PGEG S4 04 (A)

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Modern European Literature

SEMESTER IV

ENGLISH

BLOCK 2

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Subject Experts

Prof. Pona Mahanta, Former Head, Department of English, Dibrugarh University

Prof. Ranjit Kumar Dev Goswami, Former Srimanta Sankardeva Chair, Tezpur University

Prof. Bibhash Choudhury, Department of English, Gauhati University

Course Coordinators : **Dr. Prasenjit Das,** Associate Professor, Department of English, KKHSOU

SLM Preparation Team

UNITS	CONTRIBUTORS
5	**Debobhushan Borah**, Department of English, Majuli College
6	**Arfan Hussain**, Research Scholar, IITG
7	**Dr. Manab Medhi**, Department of English, Bodoland University
8-10	**Dr. Prasenjit Das**

Editorial Team

Content : Units 5, 7-10 : **Prof. Pona Mahanta**

Units 6 : **Dr. Manab Medhi**

Structure, Format & Graphics: Dr. Prasenjit Das

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SEMESTER 4

MA IN ENGLISH

COURSE 4: (OPTION A) MODERN EUROPEAN LITERATURE

BLOCK 2: EUROPEAN POETRY AND FICTION

DETAILED SYLLABUS

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BLOCK 2: INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in the Course Introduction, this Block comprises a total of six units that deal with European poetry and fiction.

Unit 5: In this unit, we shall read about the French poet Charles Baudelaire and his poem "Correspondences". "Correspondences", which is an important poem in *Les Fleurs du mal* (*The Flowers of Evil),* indicates a belief that there exists a relationship between the physical world and a spiritual world. From your reading of a poem, you will get to know that Baudelaire's poetry can be considered an antecedent to symbolism.

Unit 6: In this unit, we shall deal with another European poet Federico Garcia Lorca with reference to his poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias". Federico Garcia Lorca is widely regarded as Spain's most distinguished twentieth-century writer. The poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias" is divided into four sections that have relevance with the four stages of human psyche.

Unit 7: In this unit, we shall be introduced to the poem "Ars Poetica" composed by Pablo Neruda. This poem is one of Neruda's most discussed poems that explores the experience of the torment, pain, and death and decay that the artist has to undergo while engaged in the moment of composing poetry or creating art.

Unit 8: This unit shall deal with the German writer Franz Kafka and his short story "The Metamorphosis". Kafka is one of the most powerful voices of literary modernism. Although Kafka hails from Germany, his far fletched influence on the literatures of other countries is worth mentioning. This is the story of a man who, one morning, discovers that he has turned into an insect: "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous vermin." This famous and shocking beginning indicates a total subversion of the 19th century realism in storytelling.

Unit 9 & 10: These units will introduce us to the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky and his novel *Crime and Punishment.* The novel is based on Raskolnikov, a poor university student who makes a plan to kill an old woman, Alyona Ivanovna—a pawnbroker. Finally, he commits the crime in order to test his own ideas about the notion of conscience, morality and human nature. Following the murder, Raskolnikov undergoes tremendous emotional turmoil, and his sense of guilt and self-doubt makes him confess and suffer the consequences.

While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you know some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also read about some relevant ideas and concepts in “LET US KNOW” along with the text. We have kept “CHECK YOUR PROGRESS” questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. The hints for the answers to these questions are given at the end of the unit. We strongly advise that you answer the questions immediately after you finish reading the section in which these questions occur. We have also included a few books in the “FURTHER READING” which will be helpful for your further consultation. The books referred to in the preparation of the units have been added at the end of the block. As you know the world of literature and criticism is too big, we strongly advise you not to take a unit to be an end in itself. Despite our attempts to make a unit self-contained, we advise that you read the original texts of the authors prescribed as well as other additional materials for a thorough understanding of the contents of a particular unit.

UNIT 5: CHARLES BAUDELAIRE: "CORRESPONDENCES"

UNIT STRUCTURE

5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 Charles Baudelaire: The Poet

- 5.3.1 His Life
- 5.3.2 His Works

5.4 The Poem: "Correspondences"

- 5.4.1 The Text of the Poem
- 5.4.2 Reading the Poem
- 5.4.3 Major Themes
- 5.4.4 Baudelaire's Poetic Style

5.5 Critical Reception of Baudelaire

5.6 Let us Sum up

5.7 Further Reading

5.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

5.9 Possible Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- reflect on the life and works of Charles Baudelaire
- discuss the various issues related to the poem "Correspondences"
- make an assessment of the reception of the poem and of Baudelaire
- form an idea of how movements such as symbolism and modernism are related to the poetry of Baudelaire
- form an idea of Charles Baudelaire as a major French poet

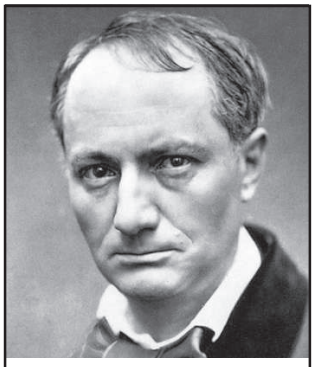
5.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of Block 2 of the course on Modern European Literature. In this unit, we shall discuss the French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) and his poem "Correspondences". We shall note that Baudelaire undeniably occupies a prominent place among the great poets of the world. Being a remarkable litterateur in the canons of European and world literature, he had rendered tremendous influence on the poets worldwide. Further, he is a significant art critic who had a profound effect on the development of art criticism as well. He also played a vital role in translating the American poet and short-story writer Edgar Allan Poe, and English Romantic writer Thomas de Quincey into French. His literary criticism explored the restrictions and possibilities of the age along with revealing his own aesthetic convictions and practices. Moreover, as Barbara Johnson has opined, Baudelaire did not only extend the range of subjects and emotions available for verse-poetic treatment, but also established the genre of prose poetry as it is known today. Baudelaire contributed to the development of Aestheticism as he believed in the claim made by Edger Allan Poe that 'a poem written solely for the poem's sake'. Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* (*The Flowers of Evil)* can be seen as the symbolic manifesto of French poetry. "Correspondences", which is an important poem in this collection, indicates a belief that there exists a relationship between the physical world and a spiritual world. By the time we finish reading this unit, we shall learn how such a view on the part of Baudelaire can be seen as an antecedent to Symbolism.

5.3 CHARLES BAUDELAIRE: THE POET

In the following sub-sections, we shall briefly study the life and works of Charles Baudelaire, one of most significant poets in French literature who also contributed to the development of literary modernism in Europe.

5.3.1 His Life



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Charles_Baudelaire

Charles Baudelaire was born in Paris in 1821. His father Joseph-Francois Baudelaire was a senior civil servant and his mother was Caroline Archimbaut Dufays. Baudelaire's father died in 1827 when Baudelaire was only six. The following year, Caroline married Lieutenant Colonel Jacques Aupick, who later became an ambassador of France. Baudelaire had a very cordial attachment to his mother, but he became intensely upset when she married Jacques Aupick. Their family shifted to Lyon in the year 1833 where Baudelaire attended a military boarding school. He was irregular in his studies, sometimes attentive or at times prone to idleness. He returned to Paris in and attended the Louis-le-Grand there. He was expelled from the college, Louis-le-Grand in 1837. He then decided to embark upon literary career instead of his stepfather's wish to be a diplomat.

Baudelaire spent the next two years in 'Latin Quarter' chasing a career as a writer and accumulating debt. Some sources indicate that he contracted syphilis around this time. Subsequently, his parents sent him on ship to Calcutta, India in 1841, as they expected that the experience would help reform his bohemian urges. It provided good impressions of the sea, sailing, and exotic ports, which he later employed in his poetry. However, he returned to Paris in 1842. While he had returned to the native soil, he received a large inheritance. It rendered him to live the life of a rich man. He developed a love for clothing and spent his days in the art galleries and cafes of Paris. Meanwhile, he also started using drugs such as hashish and opium. During that time, Baudelaire fell in love with Jeanne Duval, who inspired the "Black Venus" section of *Les Fleurs du mal* (*The Flowers of Evil)*. However, he had spent nearly half of his

inheritance by 1844. His family won a court order that appointed a lawyer to manage Baudelaire's fortune and forfeit him little "allowance" for the rest of his life. Subsequently, Baudelaire started to write art criticism, essays, and reviews for various journals in an attempt to supplement his income. His early criticism of contemporary French painter such as Eugene Delacroix earned him a reputation as an important critic. In 1847, he published the autobiographical novella *La Fanfarlo*. He also took part in the 'Revolutions of 1848' and wrote for a revolutionary newspaper. The task was indeed momentary.

His first publications of poetry appeared in different journals in the mid-1840s. In 1854 and 1855, he published translations of Edgar Allan Poe whom he called a "twin soul". His translations were widely praised in France. The first edition of *The Flowers of Evil* was published in 1857. After its publication, it was criticised for violating public morality as some poems of the volume treated lesbian love, sadism, and also questioned conventional morality. The second edition in 1861 dropped the six poems that were banned by the Public Safety section of French Administration. The ban on these poems was not lifted in France until 1949. In 1861, Baudelaire added thirty-five new poems to the collection. Though at first *The Flowers of Evil* afforded Baudelaire a degree of notoriety; writers such as Gustave Flaubert and Victor Hugo wrote in praise of the poems. Flaubert wrote to Baudelaire claiming that he had found a way to inject new life into Romanticism and that he possessed a unique voice. Unlike earlier Romantics, Baudelaire rendered a new treatment of the urban life of Paris as he argued that art must create beauty even from the most depraved or "non-poetic" situations.

The Flowers of Evil, with its explicit sexual content and juxtapositions of urban beauty and decay, however, added to Baudelaire's reputation as a controversial poet. Baudelaire enhanced this reputation by flaunting his eccentricities. In the 1860s, he continued to write articles and essays on a wide range of subjects

and figures. He was also publishing prose poems, which were posthumously collected as *Little Poems in Prose* in 1869. By writing these non-metrical poems, Baudelaire was the first poet to make a radical break with the form of verse. This highly original style of prose-poetry influenced a whole generation of poets including Stephane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, and Arthur Rimbaud.

By 1859, his illnesses had increased due to his long-term use of laudanum and poverty. He had aged noticeably. But at last, his mother relented and agreed to let him live with her for a while at Honfleur. Baudelaire was productive and at peace in the seaside town, his poem *Le Voyage* being one example of his efforts during that time. His financial difficulties increased again, particularly after his publisher Poulet Malassis went bankrupt in 1861. In 1864, he left Paris for Belgium, partly in the hope of selling the rights to his works and also to give lectures. His long-standing relationship with Jeanne Duval continued on-and-off, and he helped her to the end of his life. He smoked opium, and in Brussels, he began to drink excessively. Baudelaire suffered a massive stroke in 1866 and paralysis followed. After more than a year of aphasia, he received the last rites of the Catholic Church.

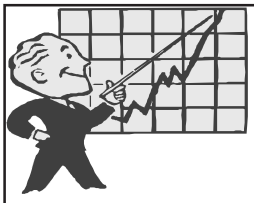
The last two years of his life were spent in a semi-paralysed state in Brussels and in Paris, where he died on August 31, 1867 at the age of forty-six. Although, the doctors at the time did not mention it, it is likely that syphilis caused his final illness. Baudelaire was buried in the Cimetière du Montparnasse, Paris.



LET US KNOW

Baudelaire's views helped in the growth of the movement called 'the Decadence'. The Symbolist Movement, in a way, started with Baudelaire. Again, his great verse poem 'The Swan' is often considered to be a work that instigated literary Modernism. Rosemary Lloyd in *The Cambridge Companion to Baudelaire* states that Baudelaire's influence on

international Modernism was so far-reaching that it is difficult to understand that crucial movement unless one is familiar with Baudelaire. Thus, Baudelaire's predecessors such as Rimbaud saw him as a god; Mallarm´e and T. S. Eliot recognised him for the great genius he was. They all regarded that his impact on twentieth-century poetry was unavoidable and memorable. Baudelaire also inspired several artists such as Gauguin, Matisse, Picasso and Nolan. His poetry has been set to music by some prominent composers. His poetry has been translated by literary icons such as Richard Wilbur, Robert Fitzgerald, Seamus Heaney, Richard Howard and Norman Shapiro. However, they are subjected to a huge range of criticism including those of Walter Benjamin, T. S. Eliot, Georg Lukacs, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and so on. It is seen that sometimes Baudelaire's cultural roots go back into the past, it draws nutrition from the great writers of antiquity, especially from Ovid and Virgil, from Dante, Rabelais and Montaigne, from thinkers and artists such as Sade, Rembrandt, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Delacroix. Thus, we get a unique blend of poetic self in the voice of Baudelaire.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Why was Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil* criticised after its first publication in 1857?

Q 2: What, according to you, accounts for Charles Baudelaire's significance as a great writer?

5.3.2 His Works

Baudelaire is one of the major figures in French literature. His poetry was influenced by the French romantic poets and in turn, he started influencing a number of modern poets worldwide. Baudelaire started his literary career as an art critic while he did a

review of 'Salon' in 1845. In the same year, he also wrote a poem entitled "To a Creole Lady". Many of Baudelaire's critical opinions were new to his time. Some of his views in fact seem remarkably in tune with the future theories of the Impressionist painters. By that time, Baudelaire's translations of the works of Edgar Allan Poe begin to appear in the French press. His *Salon of 1846* published in the next year. This second Salon review gave him additional integrity as an advocate and critic of Romanticism. His support of Delacroix as the foremost Romantic artist gained widespread notice. His novella, *La Fanfarlo* got published in 1847. In 1848, Baudelaire collaborated on a newspaper, *La Salut public*, of which only two numbers appear. In the same year, Baudelaire's first translation of Poe, the tale called *Magnetic Revelation* published.

Baudelaire was a slow and difficult writer, often preoccupied by emotional distress and illness, and it was not until 1857 that he published his first and most famous volume of poems, *The Flowers of Evil*. Some of these poems had already appeared in the *Review of Two Worlds* in 1855. The poems of the volume represent the changing nature of beauty in modern, industrialising Paris during the time. The volume found a small, appreciative audience, but greater public attention was given to their subject matter. The effect on his fellow artists was "immense, prodigious, unexpected, mingled with admiration and with some indefinable anxious fear". Gustave Flaubert, attacked in a similar fashion for his *Madame Bovary,* was impressed and wrote to Baudelaire: "You have found a way to rejuvenate Romanticism... You are as unyielding as marble, and as penetrating as an English mist". However, the major themes of sex and death in his poems were considered scandalous. Baudelaire also touched on lesbianism, sacred and profane love, metamorphosis, melancholy, the corruption of the city, lost innocence, the oppressiveness of living, and wine. Baudelaire's use of imagery of the sense of smell and of fragrances, which is used to evoke feelings of nostalgia and past intimacy, is quite remarkable.

The book quickly became an epitome for profanity among mainstream critics of the day. Some critics called a few of the poems "masterpieces of passion, art and poetry". Some intellectuals of the time led the charge against Baudelaire who responded to the quarrel in a prophetic letter to his mother stating that he had always considered literature and art as independent of morality, and that beauty of conception and style was enough for him. Baudelaire, his publisher and the press, nevertheless, were prosecuted for creating an 'offense' against public morals. They were fined but Baudelaire was not imprisoned. Six of the poems were suppressed, but printed later as *The Wrecks* (1866). Another edition of *The Flowers of Evil*, without these poems, but with considerable additions, appeared in 1861. Victor Hugo wrote to him: "Your *The Flowers of Evil* shine and dazzle like stars... I applaud your vigorous spirit with all my might". Baudelaire did not appeal the judgment but his fine was reduced. Nearly 100 years later, on May 11, 1949, Baudelaire was vindicated, the judgment officially reversed, and the six banned poems reinstated in France.

Baudelaire's translation of Poe's novel *Arthur Gordon Pym* was published in 1858. He then worked on a translation and adaptation of Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater.* Other works in the years that followed included *Small Prose Poems* which is a series of art reviews published in the *Country, World Fair*; studies on Gustave Flaubert; on Théophile Gautier (1858); various articles contributed to Eugene Crepet's *French poets; Artificial Paradises: Opium and Hashish* (1860); and *A Final Chapter of the history of works of Balzac* (1880). Many of Baudelaire's works were published posthumously. His reputation as poet at that time was secure. The writers such as Stephane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, and Arthur Rimbaud claimed him as a predecessor. In the 20th century, thinkers and artists as diverse as Jean-Paul Sartre, Walter Benjamin, Robert Lowell, and Seamus

Heaney started to look at Baudelaire from certain new perspectives and established his worth as a great poet of the 19th century.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: How did Baudelaire begin his literary career?

Q 4: What are the important characteristics of Baudelaire as a poet?

5.4 THE POEM: "CORRESPONDENCES"

The following sections, will guide us to read the prescribed poem "Correspondences" in terms of its various important aspects.

5.4.1 The Text of the Poem

Correspondences

Nature is a temple where living pillars
Let sometimes emerge confused words;
Man crosses it through forests of symbols
Which watch him with intimate eyes.

Like those deep echoes that meet from afar
In a dark and profound harmony,
As vast as night and clarity,
So perfumes, colors, tones answer each other.

There are perfumes fresh as children's flesh,
Soft as oboes, green as meadows,
And others, corrupted, rich, triumphant,

Possessing the diffusion of infinite things,
Like amber, musk, incense and aromatic resin,
Chanting the ecstasies of spirit and senses.

Geoffrey Wagner, *Selected Poems of Charles Baudelaire* (NY: Grove Press, 1974)

5.4.2 Reading the Poem

Baudelaire's "Correspondences" indicates a belief that there exists a relationship between the physical world and a spiritual world. This view is often considered an antecedent to symbolism and is beautifully presented in the poem "Correspondences". The poet reveals the connection between Nature and the Metaphysical world. Nature is presented as a 'temple' whose living 'pillars' speak to man and whose 'forest of symbols' observes him. The poet expresses that perfumes, colours, and sounds interact with each other like echoes in a dark and deep unity. In a way, the poem talks about the unity of nature and human perceptions of interdependence in sense perceptions. One becomes aware of this unity only at exceptional moments. When one loses one's ordinary state of mind, when one no longer separates oneself from one's surroundings and objects from one another, one may be able to perceive the likeness of one sense impression to another—perfume to sight, sound to colour.

In the lines such as "rich, corrupt and masterful", "the sounds, the scents, the colors" and "incense, amber, benjamin and musk" the poet uses rhetorical device called asyndeton. It is used to achieve dramatic effect. These lines also indicate parallelism in which all words are associated to the poem's meaning as a whole. There is an antithesis in the contrast— 'corrupt' yet 'masterful' senses. The 'forest of symbols' that may walk through one's life is a metaphor for the connection between all things outside one's self and all things inside one's self. The "temple of nature" and "forest of symbols" in which a man walks can also be seen as the relation of the body to what surrounds the body.



LET US KNOW

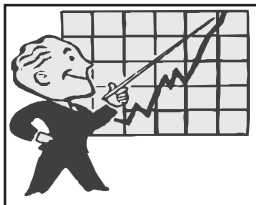
In fact, the combination of body and mind is central to the perception of reality by Baudelaire, which receives fuller expression in the poem. Though the poet

does not include a direct expression of faith in God or gods in the poem, his mystical belief in the world's fundamental unity is clear. Therefore, this particular world order "possesses the power of such infinite things" for the poet.

A central idea reflected in 'Correspondences' is that the material world suggests some abstract meanings. This idea was not new as it had already been developed by the Swedish theologian Emanuel Swedenborg. Besides, this idea proved to be a rich layer in Western European literature starting with Balzac and E. T. A. Hoffmann to W.B. Yeats. Here, the trees, or columns of a temple, seem to be winking knowingly, as though they contain a hidden message, which only the poet can translate. In a way, the poem epitomises the poet's complicated spirituality in order to "praise the senses, raptures and the mind's". What is put forward, however, is a vertical movement in one direction only – from Earth to Heaven – and is not to be confused with the combination of different modes of perception, known as 'synaesthesia'(the transformation of one form of sensory perception into another, for example seeing music or hearing a work of visual art), underpinning the sestet. Through synaesthesia- in which sounds, colours, and scents are tied together to create mental images, where all senses are stimulated through the mind's eye, the poet transfers a French Symbolist impression of Art and Nature onto the reader. The physical sensations are here shown to be interrelated in such a way that a perfume can suggest the softness of touch of a child's skin, the sound of an oboe or the green of a pasture. These, moving from one sense impression to another, are examples of horizontal synaesthesia. Other perfumes – in the instance adduced by Baudelaire, less pure – are rich, sultry and heady. They can lead to the rapture of mind and body and may be characterised as vertical, as well as horizontal synaesthesia.

The sense of ecstasy in the poetic expression, however, suggests a state of "standing outside" oneself. Such an altered state

of consciousness may be induced by hallucinogenic drugs. Baudelaire admired Thomas De Quincey, the author of *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821), and Edgar Allan Poe, whose dreamlike poems and stories were extremely influential in France. Baudelaire himself took opium and hashish. Another inducement to a unitary state of mind, a traditional and universal way, is the practice of meditation in many forms: quieting the analytical mind by dancing, chanting, repeating a mantra, or putting the service of others before one's own ego demands. Most religious sects enable devotees to attain "oneness" with God by such practices. For centuries, "out of body" experiences have been recorded by mystics. Thus, the poem "Correspondences" marks a powerful union of the physical and the non-physical. In a way, the poem is a symbolic representation of the connection of 'Self' to its surroundings. Baudelaire has abundantly used metaphors, synaesthesia, and other rhetorical devices to take the reader on a journey through nature's correspondence with consciousness.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What is the basic idea in the poem "Correspondences"?

Q 6: Why did *The Flowers of Evil* create controversy at the time of its publication?

5.4.3 Major Themes

The major themes of the poem "Correspondences" can be best understood in connection with the other poems of *Flowers of Evil*.

The poem "Correspondences" deals with themes such as men's **relationship with nature, men's sense perception corresponding to the outer world, the relationship between the physical world and a spiritual world** and so on. To an extent, the poem is about the unity of nature, human perceptions of

interdependence in sense perceptions. He based the symbolic mode of the poem on the ancient belief in **correspondences**—**the view that there exist inherent and systematic analogies between human mind and the outer world**, between the material and the spiritual worlds. Baudelaire termed this doctrine as – "Everything, form, movement, number, color, perfume, in the spiritual as in the natural world, is significative, reciprocal, converse, correspondent." Such views in fact worked on in the others poem of *The Flowers of Evil*. An isolated reading of the poem, therefore, may not reveal the larger possibilities that the poet seeks to explore through his poetry. Hence, having a cursory look on the major issues in *The Flowers of Evil* may help you in understanding the main concerns in "Correspondences".

The Flowers of Evil, to a great extent, **extracts beauty from the malignant**. The poems in *The Flowers of Evil* can be seen as confession of hopes, dreams, failures, and sins. Unlike traditional poetry that relied on the serene beauty of the natural world to convey emotions, Baudelaire felt that modern poetry must evoke the artificial and paradoxical aspects of life. He thought that beauty could evolve on its own, irrespective of nature and even fuelled by sin. The result is a clear opposition between two worlds, "spleen" and the "ideal" represented in the poems such as "Spleen" (i, ii, ii, iv) and "The Ideal" respectively. Spleen signifies everything that is wrong with the world: death, despair, solitude, murder, and disease. (The spleen is an organ that removes disease-causing agents from the bloodstream; hence, it has been used as a major symbol) In contrast, the ideal represents transcendence over the harsh reality of spleen, where love is possible and the senses are united in ecstasy.



LET US KNOW

Spleen and the Ideal:

You would like to know that for Baudelaire, the ideal is primarily an escape from reality through wine, opium, travel, and passion. Having the harsh impact of one's failure and regrets, the ideal is an imagined state of happiness or ecstasy where time, death find no place. Baudelaire often uses erotic imagery to convey the impassioned feeling of the ideal. However, the speaker is consistently disappointed as spleen again takes up its reign. He is endlessly confronted with the fear of death, the failure of his will, and the suffocation of his spirit. Yet even as the poem's speaker is thwarted by spleen, Baudelaire himself never desists in his attempt to make the bizarre beautiful, an attempt perfectly expressed by the juxtaposition of his two worlds. As in the poem "Carrion" the decomposing flesh has not only artistic value but inspires the poet to render it beautifully.

