EUROPEAN LITERATURE (IN TRANSLATION)-II

MA [English] -Second Semester

Course: 204

Directorate of Distance Education

DIBRUGARH UNIVERSITY

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UNIT - 1
RUSSIAN NOVEL

Structure

1.0 Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Examine the life and major works of Fyodor Dostoevsky
- Discuss the plot of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*
- Analyse the various themes and techniques in *Crime and Punishment*

1.1 Introduction

Fyodor Dostoevsky is considered to be one of the most prolific writers in Russian Literature along with Gogol and Tolstoy. His fame primarily lies in his novels with an intense psychological insight. Dostoevsky unravels a wide array of issues with profound political, social, and religious implications, delving deep into the psychological recesses of his protagonists. Dostoevsky's first novel, *Poor Folk* (1846), received immediate commendation from the critics after its publication, and due to his active opposition regarding the institution of Serfdom, Dostoevsky became increasingly prominent in the socialist circles. His achievement as a pioneering author in the psychological-realist vein was only consolidated by the publication of *Crime and Punishment* in 1866. In this long, feverish trip through the psyche of an anguished murderer, Dostoevsky's narrative skill reached an unsurpassed height. Apart from literary fame, the novel also achieved significant commercial success.

1.2 Russian Novel: An Introduction

From sixteenth century onwards, Russian empire consciously strove to be a part of the political and cultural network of Europe. However, this attempt often remained half-hearted, if not an imitative project. French culture and literature dominated the Russian scenario as it did in many other European courts. Cultural and literary activity became somewhat animated from the early nineteenth century onwards, with more active engagement and patronage of the Russian court as well as appearance of a group of enterprising and gifted literary personalities. As mentioned in a previous section on Russian drama, a new conduit of writers, publishers and readers emerged from the early nineteenth century. Soon, it gained strength, and by the mid-nineteenth century, Russian literature seemed to break its unique national ground in many fronts of literature and culture.

With the increasing circulation of newspapers and literary periodicals, demand for prose fiction also increased. Moreover, since Russian Censorship was often considered to be a draconian institution, many expressions of criticism were channelled through fictional forms. In fact, the master story teller of the period, Nicolai Gogol, based both his best-known short stories, such as *The Overcoat*, and his pioneering Russian novel, *The Dead Souls* (1842), on the vagaries of the contemporary bureaucratic rigmarole and social labyrinth. Apart from such nuanced or overt social criticism, Russian prose fiction had diverse concerns, such as historical narratives in the vein of Romantic narratives of Pushkin. Although suddenly, Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* in later half of the nineteenth century brought a fresh spell of modernist direction in the Russian prose fiction. However, it may also be recalled that Dostoevsky's earliest work, *The Poor Folk* (1846), was also written in the tradition of social realism prevalent in the mid-nineteenth century. Further, the realistic representation of various social strata, in the manner of French masters like Balzac and Zola, also received considerable commercial and critical acclaim. Nevertheless, the so-called modernist responsibility, that has ceased to blame external factors like social inequalities or squalid urban materiality as sources of human degradation and realizing the knowledge as one defining feature, manifests itself thorough Dostoevsky's writing.

Dostoevsky's maturity through the 1860s and the appearance of Leo Tolstoy in Russian literature immediately after this period is usually considered to be the zenith of literary flourish of the so-called Silver Age of Russian literature. Within a short span of time, approximately half a century, Russian novel did not only come of age, but came to the forefront of the European tradition, both in terms of its technical virtuosity as well as the depth and treatment of epic subject matters.

1.3 Dostoevsky and his Works

Fyodor Dostoevsky's fame primarily lies in his novels with an intense psychological insight. By delving deep into the psychological recesses of his protagonists, Dostoevsky unravels a wide array of issues with profound political, social, and religious implications. The interiorized perspective of the individual narrator or protagonist in his novels presents a unique view of the interaction between the interior and the external forces that leave indelible impressions on the inner life of the individual. Dostoevsky was born in Moscow in 1821. His father was a doctor. Though his education started at home, he was eventually sent to an elite boarding school. Finally, he graduated from the St. Petersburg Academy of Military Engineering in 1843. However, he soon realized that his real calling lay in literature and resigned from the rank of a sub-lieutenant to pursue the career of a fiction writer.

Unlike many others, Dostoevsky was lucky as *Poor Folk* (1846), his first novel, received immediate commendation from the critics after its publication. Due to his active opposition to the institution of Serfdom, Dostoevsky became increasingly prominent in the socialist circles. His involvement in this and many other socialist causes gradually increased during the period of 1847-1849. Due to his involvement in printing and distributing socialist doctrines which were considered illegal and insidious, Dostoevsky was arrested and sentenced to a long imprisonment. After spending eight months in the prison along with many others convicted of similar crimes, Dostoevsky was sentenced to be executed. However, it became apparent that the execution was a show meant to psychologically crush the activists. Their 'death sentence' was commuted to a sentence of four-year penal servitude in a labour camp in Siberia. Four years of compulsory service to the military followed a term of penal servitude. Raskolnikov's experience in a Siberian prison, as depicted in the 'Epilogue' of *Crime and Punishment*, is produced out of Dostoevsky's own familiarity regarding a similar situation.

More directly, Dostoevsky's *The House of the Dead* records his prison experiences as well as the psychological condition and trauma created by a life of penal servitude (cf. Chekhov's visit and record of Sakhalin penal colony and recording of them in *Ward No 6* and other stories). During his term in Siberia, Dostoevsky underwent two major experiences that shaped rest of his life. First, during this time he suffered the first of many epileptic seizures. This personal experience shaped and coloured many of his literary presentations of the alleged 'abnormal' mind that offers unique insight into human greatness achieved in mental spheres. The wisdom that is attained by such 'insane' people is immortalized in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*. However, apart from that, in general, many of Dostoevsky's protagonists exhibit moments of wisdom and insight when they are seized by irrational impulses,

as experienced by the people who suffer from such epileptic seizures. Secondly, perhaps in a more pervasive way, Dostoevsky's faith in social radicalism and socialist revolutions underwent a paradigmatic shift. He not only lost faith in such interventionist-constructivist social activism, but also became a staunch opponent to all such rational enterprises to change human behaviour in society through use of specific pragmatic techniques. The first outburst of his systematic fictional treatment of the critique regarding this pragmatic approach to human life and civilization was presented in his *Notes from Underground*. In this text, he directly takes on *What is to be Done?*, one of the most important text of socialist revolutionary tenets. However, *What is to be Done?* remains one of the most seminal texts, even for a generation after that. Lenin was immensely influenced by the text and offered his own paraphrase, making it a suitable textbook for revolution. Dostoevsky's ideological opposition to such rational, pragmatic approach to human welfare and betterment, as found in his *Notes,* becomes more trenchant in *Crime and Punishment*. Here, the presentation of the dialectic behind murder motive and other ways of supporting a crime works as a travesty of the whole idea of discourse of rationalization for human actions. In fact, in part Raskolnikov's crime is motivated by his justification of any action based on such a pragmatic, utilitarian view of the society. Further, Lebezyatnikov, whose name is a derivative of the Russian word for 'sycophant', is fixated on the new philosophy that was fashionable in St. Petersburg. Luzhin, a middle-ranking public servant, is constantly anxious of being 'uncovered by the nihilists'. Dostoevsky's marriage to Mariya Dmitriyevna Isayeva in 1857 ended when she died of consumption seven years later. During the 1860s, Dostoevsky spent much of his time in close proximity with Western European culture. This experience gave him direct access to the invading cultural mores that were transforming Russian customs in an irrevocable way. Further, during the early part of the decade, he was beleaguered by a number of personal problems, his wife's illness and death being one of the most profound, and crises like acute poverty, epileptic illness and apparently an incorrigible addiction to gambling. His personal problems were further aggravated by his brother's protracted illness, which he heroically tended to, and his brother's eventual untimely death, that burdened his already impoverished condition with further burden of a huge debt caused by his brother's reckless lifestyle. If his personal and material conditions reached its lowest point in the middle of the decade, these experiences also contributed to the reversal of his fortunes. Firstly, *Notes from Underground* presented the anti-rationalistic tormented diatribe in the form of a troubled mind's long monologue. The novella not only consolidated Dostoevsky's stand as an anti-socialist, but also established him as the pioneering writer with a unique psychological insight into the complex human minds. His achievement as a pioneering author in the psychological-realist

vein was only consolidated by the publication of *Crime and Punishment* in 1866. In this long, feverish trip through the psyche of an anguished murderer, Dostoevesky's narrative skill reached an unsurpassed height. Apart from literary fame, the novel also achieved significant commercial success that barely allowed him to keep afloat in terms of finance. However, his earnings were soon eroded by the mounting impact of his doubly daunting financial burden, inherited credits and the responsibility of raising a number of children orphaned by premature and sudden deaths of both of his brother and sister. In 1867, he remarried Anna Grigoryevna Snitkina. She helped him deal with his clinical problems of epilepsy, psychological difficulties of depression and gambling, and offered the services of a stenographer for his novel, *The Gambler*.

Dostoevsky continued to write many more novels which also attained the status of classics with lasting reputation. Among these, *The Idiot* (1868) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), completed a year before his death, are considered to be most important ones. The legacy and influence of Dostoevsky's novels and writings can be traced in many major branches of twentieth century literature and philosophy, cutting across the geographical and cultural boundaries of Europe. Some saw his treatment of the external issues as prescient depictions of life under future totalitarian regimes that created pragmatic monstrosities professing to ostensibly improve the very condition it ended up stifling manifold. Dostoevsky's accounts of the frustratingly futile nature of human encounter with mortality, despair, meaninglessness and futility of anxious choices were lapped by the existentialist thinkers who flourished during the mid-twentieth century.

His literary successors like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus treasured Dostoevsky's works for his perceptive insight into human quandary. The befitting style to such content was created by his treatment of literary techniques. The unforgettable characters in his novels contribute to the continuation and consolidation of a lasting legacy, long after his death.

Check Your Progress-1

1. Which was the first novel written by Dostoevsky?
2. Which novel records Dostoevsky's prison experiences as well as the psychological condition and trauma created by a life of penal servitude?
3. Which novel by Dostoevsky presents the anti-rationalistic tormented diatribe in the form of a troubled mind's long monologue?

1.4 *Crime and Punishment*: Plot Overview

In the beginning of the novel, we find the protagonist, Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov, recently a student, but now unoccupied, living alone in the little attic of a ramshackle St Petersburg apartment. Though handsome and intelligent, Raskolnikov looks wan and is scruffily dressed. While his financial condition verges on poverty, he is often found to be abstractedly engaged in a monologue with himself. He is often shown deeply pondering over a dreadful crime of uncertain character. He goes to the house of an old pawnbroker, Alyona Ivanovna, with the intention of pawning a watch for some money. However, it is hinted that the ulterior motive for the visit is to plan the crime more thoroughly.

On his way back, he meets an extraordinary person called Marmeladov at the tavern. He reveals that in a fit of drunkenness, he has indulged in a five-day spell of drinking after abandoning his job. Now he is afraid to return to his family and to tell them what he has done. He tells Raskolnikov about his ailing wife and his daughter, Sonya. Marmeladov tells him that Sonya has been forced into prostitution to support the family. Without any logical explanation, Raskolnikov accompanies Marmeladov to his apartment and finds his family living in extreme poverty and squalor. Pulcheria Alexandrovna, Raskolnikov's mother, sends him a letter informing him of his sister, Dunya's, imminent marriage to a government servant, Luzhin, and their plan to move to St Petersburg for solemnizing the marriage. After receiving the letter, Raskolnikov goes to another tavern only to overhear another fellow student declaring how the world would be a better place if the old pawnbroker, Alyona Ivanovna, died. As if to conjure the entire circumstance to some specific goal, Raskolnikov, on the streets, overhears another bit of information that the old pawnbroker will be alone at her apartment the next evening. By the time we find him sleeping fitfully at night and arranging for an axe in the morning, we are half-aware that the awful crime he had contemplated for long is the murder of the old pawnbroker. Raskolnikov takes out the same watch that he had taken with him during his previous visit to the pawnbroker to create an alibi for his visit. In the evening, Raskolnikov finds the old pawnbroker alone at her apartment. He kills her in an instant, but while rummaging through her belongings for money, her sister, Lizaveta, suddenly walks in. Fearing that she could be a potential witness to the crime, Raskolnikov kills her as well. He manages to narrowly escape from the crime scene without being seen by more witnesses. Returning to his apartment, Raskolnikov collapses on his sofa. Next morning, he wakes up with an unexplained restlessness and frantically hunts down every possible bloodstain on his clothing. A police summons requires him to visit the police station, where he finds out that the summons is not related to the murder, but his landlady, trying to evict him for non-payment of house rent

for a long period of time. However, at the police station, he overhears a conversation regarding the murder of the pawnbroker. He collapses immediately, thereby setting off the police to include him in the list of suspects. Anxiously, Raskolnikov returns to his house to gather all the wares he had amassed at the pawnbroker's and hides it under a stone slab in an isolated courtyard. Restless, he craves for a change of scene and goes to his friend Razumikhin, where he receives an immediate offer of work. He refuses the offer of work due to his inner restlessness and rather inexplicably leaves his friend's place and abruptly returns to his own apartment.

After coming back to his apartment, he falls into a disturbed and restless sleep. When he wakes up after four days of disorientation and fever, he finds that Razumikhin and Nastasya had been taking care of him. He also finds out that a doctor, Zossimov, and a young police detective, Zamyotov, had also been visiting him. They notice that Raskolnikov becomes quite uncomfortable when the murders of the pawnbroker and her sister are mentioned.

Dunya's fiancé, Luzhin, also pays a visit and Raskolnikov, after a confrontation with him, goes to a café, almost confessing his crime to Zamyotov. Furthermore, on an impulse, he also goes to the pawnbroker's apartment. While going back home, he discerns that Marmeladov had been run over by a carriage. He carries Marmeladov to his apartment, where he dies, succumbing to his injuries. He meets Sonya at the apartment. He gives Marmeladov's family the twenty roubles he had been given by his mother. When Raskolnikov returns with Razumikhin to his apartment, he faints upon discovering that his mother and sister were waiting for him. He becomes angry with Dunya and Pulcheria Alexandrovna, and orders them to leave the room. He orders Dunya to break-off her engagement with Luzhin. In the meantime, Razumikhin falls in love with Dunya. Razumikhin tries to explain about Raskolnikov to his mother and sister the next morning. The trio return to Raskolnikov's apartment, where they are greeted by Zossimov, who informs them that Raskolnikov was feeling much better. Raskolnikov apologizes to his mother and sister about his behaviour from last night and confesses about giving all of his money to the Marmeladovs.

However, he again becomes angry and irritable, ordering Dunya to not marry Luzhin. Dunya, knowing that Luzhin had particularly requested her not to bring Raskolnikov, asks him whether he wanted to go meet Luzhin with her that evening. Raskolnikov agrees to it and at that moment, Sonya, who is quite embarrassed to be amongst Raskolnikov's family, enters the room. Sonya invites Raskolnikov to her father's funeral. Sonya is followed by Svidrigailov, Dunya's former lecherous employer, on her way back to the apartment. Raskolnikov pays a visit to Porfiry Petrovich, Razumikhin's relative and the magistrate in charge of the murder investigation under the pretence of recovering a watch pawned by him.

When Raskolnikov arrives at Porfiry Petrovich's house, he finds Zamyotov already present there. They have an apprehensive conversation regarding the murders. Raskolnikov believes that Porfiry suspected him of the murders and was leading him into a trap. Raskolnikov and Razumikhin later discuss Raskolnikov's conversation with Porfiry, trying to find out whether he suspected Raskolnikov for the murder. Raskolnikov, upon returning to his apartment, is informed that a man had come looking for him in his absence. The man called Raskolnikov a murderer when he caught up with the man in the street. Raskolnikov dreamt about the pawnbroker's murder that night. When he woke up, he saw a stranger in his room, who eventually turned out to be Svidrigailov. Svidrigailov explains to Raskolnikov that he wanted Dunya to call-off her engagement with Luzhin as he was not worthy of her love and affection. He even offered Dunya a sum of ten thousand roubles to terminate he engagement with Luzhin. Svidrigailov also informs Raskolnikov that Marfa Petrovna, his late wife, had bequeathed three thousand roubles to Dunya in her will. Raskolnikov refuses the offer made by Svidrigailov and suspected that he was insane, as Svidrigailov kept talking about seeing the ghost of Marfa. Raskolnikov and Razumikhin go to a restaurant to meet Pulcheria Alexandrovna, Dunya and Luzhin after Svidrigailov leaves.

Razumikhin informs Raskolnikov that he is convinced about the police suspecting Raskolnikov for the murders. Luzhin feels insulted when he discovers Raskolnikov at the meal, after he had specifically requested him not being there. They talk about Svidrigailov arriving in the city and the money offered by him to Dunya. Raskolnikov and Luzhin start arguing with each other, and Luzhin offended everyone in the room, including his soon-to-be mother-in-law and fiancée. As a result, Dunya breaks-off her engagement to Luzhin and asks him to leave, leaving everyone overjoyed. Razumikhin talks about his plans of entering into the publishing business as a family. However, Raskolnikov spoils everyone's cheerful mood by saying that he did not want to see them anymore. Razumikhin chases after Raskolnikov when he leaves the room, and after catching up with him, Razumikhin realizes that Raskolnikov was guilty of the murders. Razumikhin then goes back to Dunya and her mother, reassuring them that he would take care of them and help them overcome any difficulties they might encounter.

Raskolnikov goes to Sonya Marmeladov's apartment and during their conversation finds out that Sonya was a friend of Lizaveta, one of his victims. He forces Sonya to read aloud the biblical story of Lazarus, who was resurrected by Jesus Christ. In the meantime, Svidrigailov was eavesdropping on their conversation from the apartment next door. Raskolnikov visits Porfiry Petrovich at the police department the next morning, under the pretext of lodging a formal complaint regarding his pawned watch.

Raskolnikov again starts feeling that Porfiry Petrovich was leading him into a trap. He eventually succumbs to the pressure and blames Porfiry Petrovich of playing psychological games. Nikolai, a workman held under suspicion for the murders, felt the tension between the two and burst into the room, confessing to the murders. Raskolnikov, on the way to Katerina Ivanovna's memorial dinner in the honour of Marmeladov, comes across the mystery-man who had called him a murderer on the street. After confronting the man, Raskolnikov discovers that he does not know quite a lot about the case.

The scene now shifts to Luzhin and Lebezyatnikov's apartment. Luzhin is seething over his humiliation by Dunya and Raskolnikov, whom he holds responsible for breaking-off his engagement to Dunya. Luzhin refused to attend the memorial dinner for Marmeladov, even though he was graciously invited. Luzhin invites Sonya to his room, giving her ten roubles. Katerina's dinner does not go as she had planned, and since she was extremely arrogant and fussy, few guests had shown up, in a drunk and crude state, with the exception of Raskolnikov. Luzhin comes to the dinner and accuses Sonya of stealing hundred roubles from him. The bill is discovered in her pocket, even though she denied stealing it. However, Lebezyatnikov enters the room and informs everyone that he had seen Luzhin slip the bill in Sonya's pocket when she was leaving Luzhin's room.

Upon discovering the truth, Raskolnikov tells everyone that Luzhin was just trying to embarrass him and get back at him for breaking-off his engagement to Dunya, by discrediting Sonya. Luzhin then leaves the room, and at that moment, Katerina and her landlady start fighting with each other. Raskolnikov, after the dinner, goes to Sonya and confesses about the murders committed by him. Subsequently, they enter into a long conversation regarding his confusing and bewildering motives. Sonya convinces him to confess his crime to the authorities. Lebezyatnikov comes to the apartment and tells them that Katerina had gone mad as she was parading around the children on the streets, making them beg for money. Sonya hastens to find her and Raskolnikov goes back to his apartment to talk to Dunya. He goes to the streets and sees Katerina singing and dancing wildly. After confrontation with a policeman, she collapses. After being brought back to her room, she eventually dies. Svidrigailov, upon Katerina's death, offers to look after the children and pay for her funeral. He also tells Raskolnikov that he was certain that Raskolnikov had committed those murders.

Raskolnikov wanders around in a trance after the death of Katerina and his confession to Sonya. Razumikhin confronts him, informing him about the pain he had caused his sister and mother, and asks him if he had gone mad. Subsequently, Porfiry comes to his apartment, apologizing for the way he had treated Raskolnikov at the police station. However, Porfiry still does not believe Nikolai's confession. He still accuses Raskolnikov for the murders,

but admitted that he did not have enough evidence against him to arrest him. He tries to coax Raskolnikov into confessing to his crime, saying that if he does, he would get a lighter sentence. Raskolnikov leaves his apartment to find Svidrigailov. He found Svidrigailov in a café, where Svidrigailov informs him that although he was engaged to a sixteen-year-old girl, he was still attracted to Dunya. Svidrigailov leaves the café and manages to lure Dunya in his room, threatening to rape her if she did not marry him. Dunya, feeling trapped, fired several rounds at him with her revolver, but missed him every time. Svidrigailov, seeing her strong dislike for him, lets her leave unharmed. He wanders around St. Petersburg aimlessly with Dunya's revolver. Subsequently, he gives Dunya a sum of three thousand roubles along with fifteen thousand roubles to his fiancée's family. After that, he books a room in a hotel, sleeping peacefully and dreaming of a seductive five-year-old girl and a flood. He kills himself in the morning.

Raskolnikov tells his mother that he loves her and goes back to his apartment, informing Dunya of his plan to confess to his crime. After Dunya leaves, Raskolnikov visits Sonya. Sonya gives him a cross to wear as a parting gift. While going to the police station, he stops and kisses the ground in a marketplace. He almost changes his mind when he reaches the police station and is informed of Svidrigailov's suicide. However, the thought of Sonya helps him through his hesitation, and he confesses his crime to Ilya Petrovich, a police officer.

After a year and a half, we find Raskolnikov in a Siberian prison, where he had been sent nine months ago. Sonya had also moved to a town close to the prison, visiting him regularly. His death sentence had been reduced to a sentence of eight years of hard toil and labour in Siberia due to his confession and past good deeds and his mental confusion surrounding the murders. After his arrest, his mother had died, and Dunya married Razumikhin. Raskolnikov, for a while, remained self-righteous and alienated himself from humanity. However, he eventually realized that he truly loved Sonya and expressed remorse for his crime.

1.4.1 Main Characters in *Crime and Punishment*

Raskolnikov

Raskolnikov is not just the protagonist of the novel, as the novel mostly employs a subjective I-narrator, who is the exclusive narrator of the entire story. His name is derived from the Russian word 'raskolnik' which means 'divided' or 'cleft'. Such derivation aptly befits a person, whose main character attribute is an estrangement from humanity in general. Due to his extreme sense of pride and intellectualism, he considers all fellow human beings fit to perpetuate only their biological functions and is extremely disdainful of them for this reason. Detaching himself from the rest of them, he believes

that he belongs to the rank of elites who should be considered as supermen. He also thinks that since he and other select few who constitute this elite class are above the common limitations of other members of the society. Consequently, they can also contravene the prevalent moral principles of the society for achieving certain higher goals.

Raskolnikov's tormenting agony after the murder and recurring fainting at the reference of his secret crime, however, betrays his ordinariness, contrary to his own belief of belonging to the clan of the hardened pragmatic 'supermen'. In spite of his continuous struggle throughout the novel regarding the decision to confess to his crime, he remains convinced regarding the justification of the pawnbroker's murder for most part of the narrative. Nevertheless, he gradually acknowledges the certainty of his mediety, but at the same time, he also realizes that the force of love he feels for Sonya is strong enough to overcome his entrenched disdain of human society. Apart from his evolving relationship with Sonya, Raskolnikov's affiliations with other characters shed light on his character as well as clarify his understanding of himself. His concerns about Razumikhin, Pulcheria Alexandrova and Dunya are often overshadowed by his sceptical attitude and indifference to their earnest attempts at helping him. Even if he is primarily attracted to Sonya by considering her a companion in social transgression, he does not realize that Sonya's 'crime' is of completely different order. Her transgressions are indeed committed for the sake of others, while his crime is solely motivated by self- seeking mentality.

His association with Svidrigailov is also inscrutable. Raskolnikov loathes the man for his wickedness, but also wants to be a little like him. This want may be conjectured as a justification offered by a toughened malcontent of Raskolikov's crime.

The description Razumikhin offers to Sonya and Pulcheria Alexandrovna is that even in more than a year's time, the bundle of contradiction remains more hidden to him than revealed and presents a range of complexities that Raskolnikov embodies. The major attributes of Raskolnikov's character like self-centredness, and kindness are elaborated by his comments. Nevertheless, apparent contradiction, inherent in both the character he is commenting upon as well as the narration he is offering, is brought about by the prolonged, colloquial and grammatically imprecise statements given by Razumikhin. The unresolved tension experienced by Raskolnikov in his contradictory wishes to admit guilt and avoid imprisonment is brought about by the mention of the 'two opposite characters in him.' Altogether, this indistinct portrayal records Raskolnikov's essentially divided character that his connections with the humanity has been severed and he engages with it only when social engagement brings him tangible benefits. In effect, he has taken utilitarianism to its extreme by taking human beings not at their intrinsic value but by their usage value. Moreover, the

contrasting characters of Razumikhin's sociability and affability are presented in relation to glumness and surliness embodied in Raskolinkov's behaviour. The argument regarding Raskolnikov's troubled conditions compelling him to carry on the murderous plot is easily counter-evidenced by such statements, showing his fundamental nature as already predisposed towards such motives. Further, Razumikhin is also a poor student in dire economic hardship but his desperation never prods him to consider such criminal action. Quite contrarily, his happiness in general pursuits of life is genuine and pleasurable.

