speaking Czech-Jewish parents. His formative years were shaped by his education in a German elementary school followed by enrolment in a state *gymnasium*, where he received a rigorous academic foundation. Later, Kafka pursued studies in law at the university in Prague, a period during which he crossed paths with Max Brod, who would become his lifelong friend and literary executor.

#### ► Ill health

By 1908, Kafka found himself employed at an insurance company, a position that afforded him the necessary flexibility to dedicate time to his writing endeavours. During his spare moments, he crafted prose sketches and stories, which found publication in magazines and small collections, notably beginning with *Meditations* in 1912. However, Kafka's creative pursuits were frequently punctuated by bouts of poor health, culminating in a diagnosis of tuberculosis in 1917. This marked the onset of a period where his regular life was disrupted by extended stays in the sanatorium, ultimately leading to his premature retirement in 1922. He died on 3 June, 1924.

#### ► Strained relation with father

Kafka's personal life was fraught with challenges, characterised by a strained relationship with his authoritarian father, depicted vividly in "Letter to His Father," where Kafka reveals the profound sense of inadequacy instilled in him by his father's intimidating presence. Similarly, his romantic endeavours proved largely unsuccessful, as reflected in his failure to marry despite engagement with multiple partners. Throughout the tumult of his personal struggles, Kafka remained steadfastly devoted to literature and writing, viewing his craft as a form of therapeutic self-expression.

In 1923, Kafka relocated from Prague to Berlin to live with his lover, yet his declining health necessitated a return to Prague, where he succumbed to illness in 1924 at the age of 40. Despite his relatively brief lifespan, Kafka's literary legacy endures through the publication of seven small works during his lifetime, including "The Stoker," "The Judgment," "The Metamorphosis,"

► Literary works

“In the Penal Colony,” *A Country Doctor: Little Stories*, and *A Fasting Artist: Four Stories*. Additionally, he left behind three incomplete novels and a trove of letters and diaries, which he instructed Max Brod to destroy upon his death. However, Brod disregarded Kafka’s wishes, opting instead to edit and publish these works posthumously. These included novels like *The Trial* (1925), *The Castle* (1926) and *Amerika* (1927).

► Kafka’s literary legacy

Though little known during his lifetime, Kafka’s renown spread to the Anglo-American world with the translation of his works into English by Willa and Edwin Muir, commencing with the novel *The Castle* in 1930. Today, Kafka stands as the quintessential literary voice of the twentieth century who gave voice to the existential angst of the modern individual. W. H. Auden in 1941 said: “Had one to name the artist who comes nearest to bearing the same kind of relation to our age that Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe bore to theirs, Kafka is the first, one would think of.”

► Marques on Kafka

Gabriel Garcia Marques was highly influenced by Kafka’s writing. He once said that his writing started with his reading of Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*. “When I read the [first] line I thought to myself that I didn’t know anyone was allowed to write things like that. If I had known I would have started writing a long time ago. So I immediately started writing short stories.”

### 4.3.2.2 Narrative Style and Technique

► Literary Style

Franz Kafka’s literary style is renowned for its unique blend of surrealism, absurdity, and existential angst. Throughout his works, Kafka crafts narratives that captivate readers with their haunting, dreamlike quality, blurring the line between reality and fantasy to create an unsettling and disorienting atmosphere. His prose often carries a tone of detachment and estrangement, paying meticulous attention to detail while delving deep into the internal conflicts of his characters.

► Enigmatic narratives

Reading Kafka is akin to embarking on an enigmatic journey where impossible events unfold with a sense of inevitability, leaving characters and readers equally bewildered. Whether it’s Gregor Samsa’s inexplicable transformation into an insect in “Metamorphosis” or Joseph K’s arrest without a clear reason in *The Trial*, Kafka’s narratives are marked by uncertainty and ambiguity. Much like the cinematic experience, Kafka’s stories are presented from the perspective of a single character, offering glimpses into their psyche and leaving much to interpretation.

Kafka’s style is often associated with Expressionism, a

► Expressionism

German version of modernism that aims to disrupt familiar reality and reveal underlying forces through powerful imagery. Reality is often distorted to convey psychological and emotional truths.

► Major themes

Thematically, Kafka's works delve into the complexities of the human condition, exploring themes such as alienation, identity, powerlessness, and the search for meaning in an indifferent universe. One of Kafka's most prominent themes is the pervasive influence of modern bureaucratic and totalitarian systems on individuals, which he often portrays as oppressive and dehumanising forces. Kafka's protagonists frequently find themselves trapped in labyrinthine bureaucracies or caught in the grip of incomprehensible and arbitrary authority figures, struggling in vain to assert their autonomy and make sense of their circumstances.