Within the poetic journey in *The Flowers of Evil* we see different concerns of the poet. There is, first of all, the traditional one, leading from birth in "Benediction", to death in "Le Voyage", tracing the outline of human destiny. Humanity is shown as seeking for some infinite satisfaction in art and love ('Spleen and the Ideal'), in the life of the city ('Parisian Scenes') in stimulants ('Wine'), in perversity ('Flowers of Evil') in rebellion against the nature of things ('Revolt') and finally, in death ('Death'). Within each of these sections – and often within the poems themselves–a threefold pattern may be detected of aspiration towards the ideal, followed by disillusionment. However, his acute sense of the contemporary social system is well manifested in the opening poem 'Au lecteur'. The insidious corruption, cowardice, stupidity, and self-seeking hypocrisy of the world are related to all human beings, in both mind and body in the poem–which has been a recurring dichotomy throughout his *The Flowers of Evil*.

Women are important source of symbolism for Baudelaire. They often serve as an intermediary between the ideal and spleen. Thus, while the speaker must run his hands through a woman's hair in order to conjure up his ideal world, he later compares his lover to a decomposing animal, reminding her that one day she will be kissing worms instead of him. His lover is both his muse, providing ephemeral perfection, and a curse, condemning him to unrequited love and an early death. Women, thus, embody both what Baudelaire called the elevation toward God and what he referred to as the gradual descent toward Satan: They are luminous guides of his imagination but also monstrous vampires that intensify his sense of spleen, or ill temper. The result is a moderate misogyny: Baudelaire associates women with nature; thus, his attempt to capture the poetry of the artificial necessarily denied women a positive role in his artistic vision.

Baudelaire's poetry also evokes the **presence of death**. In "To a Passerby," a possible love interest turns out to be a menacing death. Female demons, vampires, and monsters also consistently remind the speaker of his mortality. However, the passing of time, especially in the form of a newly remodelled Paris, isolates the speaker and makes him feel alienated from society. This theme of alienation leaves the speaker alone to the horrific contemplation of himself and the hopes of a consoling death. Baudelaire further emphasises the proximity of death through his reliance on religious imagery and fantasy.

Baudelaire's treatment of **violence features** criminal acts of murder and suicide, verbal threats and the solitary melancholy of illness, and generalised suffering. In his portrayals of the artist, the lover and the criminal, a sense of intimacy connects these fictional characters with the reader. In the poems and prose poetry, the identity of the speaker or narrator – frequently masculine, but sometimes neutral – is not known. Accompanied by this mysterious speaker, the reader plunges into Baudelaire's cityscapes, deserted

spaces, cemeteries and boudoir scenes. It may seem paradoxical, but the violence that permeates *Les Fleurs du Mal* has not prevented readers from viewing Baudelaire as one of the greatest poets of desire, love and memory.

Elements of fantastical horror—from ghosts to bats to black cats—also amplify the destructive force of the spleen on the mind. Baudelaire was inspired by Edgar Allen Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination,* and he saw Poe's use of fantasy as a way of emphasizing the mystery and tragedy of human existence. For example, Baudelaire's three different poems about black cats express what he saw as the taunting ambiguity of women. Moreover, the presence of tortured demons and phantoms make the possibility of death more immediate to the speaker, anticipating the fear and isolation that death will bring.

However, the central issue reflected in 'Correspondences' is that the **material world suggests some abstract meanings**. The idea had been developed by Emanuel Swedenborg, which found a place in certain significant writers such as Balzac, E. T. A. Hoffmann and Yeats. In the poem the trees, or columns of a temple, seem to be sparkling. In a way, the poem epitomises the poet's complicated spirituality in order to 'praise the senses' raptures and the mind's'. 'Synaesthesia' has been adequately employed and through synaesthesia—in which sounds, colours, and scents are tied together to create mental images, where all senses are moved through the mind's eye, the poet transfers a Symbolist impression of Art and Nature onto the reader. The physical sensations are here shown to be interrelated in such a way that a perfume can suggest the softness of touch of a child's skin, the sound of an oboe or the green of a pasture. Whatever might be the poet's real intention, the poem 'Correspondences', as stated above, is a symbolic representation of the connection of 'Self' to its surroundings. To do so, the poet aptly uses various metaphors, synaesthesia, and other rhetorical devices in the text of the poem.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: What, according to you, is the main poetic device in "Correspondences"?

Q 8: What are the main aspects in the poetry of Baudelaire?

Q 9: Why did Baudelaire use symbol in the poem?

5.4.4 Baudelaire's Poetic Style

Baudelaire's impact on literary and cultural history can be seen in terms of his using of symbols, figures, images and poetic techniques. Baudelaire combines aspects of the old and the new to create a Modernist poetics. To an extent, early Modernism, the way the term has been used to indicate innovations in terms of content and style in literature and art, emerges from Baudelaire's transformation of French Romanticism, and this transformation continues to influence writers, artists and critics. In essays, translations, verse and prose poetry, from the early poetics of 'Spleen' or 'The Ideal' to the final sections of *The Flowers of Evil* and *Little Poems in Prose*, Baudelaire's trans-romantic aesthetics goes beyond the boundaries of genre to surprise the reader. As the first poet of the Symbolist tradition and precursor to the poets such as Rimbaud, Verlaine, Mallarme, Rilke or T.S. Eliot, his influence on modern poetry is immense. In addition, the importance greatly lies in his poetic style, in his use of symbols. The notion of 'avant-garde' is significantly rooted in Baudelaire. Baudelaire re-articulated the inherited aesthetic vocabulary of Imagination, the Ideal and the Beautiful to make it a modern aesthetic. Therefore, Baudelaire adopted a unique way to narrate his subjects, sometimes putting an implied speaker behind his poetic self.

The introductory poem of *The Flowers of Evil* takes in the element of evil and violence. The power of this poem and many others originate in the new relationship between the theatrical and poetic voice of the speaker or narrator, and the familiar but anonymous 'you', the poem's presumed reader. For Baudelaire, evil

is everywhere: the Catholic dogma of original sin pervades the human condition. With a tone that is disturbingly bitter and intimate, the narrator accuses the reader of every human failing. Evocations of prostitution, hypocrisy and acts of criminal violence lead to the narrator's final dramatic example. The last figure of human weakness presented in the speaker's identification with the reader leads to a strangely anti-climactic ending. The poem paints a final portrait of someone suffering from *ennui*, a French name for the Romantic concept of Spleen. The victim of Spleen is subject to a state of boredom and a disconcerting lack of will power. After a detailed list of humanity's crimes, the personified vice of *ennui* is proclaimed to be the most horrible of all sins. Sometimes the entire treatment of the poem raises the question if the narrator's denunciation of the figure of *ennui*, passively smoking the water pipe, an ironic dismissal of the poor reader. The narrator is ironic here, he dramatically reveals the reader to be his own likeness and his brother. It is a unique style of conveying the thought of the poet. The resemblance between self and other defines Baudelaire's term of likeness. Baudelaire's aesthetic of resemblance leads from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to the Modernism of Arthur Rimbaud, Stephane Mallarme, Guillaume Apollinaire, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Marcel Proust, Nathalie Sarraute, and Samuel Beckett and so on.

In the poem "Correspondences", along with the use of some loaded symbols, the poet evokes Emanuel Swedenborg's doctrine of the correspondences to illustrate the human connection to the natural world. With his vision of correspondence, Baudelaire takes up the question of meaning in a secular context that contrasts 'the spirit' with 'the senses' but gives the last word of the poem to sensuality. The poem also links sensual experience and the vocabulary of art within aesthetics of suggestion. Baudelaire reshapes the Romantic concept of synaesthesia as a form of voluptuous sensual experience and as the translation of that experience into art. Many of Baudelaire's poems and prose poems

achieve the effects of correspondence: like Balzac and Gautier before him, Baudelaire was fascinated by E. T. A. Hoffmann's literary experimentation with synaesthesia. In "Correspondences", voluptuous experience dominates the second quatrain, and the translation into art of sensual exchanges of sounds, colours and sensory qualities occurs in the sestet. The poem accomplishes the art of correspondence that it represents. The plenitude of correspondence connects the power of involuntary memory–the most sensually oriented form of memory–with the evocative powers of art. In his novel *In Search of Lost Time*, Marcel Proust places the programme of Baudelaire's "Correspondences" at the centre of his character's experience of time rendered visible, and the ambition to capture that experience in writing. In the poem, Baudelaire articulates an aesthetic approach to experience that will allow the senses, the arts and thought.

5.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF BAUDELAIRE

Charles Baudelaire has been a crucial author for critics as his works bear different connotations and meanings. He has received a large body of critical responses. One of such criticisms is Walter Benjamin's *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism.* Here Benjamin challenges the image of Baudelaire as a late-Romantic dreamer, and opines that the modern poet was caught in a life-or-death struggle with the forces of the urban commodity capitalism that had emerged in Paris around 1850. Before Benjamin's radical reorientation of the image of Baudelaire, he had usually been considered in purely aesthetic terms-as a late Romantic or as a forerunner of the French Symbolists. For Benjamin, however, Baudelaire's greatness consisted precisely in his representativeness*:* in the manner in which his poetry often expresses the structure and mechanisms of his age. Benjamin was hardly alone among his contemporaries in such estimation of Baudelaire. Benjamin, moreover, finds in Baudelaire a capability analogous to the one he attributes to Kafka in his great essay of 1934: an intimate knowledge of humanity's "mythical prehistory."

You perhaps known that Baudelaire was a touchstone for T. S. Eliot, who translated Baudelaire into English and produced an important essay on Baudelaire's relation to modernity. In Germany, the great lyric poet Stefan George was an important link between Baudelaire and modern German writing. His translation of *The Flowers of Evil* is in many ways important. Eliot and George, however, saw in Baudelaire a writer very different from the one discovered by Benjamin. For Eliot, Baudelaire was the key to adequate spiritual comprehension of modernity, an important predecessor in Eliot's own quest to find a path informed by religion through the modern wasteland. Similarly, for George, Baudelaire's poetry opened onto a vast, wholly aesthetic landscape that was a proof against the indignities of the modern world.

You will find that such criticisms often help the readers of Baudelaire to have some ideas on his reception in subsequent periods.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: How do critics view Baudelaire?

Q 11: Why is Baudelaire regarded a pioneer of modernism?



5.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have noticed that Charles Baudelaire is a prominent poet in world literature as he greatly contributed to the development of Aestheticism, which in turn developed the movement called 'the Decadence'. The Symbolist Movement, it is believed, started with Baudelaire. His great verse poem "The Swan" is often considered to be a work that instigated literary Modernism in France and in Europe. Baudelaire immensely influenced writers such as Stephane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud and T.S. Eliot. The notion of 'avant-garde' is significantly rooted in Baudelaire. His *The Flowers of Evil* is regarded as a masterpiece in world literature. His poetry has been subjected to a huge range of criticism

including those of Walter Benjamin, T. S. Eliot, Georg Lukacs, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan and so on. Baudelaire's poem, "Correspondences" indicates a belief that there exists a relationship between the physical world and a spiritual world. This view is looked as an antecedent to symbolism and is presented in the poem. The poet reveals the connection between Nature and the Metaphysical world. Nature is presented as a 'temple' whose living 'pillars' speak to man and whose 'forest of symbols' observes him. The poet expresses that perfumes, colours, and sounds interact with each other like echoes in a dark and deep unity. In a way, the poem talks about the unity of nature and human perceptions of interdependence in sense perceptions. The central idea that is reflected in "Correspondences" (that the material world suggests some abstract meanings) had been developed by the Swedish theologian Emanuel Swedenborg. The next unit shall introduce you to yet another important modern poet of the 20th century.



5.7 FURTHER READING

Benjamin, Walter. (1973). *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism.* trs. H. Zohn. London: NLB.

Michael Jennings. Jennings, Michael. (Ed.). (2006). *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

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Lloyd, Rosemary. (Ed.). (2005). *The Cambridge Companion to Baudelaire.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

— (1986). *The Conquest of Solitude: Selected Letters of Charles Baudelaire*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Martin, Walter. (1997). *Charles Baudelaire: Complete Poems.* Manchester: Carcanet.

Web Resources:

http://en. Wikipedia.org/wiki/ Baudelaire

5.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: It was criticised for violating public morality as some poems of the volume treated lesbian love, sadism, and also questioned conventional morality.

Ans to Q 2: Baudelaire has tremendous influence on poets worldwide... …he did not only extend the range of subjects and emotions available for verse-poetic treatment, but he also established the genre of prose poetry as it is known today... …Symbolist Movement, in a way, started with Baudelaire… … he argued that art must create beauty even from the most depraved or "non-poetic" situations.

Ans to Q 3: Baudelaire started his literary career as an art critic as he did a review of 'Salon' in 1845... …by that time Baudelaire's translations of the works of Edgar Allan Poe began to appear in the French press… …his masterpiece, his first and most famous volume of poems *The Flowers of Evil* published in 1857.

Ans to Q 4: Baudelaire gave a new treatment to the contemporary poetry with his extensive use of symbols... ...his poetry represents the changing nature of beauty in modern, industrializing Paris during the time.. …in a way, his poetry paved the path of modern poetry with his content and style... …he re-articulated the inherited aesthetic vocabulary of Imagination, the Ideal and the Beautiful to make it a modern aesthetic in his poetry.

Ans to Q 5: 'Correspondences'' reflects a belief that there exists a relationship between the physical world and a spiritual world. ... the poet reveals the connection between Nature and the Metaphysical world. The central idea reflected in 'Correspondences' is that the material world suggests some abstract meanings.

Ans to Q 6: The major themes of the poems such as sex, lesbianism, sacred and profane love, metamorphosis, melancholy, the corruption of the city, lost innocence, the oppressiveness of living, and wine etc. created controversy.

Ans to Q 7: The poet uses a device known as 'synaesthesia'... ...it is the transformation of one form of sensory perception into another, for example seeing music or hearing a work of visual art... …through synaesthesia, in which sounds, colours, and scents are tied together to create mental images, and where all senses are stimulated through the mind's eye, the poet transfers a French Symbolist impression of Art and Nature onto the reader.

Ans to Q 8: The poet's main concerns in his poetry were beauty, nature, sin, sex, love, death, boredom, despair, solitude, murder, disease in a modern industrial world.

Ans to Q 9: Baudelaire believed that there exists a relationship between the physical world and a spiritual world… …this view is seen as an antecedent to symbolism and is presented in the poem… …he reveals the connection between Nature and the Metaphysical world… …Nature is presented as a 'temple' whose living 'pillars' speak to man and whose 'forest of symbols' observes him.

Ans to Q 10: Charles Baudelaire received a large body of critical responses… …for example, the Marxist critic Walter Benjamin challenges the image of Baudelaire as a late-Romantic dreamer, and opines that the modern poet was caught in a life-or-death struggle with the forces of the urban commodity capitalism that had emerged in Paris around 1850… …Eliot translated Baudelaire into English.

Ans to Q 11: As the first poet of the Symbolist tradition and precursor to the poets such as Rimbaud, Verlaine, Mallarme, Rilke and T.S. Eliot, his influence on modern poetry is immense... …such importance greatly lies in his poetic style, in his use of symbols... ...the notion of 'avant-garde' is significantly rooted in Baudelaire.



5.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss Baudelaire as a practitioner of symbolism with special reference to your reading of "Correspondences".

Q 2: Critically discuss the major issues reflected in the poem "Correspondences".

Q 3: Do you consider Baudelaire a pioneer of modernism? Make an assessment in the light of 'Correspondences'.

Q 4: Examine "Correspondences" as a replica of Baudelaire's own aesthetic convictions and his belief of the world order.

Q 5: Comment on the poetic style of Baudelaire in his poem "Correspondences". Discuss the features of Baudelaire's poetry with particular emphasis on "Correspondences".

Q 6: *The Flowers of Evil*, with its explicit sexual content and juxtapositions of urban beauty and decay, however, added to Baudelaire's reputation as a controversial poet. Discuss.

Q 7: In what ways, according to you, does the poem "Correspondences" deal with men's relationship with nature.

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UNIT 6: FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA: "LAMENT FOR IGNACIO SANCHEZ MEJIAS"

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 Federico Garcia Lorca: Life and Works

6.4 Reading the Poem

- 6.4.1 Text of the Poem
- 6.4.2 Analysis of the Poem
- 6.4.3 Major Themes
- 6.4.4 Lorca's Poetic Style

6.5 Critical Reception of Lorca

6.6 Let us Sum up

6.7 Further Reading

6.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

6.9 Possible Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss briefly the life and works of F G Lorca
- provide a brief summary of the poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias"
- discuss the major themes of the poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias"
- grasp a comprehensive idea of Lorca'a poetic style
- discuss the importance of the cultural and traditional practices Spain such as bullfighting

6.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall deal with another European poet Federico Garcia Lorca with reference to his poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias". Federico Garcia Lorca's reputation rests equally on his poetry and his plays.

He is widely regarded as Spain's most distinguished twentieth-century writer. Lorca achieved international recognition as a member of the Generation of 27, a group of poets who is believed to have introduced the tenets of European movements (such as Symbolism, Futurism and Surrealism) into Spanish literature. He was executed by Nationalist forces at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. The poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias" is divided into four sections that have relevance with the four stages of human psyche. The central leitmotif of this lyrical poem is the demise of his bullfighter friend, Ignacio Sanchez Mejias. It is an elegy written on the fondness of the Spanish individuals for wild bulls and the subsequent death of Ignacio who has died fighting heroically with a fierce bull.

6.3 FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA: LIFE AND WORKS

[Adapted from *Gale Encyclopaedia*]



Source:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federico_Garc % C 3% A Da_ Lorca #/media/File: Lorca_ (1914).jpg

Federico Garcia Lorca (1898-1936) was born and raised in rural Andalusia, the southernmost province of Spain and a region greatly influenced by Arabic and Gypsy culture. His life and career often seem to have coincided with the significant events in the historical and political issues of his time. For instance, the year of his birth coincided with the so-called Disaster of 1898, when Spain lost the war against the United States followed by the loss of its last remaining colonies: Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines.

Lorca spent his first eleven years on the vega (fertile plain) of Granada, to the west of the city, his family dividing its time between two villages, Fuente Vaqueros and Asquerosa. His father, Federico Garcia Rodriguez, was a well-off farmer and landowner; while his mother, the former Vicenta Lorca Romero—his father's second wife—was a local primary-school teacher. Both parents, but particularly his mother, exerted a strong influence on Garcia Lorca's character and sensibility in their different

ways. He attended schools in the nearby town of Almeria and studied law and literature at the University of Granada. After moving to Madrid in 1919, Lorca continued his studies at the Residencia de Estudiantes, a centre for writers, critics, and scholars of cultural liberalism.

While in Madrid, Lorca earned a law degree and came in contact with several emerging literary and artistic figures, many of whom would later comprise the Generation of 1927. The members of this group rejected what they considered to be the sentiment and superficiality of Romanticism and instead advocated hermetic expressionism. The years 1924 to 1927 were also a time, after the closure of the Poema del cante jondo/ Canciones phase, when he became engaged in a wide-ranging exploration of very different modes of poetic writing. One vein, or direction, is represented by what turned out to be Garcia Lorca's most successful, most popular, and best-known collection of poetry, *Gypsy Ballads* (1928).

While not as well known as *Gypsy Ballads*, *Lament for the Death of a Bullfighter and Other Poems* (1935) is also considered a masterpiece. This four-part elegy was occasioned by the mauling death of Spain's most celebrated matador, Ignacio Sanchez Mejias, who was one of Garcia Lorca's closest friends. A celebration of Spanish sound, rhythm, and assonance, Lament evidences Garcia Lorca's unique blend of poetry and drama. Despite the fact that Garcia Lorca's work was extremely popular throughout the 1920s, the poet suffered an emotional crisis in 1928, stemming from his belief that he was being stereotyped as a "gypsy poet." Leaving the Andalusian landscape with which he was so familiar, Lorca travelled to New York City in 1929, where he came in contact with images directly contrasting those of his homeland. Deeply disturbed by the monotony of industrial life and America's reliance on mechanisation, Garcia Lorca began writing verse that was later collected in the posthumous volume *Poet in New York* (1940), considered to be his most abstract and surrealistic volume due to its themes of chaos and alienation.

Although Garcia Lorca wrote the drama *The Spell of the Butterfly* in 1920, it was not until he returned to Spain in 1930, shortly after the proclamation of the Spanish Republic, that he composed the majority of his

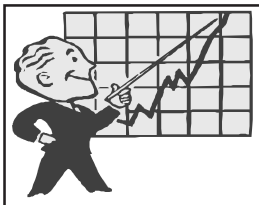
dramatic works. Among his best-known plays are *Blood Wedding* (1933), *Yerma* (1935), and *The House of Bernarda Alba* (1945). *Blood Wedding*, which closely resembles a classical Greek tragedy, is the story of a bride who runs off with another man on her wedding day. In contrast to *Blood Wedding* and the similar follow-up *Yerma*, which are generally considered expressionistic and abstract, *The House of Bernarda Alba* is intensely realistic. This work focuses on Bernarda, a tyrannical woman who virtually imprisons her five daughters in her home.

In 1936, an army coup against the government of the Second Spanish Republic resulted in the start of the Spanish Civil War, a three-year conflict that resulted in the founding of the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco, a nationalist. The political unrest forced Garcia Lorca into hiding, despite the fact he had never aligned himself with any particular political party and referred to himself as a "Catholic, communist, anarchist, liberal, conservative, and monarchist." Garcia Lorca was eventually discovered at the home of a friend and then arrested by Franco's Nationalists. After being detained by the civil government in Granada for several days, Garcia Lorca was executed by a firing squad in an olive grove outside the tiny village of Viznar and buried in an unmarked grave. His murder is often considered a tragically ironic ending for an author who so frequently wrote about death. Scholars maintain, however, that although death is a prevalent theme in his works, Garcia Lorca is perhaps more strongly esteemed for his abiding humanitarian concerns, deep affection for Andalusian culture and landscapes, and passionate dedication to all art forms.

Lorca drew upon all elements of Spanish life and culture to create poetry at once traditional, modern, personal, and universal. Combining classical verse with folk and Gypsy ballads, Garcia Lorca sought to liberate language from its structural constraints and bring out the musicality inherent in Spanish dialect. While initially influenced by the symbolists, who believed the function of poetry was to evoke and not describe, Lorca began to experiment with startling imagery, scenic metaphors, and complex rhythms after coming in contact with filmmaker Luis Bunuel, poet Pablo Neruda, and artist Salvador Dali. Garcia Lorca's dramatic approach to poetry led

him to devote the latter part of his life to playwriting. In his drama, like his verse, Lorca wrote about death, frustrated sexuality, and the relationship between dream and reality. While his poetry and drama continue to be widely studied among literary scholars, Garcia Lorca emphasised that he wrote for and about common people.

By the time Libro de poemas was in the bookshops, Garcia Lorca had already turned his back on the kind of writing it exemplified, focusing instead on a new manner that would absorb him for the next four or five years. He opted for short, often minimal lines, arranged in loosely structured patterns, often employing parallelism, repetition (sometimes with internal variation), exclamations, unanswered questions, and ellipses; the resulting short poems were arranged in thematically grouped sequences he called suites. By contrast, the eighteen poems of the *Gypsy Ballads* are all written in the traditional octosyllabic (eight syllables per line) ballad meter, whose origins go back at least as far as the fourteenth century and which had been perpetuated in a continuous oral tradition down to Garcia Lorca's times. Garcia Lorca, along with the other members of the Generation of 1927, played an influential role in bridging the gap between classical Spanish literary tradition and the European avant-gardes that came after him. Lorca's so-called rural trilogy of plays—*Blood Wedding*, *Yerma*, *The House of Bernarda Alba*—all touched upon death and rebellion against society's restrictions, often featuring women as both protagonists and antagonists, always with tragic results.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What are the major collections of poetry of Lorca?

Q 2: Write about the significance of Lorca's *Lament for the Death of a Bullfighter and Other Poems* (1935).

Q 3: How did Lorca draw his raw materials from Spanish life and culture?

6.4 READING THE POEM

With the help of the following subsections, we shall try to understand the prescribed poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias"

6.4.1 Text of the Poem

"Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias" (Source: http://www.boppin.com/lorca/lament.html)

I. Cogida and Death

At five in the afternoon.
It was exactly five in the afternoon.
A boy brought the white sheet
at five in the afternoon.
A frail of lime ready prepared
at five in the afternoon.
The rest was death, and death alone.