Sonya

The character traits of Sonya can be summarized as timorous, calm and prone to easy embarrassment. On the other hand, she is whole-heartedly dedicated to her family and is exceptionally pious. Her suffering in giving herself up to prostitution gains further poignancy due to her father's inability to control his own drunkenness. Sonya's limitless capacity to empathize with the troubled soul of Raskolinkov wins over her initial fright at the insane inconsistency of Raskolnikov. She is not repelled by his crime and seriously worries for his spiritual and mental well-being. It is her deep concern for Raskolnikov's welfare that urges her to convince him to confess of his crimes. Raskolinkov's initial identification with Sonya as that of a fellow transgressor who has overstepped the lines of conventional social morality is a partial understatement, as he surely fails to acknowledge the crucial difference between their contraventions. However, this is made obvious in the narrative explication that she sins for others' sake and his motives for crimes are completely self-serving by nature. Many contemporary socio-political issues of the time that concerned Dostoevsky deeply were given a covert treatment in the character of Sonya. Many such issues like the effects of poverty on human morality, the treatment meted out to women, an individual's commitment to the well-being of the family, individual faith and its religious significance are given fictional treatment through various events of Sonya's character.

Dunya

Proud, intellectually sharp and determined in nature, Dunya's character resembles many aspects of Raskolnikov's. However, for the most part, she is his perfect foil. His self-centredness, cruelty and intellectualism are totally absent in her compassionate, altruistic and selfless nature. Raskolinkov's slow conversion to the moment of admission of guilt turns his reactions from one extreme to the other, even if her attitude remains steadfastly based on mutual esteem and adoration. In particular, their reactions towards Luzhin bring out their level of maturity. While Raskolinkov becomes giddy and irritated, she shows an even temperament oozing in self-assuredness and command even at the face of her rising displeasure when tackling his

problems. By standing in the middle ground between pecuniary corruption and Sonya's extreme timidity, Dunya is certainly the most powerful woman in the novel. Certainly, along with Razumikhin, she could be counted as one of the heroes of the novel, and that makes their marriage at the end of the novel principally appropriate.

Svidrigailov

Svidrigailov is one of the most enigmatic and complex characters in the novel. Svidrigailov is depicted as morally weak man who does not seem to understand when he is unwelcome or perhaps simply does not care. But unlike most of the other characters such as the kind and compassionate Razumikhin or the miserly Alyona Ivanovna, Svidrigailov is not drawn quickly and decisively. His mental state, motives, and true nature remains enigmatic throughout the novel. Dostoevsky portrays Svidrigailov almost as a villain in the novel. But all of Svidrigailov's crimes except for his attempted rape of Dunya, are behind him. He is depicted as performing good deeds such as giving money to the family of his fiancee, to Katerina Ivanovna and her children and to Dunya in contrasting way to his evil actions. Svidrigailov embodies the qualities of immorality and self-absorption. He displays the sneaky and calculating character in his attempted rape of Dunya. His actions are ambiguous and his show of generosity casts doubt on his intentions. It can be argued that his financial support to Marmeladov family is not what it appears to be, the kind gestures of a sinful and repentant man, but merely an attempt to get closer to Raskolnikov and, through him, Dunya. Although he is a violent and sneaky character, Svidrigailov possesses the ability to accept that he cannot force reality to conform to his deepest desires. In this regard he acts as a foil to Raskolnikov, who can accept only partially the breakdown of his presumed 'superhuman' identity. Further, whereas Raskolnikov believes unflinchingly in the utilitarian rationale for Alyona Ivanovna's murder, Svidrigailov does not try to contest the death of his romantic vision when Dunya rejects him. Although the painful realization that he will never have the love of someone as honest, kind, intelligent and beautiful as she compels him to commit suicide. He is one of the few characters in the novel to die with dignity.

Razumikhin

Razumikhin is Raskolnikov's friend from the university. A poor ex-student, he responds to his poverty not by taking from others but by working even harder. Razumikhin is Raskolnikov's foil, illustrating through his kindness and amicability the extent to which Raskolnikov has alienated himself from society. He is cheerful, friendly and relaxed in contrast to Raskolnikov's disgruntled, anti-social and agitated state of mind. To some extent he even serves as Raskolnikov's replacement, stepping in to advise and protect

Pulcheria Alexandrovna and Dunya. His name comes from the Russian word 'razum' which means 'reason' or 'intelligence'. He is accommodating qualities help to show that by engaging with humanity one can avoid the pain of alienation from society. These qualities also help to confirm that circumstance alone do not cause Raskolnikov to commit the crime. Razumikhin, like Raskolnikov is also a poor student but he manages to support himself without even contemplating, let alone putting into practice, Raskolnikov's extreme measures like murder. He is an uncomplicated young man with unlimited energy and faith in life and people around him and he is also one who has the ability for love and quality of a trustworthy friend.

Check Your Progress-2

1. What is the crime committed by Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*?
2. Who does Dunya marry in the novel *Crime and Punishment*?
3. What are the prominent character traits of Sonya?

1.5 Themes and Techniques in *Crime and Punishment*

There are numerous themes and techniques used by Dostoevsky in his novel *Crime and Punishment*.

I. Religious redemption (The Punishment)

The ironic, if not contradictory, presentation of the view of religious redemption coming in an apparent guise of a practical punishment is one of the clinching achievements of the novel. Fictional treatment of human destiny has often delved in the relation between the appearance and contradictory nature to the reality it often bears. Two classic examples regarding loss of sight and gain of vision, and loss of worldly possession to gain an empire of the soul in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Tolstoy's *Resurrection* will suffice for the moment. Similar treatment of punishment in the form of a spiritual atonement and grace abounding can be found in the plot of this novel. In order of importance and priority the redemption far outweighs the crime, but following the causal sequence the punishment must follow the crime. While the treatment of the motive for the crime as a definite gain (that in the end turns out to be a failed crime due to failure in its proper ratiocination) is perfunctory, if not intentionally flawed, the gain in giving up this lucrative motive by admitting the crime is certainly about true spiritual gain. Even at a very practical level, Sonya's insistence on Raskolnikov's admission to the crime only confirms their imminent separation. However, such separation only affirms their

perpetual union at the level of deepest tenderness. This contradiction that has constituted the core of universal mystical tradition is essential to the understanding of the novel's main concern.

II. Anti-rationalism

Intellect not supported by humanity is a source of human corruption as well as a fundamental idea in the novel. This critique on the insistence of the purely rational worldview is a key idea in Dostoevsky's intellectual world that links this to many other building blocks of his attitudes to some of the most important contemporary phenomena. In many of his novels, *The Possessed* and *The Idiot* being two important examples, his protagonists' rationality asserts that reason alone is real while a voice of conscience 'repudiates this preposterous claim of reason' (George Strem. The *Moral World of Dostoevsky*). In Dostoevsky's writing, this struggle between the rational and the spiritual eventually takes on a mystical significance that represents the Christian struggle between God and the devil. The actual debate between these agents that he presented in *Brothers Karamazov* has a few forerunners. The immensity of the concern implicitly involves the destiny of mankind. Establishment of the idea of a purely rational being will free human beings from the fetters of their own conscience. Consequently, they will abandon all moral justifications and will base their actions purely on the basis of a pragmatic view considering only personal advantages. As the narrator, Dostoevsky himself becomes the Devils' Advocate 'to expose this captivating thesis with great eloquence' (George G. Strem). When Nietzsche praised Dostoevsky's Anti-Christ arguments, he simply failed to see the narrative strategy employed. Dostoevsky meticulously gathers all evidence against a spiritual worldview only to show that such a philosophical expose will tantamount to nothing as it will only bring self-destruction. If Nietzsche championed in favour of the 'superman', he did so by ignoring Dostoevsky's efforts to counteract the temptation of the superman theory that spelt the doom of Western civilization. It may be recalled that Dostoevsky's anti-rational standpoint was first manifested in *Notes from Underground*. Though the polemical nature of the expression in that autobiographical novella succeeded in presenting his main ideas much more concisely, in *Crime and Punishment,* their varied and fictional treatment endows the novel with a more rigorous configuration.

III. Alienation

The failure of human connection, distancing or alienation is conversely speaking on one of the primary concerns of *Crime and Punishment*. Initially, Raskolnikov's consideration of himself as superior to the society in general and consequent pride disconnects him from the social order. Further, his extreme utilitarianism encourages him to consider everyone else as a tool

for his own purpose. His isolation is only intensified after committing the murder, as a severe feeling of remorse grips him. His failure to connect to others is most vividly presented in his conscious rebutting of all persons, including Dunya, Pulcheria Alexandrovna, Sonya, Razumikhin, and even Porfiry Petrovich, who are genuinely interested in helping him. However, the final realization in the Epilogue that he truly loves Sonya and the consequent conclusion of his self-centred isolation must be preceded by a phase of near-complete alienation that impresses on him its insufferable nature.

IV. Suffering

Suffering is the inevitable corollary to humility as an indispensible criterion for moral elevation, following one of the fundamental Christian doctrines in Dostoevsky's novels that those who suffer most are greatly rewarded by divine love. His profession of faith in the cleansing effect of suffering is portrayed through various ways in his writing. It constitutes one of the main elements in Prince Myshkin's behaviour in *The Idiot*. In fact, the sole purpose of Myshkin's human existence seems to be the resultant transformation that he brings in the life of Nastasia Filipovna, who is made worthy of divine grace by her inner sufferings and horrible end. Once this purpose is achieved, Prince Myshkin relapses into a state of unconsciousness. Raskolnikov is a great sufferer as well, though of a completely different order. His suffering before and after committing the murder are of two different kinds. Before the murder is committed, Raskolnikov is tormented by the mediocrity of his life and is anxious to alter it. Rather than beating down the trodden path, he plans to execute a daring act, basing great trust on his intellectual faculty in which he takes great pride. Since such a daring act will violate the norms of legal limits, he convinces himself that such limitations will not be operative on him, as he does not belong to the middling order of the society. Even if he successfully builds the argumentative structure of his argument, at the core of his heart he doubts his own superiority. To prove his self-image as true, Raskolnikov commits the crime. Once this wanton act is committed, he realizes, to his utter horror, that he is not a person of such proportions that may transcend the moral limits and violate its legal injunctions. Consequently, the premise upon which his entire existence was depending proved to be a false one. To reconcile between these potent forces of intellectual and conscientious arrays, Raskolnikov needs to accept suffering. Once this acceptance is integrated into his faith structure, his path to resurrection commences. Therefore, in a mystic sense, the pattern of his suffering before and after the crime may be reconciled into one pattern of 'direction, meaning and ultimate possibilities of human existence' (George G. Strem). Extending the archetypal possibility, Raskolnikov's sin then becomes a representative partaker in the Original Sin, a sin that can only be redeemed by suffering. Man's struggle for purification at the post-lapserian stage may

be compared to his bewildered striving at the post-crime stage, in which, like the biblical pattern, he is assisted by his woman companion. Apart from the cleansing effect, suffering also becomes a positive energy in Dostoevsky's writing. Some of his protagonists deliberately seek suffering in an attempt to find the great transformative experience of their lives. Thus, finally, the suffering in the punishment takes a self-contradictory connotation, as this suffering is the only possible action that may bring Raskolnikov to the path of contrite resurrection.

V. Psychological Realism

The order in which the novel treats the themes of crime and punishment is counter-intuitive. Textually speaking, the difference between the crimes committed in Part I and the punishment appearing in the Epilogue, hundreds of pages later, is certainly not intended to be two end-points of the narrative focus. On the contrary, quite possibly, the real focus of the novel is on the phase of transformation that separates them. This intermediate section attempts at an in-depth exploration of the criminal psychology. Therefore, what constitutes the main body of the narrative is Raskolnikov's internal world, with all its vacillation, dread, uncertainties and despair. The novelist's main narrative focus is not on the definite consequences of the crime but on the modes the crime that compels Raskolnikov to grapple with an ensuing sense of culpability. The little narrative attention to the actual punishment and imprisonment compared to the great amount of details lavished on worry and trauma involved in attempts to avert the punishment surely indicates a narrative intention to portray their relative burden. This comparative emphasis on the psychological angle of the novel is further emphasized by the canny recognition of Raskolnikov as the murderer by Porfiry Petrovich. He elaborates on the internal mechanism of Raskolnikov's murderous mind and the guilt-ridden thoughts subsequently in many of his speeches. The options available to the troubled mind of a murderer as well as the admission of guilt are succinctly presented by him. This also assures him in a strange way that Raskolnikov will eventually admit to his crime. His expertise at the psychological acuity and its exposition only reinforces the novel's perfection in other areas of psychological expertise.

VI. Murder Motive (The Crime)

Suffering constitutes a mainstay in Dostoevsky's moral world. To complete the cycle of redemption, suffering is necessary, and in the moral world of his fiction, suffering originates with crime. This makes Dostoevsky immensely interested in the lives of criminals of the worst order, who have killed their fellow human beings. These crimes may be considered as human problems carried to an extreme degree. In all four of his major works, namely, *Crime and Punishment, The Idiot, The Possessed and The Brothers Karamazov*,

murders are committed. Therefore, thematically, they all test a climactic human problem of redemption. If a man, who directly bears the stigma of original sin and the crime of Cain by committing the fratricidal sin of homicide, is capable of effecting a resurrection, then all human beings can bring themselves to a similar fate. This resurrection will then establish the basic Christian pattern of action that partakes in the declaration of Divine glory. Led by his pride and ambition, Raskolnikov commits a criminal act that immediately places him outside the boundaries of human society. Viewed from a social perspective, homicide or fratricide is the most heinous of all as it strikes at the very root of the idea of universal brotherhood that allows a human community to take shape. By committing the archetypal crime, he becomes an outcaste from all human societies. The seemingly inextinguishable flame of remorse and castigation that simmers within him must be channelled into an exercise of redemption. However, before that is implemented, he must pay the price of his action that attacks the social base. In order to do that, Raskolinkov must abandon his mother and sister and must spurn all friendship lest he denigrate those who come close to him. However, by this action of accepting the implications of his moral crime and the process of its retribution to take place in his own person, Raskolinikov asserts his identity of a moral being whose 'conscience punishes him for his crime'. In this context, the crime of Joseph K, a character in Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, may be rather pertinent. When we read about K's crimes, we find that being a novel that was authored almost sixty years after Dostoevsky's novels, that novella is even more interiorized. His crime is never spelt out in the novella. At first glance, K may even seem to be an innocent who is being executed for no reason at all. However, on closer analysis, it is obvious that K is a person whose idea of a hierarchically organized society has reached such a deplorable proportion that he has almost been disconnected from the life that sustains social organs. Among many of Raskolnikov's reasons for murdering Alyona, pride takes a prominent place, but ironically, this is not the pride of the pawn-broking lady, but clearly is an attempt in establishing his superior rank above the general public. However, his claims regarding the utilitarian purpose of the crime, that on the whole the society's happiness would be enhanced by the killing of such an appalling 'louse', or that his needs are of purely financial nature are totally contradictory to his claims of superiority. Further, in Part I, it is hinted that the squalid surroundings of the place where he lives, his failing health and the continuous state of hunger are possible factors to have weakened any restrictive urge that might have saved him from committing the crime. This statement fuses the external and internal reasons that conspire to degrade a human being to the level of a murderer. In Part III, Chapter VI, immediately after the murder has been committed, Raskolnikov rants to himself, while lying in bed and recapitulating the prior arrangements of his own arguments, saying that:

'The old woman was a mistake perhaps, but she's not the point! The old woman was merely a sickness . . . I was in a hurry to step over . . . it wasn't a human being I killed, it was a principle!'

However, his sense of failure to achieve anything out of this action is also immediately apparent to him. He confesses to himself:

'All I managed to do was kill. And I didn't even manage that, as it turns out . . .'

The abrupt phrases with frequent use of ellipsis indicate the halting nature of his fractured thoughts and its attendant language. Such fractured attempt at rationalization of human action still shows Raskolnikov's entrapment in the so-called Napoleonic mindset that goads him to believe that the only important thing is triumph in individual actions. He realizes that his crime of murder has not achieved his desired effect and his anxiety at this stage of thought evolution is produced not by his sense of committing a crime but rather by the sense that he has committed an unsuccessful crime. His failure to structure the arguments supporting his murderous action and intent indicates the ultimate failure of his rational system that might have considered the murder successful, if the crime could be rendered useful to his goal and thereby dispel the blame from his mind. Raskolnikov's repeated attempts to convince himself of the rational basis for the murder of Alyona Ivanovna and his recurring, frenetic justification of his crime in terms of rationally appropriate action manifest his uncertainty about the whole affair. This also shows how far he is from his intellectual declamation of the 'superman' idea. In another instance, Raskolnikov succinctly puts forward his ideas to Dunya saying that while there was nothing unjustified in the murder, his inability to derive tangible benefit from it was wrong.

For Raskolnikov, the internal stimulus for the murder is conceptual, cerebral, and strangely, reasonable. The argument of Raskolnikov's article 'On Crime' establishes the rational validation for a similar crime. In that article, Raskolnikov hypothesizes a group of 'supermen', whose superiority over the general public allows them to act above the general purview of usual moral codes. Therefore, even in his wavering conclusions from the outcome of his action, Raskolnikov remains fixated on the idea that though his murder is an action punishable by law, in reality, it is not a reprehensibly wicked act that would draw extreme moral condemnation. His conviction that the murder committed by him was for the greater good of humanity, in which merely 'an insect' has been killed, even accompanies him to Siberia, long after he had surrendered to the legal course of action. This conviction is complementary to his belief that he has been victimized by 'some decree of blind fate' and his conviction for the crime has been caused by the crime's slipshod execution. It means that if he could execute the crime to its perfection, it would make a practical difference to many people's lives and he could also escape the legal and investigative procedures.

The contextual root of those ideas can be traced to Nihilism, an attitude predominant in Russia, of the late nineteenth century. In the words of Lebezyatnikov, one of its principal proponents, the doctrine is known for 'negating more'. Its conceptual hallmark was the rejection of bonds of emotion, society and family as well as giving up aesthetic regard in favour of a severe materialism, or the doctrine that dogmatically denies any existence of mind and soul outside the physical world. Nihilism disdained traditional bonds of society and family as well as the effectiveness of emotional stimulus. Such tenets of nihilism can easily be traced back to its ideological progenitor, utilitarianism. Utilitarianism professed that morality should be dependent on the rule of maximum happiness for maximum number of people. This reductive tendency of pulling down human beings to mere numbers and resultant calculations based upon such numerical considerations systematically denied human beings their individual worth. As discussed earlier, Raskolnikov's remorse and inner commotion hardly befit the ideal of a 'superman' who is supposed to execute such a 'crime' with pragmatic efficiency. His attempts at justifying the murder with tenacious arguments (even if he ultimately fails to build the argument) are strongly utilitarian and nihilistic by nature.

VII. The Idea of the Superman

Initially, Raskolnikov is convinced that he belongs to a group of extraordinary 'supermen'. He considers himself as a person of extraordinary capability that enables him to transgress the conventional codes of morality, that is, applicability in standard social context. The desired self-appraisal propels him to isolate himself from rest of the society. Consequently, his murder of the pawnbroker may be interpreted as his deluded conviction of superiority above the jurisprudence, and such an action would indirectly prove his original claim to superiority.

Once the crime is committed, Raskolnikov realizes that the pragmatic-rational justification of redistribution of money taken from the pawnbroker, which served as the ostensible rationalization of his murder, is a facile one. The realization of this money-argument to be invalid also convinces him that sole reason for committing the crime is to put an effort to establish his 'supermanly' superiority over others. However, as it dawns on him that the obstacle he has done away with by murdering the pawnbroker is not of the order of an insurmountable impediment, he also realizes that his committing the crime boils down to a completely meaningless action. With this realization, the whole conception of the superman, built at so much torment and emotional cost to him, starts crumbling. Raskolnikov's failure to put down his ensuing sense of remorse, however, makes him realize that he is not a 'superman'. Though he recognizes his failing to live up to what he has presented as an ideal for his life, he is reluctant to acknowledge the complete destruction of this personality. He persists on resisting the thought that he is

as adequate as others by sustaining in his effort to convince himself that the crime was reasonable. The release from his own conceptual prison of the superman and its attendant terrible isolation is affected by the realization of his love for Sonya and the pleasures in submitting to such emotional possibility.

VIII. Poverty

As is commonly experienced in reality, poverty usually pushes the familial bonds towards greater closeness in the novel. Significantly, Raskolnikov often takes the reverse direction, though there is no apparent connection between his personal action and their economic condition. Nevertheless, he rebukes his sister, Dunya, when he realizes that she is marrying Luzhin to financially help her family. His rejection of Razumikhin's offer of employment may be seen as paralleling his reaction to Dunya's initial consent to marry Luzhin. The intersection between the socio-economic condition of poverty and the individual self-sacrifice as a way of grappling with such situations allows the novelist to create a multi-dimensional treatment of the socially important issues in a nuanced manner. Consequently, characters such as Sonya and Dunya are able to express their strength and compassion through externally manifested actions.

A regular reminder of the lack of money and its attendant unhappiness gloomily hovers over the narrative. Two of the most arresting examples are provided by the circumstances of Marmeladov's and Raskolnikov's families. For Raskolnikov, his financial disability provides him a strong motive for the crime. He thought that by committing the crime, he would be able to amass a considerable amount of money that would allow him to resume and complete his higher education, thereby allowing him to eventually lead a better life in material terms. However, he also identifies financial worries to be one decisive factor in Dunya's consent to marry Luzhin. Apparently, the Marmeladovs are in an even worse financial situation. The vicious circle that entraps the socio-economically downtrodden people is best manifested in their family's trio of misfortunes, Marmeladov's drunkenness, Katerina Ivanova's disease and Sonya's desperate recourse to prostitution to save her family from destitution. As the narrative progresses, the foundations and effects of such conditions are made explicit by a range of choices and sacrifices made by the characters in face of their pecuniary desperation. The rationale that Raskolnikov planned so elaborately as the moral justification is also based on the foundation of financial considerations. He plans to redistribute the money hoarded by the pawn-broker, and by a single stroke of action, that would release a number of people from the clutches of degrading conditions imposed by poverty in their lives. However, as he takes the victim's moneyl the fallacious nature of the pragmatic rationale of putting the money to good use becomes apparent in the same instant. His realization that he never really wanted money is coterminous with the

realization of his own desire to establish his extraordinariness and superiority over others. The money at his hand does not interest him at all. His previous plans of using the money in various ways crumbled at the instant he acquired it. He does not even count it or show the merest inclination to recall its planned usages.

Svidrigailov's magnanimity at the end of the novel changes its entire tone. By a sheer swerve in the plot manipulation, one character makes a choice that almost simultaneously solves everyone's financial crisis. This sudden change in the plot and tone can either be seen as unlikely authorial contrivance to rescue an apparently floundering plot-situation or as an affirmation to the supremacy of faith in human regenerative power that can solve all practical problems, including social inequalities and malpractices like poverty easily.

IX. Symbols

Dostoevsky's St. Petersburg is filled with physical squalor, human indignity and moral filth. The grubby streets are crammed with human bodies. The little, raucous streets of the city are filled with begging children howling for alms, worn-out women exhausted by their meagre existence and drunkards stretched out on the ground. The muddle and disorder of the city is a symbol that works in two different directions. On one hand, it represents the state of affairs of a particular society in its disparity, shortcomings and chauvinism. On the contrary, deeper psychological level, this confusion is indicative of Raskolnikov's restless and confused state of mind. For him, both the external condition of the city and the psychological prison of his mind seem like an inescapable condition. The unbearable conditions of the city in its oppressive sultriness as well as malodorous streets and crowds contribute to Raskolnikov's state of mind that is perpetually agitated and edgy. Ironically, the punishment that forces him to leave the city and stay in a small Siberian town allows him the external condition that is congenial to regaining his kindness and mental equilibrium.

Besides, the Crucifix that is given by Sonya just before Raskolnikov decides to go to the police station is a symbolic element in the novel. Apart from the conventional religious association of the Crucifix with the vicarious sacrifice and atonement of humanity through Christ's self-sacrifice, it emphasizes the redemptive quality of such an action on a personal level in the novel. However, Raskolnikov's denial of any feeling of remorse or resultant piety only drives home the point that he has not yet completely understood the significance of the Crucifix, but has rather only initiated the journey on the path of redemption through expiation. Sonya's gift of the Cross further signifies her catalytic agency in recovering his attitude towards humanity through her kindness and compassion for him.

X. Coincidences

The novel has plenty of coincidences, more so as important plot markers. There are two specific coincidences that directly contribute to the hardening of Raskolnikov's resolution to kill the pawnbroker. First, is the general remark regarding the social utility of killing the old lady, and consecutively, the second, regarding her being alone in her flat in the evening. Both these incidents of eavesdropping contribute crucially to Raskolnikov's psyche for the moment. It may be textually corroborated that before overhearing these two important pieces of information regarding the old pawnbroker, Raskolnikov was strongly disinclined to commit the crime. However, his treatment of the chance encounter of these two pieces of vital information can be read as a manifestation of his deep-seated motives which he himself might not have been explicitly aware, as if the coincidental remarks act as an encouragement towards the execution of the crime even if there were prior indication of his latent ulterior motives. His pride compels him to take those events as merely accidental by nature, even if there are other indications that he turns paranoid in interpreting seemingly trivial things into matters of great significance.