► Existential crisis in Kafka's work

Another recurring theme in Kafka's work is the existential crisis of the modern individual, characterised by a profound sense of alienation and disorientation in the face of an absurd and indifferent world. His characters grapple with feelings of existential dread and anxiety, confronted by the futility of their efforts to find purpose and fulfilment in a universe devoid of inherent meaning. Kafka's exploration of existential themes anticipates the existentialist movement of the 20th century, influencing writers such as Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre.

► Humour in Kafka's work

Despite the sombre themes, Kafka's writing also contains a gentle, playful humour, characterised by a resigned acceptance of life's imperfections. This humour, evident in his letters and tales, adds another layer of complexity to his works, inviting readers to explore the depths of human experience with both seriousness and lightness of heart.

### 4.3.2.3 Kafkaesque

► The term Kafkaesque

Mirroring the narrative worlds of Kafka, the term Kafkaesque is widely used to refer to realities that appear to be increasingly complex, bizarre, illogical and even nightmarish. Yet the term has a more nuanced signification.

► Milan Kundera's explanation

Milan Kundera, in his essay on Kafka titled "Somewhere Behind," delves into the concept of Kafkaesque in detail. According to Kundera, the term "Kafkaesque" refers to a situation where characters find themselves trapped in a world that resembles a single, vast, labyrinthine institution, which they cannot escape, nor comprehend. It encapsulates the essence of Kafka's narratives, where individuals navigate through a

landscape fraught with confusion and uncertainty.

► Web of bureaucracy

In a Kafkaesque world, bureaucracy serves as the true reality, overshadowing the physical existence of individuals. The intricate web of bureaucracy becomes a dominant force, shaping the lives and experiences of Kafka's characters in profound ways.

► Absurd punishment in Kafka's world

Within the Kafkaesque realm, punishment is meted out with inexplicable absurdity. The accused often find themselves facing penalties without understanding the reasons behind their actions. The absurdity of punishment becomes unbearable, driving individuals to seek justification for their penalty amidst the chaos and confusion.

► Comedy's role in Kafkaesque world

Unlike in Shakespearean tragedies where comedy serves as a counterpoint to lighten the tone, in the Kafkaesque world, comedy takes on a different role. It does not accompany tragedy; instead, it destroys it at its inception, robbing victims of any consolation derived from the supposed grandeur of suffering.

► Bug story

#### 4.3.2.4 About the Story

"The Metamorphosis," written in German as "Die Verwandlung," is one of the most widely discussed and analysed modern short stories. Kafka referred to it as a "bug story." He began writing the story in 1912, and it was published in 1915 in an expressionist journal *Die weißen Blätter*.

► Gregor Samsa's transformation

The opening line of the story is now among the most celebrated in western literature: "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect." The narrative revolves around the protagonist, Gregor Samsa, who wakes up one morning after a night of unsettling dreams to find himself transformed into a giant insect. In some translations it is monstrous vermin. The story depicts into how Gregor and his family struggle to adjust to this new and bizarre situation.

► Story in three parts

#### 4.3.2.5 Plot Summary

Narrated from a third person point of view, the plot of the story unfolds in three parts and the story mostly takes place in the house of the Samsa family, more particularly in Gregor's room and the living room. The closed setting creates a claustrophobic ambience where Gregor finds himself trapped. The story refers to other suffocating spaces like the office where Gregor works, though no action takes place there at the time of the story.

## Part 1

- ▶ Transformation into giant insect

In part 1 of the story the protagonist Gregor Samsa wakes up from a dream filled sleep to find himself transformed into monstrous vermin in his bed. Despite his insect form, he still retains human thoughts and instincts. As he observes the time on his alarm clock, he realises it's already past six-thirty, and he worries about missing his train to work. He considers calling in sick but knows the insurance doctor would likely certify him as healthy. He faces the dilemma of explaining his absence to his boss and fears the consequences it might bring.

- ▶ Family trying to communicate with Gregor through the doors

Gregor's family members attempt to communicate with him from different parts of the house through the doors connecting to his room. His mother gently reminds him about his train, to which he responds with a strained voice. His father and sister also try to reach him, with his father knocking on one door and his sister pleading softly at another. Gregor tries to reassure them that he's fine and is getting ready, but he avoids opening the doors, grateful for the habit of locking them, even at home. Despite his efforts to maintain a sense of normalcy, the family begins to realise something is wrong with Gregor.