The wind carried away the cottonwool
at five in the afternoon.
And the oxide scattered crystal and nickel
at five in the afternoon.
Now the dove and the leopard wrestle
at five in the afternoon.
And a thigh with a desolated horn
at five in the afternoon.
The bass-string struck up
at five in the afternoon.
Arsenic bells and smoke
at five in the afternoon.
Groups of silence in the corners
at five in the afternoon.
And the bull alone with a high heart!
At five in the afternoon.
When the sweat of snow was coming
at five in the afternoon,
when the bull ring was covered with iodine
at five in the afternoon.
Death laid eggs in the wound
at five in the afternoon.
At five in the afternoon.
At five o'clock in the afternoon.

A coffin on wheels is his bed
at five in the afternoon.
Bones and flutes resound in his ears
at five in the afternoon.
Now the bull was bellowing through his forehead
at five in the afternoon.
The room was iridiscent with agony
at five in the afternoon.
In the distance the gangrene now comes
at five in the afternoon.
Horn of the lily through green groins
at five in the afternoon.
The wounds were burning like suns
at five in the afternoon.
At five in the afternoon.
Ah, that fatal five in the afternoon!
It was five by all the clocks!
It was five in the shade of the afternoon!

II. The Spilled Blood

I will not see it!

Tell the moon to come,
for I do not want to see the blood
of Ignacio on the sand.

I will not see it!

The moon wide open.
Horse of still clouds,
and the grey bull ring of dreams
with willows in the barreras.

I will not see it!

Let my memory kindle!
Warm the jasmines
of such minute whiteness!
I will not see it!
The cow of the ancient world
passed har sad tongue
over a snout of blood
spilled on the sand,
and the bulls of Guisando,
partly death and partly stone,
bellowed like two centuries
sated with threading the earth.
No.

I will not see it!

Ignacio goes up the tiers
with all his death on his shoulders.
He sought for the dawn
but the dawn was no more.
He seeks for his confident profile
and the dream bewilders him
He sought for his beautiful body
and encountered his opened blood

Do not ask me to see it!
I do not want to hear it spurt
each time with less strength:
that spurt that illuminates
the tiers of seats, and spills
over the cordury and the leather
of a thirsty multiude.
Who shouts that I should come near!
Do not ask me to see it!

His eyes did not close
when he saw the horns near,
but the terrible mothers
lifted their heads.
And across the ranches,
an air of secret voices rose,
shouting to celestial bulls,
herdsmen of pale mist.
There was no prince in Sevilla
who could compare to him,
nor sword like his sword
nor heart so true.
Like a river of lions
was his marvellous strength,
and like a marble toroso
his firm drawn moderation.
The air of Andalusian Rome
gilded his head
where his smile was a spikenard
of wit and intelligence.
What a great torero in the ring!
What a good peasant in the sierra!
How gentle with the sheaves!
How hard with the spurs!

How tender with the dew!
How dazzling the fiesta!
How tremendous with the final
banderillas of darkness!
But now he sleeps without end.
Now the moss and the grass
open with sure fingers
the flower of his skull.
And now his blood comes out singing;
singing along marshes and meadows,
sliden on frozen horns,
faltering soulles in the mist
stoumbling over a thousand hoofs
like a long, dark, sad tongue,
to form a pool of agony
close to the starry Guadalquivir.
Oh, white wall of Spain!
Oh, black bull of sorrow!
Oh, hard blood of Ignacio!
Oh, nightingale of his veins!
No.
I will not see it!
No chalice can contain it,
no swallows can drink it,
no frost of light can cool it,
nor song nor deluge og white lilies,
no glass can cover mit with silver.
No.
I will not see it!

III. The Laid Out Body

Stone is a forehead where dreames grieve
without curving waters and frozen cypresses.
Stone is a shoulder on which to bear Time
with trees formed of tears and ribbons and planets.
I have seen grey showers move towards the waves
raising their tender riddle arms,
to avoid being caught by lying stone
which loosens their limbs without soaking their blood.

For stone gathers seed and clouds,
skeleton larks and wolves of penumbra:
but yields not sounds nor crystals nor fire,
only bull rings and bull rings and more bull rings without walls.

Now, Ignacio the well born lies on the stone.
All is finished. What is happening! Contemplate his face:
death has covered him with pale sulphur
and has place on him the head of dark minotaur.

All is finished. The rain penetrates his mouth.
The air, as if mad, leaves his sunken chest,
and Love, soaked through with tears of snow,
warms itself on the peak of the herd.

What is they saying? A stenching silence settles down.
We are here with a body laid out which fades away,
with a pure shape which had nightingales
and we see it being filled with depthless holes.

Who creases the shroud? What he says is not true!
Nobody sings here, nobody weeps in the corner,
nobody pricks the spurs, nor terrifies the serpent.
Here I want nothing else but the round eyes
to see his body without a chance of rest.

Here I want to see those men of hard voice.
Those that break horses and dominate rivers;
those men of sonorous skeleton who sing
with a mouth full of sun and flint.

Here I want to see them. Before the stone.
Before this body with broken reins.
I want to know from them the way out
for this captain stripped down by death.

I want them to show me a lament like a river
wich will have sweet mists and deep shores,
to take the body of Ignacio where it looses itself
without hearing the double planting of the bulls.

Loses itself in the round bull ring of the moon
which feigns in its youth a sad quiet bull,
loses itself in the night without song of fishes
and in the white thicket of frozen smoke.

I don't want to cover his face with handkerchiefs
that he may get used to the death he carries.
Go, Ignacio, feel not the hot bellowing
Sleep, fly, rest: even the sea dies!

IV. Absent Soul

The bull does not know you, nor the fig tree,
nor the horses, nor the ants in your own house.
The child and the afternoon do not know you
because you have dead forever.
The shoulder of the stone does not know you
nor the black silk, where you are shuttered.
Your silent memory does not know you
because you have died forever

The autumn will come with small white snails,
misty grapes and clustered hills,
but no one will look into your eyes
because you have died forever.
Because you have died for ever,
like all the dead of the earth,
like all the dead who are forgotten
in a heap of lifeless dogs.

Nobady knows you. No. But I sing of you.
For posterity I sing of your profile and grace.
Of the signal maturity of your understanding.
Of your appetite for death and the taste of its mouth.
Of the sadness of your once valiant gaiety.

It will be a long time, if ever, before there is born
an Andalusian so true, so rich in adventure.
I sing of his elegance with words that groan,
and I remember a sad breeze through the olive trees.

6.4.2 Analysis of the Poem

The poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias" by Federico Garcia Lorcais divided into four parts namely The Goring and the Death, The Spilled Blood, The Body Laid-out and The Soul Absent.

The first section **"Cogida and Death"** starts with the line 'at five in the afternoon' that seems to repeat several times to mark the intensity of the incident occurred at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. The reiteration of the line is like the repetition of the ringing of a bell in a monotonous way that heralds death to the life of the author's

friend Ignacio Sanchez Mejias who valiantly fights with the ferocious bull in the ring. The news of the demise of his friend received just at 5 O'clock in the evening has had a traumatic effect upon the poet. Remarkably, the line "five in the afternoon" functions as the outpouring of the reality which is nothing but mortal nature of human beings.

The second section, entitled **"The Spilled Blood"**, takes the readers away from the constant reminder of the precise time of death to another kind of narrative that is associated with the incidence itself. Here the readers get to know about the brave fighter Ignacio Sanchez Mejias. The repetition of "I will not see it" indicates his desire to see his friend alive on earth though it is not possible now. He does not wish to see "the blood of Ignacio in the sand". Iggnacio "sought for the dawn but the dawn was no more". The poet invites the Moon to shed its light and the clouds to appear just because he does not wish to see the blood of his dear friend. Ignacio is such a brave fighter that "his eyes did not close when he saw the horns near". His personality is so high that even "there was no prince in Sevilla who could compare to him,/ nor sword like his sword/ nor heart so true".

In the third part of the poem **"The Laid Out Body",** Lorca seems to be angry with the inanimate object like stone on which his friend was laid before death. Stone is used as a symbol of death; Stone is lifeless like death. It embraces the grief, letting it to be, severe. According to the voice of the poet, "Stone is a forehead where dreams grieve…a shoulder on which to bear Time."

Stone is symbolic in the poem that does something more, as it "gathers seed and clouds/ skeleton larks and wolves….but yields not sounds nor crystals nor fire/ only bull rings and bull rings and more bull rings without walls." The recurrence of the words 'bull rings' here emphasises the incidents happened in the ring. Ignacio is now dead, "the well born lies on the stone."

Contemplating the pale face of the his friend the poet laments, "death has covered him with pale sulphur and has placed on him the head of a dark minotaur." Death is the ultimate equalizer; after death "all is finished". There is no return in the part of his friend from the circle of death. He will not be fighting like a hero anymore. The body is now fading away "with pure shape which had nightingales" and now it is "being filled with depthless holes". Death has heralded numbness to every bullfighters as "nobody sings here, nobody weeps in the corner". That day no horse rider "pricks the spurs", a spiky metal wheel fitted to the heel of a horse-rider's boot which is being used to make the horse faster. Ignacio was undoubtedly among the "men of hard voice./Those that break horses and dominate rivers;/ those men of sonorous skeleton who sing with a mouth full of sun and flint." The poet here urges those brave bull fighters to show a lament like a river which will have mists and deep shores" because his friend Ignacio has not embraced a spineless death; his courage could be seen by each and every bystander in the ring of bullfighting. The final lines of this third section shows the ultimate celebration of death itself by Lorca:

"I don't want them to cover his face with handkerchiefs
that he may get used to the death he carries.
Go, Ignacio; feel not the hot bellowing.
Sleep, fly, rest: even the sea dies!"

This fourth and concluding section entitled **"Absent Soul"** seems to be gloomy, bitterness, full of submission and acceptance.

The repeated use of the line "because you have died forever" definitely indicates the actual loss of the life of Ignacio. It constantly reminds the grivers as well as the readers of this poem that once we go into the dark vault, no one will come back to perform his/her earthly duty. Once human beings leave this world no one will remember them. Even the name of his friend will not be in focus after death because death is a final destination without any return.

The bull does not know you, nor the fig tree
nor the horses, nor the ants in your own house.
The child and the afternoon do not know you
because you have died for ever.

But the poem is arguing that what the poet can do is to write an elegy in the name of his beloved friend:

But I sing of you.
For posterity I sing of your profile and grace.
Of the signal maturity of your understandings
Of your appetite for death and the taste of its mouth.

Though the poet will also hug death one day but his song written in the form of a requiem will be read by the generations to come that will of course retell about the dauntless activities done by Ignacio, the bullfighter.

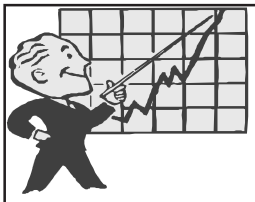


LET US KNOW

An elegy seems to follow the standard form: the initial manifestation of grief and sorrow in the incidence related to death, acknowledgement of the universal nature of loss or death, admiration of the deceased soul, philosophical contemplation on the concept of death, and an ardent endeavour to commemorate the reminiscence of a dead person especially of an acquaintance.

Bullfight seems to be part and parcel sport in Spain and Lorca in this poem tries to portray the outcome of this kind of fascinating but dreadful fight. But, he does not blame this game or amusement as the bull is seen to be worshiped by the Spanish and it is essentially connected to the their traditions and customs. It is considered a challenging task for them to face an aggressive bull; it is like confronting death itself. Lorca in the poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias" endeavours to depict the whole scenario when a bullfighter was facing death in the evening of a paricular day due to the aggressive attack by a bull in the ring.

The author with his creative talent of writing poetry transforms the whole melancholic situation of the menace of death into a celebration of the heroic feat of the bullfighter that indirectly signals the fascination of the passionate Spanish folk for heroic death. The poem shows the grave ambiance of that particular game but nowhere does he seem to condemn or challenge it owing to its connection to the deep rooted as well universally accepted traditional beliefs of the people of Spain. The Bull seems to be adored since the ancient time due to supposed reflection of the instincts of human folk in the images of bulls and even the pictures of them found in Greece, India, Mesopotamia, Egypt and Spain were seen to be depicted on the cave-walls for decorative purposes. Like the bulls, people of Spain also worship those who battle with the powerful animals. This tradition, known as National Fiesta, is symbolic in the sense that similar to its celebration of heroic death during fighting, it celebrates common death of human beings that is constantly facing deadly moments even while leading life itself. Bullfighting is so deeply embedded in the minds of the Spanish people that marking the importance of it Ortegay Gasset comments, "If bullfights can't be understood, to understand our people's psychology will get really harder."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Is the poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias" an elegy?

Q 5: What are the four phases of lamentation "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias"

6.4.3 Major Themes

The following are some of the major themes of the poem.

Celebration of Cultural Practices:

One of the major themes of this poem is the celebration of cultural practices as prevailing in Spain. The Spanish people always

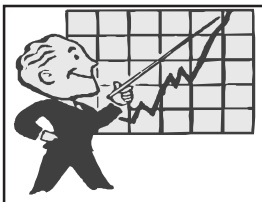
place different aspects associated with the culture in the very first position and they celebrate the feelings of nationalism enthusiastically. Their affection for bullfighting is very much prevalent in the cultural scenario as the citizens consider it as a sign of gallantry and honour. Lorca's poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias" is the best manifestation of the importance of culture and traditional practices that place the spirit of nationalism above anything else.

Death

Death is one of the hovering aspects in Lorca's poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias" as it depicts the elegiac mood of the poet while unfolding the incident of bull fighting that caused severe wounds and finally, death to his friend Ignacio in the fighting ring. Loss is unavoidable; death is a part of human life. Lament for the dead one seems to be preset beneath each line of the poem. The Spanish people believe that it is courageous to accept death through a challenging or courageous task like bullfighting than to the embrace natural death. The practice of bullfighting defines the fundamental character of a nation, which recognises human life as becoming continuously face to face with death.

Isolation and Melancholy

Lorca's earnest longing or attempt for bringing spiritual, cultural and religious reforms to the Spanish society and the subsequent results of these attempts have brought a melancholic mood into his own self. He poetically reveals the problems associated with the acceptance of the self in the hostile world, struggle to surpass isolation with the help of love and sympathy as well as the existential complications. Death and anxiety appears to haunt his life as well as his poetry. By announcing death as noble and heroic, Lorca's poem, for instance, "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias", attempts to teach humanity to take death positively by incorporating it with cultural practices. He does not wish for immortality on earth; but accepts mortal nature of human beings in a befitting way.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What is the most do minant theme in the poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias"?

Q 7: Other than death, what are the additional significant aspects seen in Lorca'a poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias"?

Q 8: How does Lorca reflect Spanish culture and tradition through his poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias"?

6.4.4 Lorca's Poetic Style

F. G. Lorca seems to follow a peculiar kind of style in his poetry where the use of powerful symbol contains the meaning of his literary work. Though the symbols vary from work to work, the recurrent theme is undoubtedly death. Andalusia where Lorca should have been born permeates through his works giving it unique feelings of Spain. His poems have lyrical or song like qualities that talk about the culture of Andalusia. His poetry seems to evoke rather than describe. Lorca's poetic prowess can be noticed in the style he employs in the poem. He uses short lines in asymmetrical patterns to explore his anguish and suffering. He shows proficiency in his use of metaphors, which are unusual as they have their own significance. His symbols are basically the Moon, water, blood and the horse, metals and grass. The Moon symbolises death as well as fertility, eroticism, beauty etc.; water stands for life and vitality; Grass and metals indicate death. His works are full of traditional and folk materials. Conventional songs and other music with the traces of Spanish culture seem to dominate his poetry.

Lorca is a great experimenter with different poetic as well as dramatic performances who was undoubtedly influenced by the miscellaneous artistic forms and styles developed during his time period. His plays and poetry combine components of Andalusian myth with stylish and often surrealistic poetic methods. Due to the experimental nature, his works do not fit easily into any particular

fold; his work vaires widely between different styles, and as he matured as a poet he developed more and more innovative and unusual forms that would undoubtedly revolutionize Spanish-language poetry. In the early days of his poetic career, his verse was marked by modern techniques as well as Surrealistic style which were followed by Spanish artist like Salvador Dali. In the later part, his style was heavily influenced by the poetry of American intellectual Walt Whitman after his travel to America. Moreover, the folk music of Spanish countryside also shaped his poetic tendencies.

6.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF LORCA

Federico Garcia Lorca is one of the celebrated figures in the Spanish world of literature who appears to be the Spain's most famous poet as well as dramatist just after Cervantes. Influenced by the Andalusian revival of 20th century, Lorca's poems are filled with the spirit of nationalism for which his fame has spread far and wide and different critics appreciate his works due to his authentic presentation of the Spanish cultural practices and beliefs with pride and glory.

Xon De Ros in his article "Science and Myths in Llanto por Ignacio Sanchez Mejias" comments on the issue of grief as shown by Lorca due to the untimly death of his friend Ignaciao by a fierce bull in the ring for bullfighting. Though it is a personal loss to the poet Lorca being an intimate friend, it seems not to be a poem evoking personal grief but it has "a wider significance beyond the personal expression of grief". Xon De Ros is trying to express Lorca's sense of nationalism reflected in his poem particularly in "Llanto por Ignacio Sanchez Mejias". His poetry is marked by Ebr Yener as "mood of mourning" as the tone of melancholy and sadness is always there. His way of mourning is peculiar as it is associated with not only the loss of his friend but also the loss for the whole nation because the Spanish culture and tradition always acknowledge gallantry shown by the native citizens. Famous critic Rios Ruiz seems to praise Lorca for his deliberate treatment of the theme of bullfight saying that "If bullfight cannot be understood, to understand our people's psychology will get harder."

The Gypsy Ballads (1928) is widely regarded as a masterpiece of Spanish poetry. In this volume, composed of eighteen poems written between 1924 and 1927, Garcia Lorca incorporated images of Gypsy village life with traditional ballad forms to create verse both thematically accessible and lyrically complex. Utilizing such dramatic elements as action, characterisation, and dialogue, Garcia Lorca created what Londre described as "symbolist dramas in miniature." Since its publication, *The Gypsy Ballads* has been popular in Spanish-speaking countries worldwide due to its focus on common people and its use of idiomatic language.



6.6 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that Federico Garcia Lorca's achievement in the field of literature is not unidirectional in its nature; he deals with various issues of modern men in day today life. He is one of the most popular representative poets of Spain who embody authentic picture of the Spanish world. In the poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias" the narrator goes through four phases of lamentation: sudden shock, denial, anger and finally acceptance. Spanish people consider bullfighter as a hero who is the symbol of courage, aggressiveness and victory. Human life is like a coin having two faces—life and death and Lorca tries two celebrate both the aspects with the help of his poem. The poem is an elegy and the sense of lament is present throughout the poem. It has taught humanity an essential lesson that though death is inevitable one should know how to face it valiantly. No one knows when death knocks at the door of human life; accepting it is certainly an art. The main motif behind the poem is to highlight the fact that facing death is not a big deal in human life as it is an inevitable phenomenon. But to consider it in the positive light, as the poet has done in the poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias", should be the proper way to confront death. Spanish culture is very much attuned to this outlook as in 1930, Lorca stated in a speech that 'Spain is the only country where death is a national spectacle'. He seemed to remain true to his native culture of Andalusia, and to the landscape from where his poetic language has gathered its strength and essence that is truly national in character.



6.7 FURTHER READING

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Web Resources:

http://www.boppin.com/lorca/lament.html

6.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Lorca's major poetry collections include: *Impresiones y paisajes (Impressions and Landscapes* 1918), *Libro de Poemas* (Book of

Poems 1921), *Suites* (posthumously published in 1983), *Caciones* (published in 1927), *Odes* (Written 1928), *Lament for Death of a Bullfighter and Other Poems* (1937), *Primeras canciones* (First Songs 1936), Selected Poems (1941).

Ans to Q 2: *Lament for the Death of a Bullfighter and Other Poems* (1935) is also considered a masterpiece. This four-part elegy was occasioned by the mauling death of Spain's most celebrated matador, Ignacio Sanchez Mejias, who was one of Garcia Lorca's closest friends.

Ans to Q 3: Lorca drew upon all elements of Spanish life and culture to create poetry at once traditional, modern, personal, and universal… …combined classical verse with folk and Gypsy ballads… …liberated language from its structural constraints… …experimented with startling imagery, scenic metaphors, and complex rhythms… …in his drama too, Lorca wrote about death, frustrated sexuality, and the relationship between dream and reality.

Ans to Q 4: Yes, the poem is truly an elegy… …bears a note of sadness and melancholy at the untimely death of the young Spanish bullfighter Ignacio Sanchez Mejias… …elegy appears to follow the standard form: the initial manifestation of grief and sorrow in the incidence related to death, acknowledgement of the universal nature of loss or death, admiration of the deceased soul, philosophical contemplation on the concept of death, and an ardent endeavour to commemorate the reminiscence of a dead person especially of an acquaintance.

Ans to Q 5: The poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias"is divided into four sections that have relevance with the four stages of human psyche… …in all the sections, the most dominant theme seems to be the death which is inescapable.

Ans to Q 6: In the poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias", the narrator goes through four phases of lamentation: sudden shock, denial, anger and finally acceptance… …the news of Ignacio's death in the bullfighting has given sudden shock to the narrator of the poem with a sense of anger… … he learns to accept death with a positive attitude as it is inevitable.

Ans to Q 7: Celebration of cultural practices… …note of lamentation… …isolation and melancholy… …importance of society… …willingness to accept death heroically.

Ans to Q 8: Spanish people always place different aspects associated with the culture in the very first position… …rejoice the feelings of nationalism…. …Spainiard's affection for bullfighting is very much widespread in the cultural scenario… …symbol of chivalry and honour… …this poem best displays the significance of culture and traditional practices that place the spirit of nationalism above anything else.



6.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Write a comprehensive note on "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias" by Federico Garcia Lorca.

Q 2: Discuss the four stages of the poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias"?

Q 3: How does Lorca celebrate the cultural practices of bullfighting in the poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias"?

Q 4: Discuss the life and works of Lorca with particular reference to the poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias".

Q 5: Is death a major aspect in Lorca's poem? Discuss with reference to the poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias."

Q 6: How does Lorca formulate the pattern of grief in his poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias"?

Q 7: Discuss Lorca's narrative style with reference to the poem "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias."

Q 8: Discuss how Garcia Lorca has been received as a poet of the 20th century.

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UNIT 7: PABLO NERUDA: “ARS POETICA”

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Learning Objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 Pablo Neruda: The Poet

- 7.3.1 His Life
- 7.3.2 His Works

7.4 The Poem: “Ars Poetica”

- 7.4.1 The Text of the Poem
- 7.4.2 Reading the Poem
- 7.4.3 Major Themes
- 7.4.4 Neruda’s Poetic Style

7.5 Critical Reception of Neruda

7.6 Let us Sum up

7.7 Further Reading

7.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

7.9 Possible Questions

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss Neruda as one of the most celebrated and highly discussed poets in World Literature
- gain some basic ideas regarding the life and works of Neruda
- introduce yourself to Latin American poetry through Neruda’s poem
- get acquainted with Neruda’s poetry in the context of his time and history
- read “Ars Poetica” critically in terms of its themes and style

7.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we have discussed the poet Lorca with reference to his poem “Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias”. This unit shall introduce us to the Latin American poet Pablo Neruda who will be studies in terms of

the prescribed poem "Ars Poetica". As we read the poem, we realise that this poem is not about the art of writing poetry but about the experience of a poet undergoing the 'labour' of poetic creation. The poem "Ars Poetica" is one of Neruda's most discussed poems that explores the experience of the torment, pain, and death and decay that the artist has to undergo while engaged in the moment of composing poetry or creating art. This unit is designed to provide you with the introductory information and basic understanding of the poem "Ars Poetica". You should not treat the content of this unit as complete and exhaustive as it is just a humble beginning for you to enter the mystic and enticing realm of Neruda's poetry. Beginning with this unit, try to develop your own reading of the poem. Follow the list of references, which will enrich your knowledge of the poetry of Neruda.

7.3 PABLO NERUDA: THE POET

In the following subsections, you will get to read about the life and works of Neruda.