Moreover, Raskolnikov's chance meeting with the hurt Marmeladov on the street is another important coincidence that turns into a vital piece of information for the plot structure. Even though this chance encounter does not provide us with any vital information regarding Raskolnikov's character, it certainly becomes instrumental in advancing the plot development and endowing a rushed sensation in the narrative progress. Every bit of this chance encounter contributes to the fast thrust of the plot in a forward direction.

XI. Nihilism

The word 'nihilism' has been derived from the Latin term 'nihil' which means 'nothing'. This has been developed into a philosophical doctrine during the 19th century suggesting the negation of one or more putatively meaningful aspects of life. Most commonly nihilism is presented in the form of existential nihilism which argues that life is without objective meaning, purpose, or intrinsic value (Alan Pratt, *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*). The term nihilism is in general sense to explain the general mood of despair at a perceived pointlessness of existence that one may develop upon realizing there are no necessary norms, rules or laws. It rejects family, societal bonds, and emotional and aesthetic concerns in favour of strict materialism or the idea that there is no 'mind' or 'soul' outside the physical world. Linked to nihilism is utilitarianism or the idea that moral decisions should be based on the rule of the greatest happiness for the largest number of people. Raskolnikov originally justifies the murder of Alyona Ivanovna on utilitarian grounds, claiming that a 'louse' has been eliminated from society. He seeks to mitigate the criminality of the murder by emphasizing

his own worth and the worthlessness of the victim. The facade of pretension that he acted as a 'superman' in killing Alyona is torn into pieces when he realizes the futility of such a belief and repents and admits to the murder. Raskolnikov acts on nihilistic doctrines as he remains completely unrepentant for most part of the novel. He cares nothing about the emotions of others and utterly disregards the social conventions that run counter to the austere interactions that he desires with the world. However, at the end of the novel, as Raskolnikov discovers love, he discards the doctrines of nihilism so far he has firmly believed in and adopted. Through this action of Raskolnikov the novel condemns the philosophy of nihilism as a shallow and impractical doctrine. Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* has been termed as an anti-nihilist novel by many critics. In fact, in this novel he makes an indictment of the so called new ideas of his age.

XII. Death

All through the novel death runs as a recurring theme. First there is the violent deaths of Alyona Ivanovna and her sister Lizaveta in Part-I Chapter-VII. In Part-II Chapter-VII Marmeladov dies pathetically in an accident pushing his family into destitution and poverty. Katerina Ivanovna dies in a most pathetic condition in Part-V Chapter-V. In Part-VI Chapter-VI Svidrigailov commits suicide being rejected in love by Dunya. The novel depicts these five deaths in great detail and evokes in the reader a sense of sanctity and value for human life. These deaths make the reader truly comprehend the value of human life. Katerina Ivanovna's death is preceded by her husband's death and her madness is especially painful and pathetic. Raskolnikov lives through the violent death of Alyona Ivanovna and her sister Lizaveta all through the novel till he admits to the crime and surrenders before the law. Similarly the suicide of Svidrigailov evokes shock and trepidation in the reader. The deaths of these characters are brought about by a certain circumstance created by their own actions. Thus Dostoevsky questions and negates the very idea of fate in this novel. He highlights the point that the deaths of these characters are occasioned by the failure of the system they lived in which pushed them into the whirlpool of poverty and moral bankruptcy.

XIII. Epilogue

Many literary scholars have argued against the inclusion of the Epilogue in the novel as redundant and an example of unnecessary authorial intervention. They argue that the simplistic techniques of the dream of the plague troubling the entire European continent and rather trite description of the blossoming of Sonya's love for Raskolnikov are examples of rather clumsy moves blighting the superb artistry and complexity of the main body of the novel. The hasty attempt to somehow connect the annexe and the original into a

forced whole does not succeed at all. The specific allegation on this count must be acknowledged as a shortcoming on the novelist's part.

Nevertheless, there are specific literary advantages of the Epilogue. Most importantly, the development of two of the most important thematic modules of the novel, individual estrangement and spiritual redemption, are given proper treatment only in the Epilogue. The end of Part VI of the novel leaves the resultant development of Raskolnikov's confession ambiguous, and thus, forces the reader into a state of uncertain conclusions. The narrative elaboration of an imprisoned and confessional Raskolnikov also presents the yet-to-be-repentant side of his character. The process, rather than a magical instantaneous transformation, is required as the narrative requirement of the novel. To make that possible, the novel must allow enough space to be devoted through the narrative space. The Epilogue is precisely able to perform that formal requirement in the novel. The dream of the spreading plague, in particular, effectively takes away all sense of superiority from Raskolnikov, leaving him within the fold of a larger group of commonplace social stratum. The first portrayal of Raskolnikov's true happiness is delineated at the moment of his epiphanic realization of his true love for Sonya and as a symbolic prostration at her feet. Indeed, the transformation of Raskolnikov is rather epiphanic, if not abrupt. However, the development in the Epilogue for months of mortification and contemplation is the narrative space that prepares the transformation covertly. Sonya's gift of the Crucifix and reading of the Bible are both symbols of the stirring of spiritual conviction. Rather than the inherent nature of faith, the transformative capacity of faith is what is most important in the presentation of the idea in the novel. The transformative capacity is also a way of reconnecting with other individuals. The divine faith rekindles faith in other human beings and the story of Lazarus emblematically brings the idea of resurrection to the core of the novel. Raskolnikov's reaching out to the New Testament symbolically presents the possibilities of such ultimate resurrection. A definite moment of transformation may be recognized in the description of the climax of the Epilogue, in which, Sonya at long last realizes Raskolnikov's genuine love towards her. The significance is both personal and public. By demonstrating his capacity to love an individual, Raskolnikov shows that once again, he is prepared and capable to take his position as a social element. His cry in this scene is both the sign of his compunction over crime and of great delight in comprehending the true import of Sonya's love for him. At the moment of his realization of true involvement with another person, Raskolnikov's alienation from the society ends and his return to the social structure of collective weal through suffering begins. Thus, human love in a specific personal sense, as well as human love felt by a member of the collective, revives Raskolnikov's joy of living.

Check Your Progress-3

1. Which are the four main novels written by Dostoevsky?
2. Why have numerous literary scholars argued against the inclusion of the Epilogue in the novel?

1.6 Let Us Sum Up

- From sixteenth century onwards, Russian empire consciously strove to be a part of the political and cultural network of Europe. However, this attempt often remained half-hearted, if not an imitative project. French culture and literature dominated the Russian scenario as it did in many other European courts.
- Cultural and literary activity became somewhat animated from the early nineteenth century onwards, with more active engagement and patronage of the Russian court as well as appearance of a group of enterprising and gifted literary personalities.
- With the increasing circulation of newspapers and literary periodicals, demand for prose fiction also increased. Moreover, since Russian Censorship was often considered to be a draconian institution, many expressions of criticism were channelled through fictional forms.
- Dostoevsky's maturity through the 1860s and the appearance of Leo Tolstoy in Russian literature immediately after this period is usually considered to be the zenith of literary flourish of the so-called Silver Age of Russian literature.
- Fyodor Dostoevsky is considered to be one of the great masters of the Russian Literature along with Gogol and Tolstoy. His fame primarily lies in his novels with an intense psychological insight.
- The interiorized perspective of the individual narrator or protagonist in his novels presents a unique view of the interaction between the interior and the external forces that leave indelible impressions on the inner life of the individual.
- Unlike many others, Dostoevsky was lucky as *Poor Folk* (1846), his first novel, received immediate commendation from the critics after its publication. Due to his active opposition to the institution of Serfdom, Dostoevsky became increasingly prominent in the socialist circles.
- Due to his involvement in printing and distributing socialist doctrines which were considered illegal and insidious, Dostoevsky was arrested and sentenced to a long imprisonment.

- Raskolnikov's experience in a Siberian prison, as depicted in the 'Epilogue' of *Crime and Punishment*, is produced out of Dostoevsky's own familiarity regarding a similar situation.
- The first outburst of his systematic fictional treatment of the critique regarding this pragmatic approach to human life and civilization was presented in his *Notes from Underground*.
- Dostoevsky's ideological opposition to such rational, pragmatic approach to human welfare and betterment, as found in his *Notes*, becomes more trenchant in *Crime and Punishment*.
- During the 1860s, Dostoevsky spent much of his time in close proximity with Western European culture. This experience gave him direct access to the invading cultural mores that were transforming Russian customs in an irrevocable way.
- *Notes from Underground* presented the anti-rationalistic tormented diatribe in the form of a troubled mind's long monologue. The novella not only consolidated Dostoevsky's stand as an anti-socialist, but also established him as the pioneering writer with a unique psychological insight into the complex human minds.
- Dostoevsky continued to write many more novels which also attained the status of classics with lasting reputation. Among these, *The Idiot* (1868) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), completed a year before his death, are considered to be most important ones.
- The legacy and influence of Dostoevsky's novels and writings can be traced in many major branches of twentieth century literature and philosophy, cutting across the geographical and cultural boundaries of Europe.
- His literary successors like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus treasured Dostoevsky's works for his perceptive insight into human quandary. The befitting style to such content was created by his treatment of literary techniques. The unforgettable characters in his novels contribute to the continuation and consolidation of a lasting legacy, long after his death.
- Raskolnikov is not just the protagonist of the novel, as the novel mostly employs a subjective I-narrator, who is the exclusive narrator of the entire story. Due to his extreme sense of pride and intellectualism, he considers all fellow human beings fit to perpetuate only their biological functions and is extremely disdainful of them for this reason.
- The character traits of Sonya can be summarized as timorous, calm and prone to easy embarrassment. On the other hand, she is whole-heartedly dedicated to her family and is exceptionally pious. Her suffering in giving herself up to prostitution gains further poignancy due to her father's inability to control his own drunkenness.

- Proud, intellectually sharp and determined in nature, Dunya's character resembles many aspects of Raskolnikov's. However, for the most part, she is his perfect foil. His self-centredness, cruelty and intellectualism are totally absent in her compassionate, altruistic and selfless nature.
- The ironic, if not contradictory, presentation of the view of religious redemption coming in an apparent guise of a practical punishment is one of the clinching achievements of the novel. Fictional treatment of human destiny has often delved in the relation between the appearance and contradictory nature to the reality it often bears.
- Intellect not supported by humanity is a source of human corruption as well as a fundamental idea in the novel. This critique on the insistence of the purely rational worldview is a key idea in Dostoevsky's intellectual world that links this to many other building blocks of his attitudes to some of the most important contemporary phenomena.
- The failure of human connection, distancing or alienation is conversely speaking on one of the primary concerns of *Crime and Punishment*. Initially, Raskolnikov's consideration of himself as superior to the society in general and consequent pride disconnects him from the social order.
- Suffering is the inevitable corollary to humility as an indispensible criterion for moral elevation, following one of the fundamental Christian doctrines in Dostoevsky's novels that those who suffer most are greatly rewarded by divine love. His profession of faith in the cleansing effect of suffering is portrayed through various ways in his writing.
- The order in which the novel treats the themes of crime and punishment is counter-intuitive. The novelist's main narrative focus is not on the definite consequences of the crime but on the modes the crime that compels Raskolnikov to grapple with an ensuing sense of culpability.
- Suffering constitutes a mainstay in Dostoevsky's moral world. To complete the cycle of redemption, suffering is necessary, and in the moral world of his fiction, suffering originates with crime. This makes Dostoevsky immensely interested in the lives of criminals of the worst order, who have killed their fellow human beings.
- For Raskolnikov, the internal stimulus for the murder is conceptual, cerebral, and strangely, reasonable. The argument of Raskolnikov's article 'On Crime' establishes the rational validation for a similar crime. In that article, Raskolnikov hypothesizes a group of 'supermen', whose superiority over the general public allows them to act above the general purview of usual moral codes.

- Initially, Raskolnikov is convinced that he belongs to a group of extraordinary 'supermen'. He considers himself as a person of extraordinary capability that enables him to transgress the conventional codes of morality, that is, applicability in standard social context. The desired self-appraisal propels him to isolate himself from rest of the society.
- Dostoevsky's St. Petersburg is filled with physical squalor, human indignity and moral filth. The grubby streets are crammed with human bodies. The little, raucous streets of the city are filled with begging children howling for alms, worn-out women exhausted by their meagre existence and drunkards stretched out on the ground. The muddle and disorder of the city is a symbol that works in two different directions.
- The novel has plenty of coincidences, more so as important plot markers. There are two specific coincidences that directly contribute to the hardening of Raskolnikov's resolution to kill the pawnbroker. First, is the general remark regarding the social utility of killing the old lady, and consecutively, the second, regarding her being alone in her flat in the evening.
- Many literary scholars have argued against the inclusion of the Epilogue in the novel as redundant and an example of unnecessary authorial intervention. They argue that the simplistic techniques of the dream of the plague troubling the entire European continent and rather trite description of the blossoming of Sonya's love for Raskolnikov are examples of rather clumsy moves blighting the superb artistry and complexity of the main body of the novel.
- Nevertheless, there are specific literary advantages of the Epilogue. Most importantly, the development of two of the most important thematic modules of the novel, individual estrangement and spiritual redemption, are given proper treatment only in the Epilogue.

1.7 Key Words

- **Pawnbroker:** A pawnbroker is an individual or business (pawnshop or pawn shop) that offers secured loans to people, with items of personal property used as collateral.
- **Rouble:** Rouble is the standard monetary unit of Belarus and Russia, divided into 100 kopecks.
- **Post-lapserian Stage:** Post-lapserian stage is the time or condition after the fall of humankind described in the Bible.

- **Psychological Realism:** Psychological realism is a genre which explores the sub consciousness of the human mind.
- **Epilogue:** An epilogue or epilog is a piece of writing at the end of a work of literature, usually used to bring closure to the work.

1.8 Terminal Questions

1. Write a short note on the two major changes brought about by Dostoevsky's experience at the Siberian penal colony that affected all his subsequent writing.
2. What is Dostoevsky's contribution to creation of an anti-rationalistic tradition?
3. Discuss the factors that contributed to the development a style developed by Dostoevsky that presented an 'abnormal' style.
4. Write a brief summary on the plot and storyline of *Crime and Punishment.*
5. Examine the nature and relationship between 'crime' and 'punishment' in *Crime and Punishment.*
6. Would you consider the Epilogue to the novel an integral part of the novel? Give reasons for your answer.
7. Do you think the characterization of Raskonikov is a presentation of the criminal mind? Substantiate your point of view with close textual references.
8. What are the specific literary advantages of the Epilogue in *Crime and Punishment*?
9. Consider *Crime and Punishment as an Anti-rationalistic novel.*
10. Do you consider Crime and Punishment as an anti-nihilism novel? Substantiate your answer with reasoned arguments.

1.9 Suggested Reading

- Frank, Joseph. *Dostoevsky.* 5 vols. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979–2003.
- Grossman, Leonid Petrovich. *Dostoevsky: A Biography*. Trans. Mary Mackler. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1975.
- Miller, Robin Feuer, ed. *Critical Essays on Dostoevsky*. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986.
- Terras, Victor. *Reading Dostoevsky*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998.
- Tuten, Frederic. *Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment*. New York: Monarch Press, 1966.

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1.10 Model Answers to 'Check Your Progress'

Check Your Progress-1

1. *Poor Folk* was the first novel written by Dostoevsky in1846.
2. *The House of the Dead* records Dostoevsky's prison experiences as well as the psychological condition and trauma created by a life of penal servitude.
3. *Notes from Underground* by Dostoevsky presents the anti-rationalistic tormented diatribe in the form of a troubled mind's long monologue.

Check Your Progress-2

1. The crime committed by Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* is the murder of the pawnbroker, Alyona Ivanovna.
2. Dunya marries Razumikhin in the novel *Crime and Punishment.*
3. The prominent character traits of Sonya are timorous, calm and prone to easy embarrassment.

Check Your Progress-3

1. The four main novels written by Dostoevsky are *Crime and Punishment, The Idiot, The Possessed* and *The Brothers Karamazov.*
2. Many literary scholars have argued against the inclusion of the Epilogue in the novel as it is redundant and is an example of unnecessary authorial intervention.

UNIT - 1
GERMAN NOVEL

Structure

1.0 Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the German Novel in the Eighteenth-century, Bourgeois Realism and Weimar Culture
- Examine the life and works of *Franz Kafka*
- Analyse the plot, characters, themes and techniques in *The Trial*

1.1 Introduction

The German novel, with a prose narrative and epic proportions, made its appearance around the late eighteenth century. Apart from three main areas of Germanic habitation, Prussia, Austria and Bohemia, German literature has also historically developed in parts of Switzerland, Czech Republic and other places inhabited by German Diaspora. The horrifying experiences of the Thirty Years' War were recounted in many literary modes of that period. The three broad periods of German novel writing are the period of Romantic Novels, Poetic Realism or Bourgeois Realism and the Weimar Culture. As in French and Russian literatures, German literature also reacted against Romantic modes of expression. Keeping with the general flourish of arts and sciences during the inter-war periods of 1918-1933, the Weimar Culture also produced some of the greatest German novelists. Franz Kafka was a German novelist and was regarded as one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century by critics. He was a writer strongly influenced by the

genre of existentialism. *The Trial*, written by Franz Kafka, has been a favourite haunt of twentieth-century critical interpretation.

1.2 German Novel in the Eighteenth-Century

Novel, in its modern sense of a prose narrative with epic proportions, made its appearance in the German linguistic scene around the late eighteenth century. This was not an isolated and unique phenomenon for the German culture. Across Europe, many literary cultures had their first successful attempt at novel writing during the same period. In England, three of its most important early novelists, Defoe, Swift and Addison make their novelistic debut during eighteenth century. Manifold increase in journalistic reading and writing created a favourable context for the rise of novel in all three cultures of England, France and Germany. Furthermore, the possibility of customizing the epic legacy of the novel has already been explored by Rousseau in France and Addison in England. However, it must be mentioned that as in many late Renaissance cultures, picaresque and historical novels became popular in Germany much before this. The horrible experiences of the Thirty Years' War were recounted in many literary modes of that period. Grimmelshausen's adventures of the young and naïve Simplicissimus, in the eponymous book *Simplicius Simplicissimus*, became the most popular novel of the German Baroque period. Debates concerning the relationship between history and historical novel that peaked during this period with new ideas related to objective historiography and purpose of history questions were also transposed to sentimental novel writing. For example, treatment of personal history in a sentimental novel can either be done in accordance with a larger collective historical perspective or can be done in contradistinction to such larger projects. In fact, Goethe's two most famous novels, The *Sorrows of Young Werther* (1775) and *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795), obliquely present various sides of this debate. While at the heart of the Enlightenment principle that dominated many European cultures, including Germany, believed that individuals have a destiny within the collective destiny of a historical progression, this was also the period of transition to a more individualistic view espoused by the emerging Romantic sensibility. In this context, it must also be recalled that even though during the same period Romantic sensibility was being transferred to a nationalistic project into many countries, the idea of a politically united Germany did not have a distinct institutional shape at this time. This idea of a romantic nationalism taking shape through the exercise of language was further complicate by the difference between a German multinational culture and the idea of a national German culture. Apart from three main areas of Germanic habitation, Prussia, Austria and Bohemia, German literature has also historically developed in parts of Switzerland, Czech Republic and

other places inhabited by German Diaspora. In Goethe's novels, it may be observed that though the novel ironically comments on Wilhelm Meister's education or Bildung's individuation, this novel sets the pattern for many future novels modelled on such biographical structure and are called novels of formation or growing up (Bildungsroman). Therefore, the history of development of particular individuals becomes a subject worthy of depiction and analysis of serious writing. During the same time, historical novel (historischer Roman) also became a standard term of use for literary critics and authors. In August 1785, Gottlieb Meißner's *Bianca Capello* is recommended to the public in a review as being an ideal historical novel that amalgamates imagination and historical facts at an optimum degree. As mentioned earlier, this idea was, however, was not free from counter arguments. There is heated controversy over the relationship between fact and fiction, over the appropriate integration of historical facts into a work of art, and over the didactic implications for the readers who follow it. At this point, contemporaries could clearly distinguish between historical novels on one hand, and the romances of chivalry and gothic novels on the other.

1.2.1 The Romantic Novel

While it is true that Goethe's above-mentioned novel created the pan-European Romantic ideal of an artist in search of artistic truth and a life lived in sublime sense of beauty, in Germany, the predominant form of Romantic expression was that of poetry, music and dramatic performances. All major German Romantic writers were, like their English Romantic counterparts, masters of the poetic or musical arts. Apart from these, German Romanticism manifested in fine arts, but not as much in novel writing. However, the reception of Sir Walter Scott's early novels was observed with particular curiosity by his colleagues. In the 1820s, Sir Walter Scott's novels triggered a wave of historical novels that his colleagues called 'Scott-Mania'. In only a few years, literary production flourished and finally reached new heights in the 1830s. It can also be observed that there is hardly a year in the nineteenth century when nearly as many historical novels were published in 1830. In the typical lending library of the Biedermeier period, one could find novels by Benedicte Naubert on the same platform as successful writers of the 1820s or 1830s. Caroline Pichler's *Agathokles* (1808) became the most triumphant historical novel of the first half of the nineteenth century, with the only exception of Carl Spindler's *Der Jesuit*. The main writers of that period are August von Witzleben, Carl Franz van der Velde, Henriette von Paalzow, Willibald Alexis, Ludwig Rellstab, Spindler, Karl Borromäus Herloßsohn and Pichler. Rise of the popularity of historical novel during the oppressive Biedermeier period is a curious phenomenon in many contexts. Often, historical novels revive a period in the glorious history of a group, and thus, harkens to a dominant nation-building voice. During Maeterlinck's

regime, such revolutionary desires would not have been tolerated. Therefore, talking about the past was a safer option for many writers and readers, as long as it did not talk about its political bearing on the contemporary times.

1.2.2 Poetic Realism or Bourgeois Realism

As in French and Russian literatures, German literature also reacted against Romantic modes of expression. Though the term 'Bourgeois Realism' is often critically applied to many realist novelists who represented only bourgeois lifestyle to prove their realistic claims, in Germany, such negative connotations were lacking. The famous novelist and poet, Theodor Fontane, is regarded by many as the most important nineteenth century German language realist writer. Trained as an apothecary, he moved from small towns to large German cities. Joining the Prussian Army during the 1840s, he travelled widely to gain a direct perspective of German life. He also travelled to England quite often and became a London-based correspondent of a German language newspaper. Starting with journalistic and historical writing, Fontane found a distinctive literary language towards the end of his career. His fine historical romance, *Vor dem Sturm* (1878), was followed by a series of novels depicting modern life, notably *L'Adultera* (1882), a book about adultery, which was considered so risqué that it took Fontane two years to find a publisher for it. In his novels *Frau Jenny Treibel*, *Irrungen*, *Wirrungen* and *Effi Briest* (1894), he found his own tone, yielding insights into the lives of the nobility as well as the 'common man'. His perfection in reproducing the lives of this social stratum is what earned his writing the sobriquet of 'poetic realism'. In *Der Stechlin* (1899), his last completed novel, Fontane adapted the realistic methods and social criticism of contemporary French fiction to the conditions of Prussian life.

Gustav Freytag was a German novelist and playwright of a different order. His fiercely partisan nationalistic politics was the mainstay of his writings. His writing was brashly colonialist in its advocacy of 'eastern marches', starting a public re-interpretation of the Ostsiedlung. In his novels *Soll und Haben* (*Debit and Credit*) and *Die verlorene Handschrift* (1864), he presented the 'eastern marches' as the historical mission of the Germans (Kulturtrager), legitimizing continued occupation of Polish areas and suppression of the Polish population.

Gottfried Keller, a Swiss writer of German literature, was a major contributor to a different version of realism. Keller's semi-autobiographical novel, *Der grüne Heinrich* (Green Henry), being the most personal of all his works, intended to be a short narrative of the collapse of the life of a young artist. However, under the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's doctrine of a return to nature and the noble savage, it expanded its composition into a huge work, drawing on Keller's youth and career (or more precisely

non-career) as a painter up to 1842. He his first collection of short stories, *Die Leute von Seldwyla* (The People of Seldwyla), contains five long stories. Two of the stories in the collection, *Die drei gerechten Kammacher*, are viewed as the most satiric and scorching attack on the sordid petit bourgeois morality ever written. Furthermore, *Romeo und Julie auf dem Dorfe*, one of the most pathetic tales in literature, presents Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet plot in a Swiss village setting. Keller's fame was further consolidated by his later short stories. The milieu of his short stories is always that of an orderly bourgeois existence, within which, the most manifold human destinies are forged, the most humorous relations are progressed, and the most peculiar types of endurance and reticence are formed.

1.2.3 The Weimar Culture

Keeping with the general flourish of arts and sciences during the inter-war periods of 1918-1933, the Weimar culture also produced some of the greatest German novelists. For your reference, you may note that the work under consideration, Franz Kafka's *The Trial,* was conceptualized before the Weimar Period. Moreover, since Kafka did not belong to the metropolitan German cultural circle (for example, Berlin), his writing must not be contextualized within the Weimar Culture. Such an attempt will not only be anachronistic, but will also seem as an attempt towards straitjacketing Kafka's uniqueness. Continuing from the Naturalist influence of the most important early twentieth-century German playwright, Gerhart Hauptmann, Weimar Culture improvised and branched into new ways to represent modernism in its most vivid manifestation. Litterateur brothers, Heinrich and Thomas Mann, presented a bleak modern view of the disintegrating world that conformed to similar expressions by T. S. Eliot and Pablo Picaso.