- ▶ Gregor's futile attempts to move

Gregor attempts to get out of bed, but struggles with his transformed body. Gregor tries various methods to get out of bed, but each attempt is met with difficulty and pain. Despite his misery and struggles, Gregor finds a hint of humour in the absurdity of his situation, even considering calling for help but ultimately deciding against it.

- ▶ Family and Chief clerk's response

Soon the Chief clerk from Gregor's office is sent to check on him, adding a sense of urgency to the situation. Gregor tries to communicate with him but the Clerk doesn't understand a word. It emerges that it is not just his body that has transformed, his voice has changed too. Nobody can make sense of what he is talking about. Eventually, they send for a doctor and a locksmith. Although Gregor's words become unintelligible to others, he finds comfort in their efforts to help him, feeling drawn back into the human circle and hoping for a positive outcome from the assistance they've arranged.

- ▶ Gregor opens the door

Eventually, Gregor manages to open the door using his mouth to turn the key. However, he struggles due to his lack of teeth, causing a brown fluid to flow from his mouth. As he slowly edges around the door, he hears the chief clerk's startled reaction and sees his mother's distress. The family's shock and despair at seeing Gregor in his transformed state are palpable, illustrating the profound impact of his metamorphosis on their lives.

- ▶ Gregor's attempt to reassure the Chief clerk

Gregor attempts to calm the Chief clerk, assuring him that he will get dressed, pack his samples, and head to work. He emphasises his willingness to work and his dedication to his job, hoping to avoid being sacked. However, the Chief clerk, horrified, retreats towards the staircase to escape. Gregor, trying to follow him, experiences a moment of physical comfort as he realises his hind legs are now steady and obedient. His mother, startled, accidentally spills coffee over the rug as she moves away from him. Gregor, momentarily distracted by the sight of the coffee, snaps his jaws, causing his mother to scream. He then tries to chase after the Chief clerk, but the clerk leaps down the stairs and disappears, shouting in horror.

- ▶ Mr. Samsa's reaction

Gregor's father, witnessing the whole scene, steps in and violently forces him back into his room, wielding a stick and a newspaper. Gregor struggles to get through the partially opened door, but his father pushes him until he becomes stuck, bruising his body and leaving blotches on the door. Unable to move on his own, Gregor is finally freed when his father gives him a strong push, causing him to fly into the room and bleed profusely. His father then slams the door shut with the stick, bringing an end to the chaotic and violent encounter.

## Part 2

- ▶ Family adapting to the new situation

In part 2 we see Gregor's family gradually adjusting to Gregor's transformation, believing it to be a temporary condition. Gregor is initially placed on a diet of milk by his sister, but he finds it repulsive and leaves it untouched. One of his legs has been damaged in a collision with his father, causing him to limp and trail it uselessly behind him as he crawls around the room, hungry but unable to stomach the milk provided. Soon Gregor's sister takes charge and becomes responsible for feeding him. Though she is the only one brave enough to enter his room, she is terrified by his appearance. To make her visits more bearable, Gregor hides under the sofa when she comes in. When she brings him a variety of foods to see what he prefers, he surprises her by preferring rotten food.

- ▶ Economic situation of the family

As the family mulls over their economic situation and future course in the absence of Gregor's income it's revealed that his father, who was running a business had gone bankrupt five years ago. Gregor took the job as travelling salesman with one of his father's creditor's firm in order to help him pay off his debts. Gregor had been the sole provider of the family for the past five years. The family, including Gregor, had grown accustomed to accepting and giving money without much warmth. Gregor had a secret plan to send his sister to study at the School of Music,

despite the expense, which he hoped to announce on Christmas eve.

► Family's financial situation

However, Gregor after his transformation overhears his father explaining that they have a small amount of investments that survived their financial ruin, along with Gregor's monthly earnings, which had accumulated into a small capital sum. Gregor is pleased with his father's unexpected thrift and foresight, despite the fact that he could have used the extra money to pay off more of his father's debts. The family decides to keep the sum untouched for emergencies, but they are still struggling to meet living expenses. Gregor's father has not worked in five years, and his mother's asthma prevents her from working. The idea of Gregor's sister, who is only seventeen and accustomed to a pleasant life, having to earn money causes Gregor great shame and grief.