7.3.1 His Life



Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Pablo_Neruda

Pablo Neruda (1904-1973), one of the greatest Latin American poets, was born on 12 July 1904, in the town of Parral in Chile. Pablo Neruda was his first name adopted in memory of the Czechoslovac poet Jan Neruda. His real name is Neftalí Ricardo Reyes Basoalto, christened after his mother's middle name. Born to José del Carmen Reyes Morales, a Railway worker and to Rosa Basoalto, a schoolteacher who died soon after his birth, Neruda spent his childhood and youth at Temuco. It was at Temuco that Neruda got acquainted with Gabriela Mistral, a future Nobel Prize winner, working as the head of the girls' secondary school, and developed a close relationship with her. This correspondence served as one of his early inspirations for writing

poetry. Despite his father's discouragement, Neruda started writing for journals at an age as early as thirteen years. His first publication, an essay entitled "Entusiasmoy Perseverancia", appeared in a local daily called *La Mañana.* Since 1920, he started contributing regularly to the literary journal *Selva Austral* under the pen name of Pablo Neruda. His main intention of publishing under a pseudonym was to avoid his father's disapproval of his career in writing.

In 1921, at the age of sixteen, Neruda went to Santiago and joined the University of Chile to study pedagogy and French, and thought of the career of a teacher. However, soon he realised his weakness towards poetry and decided to devout his whole life to poetry. By 1923, Neruda published his first book of verses *Crepusculario* which included some of his poems written till that time. In 1924, he published one of his most read and highly translated works *Veintepoemas de amory unacanciondesesperada.* This collection of love poems encouraged numerous criticism and controversies on account of its bold treatment of sexuality and eroticism. By the age of twenty, Neruda established himself as a familiar name in the field of poetry across the world. However, despite this worldwide fame, he had to live in stark poverty. In 1926, he published the collection *Tentativa del hombre infinito* (*The Attempt of the Infinite Man*) and the novel *El habitante y suesperanza* (*The Inhabitant and his Hope*).

Between 1927 and 1935, he had to serve the government by being in charge of a number of honorary consulships. This job made him travel to Burma, Sri Lanka, Java, Singapore, Buenos Aires, Barcelona, Madrid and many other places. During this difficult period, he continued writing and published, among other works, *Residencia en la tierra* (1933), a collection of surrealistic poems. This volume marked his literary breakthrough. In Java, he got married to a Dutch bank employee named Maryka Antonieta Hagenaar Vogelzang. After his return to Chile, Neruda was again posted as diplomats in Buenos Aires and then in Barcelona, Spain. Later, he

succeeded Gabriela Mistral as consul in Madrid. Here he developed a lively literary circle that included writers like Rafael Alberti, Federico García Lorca, and the Peruvian poet César Vallejo.



LET US KNOW

Throughout his life, Neruda happened to experience different moments of emotional highs and lows very vividly, and these experiences were well reflected in his poetry. At moments of inspiration, he was capable of intense romanticism. His passionate love affairs, especially with his third wife, often inspired him to delve deeper into the realm of poetry. Neruda's capacity for experiencing and expressing joy and reverence toward life is evident in works such as *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* (1924) and *100 Love Sonnets* (1960).

His experiences of the Spanish Civil War affected him a lot. The most important incident that changed his attitude towards poetry and politics was the execution of García Lorca by forces loyal to the Spanish dictator Franco. After Lorca's death, Neruda became an ardent communist. He joined the Republican movement, first in Spain, and later in France, where he started working on his collection of poems *España en el Corazón* (1937). The same year he returned to his native country, to which he had been recalled, and his poetry during the following period was characterised by an orientation towards political and social matters. *España en el Corazón* had a great impact by virtue of its being printed in the middle of the front during the civil war. Bolstered by his experiences in the Spanish Civil War, Neruda became an admirer of the Soviet Union and of Joseph Stalin, especially for the role it played in defeating Nazi Germany and the idealist views of theoretical Marxist doctrine.

Neruda's next diplomatic post was as Consul General in Mexico City, from 1940 to 1943.By this time, he was already

separated from his first wife and during his stay in Mexico, he married del Carril. Neruda faced another series of severe criticism and controversies over his association with a Mexican painter David Alfaro Siqueiros, who was accused of being one of the conspirators in the failed attempt to assassin Leon Trotsky. In Mexico, Pablo Neruda developed acquaintances with the famous Mexican writer Octavio Paz. However, Neruda's growing interest in Stalinism later created a rift between these two friends.

Neruda returned to Chile in 1943, and in 1945, he was elected senator of the Republic. In the same year, he joined the Communist Party of Chile. Due to his protests against his one-time political alley and then President González Videla's repressive policy against striking miners in 1947, he had to live underground in his own country for two years until he managed to leave in 1949. Neruda took advantage of the slight resemblance between him and his friend, the future Nobel Prize-winning novelist, Miguel Ángel Asturias, and travelled to Europe using Asturias's passport. Pablo Picasso helped him to enter into Paris. Until his return to Chile in 1952, Neruda spent the three years of exile travelling extensively throughout Europe as well as visiting India, China, Sri Lanka and the Soviet Union. Most of his writings published during that period of exile bear the stamp of his political activities. During this period, a Chilean singer called Matilde Urrutia took care of him following which Neruda began an affair with her. This relationship would later culminate into their marriage.

In 1952, the Chilean Socialist Party was going to nominate Salvador Allende as its candidate for the presidential elections. The party was keen to have Neruda, who was by now regarded as Chile's most prominent left-wing literary figure, in their campaign. The González-Videla government was marred by allegations of corruption. Neruda returned to Chile in that year and rejoined his then wife Delia del Carril, with whom his marriage was crumbling. Del Carril came to know about his affair with Matilde Urrutia. She

managed the Chilean officials to lift his arrest and allow Urrutia and Neruda to go to Italy. Neruda spent the rest of his life with Urrutia in Chile.

In the year of 1970, Neruda was nominated as a candidate for the Chilean presidency. However, he extended his support to Salvador Allende helping him winning the election. Shortly thereafter Neruda was appointed the Chilean ambassador to France from 1970 to 1972. During this period in Paris, Neruda helped to renegotiate the billions of external debt of Chile, owed to European and American banks. However, within months of his arrival in Paris, his health began to deteriorate and he had to return home.

One of the most important aspects of the poetic genius in Neruda was that **even in times of great happiness he could slip dark imagery into his poetry**. This tendency also heightens the sense of mystery surrounding the poet's poetic sensibility. When read in a different light, his love poems appear to be a subtle but powerful wail against life's tragedies. Neruda's moments of happiness were often interposed with extreme depression; politics or financial troubles often forced him to abandon his friends, his country, and even his wives. On such occasions, the passion he had reserved for these loves often turned inward and resulted in an aggravating sense of loneliness. The dark undertones in his daily life also were represented in his poems. Even during the times of composing love poems in times of joy, he sometimes composed poems dealing with the crude macabre. *Residence on Earth* (1935) is one such collection that details the sinister energy the poet was able to derive from everyday objects.

It was in this quest to seek out and attempt to describe the essence of life that he most closely resembled, and sometimes imitate, Walt Whitman. Like Whitman's poems, on many occasions, Neruda's poems, like those included in his *General Study* (1950), were an attempt to discover and explain truths across multiplicity of themes. His works often tried to connect nature with nation, with

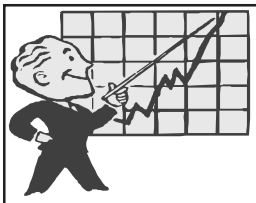
history, as well as with freedom. Paradoxically, Neruda was also able to capture the intrinsic value inherent in plants, animals, and simple objects without unduly colouring the odes with emotion. His *Elementary Odes* (1954) also followed Whitman's lead, and were heralded for their insightful brand of simplicity. Neruda's greatest literary success was his ability to approach the grandiose and the minute, the tragic and the joyous, with equal patience and reverence.

Neruda's views on Time and Death

As a poet, Neruda differed starkly from his European counterparts in his treatment of time and death. In the traditional Western poetry obsessed with death, time is often represented as winged, a thing in constant flux, a fleet-footed phenomenon in eternal hurry. However, it was not so in the case of Neruda. For Neruda, each moment that passes by emerges into a silent and slowly accumulating menace that would fill his environment. In him, time grows like a parasitic plant, eating away at life. Time, for Neruda, is a symbol serving as a bridge between the related themes of death and of solitude.

Neruda also tried to give voice to the oppressed. In the year of 1945, Neruda composed one of his most famous poems *Las alturas de Macchu Picchu*, which formed the earlier part of his monumental work *Canto General.* In this poem, Neruda strives to show his concern for man. Man is what matters because 'man is wider than all the sea'. In this poem, Neruda wants to get through all the men who died building the city so that they might rise again to birth – with him and through him – as his brothers. It was his desire to give voice to the voiceless, give freedom to the captives, give energy to the weak and give life to the dying that encouraged Neruda to compose such poems. *Canto General* is one of his greatest achievements that represent the poet's boundless ambition of translating history into the language of lyric. The poem involves the whole of the South American continent, its flora and fauna, its dreams and realities. He explores the history of the people of his country Chile that goes deep into the history of the continent.

In 1971, Neruda was awarded the Nobel Prize. The next year he was awarded with the prestigious Golden Wreath Award at the Struga Poetry Evenings. In 1973, Neruda was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Despite his illness, Neruda was extremely happy during his final years in Chile, and his love for his country served as an equally powerful contributor to his poetry. He passed away in the year of 1973.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Which are the important aspects of Neruda's poetry?

Q 2: How did the Spanish Civil War affect Neruda as a poet?

Q 3: How did Neruda differ from the other European poets in terms of his views on Time and Death?

Q 4: What is the significance of *Canto General* by Pablo Neruda?

7.3.2 His Works

As a poet, who earned worldwide popularity at a tender age, both because of his intense poetic sensibility as well as radical political stance, Neruda drew his inspirations from various great authors of the past as well as his contemporary times. As a boy, Neruda met Gabriela Mistral, a future Nobel Laureate and derived his early inspirations from her. In 1933, Neruda met the Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca in Buenos Aires, Argentina and developed deep friendship with him. Lorca, along with many other renowned writers and poets, had deep influence in the development of political attitude in his poetry. Garcia Lorca also introduced him to influential Communists and publicly supported Neruda's poetry. Neruda developed interest in both national and international aspects of literature. He was inspired to translate foreign works by many older and influential authors like William Blake and William Shakespeare. At the same time, he also carefully studied the major Spanish language writers like Garcia Lorca, Jorge Luis Borges, and Miguel

de Cervantes. However, throughout his career, Neruda acknowledged that Walt Whitman had been his deepest inspiration.

Neruda began his career as a writer at a very early age. On 18th July, 1917, when he was only thirteen, he published his first work, an essay entitled *Entusiasmoyperseverancia* (*Enthusiasm and Perseverance*) in the local daily newspaper under the name Neftalí Reyes. As Neftalí Reyes, he published numerous poems, such as "Misojos" ("My eyes"), and essays in local magazines from 1918 to mid-1920. By mid-1920, when he adopted the pseudonym Pablo Neruda, he established himself as a well-known author of poetry, prose, and journalism. His first volume of verse, *Crepusculario* (*Book of Twilights*), was published in 1923. In 1924, he published his next volume of love poems *Veintepoemas de amory unacancióndesesperada* (*Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*), which was highly controversial and severely critiqued by readers for its eroticism, especially in connection with the poet's young age.



LET US KNOW

You will like to know that the Chilean publishing house Nascimento, which published his earlier collection, refused to print the love poems, as it was felt that they were too erotic to be published at the cost of the good reputation of the press. Love and sex have long been traditional subjects of poetry. However, it was the treatment of the erotic theme that challenged the traditional construction of love and sex. Idealism, that centred the earlier representations, was replaced by sensualism, abstraction by concreteness. In *Veintepoemas de amor*, love was not sentimental and unrequited; through the representation of love, Neruda rather openly celebrated the exalted erotic passion and the sensual delights of the flesh. Neruda, in this collection, set aside all the poetic conventions in order to celebrate the call of anonymous flesh and carnal pleasure: the body of woman, any woman, all women.

In 1926, Neruda published the poetry collection *Tentativa del hombre infinito* (*The Attempt of the Infinite man*) and the novel *El habitantey suesperanza* (*The Inhabitant and his Hope*). *Residencia en la tierra*, published in 1933, was a collection of some surrealistic poems. After joining the Republican movement, first in Spain, and later in France, where he started working on his collection of poems *España en el Corazón* and published it in 1938. In 1939, as the Consul General in Mexico, Neruda rewrote his *Canto General de Chile* and transformed it into an epic poem about the whole South American continent, its nature, its people and its historical destiny. This work, entitled *Canto General*, consisting of approximately 250 poems brought together into fifteen literary cycles, was published in Mexico in 1950, and also underground in Chile. It constitutes the central part of Neruda's production. Shortly after its publication, *Canto General* was translated into some ten languages and acclaimed critical response from across the world.

In 1943, Neruda made a tour of Peru, where he visited Machu Picchu. The beauty of the Inca citadel later inspired *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*, a book-length poem in twelve parts, which he completed in 1945, and which marked a growing awareness and interest in the ancient civilisations of the Americas, themes he was to explore further in *Canto General*. In *Alturas*, Neruda celebrated the achievement of Machu Picchu, but also condemned the slavery, which had made it possible. In *Canto XII*, he called upon the dead of many centuries to be born again and to speak through him. Martín Espada, poet and professor of creative writing at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, has hailed the work as a masterpiece, declaring "there is no greater political poem".

Neruda's admiration of Soviet Union and Marxist ideologies echoed in poems such as "Canto a Stalingrado" (1942) and "Nuevo canto de amor a Stalingrado" (1943). In 1953, Neruda was awarded the Stalin Peace Prize. In the same year at Stalin's death, Neruda wrote an ode to him; during World War II, he wrote poetry in praise

of Fulgencio Batista "Saludo a Batista", ("Salute to Batista") and later to Fidel Castro too. During his days in exile in various European countries between 1949 and 1952, what Neruda published carried the mark of his political activities. *Las Uvas yel Viento,* published in 1954, can be regarded as the diary of Neruda's political exile. In *Odaselementales* (1954-1959) his message is expanded into a more extensive description of the world, where the objects of the hymns-things, events and relations-are duly presented in alphabetic form.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Name the poets who inspired Neruda.

Q 6: Why did the Chilean publishing houses refuse to publish the poems of Neruda?

7.4 THE POEM: "ARS POETICA"

Read the following subsections to gain a better grasp of the various aspects of the poem "Ars Poetica".

7.4.1 The Text of the Poem

The poem "Ars Poetica" was published in his collection *Residence on the Earth* (1933). The text of the poem in English translation is as follows:

Between shadow and space, young girls and garrison,
saddled with a strange heart, with funeral dreams,
taken suddenly pale, my forehead withered
by the rage of a widower's grief for each day of lost life —
oh for each invisible drop I drink in a stupor
and for each sound I harbour, trembling,
I nurse the same far thirst, the same cold fever,
a noise in labour, a devious anguish —
as if thieves or emanations were coming —
in the enveloping shell, rooted, profound,

like a humiliated scullion, a bell cracked a little,
a mirror tarnished, the fug of a deserted house
whose guests come in at night sloshed to perdition,
with a stench of clothes scattered on the floor
and a yearning for flowers —
another way to put it perhaps, a touch less sadly:
but the hard truth is if you want it so,
this wind that whacks at my breast,
the unbounded expanse of night collapsing in my bedroom,
the morning's rumours afire with sacrifice
now beg of me this prophecy I have, with mournfulness
and a lurch of objects calling without answers,
with a truceless movement, a name I can't make out.

7.4.2 Reading the Poem

The poem "Ars Poetica" narrativises the experience of a creator, a poet or an artist, at the moment of creativity. The speaker does not seem to be addressing anyone as audience, either real or imaginary; the voice seems to be talking to itself as a kind of brooding over a personal journey to the inner self. The narrative seems to be a monologue in which the speaker strives hard at self-exploration and understand the moment of artistic creativity where he himself is the artist trying to give an expression to the ever confusing and paradoxical experiences of life.

In the **first two lines** of the poem, the poet tries to set the stage for the reader, disclosing the conditions in which he has undertaken this journey. It is a situation 'between shadow and space', a realm between reality and dream, between the beautiful and youthful and the dangerous (young girls and garrisons), he starts his journey. The poet does not understand his own feelings as 'saddled with a strange heart' he enters 'with funeral dreams'– with dreams soaked in the feelings of death and despair. In the next two lines, the poet's responds to this situation with a crumpled forehead.

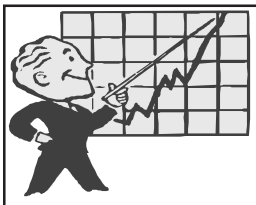
He is filled from inside with a rage that can be compared to the anger evoked by the deep sense of loss experienced by a widower at the realisation of the lost possibilities of life at the death of his companion. This anguish grows within him, unknowingly like the 'invisible drop' of emotions that he does 'drink in a stupor'. The poet is aware as well as watchful of everything happening outside; 'for each sound' that he harbours, he nurses the same feeling of anguish, which he understands as the 'same far thirst' and 'the same cold fever'. Both these 'thirst' and 'fever' condition an internal burning desire for something unknown, unrealised that well up the anguish inside of the poet. This anguish torments him from within; he shrieks like a woman at childbirth. He experiences a sensation as if ghosts or apparitions coming, flying towards him.

In **lines 11-12**, the images of 'the enveloping shell,' the 'humiliated scullion' refer to the defence mechanisms we employ in order to cope with anguish. The image of the mirror being tarnished refer to the defragmented, disintegrated understanding of the self– confusing and multiple layered images of the face being reflected on the pieces of the broken mirror. The defence mechanism, in terms of the 'enveloping shell,' distances the poet from the self. In lines 12-16, the poet draws the image of the 'fug' of a 'deserted house', where drunken guests come stumbling in with their stinking clothes. He employs the images of the fug in the deserted house, the drunken guests as signifiers of death and decay. However, this dogged situation itself has a desire to get purified; the environment of death and decay has a yearning to get recovered; the stinking house itself has a yearning for the fresh smell of the flowers. The house desires for the freshness of the flowers, which will balance the stench and the mustiness.

Lines 17-24 are part of the poet's attempt to re-phrase his realisation in gentler, plainer terms. For him, the hard, cold truth is that the 'wind that whacks at' his heart – all of these vast, descriptive dreams, possibly the answers to all the questions of the universe –

dissolve in the in-between state. The poet is describing a feeling of forgetting what it was he was dreaming, what it was he was about to discover or realize. He wakes up before he can solve the mystery. Every night, the poet receives an infinite amount of substance, knowledge and prophecy in his dreams.

This poem is a description of that moment of the artist being engaged in the process of creation and the detailing of how he can only capture a fraction of his experiences with the world with his writing. The usage of the 'shell' metaphor is of particular note in this work. The description of the humiliated scullion brings to mind an image of a servant wearing a trembling, faltering smile while being slated by a superior. The shell that he refers to is the false smile worn while enduring the abuse the world unleashes on the individual. The tarnished mirror is also significant because it is a metaphor for the defence mechanisms that humans employ in traumatic situations. However, we do not see clearly in the tarnished mirror, as the world does not see us clearly, when we erect our facades. Therefore, it refers to a condition when recreation of the experiences in art becomes difficult and tormenting.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: What does the poem "Ars Poetica" narrativise?

Q 8: What, according to you, is the poem "Ars Poetica" all about?

7.4.3 Major Themes

In "Ars Poetica", unlike what the title of the poem suggests, the poet does not deal with the art of composition of poetry or creation on art. Instead, he presents an image of the **artist at work**. The artist is a kind of sentinel to everything that surrounds life; he is alert to the activities within world and responsible for capturing every sign of life, no matter how vague or insignificant that might seem. And, there is no necessity to impose an absolute order and meaning on

the experience that the sentinel perceives; because to put it into a structure is to afflict it with violence.

The poem is full of paradoxical experiences and explanations that contribute to the development of a sense of **internal confusion significant of the modern world** in which we live. The poet here seems as sensitive as a 19th century romantic; but he is no longer a visionary like them. He simply exposes his inability to understand the mystery of his experience. The poem reads like a catalogue of desolate experiences in which the speaker, who seems to have embodied an extraordinarily sensitive perception, is repeatedly and unexpectedly disheartened by what he sees and feels. It is very much like a dramatic soliloquy, an interior monologue. It is as if a journey into the inner mind, where the speaker, immersed in the free flow of thoughts, seems to be suddenly jolted into another plane of consciousness requiring yet another mode of discourse.

In the poem, the verses scintillate with sensuous imagery despite representing the anguish about the contemporary social order. This poem was written when Neruda was serving as a diplomat, and when his main themes in poetry used to be time, death, chaos and the past. His preoccupation with history, especially Chile's relationship with Spain as an aftermath of colonisation, unleashed certain uncertainties in his mind that led to his fragmented style. Neruda deliberately juxtaposes **the crude against the beautiful** in order to shock the reader out of complacency. Nature, in this poem becomes intensified and there is deliberate reference to vagueness and violence. In the beginning of the poem, the poet clubs together 'girls and garrisons' to induce an understanding of freshness and youth moving towards destruction caused by battles. To express his own sentiments, he uses very uncommonly used but at the same time domestic metaphors like 'a widower's grief' and 'a humiliated scullion'.

The desire to live and recreate amidst **death and decay** is an important theme of the poem. The poem is full of hints and

imageries of death and decay. There is reference to violence in the 'wind that whacks at my breast'. This reference to violence in the wind has political connotations, suggesting the present condition of his country and the people. Neruda has represented a haunted house with fustiness of air. People who come into this stale smelling, mouldy and stuffy house are intoxicated to such an extent that they are ignorant and forgetful of everything outside their world. They are as if in a state of eternal death–'sloshed to perdition' – from where there is no path to escape. In death and decay, the intoxicated people are stark naked in their forgetfulness – as the room is filled with the stench of their 'clothes scattered on the floor'. However, within this environment of death and decay, the house has a desire for life. The 'stench of clothes' discarded uselessly awakens 'a yearning for flower' that would drive out the odour of the other. The environment outside is actually entering the house and the description of the 'night collapsing in my bedroom' is acutely surrealistic where the action of 'collapsing' continues the process of general decay that surround the poet.

The **theme of poetic creation** is an important aspect of the poem. In "Ars Poetica", Neruda talks about the different ways in which inspiration can find a writer and the difficulty of creating a tangible product from it. For him, inspiration comes when he least expects it; through no effort of his. He talks about inspiration coming from 'a tarnished mirror, the fug of a deserted house'. He is inspired by his surroundings, by the experiences of the people around him: inspiration is an external experience that finds him. Neruda has discovered and realised that poetry is not created simply by beauty or what is beautiful; poetry must be recovered or created from a perception of that which appears grim and destroyed, and from the hidden recesses of human consciousness. In the phrase 'a name I can't make out', Neruda refers to that realm which remains undetected, uncared for, and unthought of, in the human heart. It is something whose recreation through pain is necessary to give birth

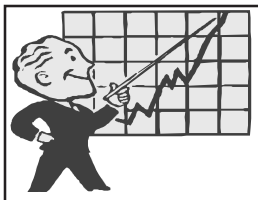
to poetry. The poet precludes the reader from trying to find the traditional aspects of romanticism or romantic, nature imagery in his verse. The 'devious anguish' and 'a noise in labour' emphasize that poetry must be born out of suffering.



LET US KNOW

The poem was originally written in Spanish under the title 'Arte Poetica' which can be translated into English simply as 'The Art of Poetry' or 'The Poetic Art'. However, the title "Ars Poetica", chosen by the translator of the poem Nathaniel Tarn, distances the poem from the English language and invests classical connotations to it. The title "Ars Poetica" connects to the classical ideas on the art of poetry followed by the Neo-classicists and the Romantics. Neruda's art is, however, divorced from both traditions; he is distant from Spanish Neo-classical characteristics too. By presenting a series of disjointed images, Neruda deliberately asserts his break from these traditions.

The labour required to articulate the inspiration for creation is emphasised by Neruda in this poem. The difficulty of communicating the ideas and experiences is paralleled to the difficulty of articulation that an infant has to undergo. Neruda believes that the poet has to begin at a state of pure ignorance, like that of an infant, and then mould his work into perfection of expression. Neruda begins by knowing nothing and grows into the prophet of whom "the unbounded expanse of night collapsing in my bedroom, the morning's rumours afire with sacrifice" (20) beg a prophecy. He moves from learning a language to becoming master of it. However, for Neruda, the process of writing or travelling from a moment of ignorance to the moment of articulating experiences is always conditioned by labour.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: Write a note on the theme death and decay in the poem "Ars Poetica".