Bruno Alfred Doblin's iconic novel, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929), presents an underground life of crime and betrayal with an unmatched élan for evoking montage and narrative monologues. Its manifold narrative sources use sound effects, newspaper articles, songs, speeches, and other books to propel forward the plot of the novel. Some more important novelists who also wrote during this period must be mentioned, even if they did not have a direct association with the cultural scene centred at Berlin. Erich Maria Remarque shot to fame through his depiction of conflicting sides of war, and its horror and sublimation of human virtues in *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Hermann Hesse's mystic and poetical novels drew readers' attention back to a more fundamental way of looking at human life by drawing upon not only Western and Eastern philosophies, but also amalgamating them in the fictional life of German Schwabia. However, both Hesse and the Mann brothers were drawn towards the psychological intricacies and variations of

their subjects, a field that was pioneered by German psycho analysts, Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung.

Finally, it may be concluded that while Kafka's writing could not be placed in the tradition of contemporary German culture of his time, he surely presented some of the earliest concerns of existentialist writings that gained importance after World War II.

1.3 *Franz Kafka:* Life and Works

Franz Kafka (1883-1924) was born in Prague to middle-class Jewish parents. His father, the son of a village butcher, was a man of little education but strong entrepreneurial ambition. He was a successful social climber, who rose to become a successful retailer and wholesaler. This was further advanced by his marriage to the daughter of a wealthy brewery owner. Kafka was the first born child, followed by two brothers who died in infancy, and then three surviving sisters. Kafka's relationship with his harsh father remained sour throughout his life.

Kafka, after his primary education, got admission in a law school and received a doctorate degree. As a law student, he established connections with many members of Prague's promising literary scene of young, German writers. Max Brod, a companion from this group, became Kafka's lifelong friend and was ultimately responsible for preserving much of what exists of Kafka's writing today.

As Franz Kafka has become a representative figure for twentieth-century alienation and unsettled unease, his work is often introduced in the context of his own experience of alienation. Kafka nowhere found a comfortable fit in his multiple levels of non-belonging. All these aspects of alienation, a Czech in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a German-speaker among the Czechs, a Jew among German-speakers, a disbeliever among the Jews, and being disconnected and bullied by his overbearing father, repelled Kafka. He was pulled apart by his desire to live in literature and a desire to live a successful, ordered bourgeois life. He was intensely and explicitly self-critical and his physical vulnerability contributed to his sense of emotional anxiety.

Kafka knew that writing was his passion, but he never thought that he could earn a living from it and did not want to try it as much. This was a personal 'form of prayer' for him. It was also a momentary freedom from his demons for him. He started a law internship after he graduated. Thereafter, he attained a job with a private insurance company. He got an entry-level position with the Workmen's Accident Insurance Institute for the Kingdom of Bohemia in 1908, where he served as a highly respected functionary till he prematurely retired in 1922.

Kafka dies at the age of forty-one from tuberculosis in the year 1924. A huge amount of his work was published after he dies. At the same time, many of the nightmares that he had described in his works were taking shape in the new totalitarian states of Europe. Kafka's novels *The Castle*, *Amerika* and *The Trial* were left unfinished by him. Nonetheless, he had many admirers during his lifetime. The novellas and short stories written by him did not sell many copies. However, they earned rave reviews from learned men worldwide as well as a small but respected circle of German intellectuals.

The developments of the twisted century itself brought Kafka's works to the world's attention, and lent the word 'kafkaesque' to hundreds of languages. Kafka's three sisters and the woman who was his one true love perished in concentration camps after his death. It is Kafka's description of the struggle to find meaning in a cosmos he knew to be meaningless that makes his work the gateway to modern literature.

Stop to consider

Max Brod (1884-1968), well known as the friend and biographer of Franz Kafka, was a German-speaking Czech Jewish, and later became an Israeli citizen. He was a famed author, composer, and journalist. He was a prolific writer in his own right and was also the literary executor of Franz Kafka. Kafka before his death has written a note that none of his manuscripts should be published after his death and all his manuscripts should be burned and destroyed. Brod refused to follow the writer's instructions to burn his life's work, and had them published instead.

Max Brod writes in his epilogue—'the manuscript of this novel, *The Trial*, I took home with me in June 1920 and set in order soon after. The manuscript had no title. But in speaking of it Kafka always referred to it as *The Trial*. For the division into chapters Kafka is responsible, but for the arrangement of the chapters I have had to depend on judgement. Since, however, my friend had read me a great part of the manuscript, my judgement has been supported by actual recollection.'

List of Characters

Josef K.: A thirty year old senior bank clerk accused of an undisclosed offence. He was a boarder in the lodging house owned by Frau Grubach and also the protagonist of the novel.

Fraulein Burstner: A boarder in the same lodging house as Josef K. and is typist by profession. Josef K. once kisses her but later she rebuffs his advances. She makes a brief reappearance in the final part of the novel.

Fraulein Montag: A friend of Fraulein Burstner. She acts a mediator between Josef K. and Fraulein Burstner.

Frau Grubach: The proprietress of the lodging house where Josef K. stays. She is fond of Josef K.

Willem and Franz: Officers who arrest Josef K. without telling him his crime.

Uncle Karl: Josef K.'s impetuous uncle from the country formerly his guardian who insists on hiring the lawyer Herr Huld.

Herr Huld: Josef K.'s pretentious and invalid lawyer who hardly does anything to save him from the court.

Leni: She was Herr Huld's nurse and mistress. She shows Josef K her webbed hand and she is attracted towards accused persons. She has a feeling for Josef K. and soon becomes his lover. She advises Josef K. to surrender before the court.

Rudi Block, the Merchant: A litigant for the last five years in the court and a client of advocate Herr Huld. A grain merchant and has hired Herr Huld along with a host of lawyers to fight his cases in the court. The case has taken heavy toll on him and he now looks as shadow of his earlier self. He is completely subservient to Huld.

Titorelli, the Painter: He has inherited this position of the court painter from his father. He paints the portraits of Magistrates for the court. He knows a great deal about the functioning of the court. He offers to help Josef K. He explains to Josef K. that there are three possible acquittals that can be hoped for they are—definite acquittal, ostensible acquittal, and indefinite postponement of the court.

Check Your Progress-1

1. Which was the most popular novel of the German Baroque period?
2. In which of his novels did Theodor Fontane find his own tone, yielding insights into the lives of the nobility and the common man?
3. Name the unfinished novels by Franz Kafka.

1.4 *The Trial:* Plot Summary

On the morning of his thirtieth birthday, Josef K., an ambitious, worldly-wise young bank official, is arrested by two janitors, although he does not remember committing any crime. K. is left feeling offended and annoyed. One year later, on the morning of his thirty-first birthday, two warders come again for K. They take him to a quarry outside the town and execute him in the name of the Law.

The Trial is the account of that intervening year in which K.'s 'trial' goes on. It records his struggles and encounter with the invisible Law and the imperviously omnipotent Court. It is an account, ultimately, of the institutionally-induced self-destruction of an individual. However, as in all of

Kafka's best writing, the 'meaning' remains elusive and open to various possibilities. As the parable related by the chaplain in Chapter Nine (usually referred to as 'Before the Law') brings out endless interpretations, *The Trial* has also been a favourite haunt of twentieth-century critical interpretation. As some critics have observed, it has, in parts, the quality of a revealed truth. As such, it is ultimately irresolvable, a hall mirror for many opinionated readings.

While Kafka was an official in the Workmen's Accident Insurance Institute for the Kingdom of Bohemia during 1914-1915, he started writing this novel but left it unfinished. On one level, we can see a satirical attack (we have found a similar critical interpretation of Gogol, satirically attacking Tsarist administration in *The Overcoat*) on the Austro-Hungarian bureaucracy of Kafka's day in *The Trial*. However, to many readers, it is eerily prophetic of the psychological armaments used by the much more sinister totalitarian regimes of the legally-sanctioned death machines that Kafka luckily never lived to see. The unfinished nature of the novel is apparent in the final chapters. It is, at times, as suffocating to read as the airless rooms of the Court that it describes. The German title, *Der Prozeâ*, connotes both a 'trial' and a 'process', and it is perhaps this maddening feeling of inevitability that leaves a lasting visceral impression. Once the machinery sets in motion, it will grind toward conclusive destruction in spite of an individual's most desperate exhortations.

One fine morning, as the landlady's cook does not arrive with his breakfast at the designated hour, Josef K. rings for her. Instead of the cook, a complete stranger enters into K.'s bedroom. The stranger's companion waits in another room. These men inform Josef that he has been arrested and he should return to his room.

Being mere subordinate staff, these warders express their inability to provide any additional information regarding his arrest. The entire event leaves K. puzzled. He even considers the possibility of his colleagues having arranged a practical joke on him on the morning of his thirtieth birthday. Whatever may be the case, driven by a sense of superiority, K. does not react in front of these low-ranking people and returns to his room and simmers in inward anger. He finds that through the apartment window an elderly couple have been watching the proceedings involving him. Just as he was taking stock of the entire situation, one of the janitors shouts at K. and summons him to the Inspector. Before the meeting, they force him into a black suit (like a convicted prisoner) and walk him to an adjoining room. K. finds that the adjoining room, which was recently boarded by Fraulein Burstner, the typist, has been taken over by an Inspector and three young men. Like the janitors, the Inspector too can hardly provide any useful information or explanation regarding K.'s arrest apart from the fact the K. has been arrested and is under judicial scrutiny. However, the Inspector

allows K. to go about his daily business till he is summoned for further trial. After this, the Inspector suddenly disappears.

Afterwards, K. goes to the bank, but skips his usual after-work routine of going to the pub, evening stroll and his weekly visit to Elsa, the cabaret waitress. Rather, he meets her landlady, Frau Grubach, in order to mend some damage done by the morning incident. When K. returns to her place to talk to her, Grubach was darning socks. Frau Grubach reassures him that she has taken least notice of the morning incident, the janitors or the Inspector at her place. She considers him a valued lodger, in spite of the morning incident, and says that she has no reason for any complaint against him. This conversation presents a completely different impression of K. and supports his protestations of innocence. He inquires of Fraulein Burnster, the other lodger, whose room was literally occupied by the janitors and the Inspector to arrest K. Grubach replies that Burnster had gone to the theatre and she was usually late coming back on such occasions.

Once Fraulein Burnster returns to her lodging, K. goes to her room to apologize for the inconvenience caused on his account by the entry of two strangers to her room. While re-enacting the sequence of events of the morning, K. shouts like the janitor and in the process wakens Burnster's sleeping nephew and startles her. Rushing to reassure her that it was merely a play-acting, K. ends up kissing her thoroughly. This revives K.'s spirit but still leaves him anxious that the landlady, insistent on maintaining the respectability of her institution, may be bothered by Frauleine Burnster's situation.

In this introductory chapter, we are introduced to Josef K., an ambitious, flourishing and tough man of business. He is arrogant, calculating, intolerant of his perceived inferiors, and yet, on the side of socially-acceptable right behaviour. He achieves the difficult balance between complexity and unreality as well as sympathy and aversion. In a way, he is a typical Kafka protagonist who has perfected bourgeois sensibility and achieved moderate success in material terms. His views and expectations regarding larger questions of guilt, innocence, civil liberty and related practice are perfectly acceptable as well.

While the baffling question of his guilt hangs over the first part of the introductory chapter, this irrational sequence of actions is subsumed under a reversal and re-establishment of the usual order by K. in the evening. At the end of the day, K. could still feel his spirits rising due to the reassurance of the landlady regarding her evaluation of K. as a good lodger and his minor sexual conquest over Frauleine Burnster.

However, there is no clue in this chapter of any crime or allegation against him. That way, this so-called court thriller becomes even more thrilling in its generic mystery of what the crime is all about, and it seems

as if the perpetrator of that crime will be punished without having any idea of the crime allegedly committed by him. In effect, such an attitude itself will become a crime without the proper judicial process called trial. As the novel unfolds, the Court that has claimed him to be a vile person will make various attempts at putting up the trial through its numerous conventions and will fail. However, its failure will not be limited to its inability to conduct a proper trial, but will be up for criticism of a second order, by executing K. without any proper trial. Even if K. tries hard to brush aside the morning experience as a prank or a meaningless incident by normalizing the situation in the evening, he cannot laugh the whole thing off. Just like the reader, there is a question that haunts him that perhaps he has been thoughtless enough to commit a crime.

While internalizing the social codes, he has also considered law, order, and justice as given preconditions. The steady and invisible framework constituted by those elements has allowed him to accomplish success without any conscious thought for them. He is not accustomed to consider the larger questions for his world, defined by set practices and accepted notions. This inability to expect the unexpected has made him susceptible to the whims of social and causal order, whose path suddenly seems completely wayward.

Moreover, at the level of his experience with various legal representatives in this chapter and later, K. faces a strange dichotomy. While almost all of them are consistently friendly and decorous with him, he is particularly repelled by their inferior status and attendant small-mindedness. They strike him as automatons, executing orders from unseen hierarchical summits without any understanding of the functioning principle and motives governing them. Thus, the law and its obedience become a mechanical compulsion without any consideration for human welfare.

With a similar abruptness, as encountered in the beginning of the first chapter, a phone call informs Josef K. that a brief inquiry into his case is to take place the following Sunday. The details regarding the inquiry are intentionally left incomplete. For a change, the manger from his bank invites K. to join him on his yacht for a short pleasure trip on the same Sunday morning. Though it was a good occasion to bury the hatchet of his workplace rivalry and tension, K. refuses the invitation as he had to be present for the trial. This is the first clue that K. has started taking the trial seriously. He is even making the hard choice of being present at the trial, and refusing a far more pleasurable and acceptable social occasion.

From his experience of the ways of the world, K. decides that even if no specific time is mentioned, nine in the morning would be a good choice to be present at the trial. Instead of showing his over-eagerness to be present at the trial with an obsessive punctuality as he usually does in his official capacity, K. walks to the destination and hopes to be slightly late for

the trial. This intentional delay is another practical technique adopted by him to show his contempt for the court, consisting of people whom he considers socially inferior to him. Therefore, his attitude in this chapter brings out a new set of issues. He has started taking the trial seriously, but he is also contemptuous of the court run by people who are socially inferior to him. Arriving at the address conveyed over telephone, K. finds that it is a large building in a poor neighbourhood, bustling in the Sunday morning buzz of activities. In the building, there were several stairways leading to many sections of multiple storeys. However, there was a complete absence of any direction or signposts indicating the location of the court, which annoyed K. immensely. Picking his way around brigands of running children playing the game of marble, K. had to stop and peer into several apartments to get an idea about the possible courtroom. Rather frustrated by this apparently meaningless effort, K. is also subconsciously ashamed that he has taken the summons so seriously, while from all appearance, this was the unlikeliest place to hold a trial. Out of this feeling, he invents a ploy that he is looking for a person called Lanz, and started knocking from door to door in search of this invented Lanz. Accordingly, he is directed from door to door not in the direction of Lanz, but other people bearing names similar to Lanz. When he is exasperated enough to give up his search for the courtroom, a woman washing children's clothes directs him towards another entrance to the courtroom.

Entering the clandestine courtroom in a meeting hall with a gallery, K. finds that the place is packed with people. Seemingly, the Examining Magistrate rebukes K. for being an hour late, even though there was no time mentioned over the telephone, and K. was late by an hour only according to his own decided time. K. gives what he thinks to be a smart answer, by saying that since he was there it did not matter anymore whether he was late or not. While half the crowd bursts into applause at this answer, the other half of the audience maintains a stony silence upon listening to the reply.

The Magistrate begins the legal examination by asking him if he is a house painter, to which he replies that he is the chief clerk in a large bank. K. then tries to take over the proceedings of the meeting. He accuses the secret policy that was evidently at work in the courtroom. He seizes the Magistrate's notebook and drops it back on the table after examining the notebook with utter disdain. He describes his arrest in a dismal manner with an intention of winning over the audience's approval. Finding the Magistrate apparently making signs to someone in the audience, K. criticizes him for that as well. After an outburst of rumbling murmurs, the audience become eerily silent. Just as he concludes his condemnation of the entire system that had brought him there, he is intervened by a yell from the back of the hall. He found that some commotion is being created by the woman who had directed him to the courtroom. The sharp division that had previously

continued between the two sections in the courtroom vanishes. All people, including K., try to rush to the corner to find the cause of the commotion. However, K. is stopped from making any movement towards the corner. As he leapt from the podium down into the crowd, he realizes that audience were wearing identical badges and therefore probably belonged to one single unit. He also realizes that the corrupt officials he targeted in his harangue are already present in the room. Their show of a factious grouping was meant to encourage K. in the declamatory announcement of his innocence. In fact, they were merely entertaining themselves with the declarations of an innocent man. As he proceeds towards the door, the Magistrate accost him with the following words:

> 'I merely wanted to point out that today. . . you have flung away with your own hand all the advantages which an interrogation invariably confers on an innocent man.'

K. alleges all people in the audience to be 'scoundrels' and leaves. The courtroom is enlivened behind him as the men in badges begin to analyze the case. Presented in a fantastic mode, the interrogation scene is markedly surreal. The location lacks the fixity of a real courtroom. The top floor of a tenement, in a poor family's back room, is a highly unlikely location for a courtroom. The murmuring masses, the applause, uproar, and stony silences, the beards and badges, the secret signs, groping hands, and K.'s own intemperate and ill-advised outburst, all contribute to this sense of unreality. He is simultaneously puzzled and dazed by the investigation scene at the courtroom. Were they prodding him to a particular direction? Will his aggression be a useful tactic? Does his behaviour matter for the outcome of the examination at all? In this world of unnamed tribunals and reversed behavioural expectations, K. feels out of place and is totally unsure of the rules of engagement. His initiation does not bode well. However, to tackle that discomfort, his wishes to invoke his original weapon of not taking the entire matter seriously at all.

Throughout the novel, the Court is associated with dust, mustiness and suffocation. The transactional suffocation of not understanding the court's trial and process is almost always doubled by its actually being an airless place that physically suffocates K. Even if the poor neighbourhood, with its ill-maintained streets, crowded hallways and dirty stairwells repels K because of their social inferiority, a different kind of life and vitality somehow sustains K. However, the instant he walks into the Court meeting hall, K. feels that the air was 'too thick for him', and he is almost ejected from the place. The incomprehensibility of the trial procedure is doubly dimmed by the 'dimness, dust, and reek' through which K. tries to make out faces in the gallery.

Now, K. is half-expectant of a second summons, but this time he does not hear from the mysterious Court. This only confirms the continuity of the unpredictable trait that opened both the earlier chapters. Even if he

is not called upon, he returns to the address on the next Sunday morning. The same woman opens the door, but informs him that there is no sitting today. Entering the courtroom, K. finds it to be empty, save for a few curious books left on the table.

K. learns that the young woman cleans the courtroom and her husband works as an usher for the court. They are allowed free accommodation in the room in exchange for their labour to the court. She also explains that the disturbance last week was caused by a certain law student who is always harassing her. However, she originally entered the courtroom because she took an interest in K. She is clearly fascinated by him, and offers him her help. K. is uncertain whether she can actually help him. Furthermore, he does not want to risk her job merely to sway a sentencing in his favour that he ultimately wishes to ridicule. However, she insists and says that she can sway the Examining Magistrate in his favour, as he had recently begun to notice her.

At that moment, the bandy-legged, dishevelled law student gestures for the woman after entering the empty courtroom. She excuses herself, saying that she will return soon, and goes to speak to the law student. As the woman and the student speak in hushed tones, K. considers the motives for seducing her. Apart from the obvious reason of counting his sexual conquest, the measure of revenge it would extract from the Magistrate would be rather satisfying.

K. grows impatient as the conversation drags on. Suddenly, the student kisses the woman, lifts her in his arms, and begins to carry her away. As the scrawny student is no match for him, K. offers to rescue her, confident of his success, but she declines. As a way of justification, she says that the Magistrate has sent for her. She seemed to be in no distress regarding the situation. The student has a tough time in carrying her up a narrow flight of stairs that lead to a garret. Even if the entire sequence seems to be a fiasco, K. watches them furiously. He has been defeated, but only because he entered into a fight. The key, he realizes, is to go about his own affairs and remain above all this pettiness.

However, K. could hardly stick to his resolution for long. The usher, who is also the woman's husband, returns with his complaint of the law student and his wife. He says he cannot throttle the law student even if he really wishes to do so, due to fear of losing his job. Therefore, he requests K. to intercede on his behalf. K. states, perhaps rather superfluously, that his position is even more compromised in the situation and he should, in fact, expect to influence the outcome by being in favourable terms with the law student. At this, the usher tells him about his experience of the trial procedure, saying that the cases at the court are usually foregone conclusions.

As the usher is heading upstairs to the Law offices, he invites K. to join him. K. is repulsed at the idea of making another visit to the court, but at the same time, feels a strange attraction towards it. Eventually, his curiosity gets the better of him. Climbing a flight of stairs, they enter a long-stretched lobby, where numerous accused men await. K. tries to initiate a conversation with some of those men, but as suspected, they are too confused and demoralized to clearly articulate them. Their defeated mentality generates pity in K. However, this encounter suddenly exhausts him completely. Now, as he has lost all his interest, he asks the usher to show him the way out, but usher is reluctant to let him go. Making just enough noise to draw the attention of others, K. swoons and loses his consciousness. As in first chapter, K.'s shout attracts another woman from a nearby office, who comes to his aid and states that first visit to the court creates a similar sensation in many people. Along with another male colleague, they try to lead him to a sick room. K. remonstrates that all he needs is fresh air. As his swoon intensifies to near-paralysis, K. is scarcely able to walk and is literally led away by the people of that office. Being dragged in front of the same group of accused waiting in the corridors makes K. even more vulnerable and ashamed. Whiffs of outside air enliven his spirit, but his body completely fails him. Bewildered by his body's betrayal and his mind's confounded confusion, K makes a resolution that he will ignore all such events related to the court or trial and will put his Sundays to good use.

Conforming to the fragmentary nature of the narrative, the woman in the court appears out of nowhere, throwing herself at K. and making such an abrupt exit from the narrative. Though Huld, the lawyer, will have a solid explanation for the behaviour of his nurse, Leni, she will act in a similar abrupt fashion. She also is instrumental in tempting K. to ascend to the Law Offices. From the structure of the narrative, that seems to be the only valid purpose for her presence in it. K.'s calculations of sexual conquest, as a tool of power against the magistrate and thus the Court, leads to his first admitted defeat in this mental chess match. More than anything, this undoubtedly proves that he is now actively engaged with the court process and trial in spite of his repeated resolutions to ignore it. If his first visit and the consequent confusion indicated a sequence of events that dragged him to the court and the trial, the second visit is built from the seeds of action of his own making.

The overpowering stale and suffocating air still pervades the Court and its entire business. While at the trial, the atmosphere may have affected K.'s judgment, in the Offices, it physically debilitates him. Thus, it completes its effect on the entire body-mind complex. His loss of clear thinking, speech, and all voluntary physical action leaves him utterly at the mercy of the Court. However, as the Court and its bad air in a closed room seem ineffably linked, they also seem to be interchangeable. Like the air, the court seems

to be invisible and omnipresent at the same time. Further, its insidiousness is also universally known by its immediate effects.

K. makes several unsuccessful attempts to speak with Fraulein Burstner. In spite of his intent efforts, she succeeds in avoiding him. He writes her a letter trying to make amends for his past behaviour. He also readily agrees to follow any terms she might dictate for their future interaction. He concludes by saying that he will wait in his room on Sunday, expecting some reply from her.

Not only does his letter remain unanswered, on Sunday morning, another boarder, Fraulein Montag, moves into Burstner's room. We find that just as K. was tortured by Fraulein Burstner's silence, Frau Grubach was tortured by K's silence towards her. Therefore, when K. starts a conversation with her, Grubach considers that to be a sign of forgiveness from K. As Fraulein Montag requests a meeting with him, he meets her in the dining room. She informs him that Fraulein Burstner thought it best for all parties that his request for the interview not be responded. Fraulein Burstner did not intend to respond in any way, but Fraulein Montag insisted that Fraulein Burstner should allow her to intercede and explicitly convey Fraulein Burstner's opinion to K. K. thanks her and tries to leave. The Captain enters and greets Fraulein Montag with a respectful hand-kissing. K. senses that the two of them are both overstating Fraulein Burstner's significance to him and trying to hinder his conquest of the girl. While leaving the dining room, K. is tempted to knock at Fraulein Burstner's door. Unanswered, he goes in, realizing all the while that he is doing something pointless and wrong. As he leaves the room, he spots the Captain and Fraulein Montag involved in a casual conversation in the dining room doorway. His indiscretion was clearly witnessed by them.

The narrative and direction and action in this chapter are not seen in any other chapter of this novel. Fraulein Burstner makes a transient reappearance in the last chapter. However, the sub-plot of K.'s reluctance and pursuit is never developed. Many characters appear as well as disappear quickly with the likeliness to evaporating figures in a hallucinatory landscape. However, it can be debated that she was given more attention as she had a symbolic significance in K.'s last thoughts. The reservations of Fraulein Montag and the Captain were not related to K.'s case. These characters do not have any relation to the rest of the novel as well.

After three intervening chapters that take place on Sundays, we are back to the weekday pattern of the first chapter. As K. is readying to leave the bank after finishing his day's work, he hears 'spasmodic sighs' emerging from behind the door of the store room. He opens the door and finds that the two warders, who first came out to lead him to the Magistrate, are at the mercy of the Whipper dressed in leather. These two men are being

whipped because K. complained about their behaviour during the first interrogation. Horrified at the result, K. explains that he had merely stated their behaviour and did not hold them responsible for their conduct. He absolutely had no desire to see them punished. He even tries to bribe the Whipper to stop whipping the two pathetic, wretched men. However, since the Whipper must also stick to his responsibility, the whipping commences, and one of the warders lets out a blood-curdling shriek that rushes K. out of the room. He reassures the clerks who came to investigate the noise that it was merely a dog howling outside.