► New dynamic

A new dynamic between Gregor and his sister develops around a window instead of a door. Gregor, driven by an instinctive urge rather than a recollection of human experience, approaches the window, drawn to the light like typical insects. However, his failing human sight prevents him from seeing clearly outside. His sister, unaware of his retained human traits, disturbs him by opening the window noisily and expressing disgust at the smell in his room. When she unexpectedly finds him by the window, she reacts with alarm, further hurting Gregor's feelings. In an attempt to spare his sister from the sight of his repulsive appearance, Gregor covers himself with a sheet, showing his kindness and selflessness despite his monstrous transformation.

► Mrs. Samsa enters the room for the first time since Gregor's transformation

Two months have passed since Gregor's transformation, and his mother, asthmatic and feeble, enters his room for the first time, accompanied by his sister. Gregor, now accustomed to crawling on walls and ceilings, has left traces of sticky residue from his feet. His sister, eager to accommodate him, proposes to remove some furniture to give him more space to crawl.

► Family dynamics shift

As the women struggle to move the heavy furniture, Gregor's mother opines that leaving his room unchanged may offer him comfort when he eventually returns to human form. Gregor, torn between his new instincts and his human background, is conflicted about the changes. Meanwhile, his sister exhibits a newfound self-assurance and takes charge of Gregor's affairs and arranges to clear the furniture when the father is away on his job.

In a desperate attempt to stop all his things from being taken away, Gregor clings to the framed picture on the wall. Gregor's mother catches sight of him, appearing as a huge brown mass

- ▶ Gregor leaves his room for the second time

against the flowered wallpaper. She screams in terror and faints, while Grete, upset with Gregor, rushes to find something to revive her. Gregor tries to help but accidentally injures himself with broken glass and corrosive medicine. Unable to reach his mother or assist Grete, Gregor is overcome with self-reproach and worry, crawling aimlessly around the room until he collapses onto the table.

- ▶ Gregor's father's transformation

Soon Gregor's father arrives home and enters the living room. Gregor finds that his father has undergone a transformation, appearing in a fine blue uniform with a commanding presence. Gregor, seeking to show his intention of returning to his room without being driven, crouches against his door, hoping his father will understand and open the door for him.

- ▶ Mr. Samsa attacks Gregor with apples

However his father, driven by anger advances towards Gregor with determination, bombarding him with apples, driving Gregor back into his room. The apples cause Gregor a grave injury on his back, leaving him in pain. As his mother rushes towards the father to protect his son from attack, Gregor witnesses her pleading with his father for his life, but at this point his vision begins to fade.

### Part 3

- ▶ Shift in family dynamics

Following Gregor's injury from the apple, which left it stuck in his body as a visible reminder, his father begins to acknowledge Gregor's familial connection despite his repulsive appearance. The door between Gregor's darkened room and the lighted living room is left open, symbolising a shift in family dynamics. The family members have adapted to their new circumstances, with Gregor's mother and sister taking up jobs to support the family.

- ▶ Dire situation of the family

The disintegration of the Samsa family continues as they face financial strain and emotional turmoil. They dismiss their servant girl and hire a cheaper charwoman to handle the rough work. Despite their difficulties, their biggest lament is their inability to leave their oversized apartment because they cannot figure out how to move Gregor, who is now a burden. However, Gregor realises that their reluctance to move isn't primarily due to him, as they could easily transport him in a suitable box. Instead, it's their own sense of hopelessness and belief that they are uniquely plagued by misfortune that keeps them stuck in their current situation.

As Gregor's condition worsens, his sister's care for him diminishes. She no longer brings him food that he might enjoy, instead pushing whatever is available into his room with her

- ▶ Grete and family loses interest in Gregor

foot and hastily clearing it out later, regardless of whether it's been touched or not. The cleaning of his room is also done in a rushed manner, with dirt and filth accumulating. Gregor attempts to confront his sister about the state of his room, but she remains indifferent. When their mother tries to thoroughly clean the room, resulting in dampness that upsets Gregor, a chaotic family argument erupts.

- ▶ The three lodgers

Gregor's relationship with the bony charwoman develops in an unusual manner, who affectionately calls him "dung-beetle" though he is irritated by her. Soon after the family takes in three lodgers for extra income. The lodgers, with a penchant for order, rearrange the living situation, forcing Gregor's family to adjust their sleeping arrangements and accommodating the lodgers' preferences. One evening, the lodgers hearing Grete playing violin, invite her to play for them. During the music performance by his sister, Gregor is drawn to the living room, despite his deteriorating condition and the shame of his appearance. He longs to connect with his sister and express his appreciation of her music, envisioning a scenario where he reveals his intentions to support her musical aspirations. However, his presence is eventually noticed by one of the lodgers, leading to a confrontation where the lodgers express disgust and promptly decide to leave, citing the unsanitary conditions of the household. Despite attempts by Gregor's father to pacify them, the lodgers insist on leaving immediately, threatening legal action for damages. The abrupt departure of the lodgers adds to the family's woes, highlighting their precarious situation and the growing isolation of Gregor.