Q 10: How does the poet explore his ideas regarding the moment of poetic creation in the poem "Ars Poetica"?

7.4.4 Neruda's Poetic Style

Many critics have commented that Neruda was a self-indulgent writer. This self-indulgence was escorted by his deep feelings about his surroundings and his passionate self-expression. This poem also reflects the same attitude on the part of Neruda. From the description of the poem, it is evident that the poetic voice does not address anyone; the poetic voice is indulged with itself in a regressive manner to the world outside. However, the strong sense of paradoxes and the starkly different ideas clubbed together in the poem develop the strong sensations getting infused with his thoughts.

In case of his love poems, the lyricism was conditioned by intellectual word play. Frequent submission to nostalgia and a deliberate confusion regarding time and birth are other aspects of his love poems. The use of the images of the human body as the objects of sexual desire is another important aspect of his poetry. Escaping from the traditional conventions of love poems, Neruda established the body, not the soul, as the supreme object of desire and gratification in love. He often speaks of the world unseen, books unwritten, and the realm unimagined and unthought of. The magic realism of Garcia Gabriel Márquez's mythical land finds an echoe here.

Neruda's poems are full of easily understood images, which enhance the beauty of his poems. He often juxtaposes the crude against the beautiful in order to shock the reader. Images of the mundane with the strange, the new with the ancient, the rational with the mythical, the crude with the beautiful, the grotesque with

the lucid were often clubbed together by him in order to combine paradoxical thoughts. He often uses surrealistic images whose influence comes from French literature, especially from Baudelaire. In his images of nature, he often echoes the great American poet Whitman who had also influenced his language that carries thoughts intensified with sensibility and feelings.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: Write a note on the poetic style of Neruda in the poem "Ars Poetica".

7.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF NERUDA

Pablo Neruda is one of the greatest poets in the twentieth century and one of the most read poets in literary history. Gabriel García Márquez, the celebrated novelist from Colombia, referred to him as the world's greatest poet of the 20th century in any language. In his book *The Western Canon*, the noted critic Harold Bloom considered Neruda to be one of the 26 writers central to the Western tradition. Along with Marquez, Neruda is one of the prominent writers who have represented the entire Latin American tradition of writing and literary thoughts emphatically in front of the world.

Neruda was such a poet who could embody many styles and many voices. His monumental works are crucial to almost every important change in the twentieth-century Spanish as well as Latin American poetry. Neruda had the remarkable ability to be always ready to welcome and initiate change as he himself has struggled with his own tradition, to his constant need to search for a new system of expression in each new book. Neruda was a poet perpetually in revolution against himself, against his own tradition. Because of this desire for change, he frequently had difficulties in getting so many of the works, which are recognised as major works today, accepted immediately by the public and critics.

Neruda is often categorised by historians to be a member of a group of Spanish poets named as the Generation of 1927. However, he grew

much popular and greater as well as different than his contemporaries like Vallejo, who too remained one of the influential poets. Many critics have commented that Neruda lacked the ability to be critical in his writings on certain contemporary issues, especially in poetry written on Chile and his people and poets. He has also been derided by many for his inclination towards communism. Earning enough laurels since his teenage days as a poet, Neruda wrote in a variety of styles including surrealist poems, historical epics, political manifestos and other prose writings including his autobiography. His erotically charged love poems, especially those published in his 1924 collection *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* invited severe criticism and controversies to the young poet. He often wrote in green ink, which regarded as a personal symbol for desire and hope. During the last few decades of the twentieth century, Neruda became the most quoted poet in the world whose poetry inspired readers from all generations and all ages. His poems have been translated to more than fifty languages all over the world as he still remains one of the most sold and most read poets of all languages all over the world.



7.6 LET US SUM UP

As we finish reading this unit, we have come across various facts and information on Neruda the poet and his poetry. We have come to know that Neruda was not just a poet; he was one of the most influential political activists of Chile in mid-twentieth century. Both Neruda's political life and poetry bear marks of his communist inclination. His poems ranged from themes of naked physical love to patriotism, exploration of the natural world to the songs of the oppressed. The poem "Ars Poetica" represents the poet's philosophy of poetry. The chief thesis of the poem is that the moment of poetic creation is accompanied and conditioned by the experience of deep pain and suffering.



7.7 FURTHER READING

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7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Even in times of great happiness he could slip dark imagery into his poetry… …his love poems are powerful wail against life's tragedies… …his moments of happiness were often interposed with extreme depression… …he often tried to connect nature with nation and history… …he also tried to capture the intrinsic value inherent in plants, animals, and simple objects without unduly colouring the odes with emotion.

Ans to Q 2: The Spanish Civil War changed his attitude towards poetry and politics… …the execution of poet García Lorca by forces loyal to the Spanish dictator Franco… …Neruda became a communist… …joined the Republican movement, first in Spain, and later in France… …Neruda became an admirer of the Soviet Union and of Joseph Stalin… …affected much of his writings.

Ans to Q 3: The traditional Western poetry obsessed with death, time is often represented as winged, a thing in constant flux, a fleet-footed phenomenon in eternal hurry… …for Neruda, each moment that passes by emerges into a silent and slowly accumulating menace that would fill his environment… …in him, time grows like a parasitic

plant, eating away at life… …time a symbol serving as a bridge between the death and solitude.

Ans to Q 4: Here Neruda shows his concern for man… …because, 'man is wider than all the sea'… …he wanted to get through all the men who died building the city so that they might rise again to birth… …the desire to give voice to the voiceless, give freedom to the captives, give energy to the weak and give life to the dying that encouraged Neruda to compose *Canto General.*

Ans to Q 5: Gabriela Mistral provided the inspirations… …Federico Garcia Lorca helped in the development of political attitude in his poetry… …he was inspired to translate foreign works by many older and influential authors like William Blake and William Shakespeare… … Neruda acknowledged that Walt Whitman had been his deepest inspiration.

Ans to Q 6: They refused to print the love poems, as they were too erotic… …love and sex are traditional subjects of poetry… .but Neruda's treatment of the erotic themes challenged the traditional construction of love and sex… …he openly celebrated the exalted erotic passion and the sensual delights of the flesh… ….Neruda, openly celebrated the body of woman, any woman, all women

Ans to Q 7: The poem "Ars Poetica" narrativises the experience of a creator… …the speaker does not seem to be addressing anyone as audience… …the speaker is brooding over a personal journey into the inner self… …It seems to be a monologue in which the speaker strives hard to explore his self and express the ever confusing and paradoxical experiences of life.

Ans to Q 8: This poem is a description of that moment of the artist being engaged in the process of creation and the detailing of how he can only capture a fraction of his experiences with the world with his writing.

Ans to Q 9: The theme of death and decay is central… …connected to poetic creation… …the poet's understanding of his own self… …experience of anguish… …images of death and decay… …idea of rebirth or revival.

Ans to Q 10: The poem is not about the art of creation… …it is about the moment the poet is at work… …a moment of extreme suffering and pain… …a moment when mysterious, confusing, unimagined images and ideas of the world struggle to get expression.

Ans to Q 11: Absence of a visible addressee… …inwardness… …interior monologue… …passionate expression of experiences… …paradoxical thoughts clubbed together… …combination of opposing images… …surrealistic description and so on.

7.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Write a critical reception of "Ars Poetica" with special reference to Neruda's understanding of his function as a poet.

Q 2: Discuss "Ars Poetica" with reference to the central themes of the poem.



Q 3: Give an account of Neruda's use of images in the poem "Ars Poetica". What purpose do the images serve him in the poem?

Q 4: Discuss, in detail, the style of Pablo Neruda's poetry as reflected in the poem "Ars Poetica." Try to compare and contrast your views with reference to some other poems of the poet that you have read.

Q 5: Do you think that the poem "Ars Poetica" thematically does not bear any connection to Horace's classical text of the same title? Respond to it with a critical reading of the poem.

Q 6: Pablo Neruda is one of the greatest poets in the 20th century and one of the most read poets in literary history. Give an account of the critical reception of Neruda.

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UNIT 8: FRANZ KAFKA: "THE METAMORPHOSIS"

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Learning Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 Franz Kafka: The Writer

- 8.3.1 His Life
- 8.3.2 His Works

8.4 Reading the Story

- 8.4.1 The Storyline
- 8.4.2 Major Themes
- 8.4.3 Major Characters
- 8.4.4 Kafka's Narrative Style

8.5 Critical Reception of Kafka and "The Metamorphosis"

8.6 Let us Sum up

8.7 Further Reading

8.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

8.9 Possible Questions

8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of the German writer Franz Kafka
- identify in Kafka the upbringing of a modern writer and discuss his works
- place "The Metamorphosis" in a specific socio-political and historical background of Germany
- discuss Kafka's story "The Metamorphosis" as an important addition to Modernist Literature

8.2 INTRODUCTION

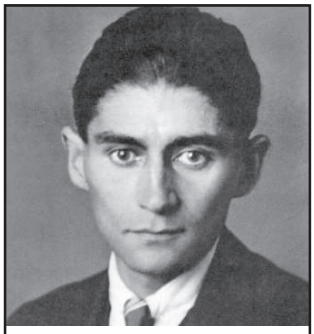
In this unit, we shall read Franz Kafka's short story "The Metamorphosis" which was published in 1915. This is the story of a man who, one morning, discovers that he has turned into an insect: "As Gregor

Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous vermin." This famous and shocking beginning indicates a total subversion of the 19th century realism in storytelling. Ironically enough, Gregor's family accepts his transformation and Gregor also tries to fit into the new ambience. As we finish reading this unit, we shall have acquainted ourselves with one of the most brilliant modern writer of the 20th century.

8.3 FRANZ KAFKA: THE WRITER

The following subsections will help you to read about the life and works of Kafka in some detail.

8.3.1 His Life



Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Franz_Kafka#/media/File:Kafka.jpg

Franz Kafka was born on July 3, 1883 in Prague. He was the first son of Herman and Julie Kafka. His mother came from a well-to-do family and his father was a prospering businessman. Along with his brothers and sisters, Franz was mostly brought up by governesses. He was sent to German schools because his father thought that it would give him social privilege. This was part of a remarkable influence of the Austro-Hungarian Empire upon the Czech elites in Prague. As a result, Kafka was equally at ease in both German and his mother tongue Czech. In 1901, he graduated and went to Charles Ferdinand University to study Chemistry. Soon he switched to law. In the next semester, he took German literature as his subject but this too exhausted him. Subsequently, he returned to law again. Later on, he opted for law in order not to destabilize his mental equilibrium. His relationship with Max Brod, whom he met at school, deepened during this period. In June 1906, he graduated with a doctorate in law.

In 1907, he started working at an insurance company but soon left it due to the lengthy working hours and intolerable conditions. In 1908, he got his job at the Workers' Accident Insurance Institute where he would spend most of the rest of his life. This job helped him explore his talent for writing. Although he started writing from 1898 sporadically, he destroyed his earlier works and tried his hands at serious writing only from 1904. Max Brod persuaded him to publish some of his writings, and in 1913, a collection of his short stories titled *Meditation* appeared. In that same year, he started gathering information for his novel *Amerika* or *The Man who Disappeared.*

In 1912, Kafka met Felice Bauer and this acquaintance would be crucial in shaping his personal life and literally career. He started writing long letters to her and in his first flush of love, he wrote *The Judgment*. In that same year, he wrote "The Metamorphosis" and started working on *Amerika*. The influence of women in Kafka's life is extraordinary yet paradoxical. Before meeting Felice, he had many temporary affairs with different women and even visited whorehouses frequently. For him except immediate sexual gratification nothing was meaningless. Yet, most strikingly, sex was the most repulsive thing in his life. He thought it to be the strongest deterrent for enjoying normal married life. He wrote in his diary, "Coitus is the punishment for the happiness of being together." This notion would ultimately damage and destroy his personal life. In 1913, he proposed to Felice Beaur and she accepted. However, he never stopped visiting other women. Among them, Gerti Wesner and Grete Bloch were prominent.

The year 1914 was particularly a productive year for Kafka, although his personal life was not so calm. In that year, Felice came to know about his affair with Grete Bloch and they broke off. Kafka started writing *The Trial* and finished it in 1916. Meanwhile, some of his famous short stories including "The Judgment" and "The Metamorphosis" were also published after much persuasion from Max Brod. Since his health had never been extraordinarily good, he

went to a sanatorium in 1913 to improve his physical condition for a brief time.

In 1917, Kafka again proposed to Felice but in the same year he was diagnosed with tuberculosis and this literally ended their relationship. She married another man in 1919. Kafka, soon after his diagnosis, went to stay with his sister Ottla in Jurau. There, he wrote what would become *The Blue Octavo Notebooks*, a collection of proverbs and sketches. In 1919, he met Milena Jesenska whose influence would be formidable in his life. They started writing long letters to each other where they discussed everything, including his fear of copulation with her. She was very understanding and soon recognised Kafka's unique talent. He started writing his monumental work *The Castle* in 1922, and she seems to have been a major inspiration, especially in the character of Frieda. However, in 1923, their relationship ended when Melina reconciled with her husband.

In 1924, his physical condition deteriorated rapidly and he went to a couple of sanatoriums. In April, he went to a sanatorium in Kierling, Austria. He agreed to the publication of some of his short stories including "The Hunger Artist". Plagued off and on by tuberculosis from 1911 on, Kafka died of that disease in a sanatorium near Vienna (Kierling), on 3rd June 1924 exactly, one month before his 41st birthday. His family brought him back to Prague for burial.

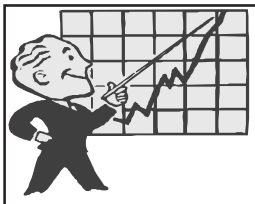
Although he did not live long enough to witness his nightmare world come true or to suffer at the hands of the Nazis, Kafka's three sisters perished in German concentration camps. Most of his work was published posthumously by his friend and editor Max Brod (who ignored Kafka's request to destroy them). Although he saved Kafka's works from oblivion, Brod also has been criticised in recent years for altering some of Kafka's texts in ways the author himself may not have intended.



LET US KNOW

Kafka's Jewish Heritage:

One of the unresolved tensions that is characteristic of Kafka's work occurs between his early (and growing) awareness of his Jewish heritage and the realisation that modern Central European Jewry had become almost wholly assimilated. This tension remained alive in him quite apart from his situation as a prominent member of the Jewish-German intelligentsia of Prague. The problem concerned him all the more directly because his family clung to Jewish traditions only in a superficial way. Although perhaps of a more orthodox background than her husband—and therefore not quite so eager to attain total assimilation into gentile society—Kafka's mother too made no great effort to cherish Jewish ways. On one level, then, Kafka's animosity toward his father and his entire family may be explained by his mounting interest in his Jewish heritage, which they did not share.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What do you think about Kafka's life history?

Q 2: Do you think Kafka was successful in his love relations?

Q 3: What role did Max Brod play in reviving Kafka's works after his death?

8.3.2 His Works

During his short lifetime, Kafka wrote three novels, all of which remained incomplete. He was also a prolific short story writer. Apart from the fictions, Kafka's letters and diaries also have great literary value.

The Trial was published in 1925. The plot revolves around Joseph K., a bank clerk, who one morning, discovers that he is

arrested "without his having done anything wrong". From this onwards, the novel follows the trials and fruitless tribulations of the protagonist Joseph K. It is not the protagonist's fate on which the novel is mainly focused but the proceedings of Joseph K.'s trial leading to a surrealistic death. Joseph K.'s guilt is paradoxical because from the very beginning he is conscious of it without knowing it. K.'s guilt lies in his inability and unwillingness to remember what this guilt really is. *The Trial* can be regarded as a burlesque on bureaucracy, an attack upon the European capitalism and the dictatorial regime. The court symbolises the terror and the silent, almost invisible torture of the state apparatus where human beings seek for justice and freedom in vain.

The Castle is another great achievement by Kafka although it remained unfinished. In the novel, the protagonist K. is a land surveyor, and he has been summoned to a strange village. However, he soon feels dubious about his engagement as the land surveyor and in order to seek confirmation of his job he tries to enter the castle but all his attempts turn futile. K. never becomes successful in entering the castle. The story is exclusively narrated from the protagonist's point of view and is largely composed of dialogues. The theme of arrival in the village has a major symbolic connotation. It is the arrival of man into the world, his attempt to fit into the order, which remains in a way inaccessible. It is a tussle between K. and the world, and the castle has become an incredible metaphor of a totalitarian world into which human beings are forever barred.

His third and the last novel *Amerika* too remained unfinished. It was published in 1927. The novel describes the immigrant life of a 16 years old teenager Karl Ross Mann in the United States who was forced to go to New York to escape the scandal of seduction by a housemaid. *Amerika* is a harsh criticism of the so-called idealistic projection of the land as an epitome of democratic values and high standard of living. It is also a poignant portrayal of the pitiful conditions of the European immigrants. The beginning of the novel is itself

indicative of the myriad social ills that the land represents. Karl witnesses that the statue of liberty holds a sword rather than a torch. Kafka's America is a land of hotels and slums where people run after money and glamour. The streets and houses are labyrinthine in nature where outsiders lose their way. There is no hope for Karl in America as each time he attempts to climb up the social ladder the society negates him in every possible way.

Kafka has also written a number of short stories, which denote remarkable variation in style, theme, and technique. Some of the short stories are very short, barely a hundred words long. Nevertheless, all the short stories exemplify Kafka's mastery over the genre with his enigmatic and weird vision. Prominent among them are—"The Metamorphosis", "The Hunger Artist", "The Great Wall of China", "The judgment", "The Country Doctor", "In the Penal Colony", "Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk", "Investigations of a Dog".

Kafka's diaries, letters, and notebooks are too invaluable literary works. Dora Diamont kept some of Kafka's letters, which could not be recovered. All these works serve as apparatus to look into the inner world of the literary stalwart and into his creative process.

The popular term "Kafkaesque" (*kafkaesk* in German) reflects the bizarre, nightmarish nature of most of the author's works. In *Die Verwandlung* (*The Metamorphosis*) Kafka's character awakes to discover he has become a huge bug: "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect." In *Der Prosess* (*The Trial*) the anonymous Josef K suddenly finds himself under arrest and attempting to defend himself against unknown charges. Most Kafka experts attribute the tortured, ambiguous nature of his writings to his personal struggle to understand his own relationship with his domineering father.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Name some of the major works of Kafka?

Q 5: Mention the general themes in some of Kafka's novels?

8.4 READING THE STORY

There are two choices of "reading" about Kafka—one being to see Kafka's world as full of parables and symbols, a world confronting us with a dream vision of our own condition; and the other choice being to forego any claim of even trying to understand his world and to expose yourself to its atmosphere of haunting anxiety, visionary bizarreness, and faint promises of hope. An experience of reading the story "The Metamorphosis" makes everything clear.

8.4.1 The Storyline

The story is divided into three parts, which are as follows:

Part I:

One of the best-known stories by Franz Kafka "The Metamorphosis" opens with the protagonist Gregor Samsa waking up in his bedroom one fine morning and discovering that he has turned into a giant dung beetle. As Gregor struggles to accept the new facets of his insect body, the readers too get to know that Gregor is a travelling salesman who lives with his parents and younger sister inside an apartment, for which Gregor needs to pay the bills. Gregor is also responsible for paying off his parents' debt. As the story progresses, Gregor struggles with the idea that he is going to be late for work. He considers calling in sick, but he doesn't want to arouse suspicion, as "since during his five years' employment he had not been ill once" and he fears his illness would be investigated. As he is contemplating, his mother knocks at his door and inquires about his situation. He answers, in a voice with a persistent horrible twittering squeak behind it that he is getting up. However, the fact

that he is still at home at this late hour of the morning leads his father to bang on his bedroom door, followed by his sister, who asks to be let in.

Gregor has no intention of letting anyone in as yet, setting his mind to the reality of his metamorphosis, hoping that he is only experiencing a temporary delusion and that before long, he will be transformed back into his usual state. However, as he tries to get out of bed, he is faced with the daunting task of arranging his huge body and "numerous little legs". His initial struggles to get out of bed prove fruitless and painful, but he is determined to move before the hour gets too late and someone from his office comes to enquire about him.

The chief clerk from Samsa's office arrives and is greeted by the servant. The family members announce that the chief clerk has arrived, and the clerk himself asks Gregor to open his door. Gregor refuses. The chief clerk wants to know if anything is wrong with him. Gregor responds with a series of pleas and excuses, claiming that he's not well and that he can still make it to the office. After slipping a few times, he finally stabilises himself long enough to hear the chief clerk and his parents talking about how unintelligible his words were. Gregor's mother gets increasingly upset, yelling for her daughter Grete to get the doctor, insisting that Gregor is ill. Deciding to attempt to allow the chief clerk in, he pushes his desk chair toward the door, climbs on top and clamps his toothless jaw around the key in an effort to unlock the door. Although he is pained by the effort, and some brown fluid dribbles out of his mouth, he is successful in his attempt to unlock it.

When the door opens, the chief clerk and Gregor's parents are horrified by the inexplicable sight of the giant dung beetle: the mother faints and the father begins to weep. Gregor tries to converse with the chief clerk, suggesting that he still plans to get dressed and make his way to the office. He requests the clerk to offer a favourable account of his situation, insisting that his condition is only temporary,

that he will bounce back with greater force, and that his parents and sister depend on him to work for the family. As Gregor continues with his plea, the chief clerk reverses slowly toward the front door of Samsa's house. Gregor knows that he must stop the clerk from leaving if he has any hope of holding back his position in office. Gregor's mother finally runs into the arms of her husband who grabs the walking stick that the chief clerk had left behind and uses it to drive Gregor back toward his room.

Thus, Part I of the story concludes with a great push from his father that forces Gregor into his room, followed by the slamming of his bedroom door.

Part II

The next part of the story opens that evening as Gregor wakes from a deep sleep. In an effort to see what is happening outside, he crawls toward the door. He is surprised to find a tray of food, most likely left by his sister. Eventually the light from the living room is turned off, and Gregor hears his family members tiptoeing to their rooms. Upset Gregor wedges his body beneath the couch, for comfort. Hunger and anxiety prevent him from falling into a deep sleep. Next day morning, at the sight of Gregor's body, Gregor's sister slams the door shut, opening it again a few moments later. Much to Gregor's surprise, she returns with some food items, meant to determine what he might want, and leaves. Gregor finds himself drawn to the cheese, vegetables and sauce. Grete returns, opening the door slowly enough to allow Gregor time to hide beneath the couch. She gathers the remains into a bucket and leaves. Thus, Gregor starts getting his meals two times a day—in the morning and in the evening—brought in and picked up by his sister.

After the cook quits, swearing that she won't let anyone know about the situation in the house, Grete is forced to take over the cooking duties. Gregor overhears his father divulging the state of the family's finances, pulling out various articles from his small safe, most left over from the demise of his former business. However,

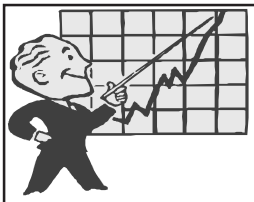
the reader had already been told that it was the failure of his father's business that forced Gregor to work in an office. Gregor also had a secret plan to send her sister to study music at the Conservatorium. These plans, however, cannot be realised in his current condition. However, Gregor is happy to know that a certain amount of the money still remained with his father.

In an effort to deal with his anxiety, he crawls up and gases outside through the window. But soon everything outside his window appears to be blurred. His inability to see the outside world relates to Gregor's metamorphosis as symbolic of an oppressive state. However, at this point in the story, Gregor's sister is unaware of the change in his vision, so recognizing that Gregor has pushed the chair near the window, she makes a point to return the chair to its place. Gregor is also uncomfortable to find that his sister has to open the windows of his room before she can do anything else. Soon, based on the tracks that Gregor has left from his habit of crawling around the walls and the ceiling, Grete concludes that he would be better off without all the furniture in his room. With the help of their mother, Grete moves the large, heavy objects out of Gregor's room. However, she ensures that Gregor is well covered—hidden as completely as possible beneath the couch and the sheet, and then signals for her mother to enter the room.