K. feels awful about the punishment meted out to the warders. He was willing to bargain a higher bribe, or to offer himself as their replacement. Though he was half-apprehensive that the Whipper might have refused the replacement option, K. was more saddened by the fact that he hardly had an opportunity to complete the conversation. If the warder had not screamed, forcing K to make a hasty exit, K. might have tried to bargain with the Whipper a bit longer, thereby decreasing the severity of the whipping at least to some degree. Although, the next day, the warders condition weighs heavily on K.'s mind. He stays late at the office, ostensibly to catch up on work, but we later realize that it was an excuse to visit the store room again. He found, like the previous evening, the warders and the Whipper present there. As the warders begin to call out to K. again, he bangs the door shut and thumps on it with his fist. Almost breaking down to tears, K. rushes back to the other office clerks. He orders them to clear out the store room immediately. Promised by them that the clearing would be done the next day, K. goes home with an empty mind.

This incident was precisely developed to affect an inevitable psychological breakdown. Many accused men exhibited these signs as well. It is excruciatingly uncomfortable to stress about one's case. However, it is more burdensome to feel like the cause of their misery. The people who perceive *The Trial* as a premonition of upcoming totalitarian atrocities are of the view that this chapter brings forth the psychological tyranny and interrogation-torture that is the trademark of many such regimes.

It is interesting to note that the Court can set itself up anywhere—in a tenement attic or a company's closet. However, it still conducts its business in uncomfortable, dark and sealed places. This is basically an essential characteristic of an unaccountable bureaucracy. However, it also refers to its nature of an all-pervasive Pan-opticon that has turned the vigilance into a round-the-clock affair.

Informed by the grapevine and really concerned by the events around him, Josef K.'s impulsive country-dwelling Uncle Karl comes to visit him. He is concerned with K's own reputation, but more than that, for the family's sake. Karl thinks that K. is taking the whole thing far too lightly and

impresses upon him the necessity for energetic action, like accompanying Uncle Karl on a visit to an old lawyer friend.

K. grudgingly agrees to visit Herr Huld, the lawyer, but finds out that Huld is sick. However, he becomes slightly animated when K. is introduced to him. Karl makes the nurse leave Huld's room by abusing her. Huld tells them that because of his close acquaintance in the Court circle, he has already heard of the case. In fact, though K. and his Uncle Karl have not noticed him, the Chief Clerk of the Court has come to pay a visit to Huld and is in the room, waiting in the shadows. The Chief Clerk joins the three and commences to speak eloquently, while intentionally ignoring K. K. wonders whether the Chief Clerk's slight might have been produced by his being present in the crowd during K's interrogation.

A loud sound of breaking cooking utensils comes from the entrance hall. K. goes to see what has happened. It is Leni, the lawyer's nurse. Apparently filled by desire for him, she had caused the uproar to lure him out of the room. She escorts him into the lawyer's study. In the study K., notices an imposing portrait of a man in a judge's robe, ready to come out from his magnificent seat. On K's inquiry, Leni tells that he is an Examining Magistrate. She also knows about K.'s case, and beseeches him to be less obstinate. Leni gives K. a key and tells him he is welcome to visit her any time. He goes out and is badly rebuked by his uncle. According to Uncle Karl, K. has damaged his case by vanishing for hours. The Chief Clerk had remained until K.'s absence became annoying, after which he left when the conversation became embarrassing. Uncle Karl had also been waiting for K's return for a long time.

Leni is the third woman to be attracted to Josef K. However, before elaborating on the Leni episode, we must consider how the episode is structurally and thematically a reverse of the episode in the first chapter, when K's recreation of the shout triggered the episode with Frauleine Burstner. We might as well start conjecturing whether K.'s shout and the subsequent events might have been planned by K., just as Leni plans them in this chapter. Kafka's biographer describes the pre-World War I Prague as a place where young professionals, a banker like K. and a lawyer or bureaucrat like Kafka, would marry women of their own class but routinely go to poorer women of a lower social class for sex. The reciprocity of this situation was also indicated in the reference to K.'s usual routine visits to Elsa, the cabaret dancer, in the first chapter.

As the lines between lovers, mistresses, free-lancers, and professionals were not strictly drawn, the idea of prostitution and casual hook-up was also quite complicated in that milieu. Undoubtedly, the economic, social and political powerlessness of women belonging to the lower social strata can be gauged from references. Young men found the situation perfectly

advantageous, and perhaps, the young women with whom they consorted got more out of the bargain than was otherwise available to them within the strictly prescribed boundaries of their social world. As mentioned above, the customs of the milieu covertly approved of the arrangement.

However, Leni's adoration of K. seems beyond all calculations of reasonable or potential advantage. K. himself has no idea why he has suddenly become so sought after, but he is arrogant enough not to think about the matter at all. Still, for someone so ambitious and scrupulous regarding his work, K. is occasionally rather reckless in his actions. The first instance was his insolence during the interrogation. And now, he snubs the Chief Clerk of the Court. In this instance, it is either Leni's charms that are unavoidable for K., or K.'s underdeveloped sense of gravity that has manifested itself in his dismissal of Court's importance by snubbing the Chief Clerk.

On a wintry morning, Josef K. breaks into a sixteen-page reverie in which he inwardly articulates his disappointment with his lawyer and recollects all the information his lawyer has communicated to him about the twisted machinery of the Court. Wearied by his lawyer's endless talk and ostensibly minimal action, K. is intensely worn out and identifies in himself the symptoms of mental tiredness due to the obsessive torment regarding his case. The lawyer supports himself by stating that at this stage in these cases, it is often better to do nothing explicit. Now, we are certain that despite all previous indirect indications of his involvement in the case, he is concerned that all his efforts to ignore the trial have failed and the process is sorely hurting him.

K. is unable to concentrate on his work. Several important people related to his work at the bank are asked to wait and are inordinately delayed by his indecision. Finally, though he agrees to meet an important manufacturer, one of the bank's important clients, K. fails to pay attention to the matter at hand. The Assistant Manager, his chief professional rival, takes over the case. Without any concern of the professional consequence of such an action, K. returns to his thoughts. On his way out, the manufacturer informs K. that he has heard of K.'s case and has a friendly suggestion for him. The manufacturer's acquaintance, a lowly painter called Titorelli, who paints portraits for the Court, can be useful in finding a favour with many important court functionaries. The manufacturer thinks that K. should visit Titorelli for a favourable outcome of the trial. At this point, K. is desperate for any suggestions, but he is shocked to encounter random people who know about his situation. However, it will soon become an everyday situation and he would find that his case has become part of people's general knowledge.

Nevertheless, K. takes the advice. After a scratchy encounter with the businessmen waiting in the lobby for him, K. goes to meet the painter.

The painter lives in a section of the city even poorer than the one K. visited for his trial. K. finds the building, climbs the stairs, runs through a gauntlet of nosy teenage girls, and meets the painter in the latter's tiny studio room. Curious girls keep on peeping and eavesdropping on the conversation from outside the room.

The painter is indeed an official Court painter and provides K. with abundant information about the Court. He readily proffers to use his connections to support K.'s cause. He states the three possible acquittals that may be hoped for, namely, definite acquittal, ostensible acquittal and indefinite postponement. The first is a rarity, and the painter does not remember ever encountering any such outcome. The second is a non-binding acquittal decided by the lower judges, which may be revoked at any time, should a higher level Court initiate action. This kind of acquittal necessitates a tiring flurry of petitioning and lobbying. However, it does not require any action afterwards until the case is revisited, at which point, the efforts must begin anew. Thus, the likelihood of the case's recommencement from the beginning becomes a perpetual shadow over the accused. Even though indefinite postponement requires there to be consistent contact with the Court, it fences off the case in its early stages. It makes a person safe from impromptu arrest but requires them to be vigilant at all times. However, the only advantage of postponement and perceived exoneration is that they do not let the case mature to a sentence.

K. finds the room to be very stuffy and claustrophobic during the conversation. He feels asphyxiated in the room, just as he had felt in the Court offices. Without indicating his preference, K. takes his leave. The troubled K. was forced by the painter to purchase a few identical landscapes before he could leave. The painter saw that the inquisitive girls were outside the door, so he let K. leave from another door in the small room. This led to a hallway which did not resemble the law offices' corridor he had visited earlier.

As the quality of air is even worse in the corridor, K. is utterly shocked by this experience. However, it is further worsened by the painter's information that there are Law Court Offices in nearly every attic. K. clutches his handkerchief over his face in utter disgust as an usher escorts him out.

Both the lawyer and the painter convince K. that what really matters is good relations with subordinate officials. This view itself is a travesty of the entire juridical process, but pragmatically speaking, seems to be the only option to get rid of it. Moreover, the hopelessness of the situation perpetuates because no one knows the higher officials. All wheedling, supplication, and influence peddling goes through the lower Courts since the higher officials are always out of reach. On the other hand, no one can really change the judgement of the trial. At best, they can interfere with the course of action

and thereby drag out the trial indefinitely while the cloak of guilt floats over the accused.

Justice delayed, of course, is justice denied, but no other kind of justice can be hoped for. The assessment of this situation could be that the Court is not corrupt due to the influence peddling at the lower level. It corruptness is due to the unaccountability towards the society that it serves. Even if the Law is rigorous internally, the people outside its circle would never know about it. The ultimate power of the judicial system is not visible except to those who stand in judgement of the accused people. Indeed, it can be said that the trial is no trial at all. Accusations are never revealed, proof is never examined and the sentence is decidedly foregone. Defence is distinctly censored and the accused is considered to be guilty from the beginning.

The Trial is generally perceived to be, among other things, a condemnation of the intractable Austro-Hungarian bureaucracy. Since Kafka himself had been an official in the State's insurance department, he was quite familiar with its structure. This book provides a perceptive representation of the authoritative structure that would emerge as a dominating factor nearly a decade after Kafka's demise. Yet, the narrative records a logical possibility of an illogical institutional structure, a society that accepts unaccountable governance in the name of necessity and regards the law as divine Law, as it declines to show itself convinced to sentence its own existence through such a legal trial.

The pivotal action of this chapter is K.'s tough decision to dispense with his lawyer's services. K's decision to dispense with Herr Huld's service is a final and desperate action on K's part to disentangle himself from the legal rigmarole. He visits the lawyer at his residence late at night and the door is opened by a little, bearded man in shirt-sleeves. He sees Leni hurriedly going to another room, wearing her nightgown. He demands of the little man whether he was Leni's lover to which he replied in the negative. The man told K. that he was a client of Herr Huld. The man, Merchant Block, escorts K. to the Kitchen where he sees Leni preparing soup for the lawyer. While Leni takes the soup to her master, K. questions Block about his case. Block tells him all about his case and the numerous lawyers he has had to appoint for it. After hearing Block's story, K. decides to dismiss the services of the lawyer. Even though Block and Leni try to dissuade him against this brash act, K. nevertheless goes to the lawyer's office and locks the door behind him.

The lawyer tells K. that Leni found all accused men quite attractive. When K. tells the lawyer his decision, he also asks K. to reconsider as he was quite fond of K. The lawyer tries to tell K. about the way in which all accused persons were treated by the Court, asking him to change his

decision. The lawyer summons Block and humiliates him, showing K. how easy it was for the Court and lawyers to humiliate and frighten the accused. K. likens the behaviour of Block to that of a dog, which horrifies and repulses him.

K. has been given instructions about entertaining an influential Italian client who was coming to town. K. had been studying Italian grammar that night and was exhausted when he came to the office early next morning. He found that the Italian had also arrived early. K. then accompanies the Italian to some of the major tourist attractions of the city. One attraction was the Cathedral, where the Italian enters, while K. waits outside. However, as the Italian does not come out and it starts raining outside, K., after walking around the cathedral and leafing through a picture album he has brought with him, decides to enter the Cathedral. In the Cathedral, a preacher climbs up to the pulpit. The priest is, in fact, the prison chaplain, connected with the court. K. asks the chaplain to come down from the pulpit, to which he agrees.

They walk together up and down the aisle. This brief tale, drawn from the writings about the Law, tells a lot about a man from the country, who tries to gain admittance at the entrance to the Law, is always denied by the doorkeeper, and yet learns, as he dies, that this entrance was meant only for him. The chaplain and K. discuss several possible interpretations of this story, such as the person who is deluded and who is subservient to whom. The chaplain lets K. know that he was a part of the Court, but told him that 'the Court wants nothing from you.'

The parable 'Before the Law' given by Kafka is opaque as well as luminous. This is a miniature version of Kafka's story. It is a cryptic origin of conjecture and continuous interpretations. *The Trial* is another proof that the people who seek justice have to accept this twisted universal principle and criteria in the end. They eventually bow down to the inevitability of their own death.

On his thirty-first birthday, K. came across two men in coats and top hats who had come for him. He impulsively decides to resist them in a deserted square. The men started dragging him at this point. At this point, he spots Fraulein Burstner, or someone who looked like him, walking across that square. When one of the men took out a butcher's knife from his coat and started passing it between him and the other man, K. realized that they had come to kill him. He, at that moment, spots a figure with outstretched arms at the window nearby.

Some novels seem to diminish gradually and die in a trail of ellipses, once most of their good ideas are spent, or their plots and sub-plots resolved. *The Trial* ends with a full stop. K.'s activities since his meeting with the chaplain remain untold. The reason behind this silence, whether it is an

incomplete work or because Kafka wished it this way, will also remain unknown.

Stop to consider

Kafka and Expressionism

Franz Kafka is mostly identified with expressionism of the early twentieth century. In expressionism, a writer represents the feelings of a character regarding a particular subject rather than its objective surface reality. In effect, a writer portrays what he sees in his work. The depiction is a phantasmagoric representation or grotesque distortion of reality in this technique. Nonetheless, there is certain logic to this approach due to the following reasons:

(a) It may be that a writer or the character portrayed by him can suffer from some sort of mental condition like paranoia or depression that can alter his perception of reality.

(b) The perception of this world is not similar for everyone. One may perceive it as a beautiful place, while for someone else, it can be ugly or bad.

A writer can present this perception by means of expressionism. K.'s perception of reality is seen through his mind's eye. To one person, the scene may appear as cheerful or normal, but to another, it might appear as depressing or miserable. Furthermore, a person's outward appearance may not reflect their true essence. Expressionist writers frequently depict the world as bizarre, fantastic and frightening. This is because they and their characters perceive the world in this manner in their works. These distortions become their reality of the world. Eugene O'Neil and James Joyce are writers who use this expressionist technique as well.

1.4.1 Themes and Techniques in *The Trial*

There are various themes and techniques used by Franz Kafka in his novel, *The Trial*.

I. Early Critical Heritage

Some of the earliest English language reviewers, Edwin and Willa Muir, who translated *The Trial*, differed on the merits of the work. Ralph Thompson, reviewing for *New York Times* simply gave up saying that 'it is beyond me.' Similar desperation was expressed by Helen MacAfee:

> 'If the book is an allegory with some sort of esoteric key to its meaning, the key escapes me.'

In the same year, Stonier, reviewing for *The New Statesman and Nation*, admitted the possibility of both a metaphysical and psychoanalytic interpretation. During the same time, Stephen Spender offered a shallow analysis, but Edward Sackville-West in *The Spectator* perceptively detected the broader structure of a treatment of the struggle of the individual against absolute authority.

Philip Rahv, in his *The Hero as Lonely Man* (1939) examined Kafka's form and content, and offered a psychoanalytic interpretation. Rahv compared the guilt complexes of Josef K. and Ivaln Ilyich, and their treatment by Kafka and Tolstoy. John Kelly's discussion of a 'theology of crisis' read into *The Trial* and Muir's metaphysical interpretation soon followed in 1940. However, this critical tide was soon reversed by Hannah Arendt when she revaluated Kafka's work and attacked metaphysical and psychoanalytical interpretations. She brought back the figure of K. to the original ambit of an individual fighting bureaucracy and demanding his due from his government. The post-World War II interest in Kafka increased manifold and various schools of interpretation depicted a close affinity to their own creed in Kafka's works. Consequently, Parker Taylor's 'Kafka and the Surrealists', 'Albert Camus, Hope and Absurdity' and Jean Wahl's 'Kierkegaard ad Kafka', all investigated and claimed his contribution to the Surrealist and Existentialist schools of thoughts.

II. Satire on Justice and Trial

The novel offers a satiric representation of the legal system, in particular and by extension, an overt critique of the entire institutional structure on which many modern institutions are ostensibly founded. Critical temptation to draw an obvious parallel to Nikolai Gogol's fictional works *The Overcoat* and *Dead Souls* is naturally high. Just as Gogol's trenchant criticism of the tsarist Russian bureaucracy was informed by his insider's point of view, Kafka's experience as an employee of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and as a law student would surely have helped him draw such a satiric sketch. George Lukács sees Josef K. as an innocent victim of the 'diabolical character of the world of modern capitalism', in the face of which, the individual man is inevitably impotent.

The titular claim to 'trial' is often considered as a definite and verifiable objective method. With that set pattern and institutional stability, one usually associates a location marker, a courtroom and a hierarchy of bureaucratic functionaries, such as janitors, examining magistrates, clerks of various capacities, judges and most importantly, the process of legal trial consisting of examination of evidence, jurisprudence and finally, dispensation of sentence or justice following the process. However, at the heart of this entire process is the core activity of examination of evidence, its record and subsequent delivery of justice or sentence as per standard procedure. The novel's title draws our attention to this core activity of the legal institution.

The novel introduces the abruptness and apparent lack of causal connection between events and personal motives, negating the expectation aroused by the above-mentioned structure. Throughout the novel, we encounter many levels of court functionaries, such as janitors, magistrates, examining clerks, lawyers, etc. However, as we move towards the core of the legal function, their nominal and functional equation starts dissolving.

Thus, though the janitor and usher actually perform actions they are supposed to, everyone else is quite disinterested in their legal responsibility. The only hint at the resumption of the legal process of the trial is actually a false start and wrong information of K. being a house painter. Once the foundational question of identity, on the basis of which contemporary jurisprudence places so much of importance, is refuted, the Court does not try to bring it back to main course by trying to establish a different set of facts. This neglect regarding establishing of identity could have been expected to take a different course of action in other situations and K. might have been released immediately, considering his original arrest to be a confusion arising out of mistaken identity.

The court not only moves beyond the false start regarding the identity of the accused, it ignores the entire process of collecting and examining evidence. The most glaring example of this trial not being a trial at all is its refusal or failure to mention K.'s guilt during the entire process. Moreover, throughout the novel, the narrative maintains a complete silence regarding K's guilt. In fact, beyond his harangue in the first Court room scene, even K. stops asking the reason behind his arrest and prosecution. Rather, he accepts the inherently corrupt nature of the legal system and starts trying to play the legal system in its own game of connections, subterfuge and corruption. Thus, even if the novel sets out to satirize the corrupt and insidious legal system that has built a demoniac system to perpetuate its frightening killing machine, the idea of this monstrosity is naturalized by the sound of the silence enveloping it.

On the other hand, the question of mistaken identity leads to different narrative possibilities. It does not really matter if K. belongs to a particular social or professional group, he is still considered guilty. Apparently, this may seem to be an absurd position. However, this is actually based on one of the basic principles of modern jurisprudence, equality before law. Therefore, if the trial is going to stick to one of its foundational principles of equality before law, it must ignore the social and professional standing of an accused person. Further, extending the possibility of the same equality principle, it does not matter whether the accused is a house painter or a senior clerk in a bank, the same fate prevails for every human being. Thus, the human existence itself looks like a condemned existence irrespective of an individual's social and economic standing. Under the circumstances, such questions regarding human identity and its consequences take on a larger, complicated shape.

III. Josef K.'s Guilt in *The Trial*

Even if the structure and pattern of *The Trial* is that of a legal thriller, the main question regarding K's guilt and violation has plagued critics and readers alike. Finding no explicit contrary evidence, critics have often suggested that Josef K. may not be guilty at all. In continuation of the

mainstream religious interpretation, Edmund Wilson and many others have found that K.'s guilt can only at best be taken as an illustration of the Original Sin. Since the Original Sin is a generic and universal guilt, in specific terms, this is no guilt at all. If declaring him not guilty is directly contradicting the narration slant risking a lot of semantic ground, the representation of K's guilt on Kafka's 'bad conscience' can then be directly linked to Kafka's Freudian guilt of hating his authoritarian father.

Though as indicated in the beginning of this section, on Kafka's silence regarding K.'s guilt, D. S Savage sees 'normality menaced and undermined by the enigmatic forces of the supernatural' and Austin Warren generalizes K.'s problem as 'one of accepting universe'. As such theological and existential interpretations merge, the trial of Josef K. has been seen by Albert Camus as a perfect illustration of the absurdity of human existence. However, all such transference of the blame through social, metaphysical or existential interpretations serves to absolve all moral responsibility of the protagonist. The characteristically modern hero of the novel is an unsatisfactory and limited human being who alternates between strident assertions or aggressive acquiescence, although remaining perpetually cold and detached from his surroundings.

Once this detachment or disconnection is taken into account, a whole range of interpretive possibilities of K.'s guilt opens up. As Charles Neider suggested, since the courts are 'irrational, unjust and deliberately clandestine', the only escape would be 'belief in oneself, in one's integrity, one's sense and one's logic.' Joan Mellen concludes that 'it is of lack of faith in himself that Josef K. is guilty.' Philip Rahv sees K.'s guilt in his 'failure to define his status in the community and win a measure of control over his social and personal destiny.' However, once catalogued, all these causes of failure, whether theological, existential, socio-economic or juridical, are limited in explaining K.'s guilt, primarily because of both sides' inability to engage in the novel's texture, and these interpretations limit themselves to the novel's epiphanic insights into human fate.

IV. The Law versus law in *The Trial*

If we abandon all metaphysical superstructures in trying to understand K.'s guilt and rely only on 'the explicit details' found in the novel, the key to K's crime may be found in a 'distinction Kafka is making between the 'law', the rules and moors by which bourgeois society functions, and a higher absolute to which he [Kafka] gives the status of natural law.' In short, K. is guilty of violating the Law that 'all men ought to obey and a moral imperative.' In fact, K. has always meticulously maintained and observed the rules of 'law' of the bourgeois society. Thus, he cannot be held guilty of violating any of its laws. However, he is guilty of violating a moral absolute. His feeling of guilt transforms into his half-conscious 'recognition that life has become

meaningless because he has lost sight of this Law.' Josef K. then becomes a person hopelessly trapped between two value systems. On one hand, he has been brought up in a bourgeois value system that he has eventually internalized to the extent of formulating his entire life according to its materialistic mores. However, a part of him is always aware that joining its ranks and shaping his own life by its dictates, K. is violating a higher Law. The rules of bourgeois respectability that he dearly upholds, such as keeping a good job, observing decorum with an eye towards advancement in rank, residing in a respectable household in a respectable area and avoiding excesses of any kind, are irreconcilable with a Law Kafka sees as a universal moral imperative.

The Law demands that all men accept each other as equals regardless of their social rank or position. Going back to the previous section, to opening question of the 'trial', the question can be taken as the last and precise moment offered to K. regarding his identification with fellow human beings. He refuses to accept this larger possibility of identification and asserts his superior social standing and professional rank. In fact, Josef K.'s relationship with everyone else is determined by his comparative rank in the hierarchy. Assertion of the self over others is one of the fundamental principles of the competitive capitalist systems. While the system thrives on such competitive transactions, it alienates each human being from the other into extreme forms of isolation. All these men, Josef K., the Bank Manager and advocate Herr Huld, value others in terms of how much wealth and prestige they have accumulated, the legacy of a middle class, whose Weltanschauung has much commonality with a community imbibed with the principles of social Darwinism.

V. The Courtroom in *The Trial*

The idea of the courtroom seems extremely flexible. The magistrate occupies Faruleine Burnster's rented room to convert it into his office. The Whipper executes the lashing sentence against the 'erring' janitors in the storeroom of K.'s office. The Courtroom where K. is summoned on Sunday morning is located in a poor neighbourhood with no definite signs leading to its exact location. The Courtroom lacks space because its infrastructure is clandestine even if it is crammed with a large gathering. However, while leaving the room, enraged by the inefficiency of the legal system, K. suddenly notices that the members of the audience wear the same badge, thereby turning not only the courtroom but also the audience into a clandestine affair.

Beyond the courtroom, there seems to be an enveloping sense of suffocation and offal around the courtroom. As indicated earlier, the breathlessness in and around the court premises is both physical and psychological. Readers may arrive at their own conclusions of metaphor or symbol, but the relationship between a closing space and the idea of the

court to be fairly consistent. The meeting hall where the first interrogation was held is a dim and hazy room. The suffocating atmosphere of the law offices made K. very dizzy. The Whipper whipped the warders in a wood closet, while the Court's painter lived in a stuffy attic. K. had to consult with the lawyer in his darkened sickroom. The cathedral where K. met the chaplain was pit black because of the storm that brewed outside. All these scenarios could affect the reader greatly as they themselves can start feeling claustrophobic by the descriptions provided by the writer.

Therefore, the obvious connection between the Courts that literally spreads everywhere is no more a physical entity but has turned into a psychological mechanism. Even though K. is never bound and imprisoned, his arrest is complete as he never seriously attempts to get rid of the whole idea of the trial. On the contrary, he is perpetually imprisoned because of the psychological confinement that he carries in his mind as the parameters of Law shrink and entwine the possibility of release from the court or its punitive possibility becomes bleak.