- ▶ Grete pronounces that Gregor is no longer her brother

As Gregor's condition deteriorates, his sister reveals her desire to rid the family of him, referring to him as a creature rather than her brother. She pronounces that they must get rid of Gregor for the sake of their own well-being, stating that it's impossible to live with him any longer. Both the father and sister agree that Gregor cannot understand them, and thus, they must make decisions without his input. The sister asserts that Gregor must go, emphasizing that he is no longer their Gregor, for if he were, he would have left on his own accord. Gregor, realising his family's rejection, painfully retreats to his room. He contemplates his family with love and tenderness but ultimately accepts his fate. In a state of peaceful resignation, Gregor passes away as the clock strikes three in the morning. His dead body is discovered the next morning, bringing relief to his family.

- ▶ Gregor's death

The pity of his life and death is revealed by the description of his mortal remains: "Indeed, Gregor's body was completely flat and dry, as could only now be seen where it was no longer



supported by the legs and nothing prevented one from looking closely at it.”

- ▶ Return of tranquility and hope in Samsa family

After Gregor’s death, the Samsa family takes a day off to rest and goes for a stroll, feeling they deserve and need the respite from work. As they write their letters of excuse to their employers, the charwoman informs them that Gregor has already been taken care of, eliciting a mixed reaction from the family. Eventually, they all leave the apartment together and take a trolley into the countryside, enjoying the warm sunshine. During the journey, they discuss their future prospects, realising that their jobs offer opportunities for advancement. They also contemplate moving to a smaller and better-located apartment. While conversing, Mr. and Mrs. Samsa notice their daughter’s increasing vitality and attractiveness, leading them to consider finding a suitable husband for her. This realisation fills them with hope for the future, and as their journey ends, their daughter eagerly stands up, symbolising a newfound optimism and readiness for what lies ahead.

#### 4.3.2.6 Characters

##### Gregor Samsa

- ▶ A dutiful soul trapped

The main character, Gregor Samsa works as a travelling salesman, feeling trapped in a job and lifestyle he dislikes but must endure to pay off his father’s debts. He conceals his true feelings from his boss, fearing job loss, and plans to quit after settling the debts. Despite not being naturally ambitious, Gregor steps up when his family faces a financial crisis, earning a promotion from assistant to travelling salesman in early days. He’s a social recluse, who even while travelling, stays in hotels, reminiscing about family conversations at home. At home, he rarely ventures out, spending his time quietly reading the newspaper or reviewing travel schedules. His only hobby is fretwork, crafting small frames in his spare time. Gregor worries about upsetting his boss, losing his job, and burdening his parents with debt repayment. He feels a strong sense of responsibility towards his family, especially towards his sister, for whom he is saving money to send her to a music conservatory. As the story progresses, we find Gregor as someone who feels increasingly caught between guilt and responsibility, his personal freedom constrained by his demanding job and a family that takes him for granted. His transformation into a giant insect symbolises his growing alienation from his job, family, and ultimately himself.

##### Grete Samsa

Grete is Gregor Samsa’s seventeen-year-old sister. Prior

- ▶ Grete's unexpected self-transformation

to Gregor's transformation, she was a passive character who remained at home, dressed herself nicely, slept late, helped her mother and played violin. Gregor harbours dreams of sending her to a conservatory for a music career. However, Gregor's metamorphosis into an insect triggers a change in Grete as well. She transforms herself from a "useless young woman" to one who takes complete charge of Gregor's new situation. She assumes responsibility for Gregor by bringing him food and tending to his room. Initially sympathetic to Gregor's plight, she brings him various foods to test his new tastes, despite her disgust at his appearance.

- ▶ Grete's abandonment

As the story progresses, Grete becomes increasingly distant from Gregor and starts neglecting him. According to Vladimir Nabokov, Grete is the true antagonist of the story, not the father as is often discussed. Nabokov argues that she betrays Gregor twice: first by removing the furniture from his room, depriving him of his possessions and sense of belonging, and then in the final scene by declaring that the creature is no longer her brother.