Gregor initially supports Grete's idea that his room should be cleared of obstacles, but he soon becomes nostalgic over the desk and pictures that had shaped his life up to the time of his metamorphosis. Unable to contain himself any longer, he runs out from under the couch in hopes of stopping his mother and sister from taking away any more of his furniture. When they return to the room, Gregor is found clamped onto a picture on his wall, causing Grete to shield her mother from witnessing the horror. But before her mother can be led out of the room, she sees Gregor and faints. Grete then shuts Gregor out of his room and proceeds to tend to her mother. In an effort to deal with his helplessness and worry,

Gregor climbs around the walls and ceiling, eventually falling onto the living room table. Grete informs their father that her mother had fainted and that Gregor had gotten loose. Gregor's father grows incensed by what he assumes is Gregor's wrong doing. At this point, the reader becomes aware of how much Gregor's father has changed since Gregor's metamorphosis. He has turned from a lethargic, failed businessman to a productive, active member of the work force. When Gregor sees him, he is stunned by how fit he looks, his appearance enhanced by his blue uniform with gold buttons. When his father finally sees him, a very slow chase around the living room ensues. Just as Gregor gets some distance, his father starts pelting him with apples.

Part II ends with Gregor's mother running out of Gregor's room, begging her husband to spare their son, and Gregor losing consciousness.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: In what ways, does the concern for money become so important in the context of the story?

Part III

This section opens with a discussion of the serious injury inflicted on Gregor, disabling him for over a month, and leaving him with a rotten apple stuck to his body, which no one is willing to take off. At this point, the reader gets to know that each member of the family has got employment which are concrete signs of their respective transformations from inert dependency to active independence: Gregor's mother has found work as a seamstress for an undergarment company, Grete is working as a salesgirl while also learning shorthand and French for bettering herself, and his father, who often falls asleep in his uniform, has become a bank messenger. Besides, the Samsa family has released their previous servant and hired a charwoman to do the rough work.

With the family so busy, Gregor starts considering himself as an increasing burden. He laments that his family members are forced to work so hard, and that they cannot move to a more suitable home because of him. Gregor too finds that the members of his family have begun to neglect him. The charwoman shows no fear of him, and regularly opens his door and says a few words to Gregor. As time goes by, Gregor grows increasingly depressed—a state that Kafka himself found struggling with. He rarely eats and is forced to deal with the stray objects that the family have stored in his room to provide space to three lodgers, described as "serious gentlemen…with full beards". Gregor starts resenting them gradually. On a night, when the lodgers are gorging on steak, Gregor hears the sound of his sister's violin coming from the kitchen for the first time since his metamorphosis. Having finished their meals, the lodgers ask if the violin can be played in the living room instead of the kitchen. Gregor's father agrees for his daughter, and the family carry the music stand, the music and Grete's violin into the living room where Grete sets up and begins to play. Excited by the sound of his sister's violin, Gregor crawls into the living room to listen.

In the beginning of the performance, everyone is absorbed in the music. But after a while, the lodgers grow restless and move toward the back of the room puffing on their cigars. Gregor is thoroughly moved by the music, and crawls farther into the living room. One of the lodgers sees him and points him out to Gregor's father who does his best to divert their attention from Gregor. In the commotion, Grete stops playing her violin and rushes into the lodgers' room to make their beds before her father can usher them back. Finally, the lead lodger announces that he plans to give notice, and that due to the unsanitary conditions, he will not pay for the time he has already spent there. Finally Grete speaks, declaring that the situation cannot go on any longer. She makes a distinction between Gregor and the creature they have been taking care of, demanding that they find a way to get rid of him. Gregor's father tries to think of some sort of agreement they might be able to work out with Gregor,

but Grete is insistent that her father must try to get rid of the idea that this is Gregor. She, in a frightful fury, insists that the creature wants to take over their home. Gregor does his best to turn around and crawl back to his room, but in his weakened state, the process is difficult and slow. When he finally makes it back, his sister rushes to the door and locks him inside. Gregor lets his body relax and wishes that he had the power to disappear.

The following morning, the charwoman enters Gregor's room and tries to tickle him with the end of the broom handle. When she finds no reaction, she begins to prod him until it becomes clear that he is dead. She immediately announces Gregor's death. Grete and her parents all gather at Gregor's door for confirmation. Then, the charwoman opens the window and shuts the door. The three lodgers come out of their room and demand breakfast. The charwoman quiets them and points them into Gregor's room where they can find the corpse. Soon after, the father demands that the lodgers leave immediately, demonstrating an authority that he hasn't possessed since the collapse of his business. After a moment of protest, the lodgers leave and the family feels "as if a burden has been lifted". Grete and her parents decide to take the day off from work and go outside for a stroll. As they're writing their respective letters of excuse, the charwoman announces that she has disposed of Gregor's body.

The story ends as the Samsas leave the apartment together and take the train out to the countryside. They realize that their situation is more hopeful than it had once seemed. They will finally have the opportunity to move to a smaller and more manageable apartment. They realize that the time to find Grete a husband is coming soon.

8.4.2 Major Themes

The following are some of the important themes of the story "The Metamorphosis".

Elements of the Absurd:

Kafka wrote story "The Metamorphosis" at the end of 1912, soon after he finished "The judgment," and it is worth noting that the two stories have much in common. Gregor Samsa is confronted with an absurd fate in the form of a "gigantic insect", while the businessman Georg Bendemann in "The judgment" is confronted by absurdity in the person of his father. Also both men are guilty: like Georg in "The judgment," Gregor Samsa is guilty of having cut himself off from his true self—long before his actual metamorphosis— and, to the extent he has done so, he is excluded from his family. His situation of intensifying anxiety, already an unalterable fact at his awakening, is significant. Gregor is a puzzled victim brought before the Absolute— here in the form of the chief clerk—which forever recedes into the background. This element of receding, an important theme in Kafka's works, intensifies the gap between the hero and the unknown source of his condemnation. Thus, the reader finds himself confronted with Gregor's doom and the existence of enough personal guilt to warrant such a harsh verdict. The selection of an ordinary individual as victim heightens the impact of the absurd.

The Character of Gregor:

Gregor is the prototype of many of Kafka's male characters—a character who is reluctant to act, fearful of possible mishaps, prone to exaggerated contemplation, given to juvenile, surrogate dealings with sex. For example, he uses his whole body to anxiously guard the magazine clipping of a lady in a fur cape. This is a good illustration of his pitiful preoccupation with sex. Though it would be unfair to blame him for procrastinating, for not getting out of bed on the first morning of his metamorphosis, we have every reason to assume that he has procrastinated long before this—especially in regard to a decision about his unbearable situation at work. Gregor has also put off sending his sister to the conservatory, although he promised to do so. He craves love and understanding, but his

prolonged inactivity gradually leads him to feel ever more indifferent about everything. It is through all his failures to act, then, rather than from specific irresponsible actions he commits, that Gregor is guilty. His guilt finally results in agonizing loneliness.

Autobiographical Element:

It is easy to view Gregor as an autobiographical study of Kafka himself. Gregor's parents and his sister also have their parallels in Kafka's family. Gregor feels that he has to appease his father, who "approaches with a grim face" toward him, and it is his father's bombardment with apples that causes his death. The two women, on the other hand, have the best of intentions—his mother pleading for her son's life, believing that Gregor's state is only some sort of temporary sickness; and Grete, so eager to understand and help her brother. She does not want to forgo her "normal" life and is the first one to demand the insect's removal. These people simply do not understand, and the reason they do not understand is that they are habitually too "preoccupied with their immediate troubles."

Gregor's situation in his family is that of Kafka within his own family. He too had a tyrannical father who hated or, at best, ignored his son's writing; a mother, who was not strong enough to cope with her husband's brutality; and a sister, Ottla, whom Kafka felt very close to. Shortly after completing "The Metamorphosis", Kafka wrote in his diary: "I am living with my family, the dearest people, and yet I am more estranged from them than from a stranger." Returning to the subject of Gregor, what strikes one most immediately is the fact that although he is outwardly equipped with all the features of an insect, he reacts like a human being.



LET US KNOW

Gregor's Metamorphosis:

Gregor never identifies himself with an insect. It is important to realize, therefore, that Gregor's metamorphosis actually takes place in his "uneasy dreams," which is something

altogether different than saying it is the result of the lingering impact of these dreams. An interpretation often advanced categorises Gregor's metamorphosis as an attempt at escaping his deep-seated conflict between his true self and the untenable situation at the company. He begs the chief clerk for precisely that situation which has caused him to be so unhappy; he implores him to help him maintain his position and, while doing so, completely forgets that he is a grotesquery standing in front of the chief clerk.

Existentialism:

The term existentialism has been more or less equated since World War II with the works of Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Camus, Sartre, Jaspers, Heidegger and so on. Kafka's relationship with existentialism is much more complex, mainly because the label "existentialist" by itself is rather meaningless. However, he remained fascinated with the major theme of all varieties of existentialist thinking, namely the difficulty of responsible commitment in the face of an absurd universe. Deprived of all metaphysical guidelines, a man is nevertheless obligated to act morally in a world where death renders everything meaningless. He alone must determine what constitutes a moral action although he can never foresee the consequences of his actions. As a result, he comes to regard his total freedom of choice as a curse. Thus, the guilt of the characters of Kafka lies in their failure to choose and to commit themselves in the face of too many possibilities. In "The Metamorphosis", Gregor is frustrated by his totally commercialised existence and yet does nothing about it, other than trying to escape. He vows that once he has sufficient money, he will quit, and yet he has no idea what he will do. This is why Kafka draws this "innermost self" as something strange and threatening to Gregor's commercialised existence. The insect represents all the dimensions of Gregor's existence, which elude description. This is why Kafka was so adamant about not

having the insect reproduced in any conventional manner when the story was published. He wrote to his publisher that it would be wrong to draw the likeness of the insect on the book cover because any literal representation would be meaningless.

Use of Delusions:

The most terrible insight, which the story conveys, is that even the most beautiful relationships between individuals are based on delusions. No one knows what he or anybody else really is: Gregor's parents, for instance, have no idea of their son's serious conflict. They have no idea that one's nature can be deformed by the continued degradation it suffers, but now that this deformation has taken on such horrible proportions, they are puzzled and look at Gregor as something alien. Typically enough, "the words he uttered were no longer understandable." The concern they should have shown for him finds a perverted outlet in their preoccupation with total strangers, the three lodgers who get an enormous amount of attention simply because of the rent they pay. Finally, it is only consistent with their way of thinking that Gregor's parents should do away with the insect.

Gregor too is mistaken about his family. He thought it to be his duty to help them pay their debts and secure a financially carefree life. The truth is that his father has far more money than Gregor knows about; also, he was not nearly as sick as he has made Gregor believe. Gregor's self-chosen sacrifice has been useless. Worse than that, the more he has done for his family, the more "they had simply got used to it." Gregor's relationship with his family members, and also their dealings among each other, are determined solely by the contrived order they have set up for themselves. Their lives are based on compromises and calculations.

Identity of Gregor:

The questions pertaining to Gregor's identity are central to the story. The narrator brings up this problem of identity when he

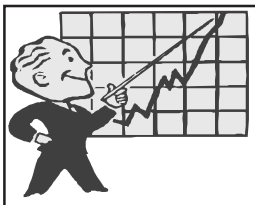
asks: "Was he an animal, that music had such an effect upon him?" Since only humans respond to music, in the way the insect responds to Grete's playing the violin, we realize that he is indeed part human. The violin playing is also a part of the countless allusions to Gregor's repressed sexual desires, particularly his longing for his sister. As Gregor lies in front of Grete and listens to her music, he has only Grete in his mind. It is almost clear that Gregor responds to the music only now, when he is not the traveling salesman he used to be. Thus, Gregor's "animal state" seems to be a precondition of his yearning for this "unknown food". This food may be sexual. The ambiguity about the nature of the food remains—as does the uncertainty about whether Gregor is experiencing only a relapse into the sphere of the animalistic or whether or not he has been lifted up to a higher plane. His identity cannot be established from his reactions because whenever Gregor is impaired as a human being, he reacts positively as an animal and vice versa.



LET US KNOW

Expressionism and Kafka:

Expressionism is one of the literary movements frequently mentioned in connection with Kafka. Kafka does have certain characteristics in common with the Expressionists. However, if we consider what he thought of some of the leading expressionists of his day, he certainly cannot be associated with the movement. He repeatedly confessed that the works of the expressionists made him sad. He further said: "I don't understand. To me, it merely proves the painter's inner chaos." What he rejected in expressionism is the overstatement of feeling and the seeming lack of craftsmanship.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q7: In what way, would you explain the theme of the absurd available in the story?

Q8: Discuss the theme of Existentialism in Kafka's "The Metamorphosis".

Q 9: What is your view on the identity of Gregor Samsa?

8.4.3 Major Characters

The following are the important characters of the story "The Metamorphosis"

Gregor Samsa:

Gregor is the primary character in the story. He is a commercial traveler (traveling salesman) who lives with his parents and sister in a modest apartment. The story opens with Gregor waking up late for work, only to find himself transformed into a giant dung beetle. In the story, he remains isolated in his room, which in turn becomes an increasing burden on his family. Now his family members are forced to find jobs and take on lodgers to make up for the income that Gregor had formerly provided. By the end of the story, all the family members have grown stronger and more independent while Gregor, struggling in his metamorphosed state, grows increasingly weak and eventually dies.

Grete:

Grete is Gregor's younger sister and the closest family member to him. Initially, she is the most sympathetic member of the family to Gregor's condition, taking on the responsibility of feeding him, but eventually she begins to see Gregor as a burden, ultimately advocating for his removal. By the end of the story, after Gregor has died, it is clear that Grete has made the most dramatic transformation: from a dependent and insecure girl, to an attractive, independent woman.

Mr. Samsa:

Mr. Samsa or Gregor's father has spent the years leading up to Gregor's metamorphosis growing increasingly lethargic, lamenting the collapse of his business, and forcing his son to be the sole provider for the family. He is the most aggressive toward the metamorphosed Gregor, once even pelting him with apples. Forced back to work by Gregor's inexplicable condition, Mr. Samsa becomes a bank messenger and is required to wear a uniform to work. After taking in some lodgers to help pay the bills, Mr. Samsa shows his renewed authority by kicking them out at the end.

Mrs. Samsa:

Mrs. Samsa or Gregor's mother is deeply upset by her son's metamorphosis, fainting upon first sight of him, and even toward the end, resisting her own daughter's suggestion that they remove the dung beetle (Gregor) from their home. She also gets a job to help pay the bills, and following Gregor's death, develops a renewed sense of hope in the budding prospects of her daughter.

The Chief clerk:

The clerk comes to the house on the day of Gregor's metamorphosis to see why he has failed to show up on time. Before Gregor reveals his condition, the chief clerk responds to Gregor's refusal to open his door by ranting about Gregor's dissatisfactory performance at work. Once Gregor opens his door, the chief clerk flees from the house, leaving his walking cane behind.

The Charwoman:

She is an old servant who is largely unaffected by Gregor's metamorphosis. She makes a point of peering into his room everyday playfully checking up on him. In the end, she reveals that she has disposed of the dung beetle corpse and that the Samsas won't have to worry about him anymore.

The Three Lodgers:

They come to stay at the Samsas' home after Gregor's metamorphosis. They take advantage of the Samsas' hospitality, at

one point requesting that Grete play the violin for them and then moving away from boredom and dissatisfaction. When Gregor reveals himself to them, they refuse to pay the Samsas any rent, but stay on in an effort to exploit the conditions even further. Ultimately, Gregor's father kicks them out of the house.

8.4.4 Kafka's Narrative Style

Franz Kafka is one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century. In his works, he turned away from the 19th century realism, and with his unique narrative and weird enigmatic outlook, he created a distinctive style. His writings encompass various trends and stances including existentialism, absurd philosophy, magic realism, and mysticism and even expressionism. The use of humour, which is dark and surreal in its tone, makes his work poignantly haunting. Kafka's heroes are often portrayed lonely, perplexed, and threatened in an alien world. They are constantly seen searching for the code to decipher the systems of the world but their effort ultimately proves fruitless. His works, like any other great literary masterpiece, cannot be confined to any particular category.

Within the story's three-part construction, Kafka also deals with the concept of time. A frequently used device in Kafka's works, the discrepancy between the time shown on the clock and the time as experienced by the hero, time symbolises his alienation. This is why, Gregor's sense of time in the first part of the story, begins to vanish in the second part, when he wakes up "out of a deep sleep, more like a swoon than a sleep." Typically, time is expressed in rather general terms, such as "twilight" or "long evening." There is no longer the regular routine of the first day; Gregor spends his time crawling up and down and around his room. Vague indications of time are reflected in such terms as "soon," "later," and "often," blurring the boundary lines between what used to be precisely measurable units of time. At one point in the story, the narrator tells us that "about

a month" probably has elapsed; on another occasion, Gregor mentions that "the lack of all direct human speech for the past two months" confuses the readers. Gregor's increasing lack of direction and continuous crawling around in circles finally result in his total loss of a sense of time. When his mother and sister remove the furniture from his room in the second part of the story, he loses his "last guideline of direction." Paradoxically, "The Metamorphosis" is enacted outside the context of time, and because of this, time is always frightfully present. As Kafka put it in an aphorism, "It is only our concept of time which permits us to use the term 'The Last judgment'; in reality, it is a permanent judgment."

A story like "The Metamorphosis" should not tempt us to analyze it along the lines of fantasy versus reality. An unchangeable and alienated world unfolds before us, a world governed by its own laws and developing its own logic. However, this world is our world and yet it is not. We encounter people we know and situations we have lived through in our own everyday lives, and yet these people and situations appear somehow estranged. They are real and physical, and yet they are also grotesque and abstract. Finally, the reader seems to be left with two choices of how to "read" Kafka. One is to see Kafka's world as full of parables and symbols, magnified and fantastically distorted (and therefore infinitely more real), a world confronting us with a dream vision of our own condition. The other choice is to forego any claim of even trying to understand his world and to expose oneself to its atmosphere of haunting anxiety, visionary bizarreness, and occasionally—faint promises of hope. These are some of the important qualities of Kafka as a writer.



LET US KNOW

Kafka's ability to successfully join the fantastic and the real is often noted as being at the root of his genius. The very nature of "The Metamorphosis," a work that asks its readers to accept that the

protagonist has been metamorphosed into a giant dung beetle, demands an investigation of the story's events that goes beyond the surface features of plot. Kafka's "Letter to His Father" details a circumstance in which he is left outside and treated as an animal, a concept that influenced Kafka's fictions, including "The Metamorphosis."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: Comment on Kafka's narrative style.

8.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF KAFKA AND "THE METAMORPHOSIS"

Since the time of the publication of "The Metamorphosis", it has received an incredible amount of international scholarly attention from a number of different academic angles. In her essay "Transforming Franz Kafka's 'Metamorphosis" Nina Pelikan Straus touches on this vast scholarship, suggesting that the reasons for scholars' interest in Kafka, particularly his masterpiece "The Metamorphosis", reflects a recognition on the part of students of religion, philosophy, psychoanalysis, political and social criticism, Marxism, and literature that Kafka's work is inexhaustible. No single interpretation invalidates or finally delivers the story's significance. In her own essay, Straus also makes the case for viewing "The Metamorphosis" through a feminist lens, focusing on Gregor's sister Grete, as well as Gregor's acknowledgement of her increasing vitality and independence.

Many scholars have also suggested that "The Metamorphosis" is an allegorical tale of oppression, making use of autobiographical circumstances relating to the household within which Kafka was raised—particularly his relationship with his father—and the sickness and depression that Kafka experienced throughout his life. Considerable attention has also been paid to the startling originality of the story. Some scholars have focused on "the variety of suffering which plagued the life of Franz Kafka" suggesting

that this played a part in the conception of Gregor and the "The Metamorphosis." Given the difficulties that Kafka had with his father, his health and his job, many critics have made the case that in "The Metamorphosis," Kafka was portraying a condition where one is treated and/or views oneself as less than human—an animal, an insect. Another of Kafka's conditions that scholars have focused on relates to his feelings of shame and guilt, particularly in relation to his family. In his essay "Franz Kafka and Animals," Peter Stine suggests a connection between the use of animals—one prominent example being the dung beetle—and Kafka's veiled portrayal of his family.



8.6 LET US SUM UP

By this time, we have learnt that Kafka is one of the most powerful voices of literary modernism. Although Kafka hails from Germany, his far fletched influence on the literatures of other countries is worth mentioning. Very much shy and introvert by nature, Kafka was in need of friends and never wanted his works to be published. His friend Max Brod played the most significant role in rescuing him from oblivion and establishing him as one of the modernist writers of the world. However, it is difficult to place Kafka in a literary tradition. The various influences on him include Gustave Flaubert, Heinrich von Kleist, and Fyodor Dostoevsky. Especially, it was Dostoevsky's *The Double* and *Brothers Karamazov*, which left their marks on his "The Metamorphosis" and *The Trial*. "The Metamorphosis" is the story of a man who, one morning, discovers that he has turned into an insect. This famous and shocking beginning indicates a total subversion of the 19th century realism in storytelling.



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8.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Throughout his life Kafka was haunted by his physical condition… …the rejection of his father and relationship with several women—all these influenced his writings greatly……he suffered from migraines, insomnia, constipation, boils and other ailments, all due to excessive stresses and strains… …he was never at ease with his father simply because of his masculinity, his success as a businessman, and his formidable influence on his mother.

Ans to Q 2: No… …his love relationships suffered because of his perverse attitude towards physical union.

Ans to Q 3: Most of his works were published posthumously by his friend and editor Max Brod… …he ignored Kafka's request to destroy them… …although he saved Kafka's works from oblivion, Brod also has been criticised in recent years for altering some of Kafka's texts in ways the author himself may not have intended.

Ans to Q 4: During his short lifetime, Kafka wrote three novels—*The Trial, The Castle, Amerika*, all of which remained incomplete… …he was also a prolific writer of short stories like —"The Metamorphosis", "The Hunger Artist", "The judgment", "The Country Doctor", "In the Penal Colony", "Investigations of a Dog" and so on… …Kafka's letters and diaries also have great literary value.

Ans to Q 5: *The Trial* revolves around Joseph K.'s guilt which lies in his inability and unwillingness to remember what this guilt really is… …the court in the vel symbolises the terror of the state apparatus where human beings seek for justice and freedom in vain... …*The Castle* presents a tussle between K. and the world, and the castle has become an incredible metaphor of a totalitarian world into which human beings are forever barred… … *Amerika* is a poignant portrayal of the pitiful conditions of the European immigrants in America.

Ans to Q 6: The thought of money proves most distressing for Gregor who cannot imagine anyone in his family capable of work… …this focuses

on the parasitic relationships that exist in the Samsa home… …first the family on Gregor, then Gregor on the family… …it is only through Gregor's metaphoric death are the members of his family finally liberated, each achieving a greater sense of vitality and independence… …but the readers are also told that Gregor's father hasn't worked in five years and has grown heavy, his mother has severe asthma, and his sister is only seventeen and has not done any serious work in her life.

Ans to Q 7: Gregor Samsa is confronted with an absurd fate in the form of a "gigantic insect"… …he is guilty of having cut himself off from his true self—long before his actual metamorphosis… …his situation of intensifying anxiety, being an unalterable fact, adds to the element of the absurd… …besides, the selection of an ordinary individual as victim heightens the impact of the absurd.

Ans to Q 8: Existentialism was in vogue since World War II through the works of Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Camus, Sartre, Jaspers, Heidegger… …Kafka remained fascinated with existentialist views on the difficulty of responsible commitment in the face of an absurd universe… …the guilt of the characters of Kafka, lies in their failure to choose and to commit themselves in the face of too many possibilities… …in "The Metamorphosis", Gregor is frustrated by his totally commercialised existence and yet does nothing about it, other than trying to escape.

Ans to Q 9: Gregor is reluctant to act, fearful of possible mishaps, prone to exaggerated contemplation, given to juvenile, surrogate dealings with sex… …but the question of Gregor's identity is central to the story… …the narrator brings up this problem of identity when he asks: "Was he an animal, that music had such an effect upon him?"… …since only humans respond to music, in the way the insect responds to Grete's playing the violin, we realize that he is indeed part human… …his identity cannot be established from his reactions because whenever Gregor is impaired as a human being, he reacts positively as an 'animal' and vice versa.

Ans to Q 10: Kafka's works encompass various trends like existentialism, absurd philosophy, magic realism, mysticism and expressionism… …his use of humour is dark and surreal… …his heroes are often portrayed as lonely, perplexed, and threatened in an alien world… …his ability to successfully join the fantastic and the real… …his concept of time which is expressed in rather general terms, such as "twilight" or "long evening."… …Freud's influence on Kafka… …his use of parables and symbols and so on



8.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How will you explain the unnatural occurrences in Kafka's "The Metamorphosis"?