VI. 'Before the Law' Parable in *The Trial*

Readers and critics have vastly disagreed regarding the identity of the protagonist of 'Before the Law' parable, but there is no doubt that the extended parable serves as the novel's centrepiece. The protagonist has been interpreted as a man from the country, the guardian at the door or a self-projection of Josef K. himself. Though strong cases have been made in favour of all three, the view that the real protagonist of the parable may be Law itself is gaining steady critical ground.

Whatever may be the identity of the protagonist, there are undeniably mystical trappings around his persona. The narrative states that 'he [the man] perceives a radiance that streams immortality from door of the Law.' More appropriately, K. hears the parable not in a court, but in a Cathedral, and the speaker is a priest, not a lawyer or a judge. However, as Steven Carter states:

> 'The supreme function of Law in 'Before the Law' is to define and deconstruct the very human relationship between the man from the country, the doorkeeper, and ultimately Josef K.'

Just as mirrors reflect and reverse, the Law simultaneously makes the doorkeeper and the man from the country doppelgangers and opposites. The doorkeeper appears as immortal, while the man from the country withers dismally with age and dies. While this double function of Law is hidden from the conventional perceptibility of K., he tries to play both the men. Like the man from the country, he seeks admission to the Law, but the doorkeeper in him makes his protestations of innocence deny him admission. This parallel only conforms to the dual structure confronting human law and the Law. Thus, only by admitting his guilt can Josef K. be

'saved' by the Law. This apparent contradiction is at the heart of the central irony of the novel.

VII. Class struggle in *The Trial*

The Magistrate posed the question related to the identity of the housepainter while consulting an old notebook. When K. returns the following week, he finds pornographic books on the magistrate's desk and decides that the status of the court is thereby compromised. Josef K.'s planned submission of a detailed life story as a defence document is never completed. His lawyer's petitions to the court are probably unwritten, undelivered or unread.

Therefore, Josef K.'s execution is solely based on his single statement regarding it. A reading of the text would depict that his occupation alone is sufficient enough to denounce him in the Court's eyes. Furthermore, the Court arranges his execution in the same concealed setting as his hearing.

The courtroom spectators' booming laughter could be directed against the ridiculous question put up by the magistrate. This also showed his lacking preparation for the case or his attitude against K.'s arrogance, as portrayed in the novel. But the answer given by K. could be wrong in a basic sense of the way. If he had answered the question put up by the magistrate in an affirmative and non-arrogant manner, the trial's outcome could have been different. If he were a housepainter, he would have been categorized in the same genre as the Court's environment, its dependents as well as its employees. K. compares the judge's and other officials' cramped offices with his luxurious office at the bank. He was trying to imply that the administrative level of the Court was socially beneath his.

The accused people who were brought to the Court generally belonged to the middle class. Therefore, the commanding nature of higher class people like Block or the executives depict the class struggle between the working class and the elites. The crowded courtroom reminds Josef K. of a 'socialist meeting.' The term was later replaced by 'a local political gathering'. The prevalent legal system operates to the advantage of the rich and powerful, and this underground, parallel justice system of the poor attacks its oppressors, particularly their more arrogant representatives like the self-made man Josef K. The purpose of the examining magistrate's apparently silly question 'you are a house painter?' is to determine Josef K.'s class membership, after which no further questioning is needed.

Russell E. Brown suggests that *The Trial* could be read as an allegory of a class struggle. The elements of this allegory are balanced on the obvious evidence of other allegories like the psychological or the religious ones. According to Peter Beicken, 'Kafka is no poet of class struggle.' However, Kafka still introduced a series of class conflict motifs into the multivalence of *The Trial*. It would be a folly to ignore these class conflicts

as presented in the novel as they present an essential part of the writer's intent.

Check Your Progress-2

1. What is the German title of Franz Kafka's *The Trial*?
2. In which year was *The Trial* published?
3. What is the name of the main protagonist in *The Trial*?

1.5 Let Us Sum Up

- Novel, in its modern sense of a prose narrative with epic proportions, made its appearance in the German linguistic scene around the late eighteenth century. This was not an isolated and unique phenomenon for the German culture.
- Across Europe, many literary cultures had their first successful attempt at novel writing during the same period. In England, three of its most important early novelists, Defoe, Swift and Addison make their novelistic debut during eighteenth century.
- Manifold increase in journalistic reading and writing created a favourable context for the rise of novel in all three cultures of England, France and Germany.
- Grimmelshausen's adventures of the young and naïve Simplicissimus, in the eponymous book *Simplicius Simplicissimus*, became the most popular novel of the German Baroque period.
- Apart from three main areas of Germanic habitation, Prussia, Austria and Bohemia, German literature has also historically developed in parts of Switzerland, Czech Republic and other places inhabited by German Diaspora.
- In Goethe's novels, it may be observed that though the novel ironically comments on Wilhelm Meister's education or Bildung's individuation, this novel sets the pattern for many future novels modelled on such biographical structure and are called novels of formation or growing up (Bildungsroman).
- All major German Romantic writers were, like their English Romantic counterparts, masters of the poetic or musical arts. Apart from these, German Romanticism manifested in fine arts, but not as much in novel writing.
- Sir Walter Scott's novels triggered a wave of historical novels that his colleagues called 'Scott-Mania'. In only a few years, literary

production flourished and finally reached new heights in the 1830s. It can also be observed that there is hardly a year in the nineteenth century when nearly as many historical novels were published in 1830.

- In the typical lending library of the Biedermeier period, one could find novels by Benedicte Naubert on the same platform as successful writers of the 1820s or 1830s. Caroline Pichler's *Agathokles* (1808) became the most triumphant historical novel of the first half of the nineteenth century, with the only exception of Carl Spindler's *Der Jesuit*.
- The main writers of that period are August von Witzleben, Carl Franz van der Velde, Henriette von Paalzow, Willibald Alexis, Ludwig Rellstab, Spindler, Karl Borromäus Herloßsohn and Pichler. Rise of the popularity of historical novel during the oppressive Biedermeier period is a curious phenomenon in many contexts.
- As in French and Russian literatures, German literature also reacted against Romantic modes of expression. Though the term 'Bourgeois Realism' is often critically applied to many realist novelists who represented only bourgeois lifestyle to prove their realistic claims, in Germany, such negative connotations were lacking.
- Gustav Freytag was a German novelist and playwright of a different order. His fiercely partisan nationalistic politics was the mainstay of his writings. His writing was brashly colonialist in its advocacy of 'eastern marches', starting a public re-interpretation of the Ostsiedlung.
- Gottfried Keller, a Swiss writer of German literature, was a major contributor to a different version of realism. Keller's semi-autobiographical novel, *Der grüne Heinrich* (Green Henry), being the most personal of all his works, intended to be a short narrative of the collapse of the life of a young artist.
- Keeping with the general flourish of arts and sciences during the inter-war periods of 1918-1933, the Weimar culture also produced some of the greatest German novelists. For your reference, you may note that the work under consideration, Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, was conceptualized before the Weimar Period.
- Bruno Alfred Doblin's iconic novel, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929), presents an underground life of crime and betrayal with an unmatched élan for evoking montage and narrative monologues. Its manifold narrative sources use sound effects, newspaper articles, songs, speeches, and other books to propel forward the plot of the novel.
- Franz Kafka (1883-1924) was born in Prague to middle-class Jewish parents. His father, the son of a village butcher, was a man of little education but strong entrepreneurial ambition. He was a successful social climber, who rose to become a successful retailer and

wholesaler. This was further advanced by his marriage to the daughter of a wealthy brewery owner.

- As Franz Kafka has become a representative figure for twentieth-century alienation and unsettled unease, his work is often introduced in the context of his own experience of alienation. Kafka nowhere found a comfortable fit in his multiple levels of non-belonging.
- Kafka knew that writing was his passion, but he never thought that he could earn a living from it and did not want to try it as much. It was something personal for him, a 'form of prayer' and a transitory reprieve from his demons. He undertook a law internship after graduation, after which, he briefly took up a job with a private insurance company.
- The developments of the twisted century itself brought Kafka's works to the world's attention, and lent the word 'kafkaesque' to hundreds of languages. Kafka's three sisters and the woman who was his one true love perished in concentration camps after his death. It is Kafka's description of the struggle to find meaning in a cosmos he knew to be meaningless that makes his work the gateway to modern literature.
- On the morning of his thirtieth birthday, Josef K., an ambitious, worldly-wise young bank official, is arrested by two janitors, although he does not remember committing any crime. K. is left feeling offended and annoyed. One year later, on the morning of his thirty-first birthday, two warders come again for K. They take him to a quarry outside the town and execute him in the name of the Law.
- *The Trial* is the account of that intervening year in which K.'s 'trial' goes on. It records his struggles and encounter with the invisible Law and the imperviously omnipotent Court. It is an account, ultimately, of the institutionally-induced self-destruction of an individual. However, as in all of Kafka's best writing, the 'meaning' remains elusive and open to various possibilities.
- The novel offers a satiric representation of the legal system, in particular and by extension, an overt critique of the entire institutional structure on which many modern institutions are ostensibly founded. Critical temptation to draw an obvious parallel to Nikolai Gogol's fictional works *The Overcoat* and *Dead Souls* is naturally high.
- Just as Gogol's trenchant criticism of the tsarist Russian bureaucracy was informed by his insider's point of view, Kafka's experience as an employee of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and as a law student would surely have helped him draw such a satiric sketch.
- The titular claim to 'trial' is often considered as a definite and verifiable objective method. With that set pattern and institutional stability, one

usually associates a location marker, a courtroom and a hierarchy of bureaucratic functionaries, such as janitors, examining magistrates, clerks of various capacities, judges and most importantly, the process of legal trial consisting of examination of evidence, jurisprudence and finally, dispensation of sentence or justice following the process.

- Even if the structure and pattern of *The Trial* is that of a legal thriller, the main question regarding K's guilt and violation has plagued critics and readers alike. Finding no explicit contrary evidence, critics have often suggested that Josef K. must be not guilty at all. In continuation of the mainstream religious interpretation, Edmund Wilson and many others have found that K.'s guilt can only at best be taken as an illustration of the Original Sin.
- Readers and critics have vastly disagreed regarding the identity of the protagonist of 'Before the Law' parable, but there is no doubt that the extended parable serves as the novel's centrepiece. The protagonist has been interpreted as a man from the country, the guardian at the door or a self-projection of Josef K. himself.

1.6 Key Words

- **Bildungsroman:** Bildungsroman is a type of novel about the moral and psychological growth of the main character.
- **Bourgeois Realism:** Bourgeois Realism is a term used to define the realistic style used to portray the people/values/behaviours of the middle class.
- **Weimar culture:** Weimar culture was a flourishing of the arts and sciences during the Weimar Republic (between Germany's defeat at the end of World War I in 1918, and Hitler's rise to power in 1933).
- **Kafkaesque:** Characteristic or reminiscent of the oppressive or nightmarish qualities of Franz Kafka's fictional world.
- **Allegory:** Allegory is a literary device in which characters or events in a literary, visual, or musical art form represent or symbolize ideas and concepts.
- **Satire:** Satire is a genre of literature, and sometimes graphic and performing arts, in which vices, follies, abuses, and shortcomings are held up to ridicule, ideally with the intent of shaming individuals, and society itself, into improvement.

1.7 Terminal Questions

1. Examine the early stage of German novel writing with special reference to the influence of foreign literature in its early stages.

2. Write a short note on German historical novel with particular reference to its popularity during the Biedermeier period.
3. Discuss the main traits and achievements of Weimar Culture with special reference to novels.
4. Write a detailed plot summary of Franz Kafka's *The Trial*.
5. Do you think that *The Trial* is a satire on the legal system of that period? Substantiate your point of view with examples from the text.
6. Give a detailed account of Josef K.'s visit to the Cathedral.
7. Examine the characterization of women in *The Trial*.
8. Discuss the various themes and techniques in Kafka's *The Trial*.
9. Comment on the theme of guilt and innocence in *The Trial*.
10. Consider *The Trial* as an existentialist novel.

1.8 Suggested Reading

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- Kafka, Franz. *The Trial*. Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir; revised, and with additional material translated by E.M. Butler. New York: Schocken Books, 1995.
- Pawel, Ernst. *The Nightmare of Reason: A Life of Franz Kafka*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984.
- Wagenbach, Klaus. *Franz Kafka: Pictures of a Life*. Translated by Arthur S. Wensinger. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

1.9 Model Answers to 'Check Your Progress'

Check Your Progress-1

1. *Simplicius Simplicissimus* was the most popular novel of the German Baroque period.
2. The unfinished novels by Franz Kafka are *The Trial*, *The Castle* and *Amerika*.
3. Theodor Fontane found his own tone yielding insights into the lives of the nobility and the common man in his novels *Frau Jenny Treibel*, *Irrungen, Wirrungen* and *Effi Briest*.

Check Your Progress-2

1. The German title of Franz Kafka's *The Trial* is *Der Proceß*.
2. *The Trial* was published in the year 1925.
3. The name of the main protagonist in *The Trial* is Josef K.

UNIT - 1
RUSSIAN SHORT STORY

Structure

1.0 Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the plot, satire and realism of Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol's *The Overcoat*
- Explain the individual and human saga as well as the structure and narrative flow of *The Overcoat*
- Discuss the concept and plot of Lev Nikolaievich Tolstoy's *Death of Ivan Ilyich*

1.1 Introduction

Short stories, in their modern European version flourished concurrently in the four metropolitan centres of Europe. Among these, the French and the Russian varieties dominated the scene for long. While these cultures had a close relationship because of many reasons (Napoleonic War being an important one), they were mainly opposed to each other. Arguably, the greatest French storywriter, Guy de Maupassant, was a master of objective short stories. Basically, Maupassant's stories are anecdotes that capture revealing moments in the lives of middle class citizens. These critical instants that are characteristically recounted in a well-made design, are best exemplified in stories like *Boule de Suif* (1880: *Ball of Tallow*) and *The Necklace* (1881). The fact that Maupassant's plots are quite unnatural is up for argument. This is because the artifice is quite apparent and the reverse irony towards the end is way too careful and neat. In Maupassant's *The House of Madame Tellier* (1881), the easily flowing prose brings forwards the corruption as well as the innocence of human behaviour.

Fable writing became a fashionable trend in the nineteenth century Russia during the first two decades. Ivan Krylov was the most widely read fabulist. He borrowed from *La Fontaine*, *Aesop Fables* and other German sources. Ivan Krylov's fables raised the popularity of short prose in Russia. Even Aleksandr Pushkin's work gained attention of the readers. Merimee was the first writer to translate Turgenev, Pushkin and Gogol into French. In a similar manner, Pushkin developed a rather classical and detached style for his stories depicting emotional conflicts such as *The Queen of Spades* (1834). Mikhail Lermontov's famous novel, *A Hero of Our Time* (1840) was quite popular amongst readers as well.

However, the distinctive Russian tradition of short story started with Nikolai Gogol. Dostoevsky commented that all Russian short story writers 'emerged from Gogol's *The Overcoat*, a punning allusion to the Master's best known story that we will read in the next section. Gogol, in a characteristically personal style, developed impressionist techniques simultaneously with Edgar Allan Poe. He published *Arabesques* in 1835. Five years later, Poe also collected some tales under a similar title. Like Poe, Gogol's tales of bewildering movement between fantasy and reality as well as hallucination are among his best works. *Diary of a Madman* and *Nevsky Prospect* are some of his best works, published in 1835. The most famous story written by Gogol in the first half of the nineteenth century was *The Overcoat* (1842). The story blends realism (characters' daily lives' details) with fragments of fantasy (return of the central character as a ghost). It anticipates the realism of Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* as well as the impressionism of Dostoevsky's *Underground Man*.

At first glance, Ivan Turgenev seems to be the opposite of Gogol. Turgenev's calm pace, simple language and narrative restraint in *A Sportsman's Notebook* (1852) sets him apart from Gogol. But Turgenev was also quite interested in enticing people rather than constructing intricate plots. The major difference between them was that Turgenev disregarded anything that was artificial. This made him more popular with the twentieth century readers. Even though he narrated the tale of a ghost in his realistic scenes like *Bezhin Meadow* (1852), he never attempted to bring in a ghost into his story like Gogol in *The Overcoat*. Turgenev was completely fixated on detached observation.

Fyodor Dostoevsky experimented with the impressionist story like Gogol. For instance, *White Nights* (1848) is a love story from *Reminiscence of a Dreamer*. *The Dream of the Ridiculous Man* (1877) echoes the style of Gogol and Poe as well. Tolstoy experimented with various techniques as he shared Dostoevsky's interest in the motives of human beings. He looked for psychological authenticity by means of a detached and passive narrator like in *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1891) and *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886). Henry James, confused, to some extent, by Leo Tolstoy's non-impressionist methods of capturing as well as delineating psychological impressions, titled him the master of disconnection of method from matter.

Anton Chekhov was the Russian master of short stories. No story-writer could deliver excellent work as consistently as Chekhov. He was compared to Guy de Maupassant quite often. However, Chekhov was more interested in writing about his characters and the quality of their lives than constructing well-plotted stories. Chekhov focussed on character, while Maupassant kept his focus on event. Chekhov's compassion, irony, perception and subtle humour is revealed in his stories like *In the Ravine* (1900), *The Grasshopper* (1892) and *The Darling* (1898). One of Chekhov's critics is of the opinion that he is not a moralist, but simply says 'you live badly, ladies and gentlemen', with an indulgent smile of a wise man.

1.2 Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol – *The Overcoat*

Nikolai Gogol occupies an important role as the master craftsman of modern Russian fiction. In fact, Gogol's *The Dead Souls* (1842) is considered to be the first Russian novel in the true sense of the term. While critics of different epochs of Russian history have discovered various traits in Gogol's writing and have described him to be a champion of that particular mode, as we will see by analyzing *The Overcoat*, it is rather fruitless to categorize Gogol as such.

1.2.1 Plot Development

The story opens with a short comment on the status of the bureaucratic structure of tsarist Russia. Rather ironically, it states the dysfunctional bureaucracy and various complaints and criticisms. However, at the same time, the narrator shows a mock-deference to the royal authority and an ordered socio-political life by not mentioning departmental names for the fear of transgression. Thus, even before any character is introduced the tsarist bureaucracy is introduced as a large system that must be invoked as the larger context in which individuals may operate.

Once this context is briefly elaborated, the low-ranking government official is introduced. His lowly official status is immediately buttressed by specific details of his unremarkable appearance. A similar ironic stance, as adopted while introducing the bureaucratic context, is manifested by the narrator's description of the physical details of the low-ranking clerk. Indeed, if the clerk is so unremarkable, why should the narrator take pain to talk about his short stature, pock-marked face, red hair, short-sighted vision, bald forehead, wrinkled cheeks and a sanguine reddish complexion? Once this description is given, in fact, we may conjure a mental picture with the help of the narrator's minute detailing. This sets off the contradiction and tension between generalization and individualization strategies.

This description of his unremarkable physical features is followed by his family background and the history of his christening. In this section, we come to know that his family name has reference to 'shoes' without any practical connection. Further, his name is the same as his father's. Thus, Russian convention of patronymic addition creates a sense of repetition in Akaky Akakievich.

His official status of perpetual titular counsellor entailed works involving mechanical copying of humdrum official documents. His ignominy at the hand of his supervisors and harassment at the hands of bullying colleagues is further elaborated. When the interference of his colleagues peaked in physical intervention to his own work, he often begged some peace from them so that they let him continue his work.

This somewhat stable life of Akaky Akakievich was invaded upon by his sudden awareness that old tattered overcoat would not be able to withstand another St. Petersburg winter. There is a hint that this awareness was a habitual pattern. Usually, the prospect of impending harsh winter prods him to make a visit to a particular tailor who patches and mends Akaky's overcoat. Nevertheless, this pattern is shattered in spite of repeated entreaties. Petrovich, the tailor refuses to mend it further and says that Akaky Akakievich must get a new overcoat. Petrovich offers him suggestions regarding material and budget for the overcoat. Petrovich's initial budget of hundred-and-fifty roubles sounds a definite absurdity to Akaky Akakievich.

He keeps on pressing Petrovich on various occasions to mend his old, tattered coat and Petrovich resolutely refutes the idea. Finally, both of them compromise their stands. Akaky Akakievich accepts the proposition of getting a new overcoat stitched and Petrovich agrees to undertake the entire job done in eighty roubles.

Once this settlement is agreed upon, Akaky Akakievich digs deep into his savings and adds up his entire annual bonus to match up to the cost of the overcoat. The new overcoat is delivered by Petrovich in the nick of time when Akaky Akakievich needs it most; severe cold has set in and it threatens to increase. However, its utilitarian purpose is almost cancelled, compared to its symbolic value. Immediately, upon wearing it, Akaky Akakievich gets into a holiday mood. The idea of putting on a new overcoat prods him to laugh alone in tremendous internal satisfaction and in this, the part played by beauty was far more important than the utilitarian value of its warmth.

His colleagues and supervisors, who never took note of him, remark on his new overcoat enthusiastically. He immediately becomes the talk of his colleagues on the day he arrives, wearing the overcoat. His immediate superior even suggests an office party in honour of Akaky Akakievich's new overcoat. Though in the beginning of the party, everyone talks of the new overcoat, but soon all veer towards other kinds of small talk and Akaky Akakievich feels out of place in the party. To escape from the gregariousness of the party Akaky Akakievich quietly slips out of the gathering. On his way back home, Akaky Akakievich collects his overcoat which was lying on the floor near the coat hangers. Just as Akaky Akakievich becomes aware of the midnight loneliness on the street, two ruffians materialize out of the dark street. They attack him brutally and as he falls down on the ground, they run away with his new overcoat.

Returning home in complete disorder because of the assault and the theft, he is suggested by his landlady to immediately report to the Police Chief. She further suggests that she could even find a reference to the Chief. On her insistence, Akaky Akakievich makes repeated attempts to meet the Chief. After being rebuffed a number of times, Akaky Akakievich gathers enough courage and threatens the clerks of the police department with his own departmental credentials. At that point, the Chief admits him to an audience. But this audience was of no use. The Chief waylays the complaint by asking Akaky Akakievich several probing irrelevant questions regarding his late night sojourns. Akaky Akakievich understands that this audience would only confuse his mental state. At that he leaves the Chief's office and spends the day indoors; he even skips his office without information.

The next day, Akaky Akakievich makes his appearance in the old, shabby cape in a disorderly physical condition. Though there are a few

officials who ridicule Akaky Akakievich even in this moment of suffering, but mostly his colleagues are touched by such loss. Some colleagues even decide to make a collection for the replacement of Akaky Akakievich's overcoat. As the departmental employees are already burdened and hard-pressed for several other subscriptions, the amount collected is trifling. Moreover, one of the clerks, determined to help Akaky Akakievich in the proper way, suggests that rather than waiting for a chance investigation by a policeman, Akaky Akakievich should approach an official, high-up in the bureaucracy. Practically speaking, this newly-promoted, VIP (very important person) was not really in a much superior position. However, since he could create an aura of importance around him by adopting specific bureaucratic mechanism, he was often considered important by many. An overall strictness of behaviour was the principle of all such characteristics. After keeping Akaky Akakievich waiting in his antechamber for an inordinate time and indulging in casual chit-chat with a childhood friend, the VIP begins the conversation in a rather dismissive tone. Seeing Akaky Akakievich's docile appearance the person assumes an even graver accent and bearing to address him. Akaky Akakievich, who is usually confused in his social interactions, becomes utterly confused by his tone and stutters in the situation. This VIP reminds him of the bureaucratic procedure to approach suitable grass-root level employees. In his confusion, Akaky Akakievich stammers his lack of faith in the secretaries who run the lower rung of the bureaucracy. At this the very important person literally flares up and gives Akaky Akakievich a heavy dose of verbal dressing down. Confronted with this, Akaky Akakievich falls into a delirious fever and soon dies.

After his death, people very quickly forget him. However, it seems that he would return to haunt them soon. It is reported from many quarters of St. Petersburg, that a corpse is haunting the nightly streets of the city and taking away their overcoats. While such events are in circulation and assume the level of an urban legend, the very important person himself is accosted by a ghostly spectre in a dark street of St. Petersburg. The spectre, having a seemingly close resemblance with Akaky Akakievich's short stature and pale countenance, demands the cloak from the VIP.

After the incident, the VIP starts projecting a less intimidating attitude towards his subordinates, but more importantly, the overcoat-snatching spectre seems to be content with the VIP's overcoat. The overcoat-snatching spectre is never seen on the streets of St. Petersburg, after his encounter with the VIP.

1.2.2 Satire/Realism

Gogol is usually considered to be a master realist and is praised abundantly for the social realism manifested in his major works. During 1840s, Gogol's

three major works in three different literary genres established his reputation in this social realist mode. His play, *The Inspector General*, novel, *The Dead Souls* and short stories, *The Nose* and *The Overcoat*, are representative works of this mode in this period. We may recall that Gogol's own working life was spent in the heart of St. Petersburg bureaucracy; in 1852, he died a collegiate assessor outranking the protagonist of *The Overcoat* by a few notches. So if he was satirizing the bureaucratic Russia, he was presenting an insider's view that established a sympathetic chord with his readers, many of whom must have confronted the bureaucracy from the outside during their daily routine transactions.

Even in the middle of the 19th century, Russia remained a strictly hierarchical society of the medieval order. This social ordering was reflected and reinforced by the Table of Hierarchy introduced by Peter the Great. This Table specifically demarcated the relative superiority (or inferiority) of each and every civil and military servant of tsarist Russia. The social recognition, respectability and social mobility were not only controlled but could be objectified by one's position in the Table.