- ▶ Grete's metamorphosis

Throughout the narrative, Grete takes on an active and assertive role in managing household affairs, exerting control over Gregor and their mother. By the story's end, when Gregor dies, Grete has blossomed into a young and beautiful woman.

### Mr. Samsa (Father)

- ▶ Patriarch regaining control

Gregor's father is depicted as an authoritarian and tyrannical figure who resorts to violent means to control Gregor once he is transformed into an insect. He is absolutely unsympathetic to Gregor's plight and treats him as a nuisance. Mr. Samsa ran a business in the past that failed due to unknown reasons, plunging the family into heavy debt. Gregor takes up a job with one of their creditors to repay the debt, and Mr. Samsa soon goes into retirement, seemingly relinquishing control of the household to Gregor. He allows Gregor to take charge and be the income provider. However, later in the story, it is revealed that he has not lost all his money and total bankruptcy and loss of control are not entirely true. Initially portrayed as a tired, fat old man, the father steps up and takes charge after Gregor's transformation. Gregor sees him in a tight fitting blue uniform with gold buttons which he refuses to take off highlighting his authoritarian streak. Every time Gregor leaves his room, the father behaves in a hostile and violent manner, injuring him first by pushing him through the doorway and later by throwing apples at him. Through the story we see the strained relationship between father and son.

## Mrs. Samsa (Mother)

- ▶ Mother's contradictory reactions

Gregor's mother is depicted as a woman in poor health who primarily tends to household duties. Suffering from asthma, she is frail and easily overwhelmed, often becoming hysterical in crisis situations. When she first sees Gregor in his insect form, she is unable to handle his presence and collapses into the arms of Mr. Samsa. Her reaction to Gregor oscillates between devotion and revulsion. However, she remains the sole person who hopes that he will eventually be restored to his original form. It is through her that we also gain an outsider's perspective into Gregor's personality, which may contradict his own assertions. For instance, his mother believes that he is totally devoted to his job.

## The Chief Clerk (Manager)

- ▶ Epitomising authoritarianism

Gregor's boss, the Chief Clerk, is introduced by the sound of his determined steps, wearing polished boots. He is the other authoritarian figure in Gregor's life. When Gregor failed to appear at the office, the manager swooped down to his place demanding an answer for his absence. He shouts at him across the door accusing him of negligence of commercial duty and embezzlement of cash and being lax at work. Gregor describes him as someone who sits at his desk way up there and talks down to his employees. He is portrayed as nasty, suspicious, and condescending in attitude.

## The Cook, Servant Maid and Charwoman

- ▶ Minor servants

The cook, servant maid and the charwomen are minor characters in the story. The cook appears in one scene begging to be relieved of her duties once she learns about Gregor's transformation. The servant maid similarly requests to be confined in the kitchen as she is too afraid to venture out in the altered scenario. She is dismissed once the financial situation in the house deteriorates. The charwoman who is employed to do the roughwork is the only character not repulsed by Gregor's form. She tries to be friendly with him by calling him "dung beetle" though Gregor is irritated by her. She is the one who sweeps away Gregor's body once he is dead.

## The Three Lodgers

The lodgers make their appearance in the third part of the story when the Samsas decide to rent out a room to earn extra money. Described as solemn gentlemen with full beards, they are particularly meticulous about tidiness, not only in their own room but in the entire household. They exhibit a high-handed attitude,

► Fastidious lodgers

especially regarding anything they deem useless or shoddy. The family is mostly nervous and overly polite around them, fearing their harsh judgement. One evening, after dinner, they hear Grete playing the violin and invite her to perform for them. However, they quickly become bored. Upon seeing Gregor's grotesque form, they make a fuss about the unclean state of the house, cancel their room reservation, and refuse to pay rent.

► Motif

### 4.3.2.7 Motif and Themes

#### *Metamorphosis*

The motif of transformation manifests in the story in three distinct ways; through Gregor, Grete, and the Samsa family as a whole.

► Gregor's Metamorphosis

**Gregor:** The most apparent metamorphosis occurs to Gregor himself, who undergoes a physical transformation to an insect. This transformation is not only physical but also psychological, as Gregor grapples with the implications of his new state. Initially, he is puzzled and confused, followed by attempts to adapt to his insect form. Throughout the story, Gregor's transformation serves as a metaphor for alienation, isolation, and the dehumanising effects of modern society.