Q 2: What did Kafka actually try to re-present through the character of Gregor Samsa in his story "The Metamorphosis"?

Q 3: Is Gregor Samsa partly to blame for having incurred his fate? Discuss.

Q 4: Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis goes hand in hand with a description of the world around him as he find himself in a new state. Discuss.

Q 5: Explain why symbols and parables are better suited to deal with Kafka's fictional works.

Q 6: Would you like to consider Kafka an "existentialist"? Discuss with reference to the story "The Metamorphosis"?

Q 7: What do you mean by the term "Kafkaesque"? Does it really help in a serious and meaningful appraisal of Kafka?

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UNIT 9: FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY: *CRIME AND PUNISHMENT* (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 Fyodor Dostoevsky: The Novelist

9.3.1 His Life

9.3.2 His Works

9.4 Russian Fiction

9.5 The Storyline of the Novel

9.6 Critical Reception of Dostoevsky

9.7 Let us Sum up

9.8 Further Reading

9.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

9.10 Possible Questions

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of the great Russian author Dostoevsky
- form an idea of Dostoevsky as a major exponent of Russian Fiction
- make a survey of the important aspects of Russian fiction
- provide a summary of the story of the novel *Crime and Punishments*
- discuss the critical reception of Dostoevsky as an important writer in world literature

9.2 INTRODUCTION

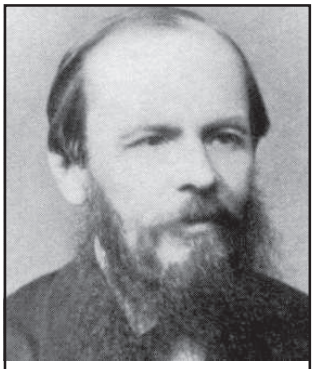
In this unit, we shall get an opportunity to read Fyodor Dostoevsky and his novel *Crime and Punishment.* Dostoevsky is one of the most important Russian novelists and his works had a profound influence on the intellectual thoughts and literatures of the 20th century. By the time you finish

reading this unit, you will be able to know that *Crime and Punishment* is an important novel in World Literature. *Crime and Punishment* is a novel loaded with multiple meanings, and it is not practically possible to discuss this novel in just around 7000 words. Hence, you should choose a good edition of the book—one of which is the Norton Edition.

9.3 FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY: THE FICTION WRITER

In the following subsections, we discuss the life and works of Dostoevsky in some detail.

9.3.1 His Life



Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki

Dostoevsky was born in Moscow, into a middle class family of seven children. His father Mikhail Dostoevsky, was a retired military surgeon, and an alcoholic. He served at the Marinsky Hospital for the Poor in Moscow situated in an area surrounded by a cemetery for criminals, a lunatic asylum, and an orphanage for infants. This environment had a lasting impact on Dostoevsky. This can also be seen as the origin of his compassion for the poor, the oppressed and the tormented. After the death of his mother Maria in 1837, Dostoevsky and his brother were sent to the Military Engineering Academy at St. Petersburg. Besides, Mathematics, he also studied Shakespeare, Pascal, Victor Hugo, and E.T.A. Hoffmann. Since his childhood days, he had developed an interest in the works of Nikolai Gogol, E.T.A Hoffmann and Honore de Balzac.

In 1843, Dostoevsky translated Balzac's novel *Eugénie Grandet.* However, he started writing his own fiction in the later part of 1844. His first work *Poor Folk* was published in 1845 when he was only 24 years old. His next novel *The Double*, published in 1846, received negative reactions from Belinsky and many others. In 1849,

he was imprisoned for being a part of the "Petrachevsky Circle" which comprised of progressive-minded intellectuals consisting of writers, students, teachers, army officers, etc. The members of the group opposed the tsars and the serf system. Later, Petrachevsky was sentenced to four years of exile with hard labour at a Katorga prison camp in Omsk, Siberia.

In the year 1854, he was released from prison. Then, he spent the next five years as a lieutenant in the Seventh Line Battalion of the Siberian Regiment. This is where he met Maria Dmitrievna Isaeva whom he married in 1857. His experiences in the prison and the army changed his religious and political ideologies. Gradually, he got disillusioned by Western ideas, and instead turned toward traditional and rustic Russian values. The change in his writings was marked by the emergence of dark, complex story lines and situations, brooding and tortured characters and a constant conflict between traditional Russian culture and modern Western philosophy. In 1859, Dostoevsky returned to St. Petersburg. In 1863, he set out for his tour in Europe where he met Apollinaria Suslova—the model of "proud women" in his novels like *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov.*

The death of his wife in 1864 completely chattered him. His financial condition too started deteriorating. This led to a period of deep depression in life. He developed a compulsion for gambling, which left him penniless. It is stated that one of his most famous works *Crime and Punishment* was completed in great hurry, as he desperately needed money. *The Gambler* was also written under similar situations. To escape from his creditors, he travelled to Western Europe in 1867. From 1873 to 1881, he was engaged with *Writer's Diary*, a monthly journal of short stories, sketches, and articles on current events. The journal was an enormous success. On June 8, 1880, Dostoevsky gave his famous Pushkin speech at the unveiling of the Pushkin monument in Moscow. It was from this occasion that he came to be known as one of the most famous Russian writers.

Dostoevsky died On February 9, 1881 and was buried in Tikhvin Cemetery at Alexander Nevsky Monastry in St. Petersburg, Russia. His funeral was attended by forty thousand mourners. His epitaph is the epigraph of his final novel, *The Brothers Karamazov.*



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Why was Dostoevsky imprisoned in 1849?

Q 2: How did Dostoevsky's experience in prison change his writings?

9.3.2 His Works

His works give us a vivid picture of the political, social and spiritual situation of 19th-century Russia. His work consists of 15 novels, 17 short novels and many essays. In this section, we will briefly discuss some of the major fictional works of Dostoevsky. The period from 1866-1881 saw the creation of Dostoevsky's greatest works: *Notes from Underground* (1864)*, The Gambler* (1867)*, Crime and Punishment* (1866), *The Idiot* (1868), *The Possessed* (1872), *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880).

The first important fictional works of Dostoevsky is *Notes from Underground* (1864). Written in two parts, this book presents the confessions of an underground man. In the first part, the nameless man introduces himself as a sick and spiteful man, and criticises the notions of free will, rationalism and romanticism, and makes an attempt to explain his ideas of life and being. In the second part, the man talks about his difficulty in relating to other people. The man is unable to interact and identify with others in society at large. Thus, this novel portrays the conflict in the mind of the main character between the rational and the irrational. Dostoevsky's underground man became a common character type in many of the novels that followed.

Dostoevsky's next important novel *The Gambler* (1867) reflects his own addiction to gambling. The story is told from the

point of view of Alexei Ivanovich a young tutor who works for a Russian family living in the suit of a German hotel. He is also in love with Polina. He succumbs to her wishes, and places a bet for her in the town's casino. He wins at the roulette table. This is his first experience with gambling. It is important to note that he completed this novel, under great pressure, to pay off his gambling debts.

The Idiot (1868) is another most famous novel of Dostoevsky. In this novel, he tried to portray the idea of a good man through the main character of the novel called Myshkin. The novel begins with three strangers travelling to Petersburg in a train. Myshkin is portrayed as a simple, innocent, and not well educated; so people consider him to be an idiot. However, he is an honest, sympathetic and gracious person. It is due to his simplicity and honesty that he has to face many troubles in a world full of complexities.

The Brothers Karamazov (1880) is Dostoevsky's last novel. The story of the novel revolves around the brutal murder of a father by one of his three sons. Each of the three brothers is marked by a distinct personality—Dmitri, a passionate and violent man, is desperate for money, Ivan is an intellectual and an atheist, and Alyosha has love, faith and compassion for everyone. Critics believe that these traits are symbolic of Dostoevsky's own personality. Besides depicting the spiritual struggle between faith, doubt, reason, and free will, this novel explores the existence of God, the notion of forgiveness, and the nature of truth.

You should note that most of Dostoevsky's works deal with questions like the notion of good and evil, the existence of God, and the constant human struggle for survival in a complex world. Through his novels, he tries to grasp the true meaning of existence. Thus, his novels also have profound psychological implications. The recurring theme in two of his most famous works *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov* is murder and the psychological suffering following the murder. Thus, his novels can be considered as studies of the human self, trying to explain the various conflicts and contradictions of the human self.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Mention the important fictional works of Dostoyevsky?

Q 4: State the significance of Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880).

9.4 RUSSIAN FICTION

We shall note that the early history of Russia is one of migrating peoples and ancient kingdoms. In fact, ancient Russia was not exactly 'Russia', but a constellation of different cities gradually coalescing into an empire. Contemporary Russia emerged with the establishment of Moscow, one of its oldest cities, in the 14th century. As a sign of the city's importance, the patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church was transferred to the city, making it the spiritual capital of Russia. With the rapid changes in economic and political life that were taking place elsewhere in Europe, Russia was lagging behind till Peter the Great, a powerful king of the Romanov dynasty decided to change all of that. The various reforms that Peter the Great envisioned, however, failed to take root in Russia, and it was not until the reign of Catherine the Great that his desire to make Russia into a great European power was in fact achieved. The history took to dramatic speeds with Napoleon's Russian campaign, and the Revolution.

Side by side, the history of prose literature was also developing traits and features of its own. Evolving through centuries in three major strains—Romantic, Realistic and Modernist, Russian fiction was slowly emerging. Alexander Pushkin, who became the father of Russian literature in the 19th century, played an important role in the development of Russian literature. He introduced Russia to all the European literary genres as well as a great number of European writers. He brought natural speech and foreign influences to create modern poetic Russian. In his brief life, he left examples of nearly every literary genre of his day: lyric poetry, narrative poetry, the novel, the short story, the drama, the critical essay, and even the personal letter. His use of the Russian language formed the basis of the

style of novelists like Ivan Turgenev, Ivan Gonacharov and Leo Tolstoy. Nikolai Gogol did an important critical study of Pushkin's work, which retains much relevance.

In the post-Romantic age, a realistic strain in writing set in. This movement could be cited with the emergence of such titans of literature as Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. With this shift, poetry was taken over completely by fiction. The latter part of the 19th century could thus be roughly regarded as the age of Realism and the names to be noted in this regard are those of Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky. Other contemporaries include names like Ivan Turgenev, Leskov, Saltykov-Shchedrin and Gonachrov.

Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) mostly remembered for the two famous works: *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace.* In their scope, breadth and realistic depiction of 19th century Russian life, these books stand at the peak of realist fiction. *War and Peace* (1869) is generally thought to be one of the greatest novels ever written, remarkable for its vast canvas including 580 characters; many of them historical, others fictional. *Anna Karenina* (1877), which Tolstoy regarded as his first true novel, was one of his most impeccably constructed and compositionally sophisticated works. It tells parallel stories of an adulterous woman trapped by the conventions and falsities of society, and of a philosophical landowner who works alongside the peasants in the fields and seeks to reform their lives.

Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky (1821–1881) was the other important figure in the literature of the period. Known for a seething psychological insight into the human psyche, he is considered one of those writers who pioneered Existentialist thoughts later in the 20th century Russia. His *Notes from Underground* (1864), written in the embittered voice of the anonymous "underground man", was named by Walter Kaufmann as the "best overture for existentialism ever written." Dostoevsky was arrested and imprisoned on April 23, 1849 for being a part of the Petrashevsky Circle—the liberal intellectual group. His experiences in prison and the army resulted in major changes in his political and religious convictions. Dostoevsky's post-prison fiction saw the appearance of dark, complex storylines and situations, often styled partly on Dostoevsky himself who

agonised over existential themes of spiritual torment, religious awakening, and the psychological confusion caused by the conflict between traditional Russian culture and the influx of modern, Western philosophy. With the publication of *Crime and Punishment* in 1866, Fyodor Dostoevsky became one of Russia's most prominent authors in the 19th century. Another of his great novels, *The Brothers Karamazov* was published in 1880.

The Sovietisation of Russia in 1917 brought about yet another group of writers and saw the emergence of modernist literature in Russia. Maxim Gorky, Nobel Prize winner Mikhail Sholokhov, Valentin Kataev, Aleksei Nikolaevich Tolstoi, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Ilf and Petrov came to prominence as part of this newly found Soviet literature. Whilst socialist realism gained official support in the Soviet Union, some of the writers—such as Mikhail Bulgakov, Boris Pasternak, Andrei Platonov, Osip Mandelstam, Yury Trifonov, Isaac Babel and Vasily Grossman—also continued the classical tradition of Russian literature, writing "into the desk", with no hope of publishing such works until after their deaths. Meanwhile, Russia had *émigré* writers such as Nobel Prize winner Ivan Alekseyevich Bunin, Alexander Kuprin, Andrey Bely, Marina Tsvetaeva and Vladimir Nabokov.

The modern writers from Russia focused on themes where an oppressive regime's lack of sensitivity curbs literary freedom. They also constantly experimented with various forms of narration. The most famous of these authors, Vladimir Nabokov, had a great command of English, and his language in the controversial masterpiece *Lolita* (1955) won many an acclaim from the English-speaking community. Writers such as Pasternak were highly disillusioned with the system, and wrote their pieces with no hopes of getting published and read. Mayakovsky gained a high place in the literati of contemporary Russia, but found it unbearable to cater to the political urges over his imagination. This poet is hailed as one of the best exponents of a school of poetry named 'futurism'.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What is the importance of Pushkin to the literary evolution of the novel in Russia?

Q 6: How did the Sovietisation of literature brought changed into Russian Literature?

9.5 THE STORYLINE OF THE NOVEL [adapted from Wikipedia]

Raskolnikov, who lives in a tiny, rented room in St. Petersburg, is undergoing tremendous mental conflict. He refuses all help from his friends, and devises a plan to murder and rob Alyona Ivanovna, an unpleasant elderly pawnbroker and moneylender. His motivation comes from the overwhelming sense that he is predetermined to kill the old woman by some power, which is not within his control. While still considering the plan, Raskolnikov befriends a drunkard Semyon Zakharovich Marmeladov, who recently squandered all the wealth of his family. Raskolnikov receives a letter from his sister and mother that they are visiting Saint Petersburg and his sister's sudden marriage plans which they plan to discuss upon their arrival.

After much deliberation, Raskolnikov enters Alyona Ivanovna's apartment, where he murders her with an axe. He also kills her half-sister Lizaveta, who happens to stumble upon the scene of the crime. Raskolnikov then flees and manages to leave undetected. After the murder, Raskolnikov falls into a feverish state and begins to worry obsessively over the consequences of the murder. He hides the items and purse that he stole from the Pawn broker, and tries desperately to clean his clothes of any blood or any evidence. He starts reacting strangely to whoever mentions the murder of the pawnbroker, which is now the most talked-about incident in the town. In his delirium, Raskolnikov starts wandering in St. Petersburg, drawing more and more attention to himself and his relation to the crime. In one of his walks through the city, he finds Marmeladov, who has been hit mortally by a carriage on the street. In order to help him out, Raskolnikov gives the remaining money to the man's teenage daughter Sonya, who has been forced to work as a prostitute to support her family.

Meanwhile, Raskolnikov's mother, Pulkheria Alexandrovna, and his sister, Avdotya Romanovna (or Dounia) arrive in the city. Avdotya had been working as a governess for the Svidrigaïlov family, but was forced out of her position by the head of the family, Arkady Ivanovich Svidrigaïlov, who despite being a married man was attracted toward Avdotya's physical beauty and her feminine qualities. He even offered her riches and elopement. Afraid Avdotya fled the family and lost her source of income. Luzhin, a man of modest income and rank, proposes to marry Avdotya, thereby securing her and her mother's financial safety, provided she accepts him quickly and without any question. It is for these very reasons that the two of them come to Saint Petersburg, both to meet Luzhin there and to obtain Raskolnikov's approval of the marriage. Raskolnikov, who is on a delirious state, dismisses Luzhin immediately as a potential husband for his sister, and realises that she only accepted him to find her family secured

As the novel progresses, Raskolnikov is introduced to the detective Porfiry, who begins to suspect him for the murder purely on psychological grounds. At the same time, a love relationship develops between Raskolnikov and Sonya. Sonya, though a prostitute, is full of Christian virtue and is only driven into the profession by poverty. Meanwhile, Raskolnikov manages to keep his sister away from continuing her relationship with Luzhin, whose true character is exposed to be cunning and base. At this point, Svidrigaïlov appears, having come from the province to Petersburg, only to seek out Avdotya. He reveals that his wife is dead, and that he is willing to pay Avdotya a vast sum of money in exchange for nothing. She, upon hearing the news, starts, suspecting him of treachery.

As Raskolnikov and Porfiry continue to meet, Raskolnikov's motives for the crime remains exposed. Porfiry too becomes increasingly certain Raskolnikov's guilt, but has no concrete evidence or witnesses with which to continue the search. However, Raskolnikov is constantly struggling with the idea of confessing, though he knows that he can never be truly convicted. He turns to Sonya for support and confesses the crime to her. By coincidence, one Svidrigaïlov has taken up residence in a room next to Sonya's and overhears the entire confession. When the two men meet

face to face, Svidrigaïlov acknowledges this fact, and suggests that he may use it against him if necessary. Svidrigaïlov also speaks of his own past, and Raskolnikov grows to suspect that the rumours about his having committed several murders are true.

Sonya urges Raskolnikov to confess, as Svidrigaïlov's testimony could potentially convict him. Furthermore, Porfiry confronts Raskolnikov with his suspicions, and assures him that confession would substantially lighten his sentence. Meantime, Svidrigaïlov attempts to seduce Avdotya, but when he realises that she will never love him, he gives up. In a state of utter confusion, he shoots himself in one morning. In the same morning, Raskolnikov goes to Sonya, who again urges him to confess and be free from his conscience. He makes his way to the police station, where he hears the news of Svidrigaïlov's suicide. He hesitates for a moment, thinking again that he might get away with a perfect crime, but is persuaded again by Sonya to confess.

The novel concludes with an epilogue in which the author gives an account of what happens afterwards in the life of Raskolnikov and his kin. Raskolnikov is sentenced to eight years of penal servitude in Siberia, where Sonya follows him. Dounia gets married to Razumihin and their mother dies soon afterwards, not being able to bear the grief of her son's departure, of which she knew the reason. Raskolnikov himself struggles in Siberia. It is only after some time in prison that his redemption and moral regeneration begin under Sonya's loving influence.

9.6 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF DOSTOEVSKY [Adapted From *Gale Encyclopaedia*]

Among the European writers of the 19th century, Fyodor Dostoevsky is the preeminent novelist of modernity. In his masterworks *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), he explored the far-ranging moral, religious, psychological, social, political, and artistic ramifications of the breakdown of traditional structures of authority and belief. He chronicled the rise and fall of the modern secular individual and traced the totalitarian potential of the new ideologies of his time, including socialism.

His personal and literary engagement with the ongoing political and social issues of his time makes his work particularly interesting from a historical perspective.

However, Dostoevsky's work is much more than a window into the world of 19th century Russia. Modern readers continue to find Dostoevsky's work compelling because of the way he examines, as no one had previously and few have since, the potential for violence and the abuse of power in all forms of human interaction. His perfectly drawn psychological portraits of common people in distress resonate with all readers who struggle to find meaning in the world.

Dostoevsky's work was generally well received by critics during his lifetime. *Poor Folk* was published in 1846 to great critical acclaim. The writer Dmitri Grigorovich, who shared an apartment with Dostoevsky, presented the manuscript to the writer and critic Nikolai Alekseevich Nekrasov, who spent all night reading it and the next morning told the critic Vissarion Belinsky that a new Gogol had appeared. Belinsky said that Dostoevsky had produced the first "social novel" in Russia and had made the truth accessible even to the most unthinking reader. Belinksy was not as impressed with Dostoevsky's next work, The Double, but later critics were intrigued by the philosophical and psychological theme of "double-ness" that Dostoevsky skilfully explored in his writing.

Dmitrii Chizhevsky, in an article first published in 1928, was among the first critics to expound on the significance of the double as a philosophical problem in Dostoevsky's works, including such later works as *The Possessed* (1872), *The Adolescent* (1875), and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880). Upon publication in 1866, *Crime and Punishment* was widely praised, primarily for the depth of its psychological analysis. In contrast, the radical critic Dmitrii Ivanovich Pisarev emphasised the depth of Dostoevsky's social economic analysis, arguing that Raskolnikov was driven by the "struggle for existence." Russian author Ivan Turgenev and Anatolii Fedorovich Koni, a leading jurist, both praised the work. Some radical critics charged that Dostoevsky had misrepresented the younger generation and its ideas. The symbolist poet Viacheslav Ivanovich Ivanov read *Crime and*

Punishment in a mythic-religious framework, comparing this and Dostoevsky's other works to ancient tragedy.

Twentieth-century author Andre´ Gide, whose own writing was influenced by *Crime and Punishment*, argues that Raskolnikov fails in his attempt to be more than ordinary, while another twentieth-century writer, Thomas Mann, called this work the greatest crime novel of all time. *Crime and Punishment* had a profound effect on the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who said that Dostoevsky was "the only psychologist from whom he had anything to learn." The Russian philosopher Nikolai Aleksandrovich Berdiaev saw in Raskolnikov's crime the crisis of modern, rational humanism with its glorification of the individual.

One of most productive sources of Dostoevsky criticism in general and *Crime and Punishment* in particular has been psychoanalysis and other forms of scientific psychology. R. D. Laing and Karen Horney are among the many professional psychologists who use Raskolnikov and other Dostoevskian heroes as examples of psychological phenomena. Alfred Bem, a Russian scholar, wrote a series of sophisticated literary studies published in the 1930s that traced the structure of the id and guilt in *Crime and Punishment* and in Dostoevsky's early fiction in general. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, critic Mikhail Bakhtin also emphasises the importance of Raskolnikov's consciousness, arguing that everything in the novel is "projected against him and dialogically reflected in him."

The impact of Dostoevsky's works can be felt throughout the world. One of the reasons for this is that his novels seem to be relevant even in our present times. Some critics have rightly claimed that Dostoevsky was an artist supremely representative, not only of his own age but also of ours. It is the philosophical, moral, psychological and political issues in his works that have interested readers. Dostoevsky's powerful literary depictions of the human condition had a profound influence on modern writers, such as Franz Kafka, who is one of the major German fiction writers of the 20th century. Dostoevsky's personal life experiences enabled him to portray, with deep sympathy, characters who are emotionally and spiritually downtrodden, and who in many cases epitomize the traditional Christian conflict between the body and the spirit.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: In what way are the works of Dostoevsky an window to the world of 19th Russia?

Q 8: The impact of Dostoevsky's works can be felt throughout the world. Why is it so?



9.7 LET US SUM UP

By this time, we have learnt that Dostoevsky, the author of the novel *Crime and Punishment*, is one of the most important Russian novelists and his works had a profound influence on the intellectual thoughts and literatures of the 20th century. The novel is based on Raskolnikov, a poor university student who makes a plan to kill an old woman, Alyona Ivanovna. Finally, he commits the crime in order to test his own ideas about the notion of conscience, morality and human nature. We have learnt the impact of Dostoevsky's works can be felt throughout the world. One of the reasons for this is that the philosophical, moral, psychological and political issues in his works are still relevant in our present times.



9.8 FURTHER READING

Bloom Harold. (Ed.). (2007). *Viva Modern Critical Interpretations: Fyodor Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment*. New Delhi: Viva Books Private Ltd.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. (1989). *Crime and Punishment*: Norton Critical Edition. W. W. Norton & Company.

Hacht, Anne Marie & Dwayne D. Hayes. (Eds.). (2009). *Gale Contextual Encyclopaedia of World Literature.* Vol. 1.

Web Resources:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crime_and_Punishment

9.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: For being a part of the "Petrachevsky Circle" which comprised of progressive-minded intellectuals consisting of writers, students, teachers, army officers, etc. The members of the group opposed the tsars and the serf system.

Ans to Q 2: His experiences in the prison and the army changed his religious and political ideologies…he got disillusioned by Western ideas, and instead turned toward traditional and rustic Russian values… …the change in his writings was marked by the emergence of dark, complex story-lines and situations, brooding and tortured characters and a constant conflict between traditional Russian culture and modern Western philosophy.

Ans to Q 3: *Notes from Underground* (1864) presents the confessions of an underground man… …*The Gambler* (1867) reflects his own addiction to gambling… …*The Idiot* (1868) tried to portray the idea of a 'good man'… …*The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) revolves around the brutal murder of a father by one of his three sons… …*Crime and Punishment* deals with murder and the psychological suffering following the murder.