The Overcoat' thus, not only represents an ordinary, loner's humdrum life, but is inextricably tied down to the bureaucratic structure that almost ensnares the person. We are made acutely aware of the lower middle class Titular Counsellor's social mediocrity.

However, this mediocrity is reinforced by the economic constraint of a 400 rouble salary that barely enables him to subsist on the edge of a gentle living. Thus, the prospect of getting a new overcoat stitched forces him to cut down to the barest minimum of material expenses, by saving on evening candles or even eating the most frugal meals. So the new overcoat with affordable trappings—cat skin instead of marten fur and handmade inner linings—is not just an object of utility in the face of St. Petersburg frost, but its beauty is achieved by skills of Petrovich and hardships endured by Akaky Akakievich. At this level, the material hardship merges with spiritual striving, as it often does in many conventional religious practices. Akaky Akakievich's life shuttles between his rented accommodation, owned and maintained by his old landlady. The realist in Gogol is also justly praised because of the minute details rendered into living essentials in his description of the ordinary life. Befitting examples of such minuteness are abounding in his evocation of day-to-day life of the lower gentry.

Apart from Akaky Akakievich, there are two more representatives of two different social classes. Petrovich, the tailor belongs to the class of urban workmen who indeed subsists on the barest minimum of the material conditions. The xenophobic, alcoholic and dissolute proletariat in Petrovich still contains two important features that serve as saving grace to his character. One of two such features is his independence of character that he exercises

in the matter of professional assertion, regarding the overcoat. Petrovich is not cowed down by the social superiority of Akaky Akakievich and acts as a free agent to convince Akaky of both, the uselessness of mending the old coat, as well as impressing upon him the necessity of having a new one. Further, Petrovich takes just pride in his professional skill. Hence when the new overcoat earns general applause, Petrovich is quick to indicate the systemic problem of a social hierarchy that not only denies him of due recognition, but also forces him into an economically precarious condition. Thus the social hierarchy perpetuates its own structure. Now we can have a different perspective on the initial impression of Petrovich as an obstinate and dissolute person, whose laziness and alcoholism perpetuate his misery. We also get to know of the cook, Anna, whose present happiness is linked to the general predisposition of the Police Chief, her current employer. Though, the short story does not show the Police Chief in any such favourable or gentle light, Anna still holds a possible link to the social hierarchy that is outside the sanctioned structure.

Finally, the VIP represents the upwardly mobile class in the official and social situation. Since his authority does neither flow from a professional acumen nor from conventional aristocracy, he labours a lot to assume the authoritative persona. The techniques practised by the VIP may, as well, generate derisive laughter among common Indian readers, as many of them continue to encounter such pretentious behaviour at many levels of our bureaucracy. We may recall that the present state of Indian bureaucracy is a legacy of the British imperial administration, whose overarching structure was comparable to that of the tsarist Russia. However, since the VIP is consciously trying to assume an air of authority, there is an inherent anxiety of authority latently manifested in his behaviour. This anxiety is manifested at his outburst against Akaky Akakievich's complaint against the inefficiency of the secretaries. There is no way to assert that the VIP, as such, takes an issue with the general comment because he identifies closely with his subordinates. On the contrary, what might have infuriated if not destabilized the VIP is the idea that Akaky Akakievich, a person whose professional identity is so fully entrenched in the bureaucratic hierarchy, can voice an internal critique to the system's efficiency. Therefore, the VIP's outburst can itself be seen as a satiric representation of various administrative methods of censure and depression, inflected upon Russian people. Gogol himself was directly at the receiving end as his various works, including *The Dead Souls* suffered at the hand of the tsarist censure. He was exiled because of his overt critique. However, before that, Gogol was testing his waters, first by offering a grotesque picture in 'The Nose' and in more sustained form, in this short story.

However, it must be remembered that *The Overcoat* does not end with the VIP's reprimand and Akaky Akakievich's subsequent death. The

ghost episode offers a strange climax to the realist narrative of the social life of mid 19th century St. Petersburg. It has often been found that the social-realist narrative structure employed by almost all European fictional writing is ultimately super-scribed by its material condition and power structure. That is, if the realist fiction must reflect social reality, then a person of lowly social standing like Akaky Akakievich will have no recourse to justice and the story should conclude at his death, following the reprimand from his superiors. However, at this point, Gogol transcends the realist mode and reaches out to available Romantic modes of his time. Thus, the defeat, in a realistic nature, is avenged by the magical-supernatural. The momentary suspension of disbelief, espoused by the Romantic mode, is however, still confined within the realm of the trivial. Thus, the moment of Akaky Akakievich's revenge on the VIP is apparently limited to the level of transaction; i.e., taking away the overcoat in the climactic action of the story. But Akaky Akakievich's ghost's concluding statement, 'you took no trouble about mine, but reprimanded me; so now give up your own', can be taken out of the specific material context of coat-snatching and maybe considered as a general statement of social restructuring, even if at different level from the practical one. This mode of accommodating the supernatural to wish away a realistic power structure has also been utilized by many postcolonial and third-world fictions. Therefore, it may be generally concluded that there is certainly a successful attempt on Gogol's part to offer a comprehensive social critique of his contemporary life. Further, though its general manifestation has been through an entangled individual's drudgery along the bureaucratic mesh and his eventual 'win', but there is neither an attempt at general systemic declamation nor a show of hope of collective betterment. The delimitation within the realm of the individual is most pronounced in the disappearance of Akaky Akakievich's ghost, after its encounter with the VIP and return of the ruffians to St. Petersburg after darkness. Thus both, Akaky Akakievich and the ruffians who stole his overcoat, are reinstated to their individual capacities without any reference to their social standing. Even the transformation of the VIP is realized at a personal level within his family transactions and his changed attitude towards his subordinates is also manifested at the level of personal behaviour, rather than a change in general attitude.

1.2.3 The Individual and the Human Saga

If Gogol has been justly praised abundantly because of his negative capability of offering the social-realist critique, he is also lauded for creation of human interest through his protagonist Akaky Akakievich. If Akaky Akakievich's living phase is a continuous catalogue of belittling circumstances and ignominious experiences, the reader will be drawn to its pathetic implications. While it is true that Akaky Akakievich is generally not much perturbed by

such ill-treatment from his superiors, this fatalistic attitude is precisely the source of pathetic indifference generated in the audience. However, during rare moments, when the intrusive mockery of his colleagues physically obstructs Akaky's life, he makes his displeasure vocal. Precisely in such moments of protest the narrative allows Akaky Akakievich, a redemptive possibility of becoming a tragic character. While this possibility is not taken to any fulfilment or transformative possibility by morphing into a tragic rebellion, it creates a similar transformative possibility in one of his colleagues. We find that Gogol allows this transformative-redemptive possibility to take full shape in the narrative digression about that unnamed colleague of Akaky Akakievich. We are told that he is a fresh recruit to the office and imitates others by making fun at Akaky. However, Akaky Akakievich's sudden outburst changes him, 'as though all about him had undergone a transformation'. This transformation is not a circumstantial accident. That is, he not only desists from mocking Akaky Akakievich in future but it brings a change in his general attitude to fellow human beings. Primarily, this change is brought about by a sense of brotherhood with entire humanity. While this is a change in the inclusive direction, he is also repelled by others who despite their well-breeding and polite upbringing, are inclined not to have such an inclusive view of human brotherhood. This repulsion, in short, was a change in an exclusive direction. Therefore, the crying voice that the unnamed colleague hears, 'I am thy brother', is not a plea on behalf of Akaky Akakievich, rather, a realization of fundamental humanity by the transformed colleague. While there is a definitive Tolstoyean moment (cf. *Resurrection*, *Crime and Punishment,* etc.) in presenting this realization produced by the general transformation, it must also be recalled that the mainstay of this story is not such benign transformative power of how an individual understands. Moreover, this individual transformation does not alter the general situation in which human depravity and cruelty towards others almost thrive in all societies. Therefore, the negative aspect of decreasing cruelty and inhuman nature is something that pervades the unnamed colleague's final realization. This is corroborated by a textual reference of how 'the young man covered his face with his hand; and many a times afterwards ... shuddered at seeing how much inhumanity there is in men, how much savage coarseness is concealed beneath delicate, refined worldliness'. Thus, it may be concluded that there exists a complementary relationship between the negative aspect of general social-realist representation and its individuated human-interest point of view.

1.2.4 Structure

In addition to content analysis of the above two sections, if we now shift our focus to the formal aspects of the short story, it would greatly broaden our area of understanding. However, the structure of and many of its linguistic

components are specific to Russian language, that we, as readers of the translated text, are surely going to miss. Therefore, in the analysis of these aspects we will often refer to Russian critics who were alert to linguistic distinctiveness of the Russian original, rather than a translated one. Boris Eichenbaum's 'The Structure of Gogol's *The Overcoat* is a pioneering work in this formal direction. Eichenbaum's formalist predilection makes his intervention even more contextually relevant.

According to Eichenbaum, the role played by an author's personal tone, structures a short story. In particular, the basis of Gogol's text is the presentation of live speech and verbalized emotion, as manifested in the first person narrative. The narrative tendency of the text, therefore, is not just a relational one, but a mimetic reproduction of the language usage. This entails that speeches are not connected by way of logical basis of their content, but by articulation, mimicry and sound gestures of expressive speech. In consequence, whatever semantic structure holds the logical development of the narrative, the verbal sound and acoustics have an independent role in Gogol's short stories. Once this parallel is accepted, it is easy to see how basic narrative devices are employed and consequently how they are interconnected with each other. In the following sub-sections, we analyze some such narrative devices employed by the author of *The Overcoat*.

1.2.5 Pun

Since the beginning, various kinds of puns are employed by the author. Basically they are of three kinds: on the simplest level, they are based on the similarity of sounds, as is universally practised, but further, some of them play on words and some even indicate a hidden absurdity. In the first rough draft, Gogol employed a pun on sounds. 'In the department of assessment and collections (*sborov*)—which incidentally is, sometimes called the department of baseness and nonsense (*zdorov*), this did not appear in the final version. However, various puns of other kinds–etymological variety are abound in the final draft. The protagonist's initial name was Tishkevich. The change from the first choice to the one finally employed by him can be driven by a desire to create an occasion for puns. A characteristic Gogolean style was a favour for diminutive suffixes (Bashmachkevich > Bashmachkin). Further, such a surname allowed imitative pronunciation and distinctive expressiveness. The appearance of seriousness that is added as supplementary information regarding his family practice, in connection to shoes, complicates the comical devices – originally started by the pun on the surname. This rhetorical musk that attempts a strict, logical and syntactical presentation of facts gives the impression that the absurdity created by such additional detail is merely incidental. Consequently, as with most incidental and unintentional puns its comic effect is only heightened by such a device. A similar device to emphasize the absence of intention in employing an absurd pun while

introducing Petrovich—the tailor. In spite of the disadvantage of having only one eye and pock-marks all over his face, the tailor carried on a rather successful trade. In this case, the logical absurdity is hidden by abundant details that draw our attention aside. Thus, the fundamental absurdity presented in the form of a logically trite sentence simply heightens its comic strength by its veneer of being unintentional.

As reported by O.N. Smirnova, a contemporary of Gogol, he gave an extraordinary amount of attention to the names of his characters. He was on the lookout for such surnames everywhere, in particular—on public displays and posters. At the first encounter with such names, there appeared before Gogol, the physical dimension and specific idiosyncratic markers. Under the circumstances, Gogol's love of designations and their random selection become a matter of interest for this short story. Out of the many names that Gogol tried before settling down on Akaky, to which Akakievich is added, with its jarring monotony and repetitiveness, this one was for Gogol, the perfect one to conceal its auditory semantics and to function as a nickname. Since his mother's insistence on repeating the name conforms to the general replicatory scheme, it results in reinforcing the sound gesture of mimicry of vocal articulation.

1.2.6 Speech

Often in Gogol's speech, the simple psychological or material connection through logical interface remains missing. In place of such speech median, a tense intonation shaped by a 'distinctively imitative sound speech' forges speech patterns. Such declamatory phase of rhetorical pathos is also found in this short story. The long, almost epic, sentences comparing the mirth and jollity of St. Petersburg bureaucrats with the lonesome dreariness of Akaky Akakievich's life can be used as an illustrative example. The sentence begins rather obscurely, if not mysteriously. It builds up a syntactical tenseness only to resolve in the comic disparity of its mundaneness. Further, the international grandeur is continuously undermined by various references to diminutive objects and occasions—little hats, pretty little girls, penny biscuits and the anecdotes of Falconet's monument—to such an extent that contradiction and disparity renders the words strange or enigmatic.

Apart from this self-defeating declamatory style, there are occasions of sentimentally melodramatic speeches. Most famous among such are the above discussed 'humane' passages. This addition, in later drafts, is introduced to the purely anecdotal style with elements of pathetic declamation. In general, characters in this short story are offered very little dialogues. When such occasions arise, their speech is so styled in a particular way that they never come closer to everyday speech. Thus, there are individual traits discernible in various characters; their commonality being their unnaturalness.

Akaky Akakievich's speech is merely an example of the general scheme of sound-speech and mimetic articulation practised by Gogol. Furnished with grammatical commentary, on its specific nature, the special nature of its constructedness becomes apparent. On the contrary, Petrovich's speech is also constructed and evokes its 'contrived' nature for just the opposite reason. If Akaky Akakievich's speech is constitutive of 'such parts of speech that have no meaning whatsoever, Petrovich's speech is condensed, severe and hard and extremely matter-of-fact. Thus, though these speech patterns offer examples by way of contrast, their similarity lies in their unnaturalness. Just like his principal protagonist, the speech of Gogol's narration is also contrived. All three stand outside of the transactions of a particular moment. As if like the puppet's talk, they are beyond the norms of processes. In particular, the narrative voice resembles a special kind of careless and native chatter. In this narrative process, seemingly redundant details keep on aggregating as if in an involuntary process. The familiar verbosity in delineating the character in all such occasions increases the comic effect of such random addition, as in the mention of Petrovich's indiscriminate holiday-drinking.

1.2.7 Narrative Flow

A sharp shift in tone, or a collision and break, mark the opening of the story. The tone of exaggerated irritation and sarcasm almost breaks into business-like introduction and epic intonation, with which the sweeping opening of the short story is marked. Some kind of digression, affecting the original composition, gives sense of improvisation taking place. This is followed by further bits of description, in which as if Gogol steps into his role of the self-conscious narrator of the story. While, the description Akaky Akakievich gathers is an amazing and whimsical assortment. Its conclusion is a mimetic gesture of a grandiose-sounding and contextually meaningless word—'haemorrhoidal'. The story is now all set to assume the character of a grotesque gesture or grimace. This transition is already in place to allow the pun on Akaky Akakievich's surname and the anecdote about his birth and christening. The appearance of awkward repetition created by his name is reinforced by the business-like concluding section of the anecdote and the impression of playing with the narrative form.

In contrast to such interventionist strategies, the so-called 'humane' passage is taken rather literally for its earnestness. Such literal reception, where the unnamed colleague steps out of his fictive role and resumes in the role of an actual human being, converts the comic mode of the narrative into a grotesque one. Consequently, the fantastic ending is taken as a sincere intervention of the soul. However, such a straight-forward, message-centric view presumes an extreme naiveté on the part of the audience and critical passivity that might destroy the structure and artistic intent of the short story.

In continuation of our previous artistic contrivance premise, every sentence of the narrative must be a construction and a performance must reject any identification of the author's psychological content as false scholarship. Thus, the serious tone offers a contrast to the comic narration. The sentimental pathos arising out of such declamatory tone contrasts the skilful puns and violates the comic presumption. If the general tone was that of a serious, meditative nature, it would not have allowed any grotesque communication at all. Therefore, since the beginning, interweaving of the solemn, if not melodramatic, declarations with a purely anecdotal narrative determines the grotesque narrative mode of the short story.

1.2.8 Grotesque Mode

Demands that the small world, in which entire experience is contained, must be so fantastic and artificial that they are completely excluded from the full experience of life. This creation of the fantastically excluded world should also demonstrate a relationship in its objects and elements that is randomly chosen and regrouped without any satiric or didactic intent. This fragmentation and reworking of the elementary relationships allow ample scope for playing around with the reality of this grotesque world. As the usual psychological and logical correlations and connections are rendered unreal in this constructed world, every trifle detail assumes colossal dimensions. Therefore, against such a scheme of things, tiny gleams of real feeling assume a staggering appearance.

Thus it becomes rather inconsequential to analyze whether Akaky Akakievich's life was rendered insignificant or whether the 'humane' passage served its sermonizing potential. What becomes really important in such a situation is Gogol's ability to fence off the fictional realm from the social contours, to an absolute extent.

Akaky Akakievich's spiritual world is indeed no way insignificant, but Eichenbaum describes it as a fantasy-limited world. In this world of his own, in copying his habitual tangents, both practically and in practice, he 'seemed to see a multifarious and pleasant world of his own'. Outside this world of repetitive gestures, nothing seemed to matter for him. A new set of laws and proportions are assumed by this world. According to the laws of this world, the new overcoat turns out to be a grand event. A material manifestation of this objective entity is further complicated by the grotesque equivalent, supplied by the authorial voice: 'spiritually he was nourished well enough, since his thoughts were full of the great idea of his future overcoat'. This spiritual endowment on the material object is taken even further by allowing the overcoat to take on the role of the soul mate and the companion in Akaky Akakievich's otherwise contentedly lonely life.

With an alteration of comic and tragic elements, Akaky Akakievich's death is described in a comparably grotesque manner, as his birth was described. The curt, business-like announcement: 'At length, poor Akaky gave up the ghost', is immediately followed by a catalogue of his trifling possessions, followed by a return to the ordinary style in conclusion. Just as the previous declamation took off immediately after a business-like passage, the narrative again breaks out in a short declamatory passage on human indifference in a metropolitan like St. Petersburg.

Finally the ending of the story has been called by Eichenbaum as 'an effective apotheosis of the grotesque'. The so-called Romantic flight into this otherwise realistic narrative often perplexes determined critics. Gogol himself foresaw this possibility when he talked about how Akaky's story unexpectedly acquired a most fantastic ending. Indeed, there is no break from the general fantastic mode; only the mode is reversed. In the earlier part of the story, a play with the reality results in a grotesque fantasy. In the concluding section, the story reverts into a usual world of known concepts and facts but the narrative style is that of playing with fantasy. Therefore, the grotesque mode envelops the entire story. The matter-of-fact anecdotal style, developed in the concluding section, moves away from Akaky Akakievich's story with melodramatic episodes. As the moustached ghost disappears with its grotesquery, the narrative mode returns to its initial, purely comic mode.

1.2.9 The Overcoat

Apart from the so-called 'progressive' social-realist criticism of the short story, others have recognized 'existential insecurity' as a general trend in Gogol's works. Soviet critic D.S. Merezkovski linked Chichikov's concern for his future descendants, as expressed in *The Dead Souls,* with Ivan Karamazov's devil for incarnation in Dostoevsky's work. This link was further elaborated by Cizevski, who justly indicated that the story ran deeper than mere social protest. Vladimir Nabokov's claim to the real message is indeed a 'dubious conclusion' that reads the whole clothing process as a disrobing that brings him back to his original state of non-being.

There have been various interpretations of how Gogol's funniest works are fraught with an obvious streak of anxiety. While critics like Driessen deny any existential consequence to them and claim them to be produced by a purely psychological condition, on the face of many alternative interpretations. Such views seem to be too limited. The religio-mythical reading of the symbolism of *The Overcoat* seems to be the most persuasive one among the available directions.

In all probability, *The Overcoat* was first composed during the intervening between Gogol's first stay in Rome and the period of recovery

from an ailment that Gogol and his doctors considered to be a terminal one. Personally, Gogol considered his recovery as a sort of miracle and a divine call to special mission. Gogol's religious beliefs were inextricably bound with his artistic sensibility. Therefore, this post-recovery stay in Rome brought forth a period of great spiritual tranquillity for Gogol.

Without rejecting the possibilities of expression of an existential predicament, psychological angst or social protest, the rest of this section will foreground the spiritual crisis that found expression through symbols of clothing in terms of the Bible and through the orthodox liturgy.

From the fig leaves of self-righteousness of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, to the saints 'who had washed their robes' in the Book of Revelation, biblical traditions have used clothing as an image of self-righteousness. Man's sinful present state is often spoken of as dirty or worn-out clothing and the need for restoration is subsequently compared to a change of clothing. The priests of the Eastern Orthodox Church use the verse from Isaiah 'my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation'. Thus establishing a spiritual connection with material vestments, such as ceremonial vestments, distinguishes them not only from other members of the congregation, but also from their own habitual self. In his *Meditations on the Divine Liturgy*, Gogol displays awareness of such symbolic meaning of religious dresses. He quotes from the Psalms, 'Let Thy priests be clothed with righteousness and let Thy saints shout for joy' and draws attention to such transformative capacity: 'Thus invested with the divine instruments, the priest is now another man.' This reference to the priest's robe of righteousness, as garment of salvation, is complicated by the reference to the opposite significance of the overcoat, as something that hides the truth. Only this connotation makes the traditional image of disrobing as attaining the naked self-relevant.

As the gun brings ruin in the story of the two Ivans, the overcoat in this short story is often indicated to be a petty passion (*zador*). On closer scrutiny, it becomes clear that the overcoat or its purchase does not bring the downfall of Akaky Akakievich, but its loss, brings the reverse of acquisition. In this case, an equally plausible parallel may be drawn with Bunyan's Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Ch. 3), which reaches the Cross and meets the Shining Ones. The first of them tells him that his sins are forgiven, while the second strips him of his rags and clothed him with a change of raiment.' The parallel is thwarted at this point because an enormous catastrophe befalls Akaky Akakievich and his robe is snatched away. As no martyrs crown awaits him, he has to roam in the utter darkness to reclaim his mortal garment.

In addition to such spiritual readings, there are many other possible connotations of the 'overcoat' which are quite remote from such spiritual

perspectives. In short, these can be catalogued as the metonymic displacement of the libido, a related idea of material virilisation, loss of innocence and celibacy, etc. Finally, the desirable form of the imaginary overcoat cast by the devilish tailor tempts Akaky Akakievich and the reader into vacuous, spectral darkness. Under the circumstances, Fyodor Dostoevsky's confessional statement 'We all come out from Gogol's *The Overcoat*, takes on a completely new dimension.

In conclusion, apart from a masterly narrative of a grotesque tale, *The Overcoat* can be read as a parable, an exercise in labyrinthine semantic puzzle, an interpretive maze, as well as social satire and spiritual or existential myth.

Check Your Progress-1

1. Which novel by Gogol is considered to be the first Russian novel in the true sense of the term?
2. Name the three major works of Gogol that established his reputation in a social realist mode.
3. How does Eichenbaum describe Akaky Akakievich's spiritual world?

1.3 Lev Nikolaievich Tolstoy – *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*

Leo Nikolaievich Tolstoy was born on 28 August 1828, at his family's estate at Yasnaya Polyana, about 120 miles south of Moscow. The Tolstoys were a wealthy and aristocratic family. Both of Tolstoy's parents died, when he was very young; his mother died when he was just two years old and his father in 1837. Though he was orphaned at an early age, a succession of female relatives took well care of the young Leo, until he attained maturity. Leo attended the Kazan University for three years, but without completing his degree and he returned to Yasnaya Polyana to stay there permanently.

1.3.1 Context

In 1851, he was attracted by a life of adventure. Leo and his elder brother joined active duty with the Russian army. Tolstoy published his first work, *Childhood*—an account of the life and experiences of a young boy, during this army duty. This earned him immediate literary recognition. As he published more stories and completed two sequels to *Childhood*: *Boyhood* and *Youth*, his status as a literary celebrity grew in stature. Suddenly, in 1859, disappointed with his vocation of a writer, Tolstoy returned to Yasnaya Polyana. He was determined to devote himself to the study of educational

practices and to the management of his estate. In 1869, Tolstoy published his epic novel, *War and Peace*. His other literary tome, *Anna Karenina* that sealed his fame as Russia's preeminent novelist, was published in 1877.

By 1875, Tolstoy plunged into a phase of increasing depression and psychological crisis. This three-year phase that continued till 1878 permanently altered his philosophy and art. Later, in his autobiographical recollection, *A Confession*, Tolstoy pointed to his helplessness at finding a satisfactory purpose of human life as the principal cause of his depression. Suddenly, the inescapability of death overwhelmed him and life seemed shallow and valueless. No great philosophers, neither of the past nor of the present, could provide him with acceptable answers. During his desperate search, he turned to the Russian people and found that the unlettered peasants, living closer to nature and primitive forms of life, possessed a definite conception of the meaning of a life. For them, the irrational knowledge and religious faith in God provided a deep sense of comfort and security. This faith rescued ordinary folk from despair and suffering and endowed a new meaning to their life. Given the exclusive choices between faith and despair, Tolstoy chose faith. Faltering at attempts to renew his relation with the church of his childhood, Tolstoy ultimately set on to develop his own faith system. Tolstoy considered four works written during the four years after his crisis (1878–1882) that elaborated his unique religious philosophy, as his most significant accomplishment as an author.

It is not a mere coincidence that *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886) was Tolstoy's first major fictional work published after his crisis and conversion. Tolstoy's new-found philosophical attitude provides the mainstay to the ideological bedrock of the novella. All the major moral principles: brotherly love, fellow feeling and Christian charity that constituted the essentials to the second half of Tolstoy's life, appear as dominant principles in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. There is an obvious similarity between Tolstoy's discovery of the right course of life, leading to an acceptance of death and Ivan Ilyich's moral stirring that heralded him to the light of a meaningful life and allayed his fear of death. Thus, a reflection and an elaboration of Tolstoy's post-conversion philosophical concerns can be found in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. Tolstoy died in 1910 after nearly a decade of continuing ill health.