► Grete's transformation

**Grete:** Another significant transformation is observed in Gregor's sister, Grete. Initially depicted as caring and compassionate towards Gregor, Grete's attitude undergoes a transformation in the course of the narrative. As Gregor's condition worsens and he becomes a liability to the family, Grete's sense of duty begins to overshadow her initial affection. She takes on more responsibilities and eventually becomes the primary caretaker of Gregor. But soon she gets tired of this role. Grete's metamorphosis reflects the shifting dynamics within the family after Gregor's transformation. By the end of the story Grete has blossomed into a beautiful woman.

► Family metamorphosis

**The Samsa family:** The third type of metamorphosis occurs within the Samsa family unit as a whole. Initially plunged into despair and hopelessness by Gregor's transformation, the family experiences a gradual shift in fortunes by the end of the story. As they adapt to their new circumstances and overcome various challenges, including financial struggles and social isolation, the family begins to find glimpses of hope and resilience. While Mr. Samsa once again starts working and experiences renewed vitality in his new job, Mrs Samsa takes up sewing work and Grete starts working as a salesgirl, studying stenography and French in the evening. Ultimately, when Gregor dies, the family

is relieved. A sense of tranquillity returns. All three take a day off from their job and set out to the city after months. They realise that their situation is not bad after all and make plans to shift to a smaller apartment.

The story is not so much about Gregor's physical transformation as it is about the way Gregor sees himself in his new form and how other characters perceive him. From Gregor's perspective, he experiences a profound sense of alienation and isolation, feeling disconnected from his human identity and struggling to navigate his new existence. His internal struggles and desires are contrasted with the reactions of his family members and other characters, who view him with varying degrees of shock, disgust, and fear. The stark contrast between Gregor's self-perception and the perceptions of others highlights themes of identity, alienation, and the human capacity for empathy or lack thereof.

► Perception versus reality alienation

### *Self-alienation and Existential Angst*

The theme of self-alienation in Kafka's "Metamorphosis" is intricately woven into the narrative, particularly through the protagonist, Gregor Samsa, and his transformation to monstrous vermin. This transformation serves as a metaphorical manifestation of Gregor's profound sense of estrangement from himself, his work, and his family.

► Self-alienation

**Gregor's Transformation:** Gregor's physical metamorphosis into a vermin reflects his deep-seated feelings of self-contempt and alienation. As he wakes up one morning to discover his grotesque new form, he becomes fundamentally estranged from his own identity. Seeing himself as a gigantic specimen of vermin, he experiences a profound disconnection from his true self, exacerbating his sense of isolation and detachment.

► Gregor's Transformation

**Alienation from Work:** Prior to his transformation, Gregor already feels alienated from his work as a travelling salesman. His job is depicted as burdensome, joyless, and devoid of intrinsic satisfaction. Gregor's labour is solely instrumental, serving the external demands of his family and employer rather than his own desires. His work does not align with his essential being, further contributing to his sense of estrangement.

► Alienation from Work

**Exploitation by Family:** Gregor's relationship with his family exemplifies his alienation, particularly in terms of his father's exploitation of his labour. His father benefits from Gregor's toil, using the surplus value of his labour to accumulate a modest capital. This dynamic mirrors the paradigm of worker

► Exploitation by Family

exploitation described by Marx, wherein labour is expropriated for the benefit of others, perpetuating Gregor's servitude and bondage.

► Loss of Self

**Loss of Self:** Gregor's metamorphosis represents a drastic loss of self, exacerbating his existing sense of alienation. His transformation into vermin serves as a tangible manifestation of the self-estrangement that existed even before his physical metamorphosis. Gregor's inability to free himself from his job due to his father's surplus capital further underscores his entrapment and disconnection from his true desires and identity.

► Dehumanization in societal norms

Overall, Kafka's exploration of self-alienation in "Metamorphosis" reveals the devastating consequences of societal expectations, familial obligations, and exploitative labour practices on individual identity and autonomy. Gregor's transformation serves as a stark reminder of the dehumanising effects of being reduced to a mere instrument of economic productivity and familial duty, highlighting the profound complexities of human alienation.

### *Family as Institution*

► Kafka's examination of oppressive institutions

Kafka was deeply intrigued by institutions, which he saw as social organisations with specific purposes, ranging from the household and family to corporations, government ministries, schools, hospitals, and even prisons. However, his focus often gravitated towards institutions where individuals are confined, apparently for their benefit but frequently against their will, such as mental asylums, and prisons. In anticipating themes later explored by Michel Foucault in the second half of the 20th century, Kafka closely analysed these institutions, revealing how they oppress the bodies and minds of their inhabitants and, in his later works, explored the potential for resistance and escape.