Ana to Q 4: It is Dostoevsky's last novel… …the story revolves around the brutal murder of a father by one of his three sons… …each son display a distinct personality—Dmitri, a passionate and violent man, Ivan is an intellectual and an atheist and Alyosha has love, faith and compassion for everyone… …these traits are viewed by critics as symbolic of Dostoevsky's own personality.

Ans to Q 5: Alexander Pushkin introduced Russia to all the European literary genres as well as the writers… …he brought natural speech and foreign influences to create modern poetic Russian… …he contributed to lyric poetry, narrative poetry, novel, short story, drama, critical essay, and even to personal letter… …his use of the Russian language formed the basis of the style of novelists like Ivan Turgenev, Ivan Gonacharov and Leo Tolstoy.

Ans to Q 6: The Sovietisation of Russia in 1917 brought modernist literature in Russia… … writers like Maxim Gorky, Mikhail Sholokhov, Valentin Kataev, Aleksei Nikolaevich Tolstoi, Vladimir Mayakovsky, came to prominence… …socialist realism gained official support… …writers such as Mikhail Bulgakov, Boris Pasternak, Andrei Platonov, Osip Mandelstam, Yury Trifonov, Isaac Babel and Vasily Grossman became important.

Ans to Q 7: Todays's readers find Dostoevsky's works compelling because of the way he examines, the potential for violence and the abuse of power in all forms of human interaction… …His psychological portraits of common people in distress resonate with all readers who struggle to find meaning in the world.

Ans to Q 8: Because his novels seem to be relevant even in our present times… …Dostoevsky was an artist supremely representative of his age… …his philosophical, moral, psychological and political issues ingrained in his works have interested the readers across the world… … his depictions of the human condition had a profound influence on modern writers, such as Franz Kafka.



9.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the history of Russian fiction with reference to the greatest stalwarts of Russian literature.

Q 2: Mention the important fictional works of Dostoevsky and discuss some of the important questions and issues raised in them.

Q 3: Discuss in detail the importance of Dostoevsky as a writer in the history of Russian literature.

Q 4: Describe the story of the novel *Crime and Punishment* in your own words.

Q 5: Write a note on the critical reception of Dostoevsky in the context of European literature.

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UNIT 10: FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY: *CRIME AND PUNISHMENT* (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 Reading the Novel: *Crime and Punishment*

10.3.1 Major Themes

10.3.2 Major Characters

10.3.3 Dostoevsky's Narrative Style

10.4 Let us Sum up

10.5 Further Reading

10.6 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

10.7 Possible Questions

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the important aspects of *Crime and Punishment* which are essential in order to understand the text
- identify the major themes and discuss them
- trace the important characters of the novel and discuss their role
- have some ideas on the narrative style of Dostoevsky as a writer
- make an assessment of the reception of the novel since its publication

10.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of Block 2 of the course on European Literature and this unit needs to be studied in connection with the previous unit. We shall, in this unit, discuss the novel *Crime and Punishment*, which was first, published in the literary journal *The Russian Messenger* in twelve monthly instalments during 1866. This is the second of Dostoyevsky's full-length novels following his return from ten years of exile in Siberia. The novel is based on Raskolnikov, a poor university student who makes a plan

to kill an old woman, Alyona Ivanovna—a pawnbroker. Finally, he commits the crime in order to test his own ideas about the notion of conscience, morality and human nature. Following the murder, Raskolnikov undergoes tremendous emotional turmoil, and his sense of guilt and self-doubt makes him confess and suffer the consequences. Meanwhile, he meets a prostitute named Sonia to whom Raskolnikov first confesses his crime. Sonia then encourages him to confess to the police. After confession, he is sentenced to eight years rigorous imprisonment in Siberia. Eventually, it is Sonia's intense love that resurrects Raskolnikov. As we finish reading this unit, we shall be able to discuss the novel in terms of its various vital aspects.

10.3 READING THE NOVEL: *CRIME AND PUNISHMENT*

Dostoevsky started working on *Crime and Punishment* in the summer of 1865. At this point in life, he was facing a major financial crisis as he squandered all his savings in gambling. This novel reflects certain aspects of Dostoevsky's own life. It can also be seen as the author's reaction to the political situation in St. Petersburg. The central debate raised in this novel is based on a crucial question: Who is a criminal?

10.3.1 Major Themes

The following are some of the important themes that you will find in this novel.

Criminal Psychology:

The moneylender Alyona Ivanovna, symbolises the "most noisome vermin" to Raskolnikov. In his attempt to rid society of such parasites, Raskolnikov commits the murder—a murder based entirely on the ideologies he has formulated while living at St. Petersburg. However, the murder of Lizaveta, Alyona's younger sister, is not pre-meditated, and therefore, renders a strong bearing on Raskolnikov's mind. It is known that Dostoevsky was well versed with criminal psychology, having closely aware of the cases of the most infamous criminals of his time. References can be made to

the **Lacenaire trial** of 1835, and the transcripts that were considered to be the most well documented insights into the criminal psyche. What was central to the Lacenaire case was the criminal's contention that he was a "victim" of society. Lacenaire claimed that all the people he had killed were pre-destined to die since society was his one and only enemy. Raskolnikov does not believe he has committed a crime, and continues to believe so. Raskolnikov's act has a lot to do with the intellectual thoughts he has been exposed to. As a student of law, he formulates a certain theory to explain crime. He divides man into two distinct categories – ordinary and extraordinary. Ordinary man is one who abides by judicial laws. Extraordinary man, on the other hand, is permitted to break the law *if* it aids him in the realisation of his idea. Ordinary man is content with the existing system. Extraordinary man, however, has the gift of the new word, and may commit crimes "in the name of what ought to exist". Herein lies a clear justification for Raskolnikov's crime. The murder of Alena Ivanovna is a right granted to extraordinary man. However, despite all such theories he cannot escape the resultant emotional turmoil. He was completely aware of the hesitation inside him. While he can find no reason to justify the murder of Lizaveta, he spends the entire novel trying to rationalize the murder of Alena Ivanovna. Thus, the psychology of crime is an integral theme in the novel *Crime and Punishment.*

From the very beginning of *Crime and Punishment*, we witness certain unease in Raskolnikov's character. Although he has come to the decision that Alena Ivanovna must be murdered, he questions the execution of the act. Raskolnikov wishes to create a better world that comprises superior human beings such as himself. When he *does* commit the double murder, Raskolnikov goes into a state of delirium, precisely because unlike Napoleon he cannot separate his conscience from his actions. Although initially, the desire to give himself up is strong, he gradually decides that there is no need to atone for something he does not consider a crime.

Dostoevsky truly captures the hellish state of an individual torn between annihilation, since he can only truly destroy himself after having embarked upon the path he has taken, and redemption. Raskolnikov himself declares, "It was myself I killed!" In a way, one might say that Raskolnikov's conscience prevails as he is exiled to Siberia for eight years. The ritual with the crosses performed by Sonya before the confession is testament to his desire for redemption. His decision to confess is driven greatly by his desire to live rather than to repent. In the Epilogue, Raskolnikov seems to display barely any remorse for the crime he has committed, although Dostoevsky suggests that the boy is ready for a renewal. What we *can* be sure of is Raskolnikov's divided conscience and a chance to start anew.

Nihilism:

Many critics have called Crime and Punishment an anti-nihilist work. It is a condemnation of the "new ideas" prevalent during Dostoevsky's time among the young, educated middle-class people. We see the parody of such new ideas in Raskolnikov, Lebezyatnikov, Luzhin and many other characters. The philosophy of nihilism attempts to solve societal problems like poverty and injustice through the destruction of all accepted social codes. Raskolnikov is a nihilist in the sense that he advocates the dismantling of laws and regulations for an elite class of 'extraordinary people'. Nihilism, however, blindly discards both the harmful and helpful aspects of tradition, and suggests no coherent model from which to rebuild the destroyed society and bring about the realisation of ideas of justice and peace. Dostoevsky, alerts us about the violence inherent in such a solution.

The Issue of Justice:

The problematic notion of legality and justice is explored in detail in the novel. For one, there are intensive descriptions of police procedures and other methods of investigation of crime, and at the

end, the readers get to know about the results of Raskolnikov's trial. One problem the novel raises is whether all people are equally culpable for crime. Raskolnikov's initial view is that there are exceptional people who may overstep legal (and even moral) bounds and still remain blameless. The old woman whom he murders is seen as just a louse and harmful to society. However, the novel shows u, at the end, that legality and justice must be blind; that the degree of punishment must not vary along class lines or, indeed, any such arbitrary category. All individuals are responsible for crimes to the same degree, regardless of background or intellect. Raskolnikov is given a lenient sentence because of his earlier good—courageous and selfless—deeds.

Retribution:

Retribution, as a theme, is closely linked to the themes of imprisonment, justice and suffering. Stylistically, one can inquire whether the novel delivers poetic justice, that is, if the characters meet appropriate ends, with the good triumphing and the evil characters being punished for their crimes. The novel, being an exercise in realism, does not deliver this kind of false poetic justice. The good characters suffer much more intensely than the bad, and the bad characters sometimes triumph or receive hardly any punishment at all. Dostoevsky is again negating the idea of fate, and showing that punishment comes out of the natural consequences of one's actions. Svidrigailov goes mad and kills himself because of his evil actions, and the rejection by the morally upright Dounia. Luzhin is humiliated because of his malignant victimisation of Sonya. However, they do not receive the type of punishment that the title of the novel refers to: a spiritual punishment brought about the soul of the evil-doer himself, such as Raskolnikov experiences. Retribution denotes punishment, but connotes the idea of vengeance or payback for a crime. Raskolnikov finally goes to prison for his actions, but the imprisonment itself is not as important as the suffering he undergoes in his own mind. Dostoevsky clearly

shows that a man who commits murder can still be reformed once he has experienced great suffering, such as in the system of imprisonment. His idea of justice is not so much empty, meaningless and vengeful retribution as the criminal understanding the gravity of his crime, repenting, and then being offered a chance to reform his life. He shows that this is naturally brought out through the conscience of the evildoer, and negates the idea that the state can induce justice through its laws and systems of incarceration.



LET US KNOW

The 'anti-hero' is a term, which denotes a protagonist who displays the typical qualities of a villain, or subverts our idea of what is heroic. Anti-heroes have had a long history in literature, especially the *picaro*, or the 'rogue' character type such as exemplified by Miguel Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. Anti-heroes are generally used to make a satirical comment on society. While heroes usually lead society, anti-heroes stay on the margins of society, and even overtly fight against it. They can be more clear-sighted about the failings of society, being outside it, and thus can offer critical assessments of it. Raskolnikov is a peculiar type of anti-hero.

Existentialism:

Existentialism as a philosophy only came into being in the 20th century, and really flourished in the 40s and 50s. You perhaps know that existentialism sees man as a rational, thinking creature responsible for each of his actions, and believes, that 'existence precedes essence'. This is in contrast with the Christian theological idea of pre-ordained fate and original sin. An existentialist reading of Dostoyevsky would, therefore, not see Raskolnikov's character as inherently flawed from birth, but call him a murderer simply because he has committed a murder. In this reading, we would not take into account the historical and socio-economic context around Raskolnikov or around any of the other characters. As an existential

figure, he is a failure, because he constantly tries to evade responsibility for his actions, and because he succumbs to the lure of social normality.

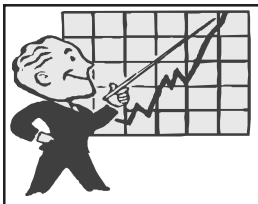
Family Ties:

How important is family to Raskolnikov? It seems that Raskolnikov is held in high regard by both his mother and his sister. He is an educated man and overviews all decisions of the family. The decision that Dounia and Luzhin should wed is the only one that is taken without the consultation of Raskolnikov. Being a sharp young law student, Raskolnikov immediately catches the superficiality of Luzhin. After the murder, Raskolnikov develops an aversion towards his family, precisely because they do not know the truth. The fact that he is a murderer torments Raskolnikov to the effect that he harbours antagonistic feelings towards anyone who showers him with love. However, the strain between his sister and him is less than the strain between his mother and him. Perhaps, this is because the bond between mother and son runs deep, and perhaps also because Pulkheria is more vocal about her feelings than Dounia ever is. Raskolnikov decides that the only way he can ease his family's suffering and so also his, is by disappearing without ever telling them that he is a killer. When Dounia learns the truth from Sonya, all that she wishes is that her brother is still alive. It is strange how brother and sister slip into a sort of ease while they discuss the murder, and appear to be closer to each other than they ever have been in the novel. Raskolnikov's parting words to his sister are that she should not forsake their mother. All these clearly show that Raskolnikov is also conscious of their family.

Critique of Contemporary Russian Society:

After his arrest in 1849, Dostoevsky focused on the changing milieu he found himself in. He was an exponent of *pochvenichestvo* (from *pochva* meaning "[one's native] soil") which sought to combine growing Western thought with traditional Russian culture. The

importance of one's native culture was on the decline after the rule of Peter I. In addition, most importantly, Dostoevsky attempts to examine in *Crime and Punishment* the midway between the *westernizers* and the *slavophiles.* Raskolnikov and Luzhin are products of the western schools of thought that were gaining rapid significance in Russia. Despite their education, they fail to successfully combine their newfound knowledge with the traditions of Russia. Dostoevsky is obviously pointing to a weakness in this mode of thinking. His idea of Christianity differed from the Orthodox sect, and he criticised the modern educated Russian for turning away from the Church. This is exemplified by Raskolnikov, and his inability to commit to any form of penitence—although he finally agrees to confess and gain salvation.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Do you think Raskolnikov can be called a 'nihilist'?

Q 2: How does Dostoevsky deal with criminal psychology in the novel?

Q 3: State the important themes of the novel *Crime and Punishment?*

Q 4: How is the theme of Retribution dealt with in this novel?

10.3.2 Major Characters

The following are the important characters of the novel *Crime and Punishment*.

Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov:

Raskolnikov is the protagonist of the novel Crime and Punishment which is discussed from his perspective. He is perhaps one of the most discussed and critically acclaimed characters in world fiction. A 23-year-old man and former student of law, now a destitute, Raskolnikov is described as "exceptionally handsome, above the average in height, slim, well built, with beautiful dark eyes

and dark brown hair." Perhaps the most striking feature of Raskolnikov is his dual personality. On the one hand, he is cold, apathetic, and antisocial; on the other, he can be surprisingly warm and compassionate. His chaotic interaction with the external world and his nihilistic worldview might be seen as the cause of his social alienation or the consequence of it. Despite its name, the novel does not so much deal with the crime and its formal punishment, as with Raskolnikov's internal struggle (the book shows that his punishment results more from his conscience than from the law). Believing society would be better for it, Raskolnikov commits murder with the idea that he possessed enough intellectual and emotional fortitude to deal with the ramifications, [based on his paper/thesis, "On Crime", that he is a Napoleon], but his sense of guilt soon overwhelms him to the point of psychological and somatic illness. It is only in the epilogue that he realises his formal punishment, having decided to confess and end his alienation from society.

The popularity that Raskolnikov has enjoyed among the literary circles owes perhaps to his complex psychology that renders him an interesting and intriguing character. Raskolnikov invents his own theory of crime, but is not for a moment spared of doubt regarding the justice of his action. Raskolnikov's capacity for love and passionate desire is revealed in his exceptional relationship with Sonia. Raskolnikov is thus a man of manifold dimensions, and it is precisely this multiplicity of his character that had carved for him a permanent niche in the arenas of world literature.

Sofya Semyonovna Marmeladov or Sonia:

Sonya is an example of female subjugation due to circumstances. Following her family's extreme poverty and her father's alcoholism, she is forced into prostitution by her stepmother Katerina Ivanovna. Her similarities to Dounia are emphasised when they are both preyed upon by the same man—Luzhin tries to malign her reputation further by falsely accusing her of being a thief. Sonia is perhaps one of the most complex female characters in world

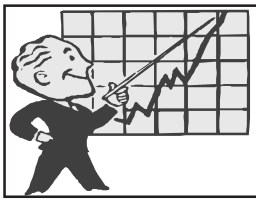
literature. She later walks willingly into the tragedies of life in Siberia, because of her incessant love for Raskolnikov. She does not for a moment try to justify her position, and submits to the rebuffs of life and all the curses and blames that are dispensed on her.

Avdotya Romanovna Raskolnikov or Dounia:

Dounia is the sister of Raskolnikov. Her love for her family is unconditional, as is evident from the fact that she is quick in forgiving her brother. The magnitude of her self-respect is revealed when she unthinkingly calls off her engagement to Luzhin the moment she detects insolence on his part. She is a strong woman who single-handedly resists the advances of a lascivious Svidrigailov, and also a dutiful daughter who stands by her mother in all her moments of woe. She tries to be financially independent by taking on a job as a governess, rather than marrying for money, since she realises that she will have to be subservient to her husband. She is an educated, proud woman with great dignity, despite her poverty. By the end, she marries Razumikhin, her equal in intelligence and moral strength.

Pulcheria Alexandrovna Raskolnikov:

Pulcheria Alexandrovna is the devoted mother of Raskolnikov and Dounia. She is a modest woman, who, despite her frailty, struggles to make both ends meet in her family. Pulcheria Alexandrovna lives solely for her family, is completely dependent on them for her emotional stability, and breaks down when catastrophe befalls the life of her son.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Comment on the character of Raskolnikov?

10.3.3 Dostoevsky's Narrative Style

In his study of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Mikhail Bakhtin refers to the concept of polyphony or "multiple voices". This narrative technique does not allow a singular interpretation to

overshadow the text. Although a greater part of the novel focuses on Raskolnikov and his inner struggles, the reader is given an understanding of the events from other characters' points of view. We know that in all probability Raskolnikov is not delirious when he thinks that Porfiry is trying to trap him. A voice is affected by the language and speech particular to each speaker. We will see that in order for Dostoevsky's imaginative world to be peopled by multiple voices, wordplay is highly important. Polyphony, by its very nature, prevents an autonomous "monophonic" voice, or any authorial intrusions. Porfiry, for example, consistently mirrors Raskolnikov's language so as to psychologically trap him. Bakhtin also talks about a type of discourse he calls *erlebte Rede* or "double discourse", wherein one's speech comes deceptively close to another's. The use of the *erlebte Rede* allows for the third-person omniscient point of view where the narrator's conscious and unconscious maybe more distinctly separated. A first-person point of view blurs the boundaries between these two states of consciousness. The omniscient third-person point of view, however, effectively traces the stream of consciousness of Raskolnikov, and makes it possible for the reader to identify the wordplay and double meaning at work in Dostoevsky's novel. The use of *erlebte Rede* by other characters acts as an externalisation of Raskolnikov's conscience; it is this that makes their speech so threatening. Characters often do not realize they are interacting through this discourse. The man who says to Raskolnikov "thou art the murderer" later apologises for his unusual outburst. The emphasis he places on the word 'thou' has nothing to do with Raskolnikov. However, this "man from the earth", like other characters, is unaware of Raskolnikov's "reading" of his speech. It is Raskolnikov alone who knows that the man's accusation is not wrong.

You will note that Dostoevsky makes use of the devices of dream to represent the inner self of Raskolnikov. Some of the most important imagery in *Crime and Punishment* comes in the form of

dreams. Four dreams in particular are significant to the action and themes of the novel:

The first is Raskolnikov's dream about the horse, in which he dreams he is a young boy, and he is walking with his father past a tavern to a cemetery to place flowers on the graves of his grandmother and baby brother. They stop to witness a violent scene in which a crowd is gathered around an old weak mare who enrages her master by her inability to pull the enormous load on his cart. The master proceeds to beat the horse to death, egged on by the crowd. The little boy, Raskolnikov, feels immense pity and sympathy for the murdered horse— He tries to protect her with his own body and weeps for her.

The second is Raskolnikov's dream re-enacting the murder of the old woman. In it, he strikes her with the axe, but she does not move. When he bends down to take a closer look, he notices that "she is laughing, shaking with noiseless laughter". Every time he frenziedly strikes her with the axe, she continues laughing until he finally runs away and notices that all around him are a crowd of laughing people. Mikhail Bakhtin points out the carnivalesque nature of this scene – the elements of crowd, laughter and chaotic disturbance of order being emphasised. Many other aspects such as sacrifice, dismemberment and carnivalesque contrasts and antitheses are present throughout the novel.

The third is a dream that occurs near the end, in which Raskolnikov dreams about a unique new plague, which infects all of humanity except a chosen few. This plague represents—the 'new ideas' of individualism and moral relativism that are taking hold of young people. The chosen few are those who have regained or retained their faith and spiritual freedom in the face of the moral freedom, which these new ideas advocate.

The fourth is a dream by Svidrigailov on the night before his suicide. He (along with the reader) confuses the dream with reality, unaware that he is dreaming until he wakes. He dreams of

walking out of his room at the hotel and meeting a little girl who is cold and crying, complaining of having been beaten by her mother.

It is impossible to examine dreams without referring to the ideas of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. Freud believed that our repressed desires get articulated in our dreams in the form of symbols— often expressed as an articulation of the conflict between the id, ego and superego. Jung formulated the idea of the collective unconscious, in which many 'archetypal' images and patterns exist and work together in the dream to provide a unified, coherent vision of the world.



10.4 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that the novel *Crime and Punishment* is the second of Dostoyevsky's full-length novels following his return from ten years of exile in Siberia. The novel is based on Raskolnikov, a poor university student who makes a plan to kill an old woman, Alyona Ivanovna. Finally, he commits the crime in order to test his own ideas about the notion of conscience, morality and human nature. Following the murder, Raskolnikov undergoes tremendous emotional turmoil, and his sense of guilt and self-doubt makes him confess and suffer the consequences. We have also learnt that *Crime and Punishment* is a novel loaded with multiple meanings. This novel is significant for its beautiful rendering of the criminal Psychology, the philosophy of existentialism and nihilism, the issue of Justice, the importance of Family Ties and most importantly the critique of contemporary Russian society. The ideas we have gained from this unit, shall help us to read the text of the novel even better.



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10.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Both yes and no… …*Crime and Punishment* has been called an anti-nihilist work by many critics… …Raskolnikov is a nihilist in the sense that he advocates the dismantling of laws and regulations for an elite class of 'extraordinary people'… … Dostoevsky, alerts us about the violence inherent in such a solution.

Ans to Q 2: As a law student, Raskolnikov formulates a certain theory to explain crime… …he divides man into two distinct categories – ordinary and extraordinary… … ordinary man is one who abides by judicial laws… … extraordinary man is permitted to break the law *if* it aids him in the realisation of his idea… …here lies a clear justification for Raskolnikov's crime… …the murder of Alena Ivanovna is a right granted to extraordinary man… … but when he commits the double murder, Raskolnikov goes into a state of delirium, precisely because he cannot separate his conscience from his actions.

Ans to Q 3: Criminal Psychology… …Nihilism… …The Issue of Justice… …Retribution… …Existential Dilemma… …Family Ties… …Critique of Contemporary Russian Society and so on.

Ans to Q 4: Retribution, as a theme, is closely linked to the themes of imprisonment, justice and suffering… …one can inquire whether the novel delivers poetic justice, that is, if the characters meet appropriate ends, with the good triumphing and the evil characters being punished for their crimes… … Dostoevsky is again negating the idea of fate, and showing that punishment comes out of the natural consequences of one's actions.

Ans to Q 5: Raskolnikov is the protagonist of the novel *Crime and Punishment… …*the most striking feature of Raskolnikov is his dual personality… …on the one hand, he is cold, apathetic, and antisocial but surprisingly warm and compassionate… …in order to better his society, Raskolnikov commits murder with the idea that he possessed enough intellectual and emotional fortitude to deal with the ramifications… …Raskolnikov invents his own theory of crime.



10.7 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What are the thoughts that occur to Raskolnikov soon after the crime? Comment on Dostoevsky's exploration of the criminal mind in the novel *Crime and Punishment*.

Q 2: In what ways, does Dostoevsky, critique the contemporary Russian society in his novel *Crime and Punishment*?

Q 3: Do you think that family ties are important to Raskolnikov? Discuss with reference to Raskolnikov's attachment with his mother and sister.

Q 4: Discuss the role played by various important characters in the development of the plot of the novel *Crime and Punishment.*

Q 5: Discuss how the novel *Crime and Punishment* has been critically received since its publication?

*** ***** ***



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