► Family as oppressive institution

The family is the primary institution under focus in "Metamorphosis". For Kafka, the family is a site of oppression. This oppression is vividly represented in Gregor Samsa's room layout, which features three doors (all of which Gregor locks at night). At the beginning of the story, at each door we see a member of his family—his father, mother, and sister—knocking and urging him to get up and go to work. It is not so much the unkindness and abuse from his parents that Gregor suffers from, but the suffocating bond created by parental affection that proves difficult to resist.

In "Metamorphosis," as in Kafka's other works like "Judgement," characters often find themselves doomed by

- ▶ Parental love as a doomed trap

their love for their parents. Gregor Samsa, the compliant son, supports the family single-handedly after his father's business fails. However, after his transformation, he discovers that his father had saved some capital and didn't actually need Gregor's self-sacrifice. Eventually, Gregor's family loses interest in him, using his room to store junk. When Gregor frightens away their lodgers, they matter-of-factly conclude that the insect cannot be Gregor.

- ▶ Dehumanization and familial rejection

Their self-deception is evident in their confusion of pronouns, initially denying that 'it' can be Gregor, then referring to him as 'he' again. His sister says, "But this animal plagues us." This dehumanises Gregor, reducing him to a true vermin. Yet, despite this treatment, Gregor feels no resentment. His thoughts are filled with tenderness and love for his family, and he ultimately dies full of meek love for them, even though they had discarded him.

- ▶ Familial dynamics

Kafka's portrayal of the family as an institution highlights the complexities of familial dynamics and the power dynamics at play within it, illustrating how love and duty can become overbearing forms of oppression.

- ▶ Social decay and existential discrepancy

In a sense Samsa's "metamorphosis" to a vermin shows that the society they live in is so rotten that it is fit only for vermins. The truly sensitive ones- in the story- Gregor Samsa- alone feel this existential discrepancy they are in.

## Summarised Overview

The second section focuses on Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and explores the motif of transformation, and themes of self-alienation, existential angst, and the family as an institution. The story delves into Gregor's profound sense of alienation and isolation following his physical transformation into a vermin. As Gregor grapples with his new existence, his internal struggles are juxtaposed with the reactions of his family members and others. Kafka's exploration reveals the devastating consequences of societal expectations and familial obligations on individual identity and autonomy, emphasizing the dehumanizing effects of being reduced to a mere economic instrument. Additionally, Kafka portrays the family as a complex institution where love and duty can become stifling, illustrating the power dynamics within familial relationships.

## Assignments

1. How does Gregor's physical transformation into an insect symbolize deeper themes of alienation and estrangement in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*?
2. What role does Gregor's sister, Grete, play in the narrative, and how does her character evolve throughout the story?
3. How does Kafka explore the theme of family dynamics and the institution of the family in *Metamorphosis*?
4. In what ways does Gregor's relationship with his family reflect broader societal issues such as exploitation, duty, and the loss of identity?
5. How does Kafka use Gregor's physical transformation as a metaphor to critique the dehumanizing effects of modern society and its expectations?

## Suggested Reading

1. Kafka, Franz. "The Metamorphosis". *The Complete Stories of Franz Kafka*. Trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, Tania and James Stern. Schocken, 1971.
2. Nabokov, Vladimir. "Lecture on Franz Kafka's Metamorphosis." *Lectures on Literature*, Ed. Fredson Bowers, Mariner Books. 2002.
3. Mairowitz, David Zane, et al. *Introducing Kafka: A Graphic Guide*. Icon, 2011.
4. Robertson, Ritchie. *Kafka: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2004.

## Reference

1. Kafka, Franz. "The Metamorphosis". *The Complete Stories of Franz Kafka*. Trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, Tania and James Stern. Schocken, 1971.
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4. Robertson, Ritchie. *Kafka: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2004.



## Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU

സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യായാൽ സ്വതന്ത്രരാകണം  
വിശ്വപൗരരായി മാറണം  
ശ്രദ്ധപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം  
ഗുരുപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കണേ

കുതിരുട്ടിൽ നിന്നു ഞങ്ങളെ  
സൂര്യവീഥിയിൽ തെളിക്കണം  
സ്നേഹദീപ്തിയായ് വിളങ്ങണം  
നീതിവൈജയന്തി പറണം

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ജാതിഭേദമാകെ മാറണം  
ബോധരശ്മിയിൽ തിളങ്ങുവാൻ  
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# European Literature

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