1.3.2 Plot Overview

The narrative of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* begins at the chronological end of the story. Ivan Ilyich's death is announced by his close friend Judge Peter Ivanovich, to a group of judges gathered in a private room of the courthouse. Rather than feeling sad about the death of a close friend, men in the room start thinking about the opportunities of promotion and transfer that Ivan's

death has created for them. When in the evening, Peter drives to Ivan's house to attend Ivan's funeral, he finds that Ivan's corpse has an expression of disapproval and warning. This bothers Peter a lot. At the funeral, Ivan's widow Praskovya, starts asking Peter about the possible strategies to maximize her dead husband's government pension. Such materialistic discussion, on the occasion of a dear one's death, only increases the discordant note initiated by the discussion in the room in the court. While returning, Peter meets Ivan's nurse, Gerasim and mentions how Ivan's death and funeral weighs heavy on him. In response, Gerasim surprises Peter with a wry remark that everyone dies some day.

The story then employs a flashback mode to take readers more than thirty years into the past and starts describing Ivan's life then. Among the three sons in the family, Ivan is the middle one and in all respects, an average and ordinary individual. While attending the School of Law, Ivan starts assimilating the values of people with high social standing. After graduating from the Law School, Ivan becomes an examining magistrate in the new judicial institution and is transferred to a new province. Ivan marries and things proceed well until Praskovya becomes pregnant. Praskovya's manners begin to come increasingly in conflict with the socially-approved lifestyle cherished by Ivan. He ever more absorbs himself in his official work. This absorption estranges him from his family. He hopes to attain an objectivity that should manifest itself at work, by removing all private concerns and at home through a purely formal approach toward his family. Gradually, he is promoted to higher ranks of the service. Just as he hopes to be offered the post of judge in a university town, he is ignored for the position. Ivan considers this decision to be grossly unjust and feels insulted by the slight. He takes a long leave and moves his family to his brother-in-law's house in the country. In search of a better-paying job, Ivan travels to St. Petersburg and learns that due to a change in the administration, a close friend of his has been posted at a position of great authority. His friend recognizes his merit and awards Ivan a higher paying position in the city. Ivan tells his family about his new position. After this, he leaves to buy as well as furnish a house to prepare for his family's arrival. As he was climbing a step-ladder one day, he slipped and knocked his side against the window. Apparently, the injury is not serious, but would eventually turn fatal. He settles into his new phase of city life, with newly acquired interests. Among these is his new-found interest in bridges, giving us the first glimpse of his transformed attitude towards life, at the later stage of his life.

Soon afterwards, his pain on his left side returns, along with an unusual taste in his mouth. The discomfort gradually increases and leaves Ivan both, irritable and quarrelsome. Doctors fail to come to any agreement on the nature of Ivan's illness, which makes him even more depressed and fearful. He loses almost all interest in life's activities. Both, his physical and

psychological conditions degenerate rapidly. When he was lying alone in the dark one night, he stumbles upon his first thoughts regarding morality that scare him. He then figures out that his illness was a question of life or death and not health or disease as he had thought earlier. By that time, he and his wife has become so estranged that she could not or would not empathize with his pain. Ivan also felt nothing but hatred towards her. Even though he knew that he was dying, he fails to understand the complete implications of his morality. Even though he tries his best to drive the thought of death out from his mind, it haunts him incessantly.

While he was suffering through this ordeal, his peasant servant, Gerasim, enters. Gerasim was assigned the duty of helping Ivan with his excretions. Gerasim starts spending the entire night with Ivan and looking after him. Gerasim also supported his legs on his shoulders to ease the pain. Gerasim started becoming a person who treated Ivan with honesty and compassion. Ivan's days were annoying and dull since his illness. People around him put up a show as if Ivan is not dying and he is merely suffering an illness. Ivan considers this reluctance to face death at its barest shape an extreme form of artificiality. During that night of extreme torment, Ivan dreams of a black sack. He feels as if someone is violently, but unsuccessfully, trying to force him to into the sack. He is simultaneously attracted and repulsed by the idea of getting into the sack. Awaking from his dream, Ivan sends Gerasim away and for the first time he hears the inner voice of his soul speaking to him.

Ivan's days of illness were spent mulling over death and seeking justification for his suffering. When he looks back on his life, he realizes that he had experienced joy and happiness before his ailment. He realizes that as his pain becomes worse, so does his life. He feels that his suffering at the brink of death was justified if he had lived a wrong life. However, since he had lived life in a right manner, he let the senselessness of death take over.

Ivan starts questioning his sense of decency one night when he looked at Gerasim's face. Ivan is prevented from entering the sack by his own sense of propriety. However, he does not want to let go of that belief. All of a sudden, a force strikes him in the chest, pushing him through the sack into a bright light. His touches his son's head with his hand and feels sorry for him. His wife comes towards his bed and has tears in her eyes. He feels sorry for her as well. He gets the feeling of great joy and finds out that his family, social relations and professional life were artificial. He stretches out and dies in the midst of a sigh.

1.3.3 Ivan Ilyich's Life

While Ivan's life could have been a defining example of living for others, its slightly different version of living on others' terms becomes the principal

shortcoming of his life. Every move and motive of his life is conditioned by the dictates of others. Ivan blindly adopts the beliefs and values of aristocratic society instead of relying on his own reason and good sense to direct his moral life. He feels that if he could live like them and associate with people of high society, he would enhance his own lifestyle and discover the meaning of fulfillment. He starts to become drawn towards the etiquette as well as the standard of decorum and propriety exuded by the upper class. He starts acting like people in his position act. He decides to get married as it was believed that it was befitting to the standard of life he was living. He buys and furnishes a house in the most elegant and tasteful manner like an aristocrat with marital status.

As Ivan grows accustomed to a high standard of living, he becomes impatient regarding anything that threatens his comfortable lifestyle. He wants to stay away from all kinds of disconcerting influences. When his wife, Praskovya, had some problems during her pregnancy, he isolated himself from her and distracted himself with office work. He adopted a formal attitude towards his family when his familial life became complicated. His ability to deal with emotional and personal situations in a detached manner can be seen in every sphere of his life. Due to his innate need for avoiding unpleasant confrontations, his personal relationships were shrunk to self-preserving and shallow simulations. Rather than being his normal self, Ivan adopted the aristocratic way of life. Therefore, he detached himself from the rest of the world. In this world of meaningful relationships and personal fulfillment, he found only dissatisfaction and pain.

Ivan, however, is not merely a mistaken character. He represents a particular attitude in the in larger moral system. Ivan's bourgeois sensibility is replete with blind self-interest and inane materialism. In Ivan's life, these principles bring out how unsuitable and utterly unfulfilling they are. Therefore, the lesson of living that Ivan learns at the face of his death may serve a stern warning to the readers of the story. This curative dimension is also found in Ivan's illness, as this provides him with a proper perspective to look at life and death. The sense of isolation that he finds pervading his life terrifies him and provokes him to serious existential contemplation. As Ivan begins to retrospectively examine his life, he starts questioning his terms of existence and the rationale behind his torment. This introspective exercise reveals to him that his life was not as it should have been. At the moment of epiphany when Ivan passes into the presence of light and realizes that compassion and love are the true values to live by, his existence is filled with an incalculable sense of joy, even at the face of his impending death. This marks the climactic moment of the novella.

1.3.4 Gerasim: Ivan's Foil

Gerasim was Ivan's personal helper. He had a pleasing personality that produced a joyful existence. He possessed a sense of compassion and

empathy for his fellow beings. Gerasim interacted with people in a way that was honest and reflective. Gerasim was concerned with the well-being of others and was able to connect with people in a meaningful manner.he was the only character in the novel who seemed to be able to cope with death in a courageous manner. For him, death and illness are inevitable events of life. His main task was to help Ivan with his excretions at night, which he perceived as his duty towards a dying man. Praskovya and Lisa would aggravate Ivan's conditions by their self-indulgent attitude. This is why Gerasim was a comforting figure for Ivan. While supporting Ivan's legs, he bridges both the spiritual as well as physical gap between Ivan and the world. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Ivan grasped his errors in life while looking at Gerasim's face. His contact with Ivan led the sick man on an eased path towards spiritual well-being.

Tolstoy's message that social ambition and materialism are redundant for a man's healthy existence in the world is revealed by the fact that Gerasim is cast in the character of a poor peasant. Aristocracy and material wealth obstruct human aspirations and contact. Even though Gerasim is content with his material possessions, he can still forge meaningful human relations that are significant for a fulfilled life. The mutually comforting relationships created by him add immense joy to his life and also provide him the courage to face death.

1.3.5 Peter Ivanovich: The Future Ivan

Peter Ivanovich, Ivan's closest friend and colleague, is only present in the first chapter of the novella. Yet, much narrative energy is spent on describing his thoughts and actions. His view regarding Ivan's society and personal life plays a significant role in developing the story's context. Peter's relationship with others is mostly selfish and shallow. He basically represents Ivan's social setting. He is not notably affected by Ivan's death even though they have been friends for most of their lives. He is more concerned about his career and the possible transfers opened up by Ivan's vacant position. He perceives human relationships as mere instruments to achieve his personal goals. Peter's attitude toward Ivan's death highlights this lack of fellow feeling and crass materialistic feature of the society. In addition to his self-enclosed and self-interested qualities, Peter is further driven by a strong desire to keep away from the disagreeable. He avoids the topic of Ivan's death, reluctantly attends the funeral and is in general, reluctant to face the prospect of his own mortality.

But Peter is no ordinary representative of this particular social attitude. He displays atypical sensitivity and honesty. He is the first of Ivan's friends to recognize that Ivan is dying. Several times Peter seems to be on the threshold of realizing the import of Ivan's death. He also apprehends the

necessity of stepping outside the socially acceptable. This goads him to confront mortality and make an attempt to search the real significance of life. Peter is the only one who is receptive to the warning communicated by the facial expression of Ivan's corpse. It is he who sees the fulfilment and fitness of Ivan's appearance, indications of Ivan's discovery of the proper way to live. While talking to Praskovya about Ivan's final days, Peter is strongly affected by the thought of Ivan's terminal illness. After the funeral, while leaving the house, Peter evokes the observation from Gerasim that it is God's will that everybody dies some day.

Peter has the possibility of doing so as he possesses the receptivity and consciousness that is lacking in other members of the society. In that way, he is the fictional agent of a true reader of the novella, who is fit to realize the true significance of death as an occasion of new life. Further, Peter's patronymic 'Ivanovich', means the 'son of Ivan' and seems to hint that like Ivan, Peter too will one day see true light.

1.3.6 Concern with Death

Tolstoy's preoccupation with death has been manifested in its three basic forms. These were: the fear of death as physical annihilation or animal death of the body; Christian fear of a sinful life coming to sudden end without a redemptive or expiatory reversal and third, the existential fear of not existing anymore or being wiped off at the most widespread sense of the term. His insistent search for a meaning in life that can avert the possibility of complete dissolution at death sometimes pushes him to the throes of suicide and self-courted death. Tolstoy severally comes back to the so-called 'riddle of death' as an experience in life of not experiencing life anymore. The first record of Tolstoy experiencing this existential fear of death is recorded in his letter of 1860. During a night halt at the town of Arzamas, he actually saw and felt death approach, like some physical appearance. This experience killed his sleep and filled his mind with thoughts of dissolution and the end of all that he held dear.

Thomas Mann, analyzing Tolstoy's general concern with death commented 'Tolstoy's strongest, most tormenting, deepest and most productive interest has to do with death. It is the thought of death which dominates his thoughts and writing, to such an extent that one may say, no other great master of literature has felt and depicted it so insatiably often'. Soviet scholars like Dmitri Merezhkovsky found Tolstoy responsible for perpetration of a chilly sense of fear and death, at the level of general worldview. This kind of extreme finality of death's destructive power is often traced to Tolstoy's lust for life, that is; he loved and clung to the good things in life so steadfastly that the idea of being separated from them, or all such good things coming to an end was insufferable to him. However, in

this novella the hero's fear of death is not caused by a feeling of love for life. He has already conditioned his life to the social demands from him and in the process has rendered his own life rather unattractive, if not into a mechanical existence.

Therefore, contextually Ivan's fear is not really a fear of death, but rather a fear of clinging to falsities. The prospect of death brings an awareness of false life and the necessity to shun that. However, just as the internal stirring sets in, an imminent sense of death also forecloses the possibility of such a change or re-making towards a true life by abandoning the falsities. This awareness of the schisms between the idea of the right and the practice of wrong creates a metaphysical dread that is much stronger than the fear of physical destruction or animal death.

Finally, Tolstoy transcends the level of the individual and links this fear of death to the 'sham' civilization, the poisonous effect of which afflicts the mind and the life of ordinary human beings, who try to go by the norms of such a civilization. Ivan is an ideal example of living by the principles of the sham civilization. However, he is only a representative of the large number of people who are also spending their lives in the same way. Such civilized people in most cases wake up to find that the life has slipped by and they are facing death, unprepared by not living their lives. Without any genuine feeling linking them to the larger community of fellow human beings, they are in extreme isolation and this isolation creates further psychosis among them.

This story revolves around Ivan's recognition and steady approach towards death as well as his search for a compromise with its nullifying effect. How can one make any sense out of their lives, relationships, aspirations and existence? Tolstoy makes it clear in the story that the groundwork for death starts with a right attitude towards life. Ivan's approach towards life changes due to his pain and prospect of death. This changes his emotions from utter terror to sheer joy. The evasion of death that describes Ivan's social setting is based on an illusion designed to shield people from harsh realities of life, leading to dissatisfaction, terror and desolation. However, accepting death and the unpredictability of life brings about a certain confidence and peace at the moment of death. This novella can be perceived as message from Tolstoy making death meaningful by right and honest living.

1.3.7 The Right Path of Life

From the beginning, it has been made quite clear to the readers that Leo Tolstoy was of the view that there are two types of lives. One was an artificial life that was represented by Ivan, Peter, Praskovya as well as Ivan's social milieu. The other type was the authentic life that was symbolized by Gerasim. The artificial life lived by Ivan and his associates was depicted

by materialism, shallowness of relationships and self-preservation. This life was unfulfilling, limited and incapable of providing answers to the significant life questions. The artificial life is a deception hiding the true meaning of life, leaving a person alone and frightened on their deathbed. However, the authentic life is centred on compassion and empathy. It does not perceive other human beings as a means to one's end. It perceives them as individuals with exclusive desires, feelings and aspirations. This kind of life gives birth to human relationships that are formed to disallow isolation and encourage interpersonal contact. It cultivates individual strength by means of solidarity through empathy. It helps one prepare for their deaths.

Gerasim is the only character in the novella who was not terrified by the prospect of death. He had led a life of truth and empathy with others and was not scared of forming personal relationships. He felt a rare kind of self-sacrificing love towards other human beings. This quality made his life even more meaningful. Gerasim provided a kind of spiritual support and companionship to Ivan during his last days, which was more significant than the physical support provided by him when he held his legs. He reduced the pain Ivan was suffering by his spiritual support. This kind of authentic life benefitted Gerasim as well as Ivan during his last days. Compassion and love go both ways and the authentic life is the right life.

Many critics see the novella as a moral fable. It is very clear to the readers that Tolstoy's narrative is driven by a definitive moral agenda. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* makes the readers question their lifestyle and advises them to live life in an authentic manner as depicted in the novella. His beliefs are quite clear to the readers even though they are disguised in the context of a story rather than a direct message. Tolstoy describes the desires, aspirations and thoughts of a common man with modest means of living. He prepares a compound sketch of us all. He lets us identify ourselves with the protagonist's life, linking us to his suffering and ultimately painful death. If Ivan's values and goals, that are not very different from ours, ultimately lead him to a bitter existential crisis on the brink of death, what will our beliefs do for us? We will start to speculate on the materialism and hypocrisy surrounding the relationships formed in his society that was highly satirized and criticized by Tolstoy. He had even extended his views to our lives. Due to this entanglement, the misery experienced by Ivan does not appear as isolated from us as before. Despite all this, Tolstoy leads us towards the path of righteousness and truth. The authentic life is based on the virtues of compassion and selfless love. It perceives humans as people with thoughts, goals and aspirations rather than means to selfish ends. This kind of life produces human relationships that do not allow isolation from others, but instead, facilitates interpersonal contact and mutual empathy. It cultivates comfort be means of empathy and strength by means of solidarity. It fosters human bonds and prepares people for their demise. The only character in

this novella that tends to live a complete and unambiguous life is Gerasim. It does not come as a surprise that he is the only person who is not afraid of death. Gerasim teaches Ivan about the true meaning of life and acts as a moral guide for us as well. By describing Ivan's suffering, wrongful life and ultimate rebirth into a moral existence, Tolstoy is successful in providing us with a roadmap to morality.

1.3.8 Internal and External Modes of Life

Tolstoy portrays the existence of human beings as a conflict between their inner and outer self as well as their physical and spiritual life. Ivan is depicted solely as a physical being who shows no indication of a physical life till Chapter IX. He is completely self-centred and maintains relations with people while having his own selfish motives in mind. He justifies his existence as the right kind and does not want to see the error in his ways. Ivan was not capable of transcending the physical as he denied the spiritual. Due to this, he eventually experienced sheer terror, excruciating pain and devastating unhappiness. However, when he confronts his isolated ways at the brink of death, he starts to observe the significance of spiritual life. When he starts supplanting the physical with the spiritual, he conquers death and discovers happiness. The message given by Leo Tolstoy is very clear here—it is every individual's task to identify the duality of their self and live their life in such a manner that their less significant physical life starts conforming to their much important physical life.

1.3.9 Reversal

Leo Tolstoy brings in many reversal patterns into the novella's structure. Ivan's death is revealed to us in the first chapter itself. However, the rest of the novella is not devoted to his death. It basically weaves a story around his life. The author has reversed the concepts of life and death. When Ivan was growing in freedom, strength and status during his early years, he was becoming susceptible to isolation and weakness. After Chapter VII, he was spiritually reborn when confined to his study due to his illness. This point is further reinforced by Tolstoy by verbal formulations. The description provided by Ivan about his spiritual awakening makes it seem like he was moving downwards, when he was moving upwards all along. He compares his sudden insight into the true nature of his life. He discovers that the true direction of travel is opposite to the supposed direction.

Tolstoy gives us an inside view of the social setting of Ivan's circle by placing his funeral in the first chapter. This made it subject to assessment and critique. He provides contrasting attitudes toward the unpleasant aspects of life. This is a primary theme in the novella. The meaningless relationships as well as the selfish and artificial behaviour of his wife, friends and colleagues

exhibit the pretentious attitude of his society. Ivan's colleagues were more interested by the official position that opened up after his death. This showed their self-preserving and misguided principles of life. Moreover, Praskovya was also unaffected by her husband's death. This shows the inability of Ivan to develop a healthy and loving relationship with his wife. This also brings forward her shallowness. Thus, Chapter I, in a way, launches an attack on the meaningless as well as valueless life of Ivan's society. Tolstoy satirizes the falsity in relationships, primacy of self-preservation as well as the insincerity of interaction revealed by Ivan's society right from the beginning of the story.

However, the first chapter establishes the society's contrasting attitudes towards death. Peter, Praskovya, Schwartz and Ivan's colleagues are unwilling to confront the prospect of their morality. They basically tend to ignore and avoid it and pretend not to let it affect their existence. Therefore, the habit of ignoring life's unpleasantness is a habit that is prevalent in Ivan's society. The only character openly acknowledging his own morality in this story is Gerasim. He treats unpleasantness, illness and death as unavoidable aspects of life. Tolstoy establishes a path for exploring the major themes in the novella by pitting the views of Gerasim against the world.

1.3.10 Isolation

The characteristic of the artificial and purely physical life has the tendency of leading a person towards alienation. Every time Ivan Ilyich came across an unpleasant situation, he distanced himself from it. This is related to the much bigger theme of outer life versus the inner life. Ivan did not lead a spiritual life and due to this, he did not form meaningful relationships with other human beings. He only worked towards fulfilling his own selfish motives and did not bother with people from whom he could derive any benefit. Therefore, he completely isolated himself from other people in his selfish pursuit of happiness. However, when he tries to ward off other people from himself, he eventually fences himself in a narrow space. At this point, Leo Tolstoy uses many images that depict isolation or enclosure to drive home this point. He points towards the voluntary separation created by Ivan right from his reference of the funeral notice surrounded by a black border to the coffin lid leaning against the wall.

1.3.11 Social Modes

Tolstoy makes use of words like proper, pleasant and decorous while referring to the accepted social norms. These norms serve as significant factors in the theme f the right life. Ivan, throughout his life, was concerned with standards of conduct, propriety and decorum. This indicates his living of an artificial rather than authentic life. He was more conscious of his

external appearance rather than internal substance. He was concerned with the appearance of reality rather than actual reality. A person who detaches himself from the opinions of the aristocratic society and pays no regard to falsified decorum is a genuine man who life the authentic kind of life.

1.3.12 Time and Space

The motif of contraction of space and time is significant in the novella. This is a significant factor in the theme of inner versus the outer life as it brings forth the importance of spiritual life. It also reinstates the notion that one's life is not limited to their time between life and death, a notion that is accomplished by Tolstoy in many ways. A span of more than forty years is covered in the first four chapters of the novella. The next four chapters cover several months and the last four, slightly more than four weeks. Tolstoy also uses shrinking spatial dimensions in addition to the shrinking temporal framework. During his early life, Ivan keeps moving from town to town. Later, he settled in a city and procured an apartment. When he fell ill, he had to spend his days in the study, and later, could not move from the sofa. Moreover, the chapters in the novella keep becoming shorter as the story progressed. Thus, there is a contraction of space and time until both reach point zero at the moment of Ivan's death, when he experiences the single, changeless and eternal instant. In this instant, his spirit moves beyond the physical boundaries of space and time. This changeless instant implies the end of death and reinstates the significance of a spiritual life.

1.3.13 Structural Devices

Leo Tolstoy places his narrative within a temporal framework. There is a contraction of space and time until both reach point zero at the moment of Ivan's death. The first four chapters cover a span of more than forty years. Tolstoy gives an account of Ivan's life right from his childhood to his professional career, marriage, and ultimately, his illness. In these chapters, he moves freely from one place to another. The next four chapters cover a span of several months. These chapters discuss his illness and physiological degeneration. During this time, he is confined to his study. The final four chapters of the novella cover less than five weeks. These chapters discuss Ivan's painful death. These chapters span the shortest amount of time. During this time, Ivan is not in a position to get up from the sofa in his study.

This contraction of the space and time accelerates Ivan's feeling of helplessness, paralysis and anxiety. It emphasizes the feeling of impending death in an effective way. However, this device allows the author to express the novella's main theme as well. Ivan starts to feel trapped within the space and time. His physical existence fades away and he is reborn into a spiritual life. There is a single changeless moment when Ivan sees the light. In this moment, he explodes the boundaries of time and space by passing into the

spiritual world. This helps the author examine the theme of the physical versus the spiritual world. Moreover, the shrinking temporal framework enhances our feeling of the protagonist's experience.

Tolstoy's structural devices also deal with the amount of words used by him to describe various events. Each chapter is progressively shorter than the one before it. Chapter I has approximately 300 lines, chapter VII has 153 lines and chapter XII has only 73 lines. This compliments the spatial dimensions. It provides momentum to the story and pushes the reader toward the foreseen conclusion of the protagonist's life.

1.3.14 Bourgeois Society

Tolstoy portrays the society Ivan lived in as a collection of shallow, self-centred and materialistic individuals all along. These people did not bother about meaningful human relationships. They craved pleasure and status. They also attempted to attain their goals at the expense of their supposed friends. This portrayal is significant for the theme of pursuance of authentic life. All these people lead an artificial as well as a superficial life. Tolstoy suggests here that materialism and social enhancement act as obstacles in the way of right and truthful living.

1.3.15 The Black Sack

Ivan initially dreams of a black sack that he imagines being thrust into in Chapter IX. He wants to fall into the sack and cooperates with the effort, but fears and resists against it at the same time. Ivan's ambivalence towards the sack becomes clear if it is assumed to be a symbol of death. He eagerly awaits death but fears on relinquishing life. The fact that Ivan breaks through the bag anticipates Ivan's escape from the power of death. But it seems logical that the symbol of the bag operates on two levels just like the plot of the story. The bag symbolizes a womb, which is a source of life, as well as death, which is the end of life. The suffering and pain experienced by Ivan while passing through the bag into the light is similar to the pain experienced during birth. The duality of the symbol holds the key to the story. Ivan's life was his death and his death brings new life.

Check Your Progress-2

1. What is Tolstoy's first work, *Childhood* about?
2. Name Tolstoy's first major fictional work published after his crisis and conversion.
3. How do Gerasim's qualities affect his fellow beings?
4. Tolstoy's preoccupation with death has been manifested in its three basic forms. What were these forms?

1.4 Let Us Sum Up

- *The Overcoat* (at times translated as *The Cloak*) is a short story by the Russian author Nikolai Gogol, who was born in Ukraine. It was published in the year 1842.
- The novella and its writer have had a profound impact on the literature of Russia. This has been communicated in a quote ascribed to Fyodor Dostoevsky: 'We all come out from Gogol's *The Overcoat*.
- This story has been adapted into a variety of stage and film.
- *The Overcoat* was an inspiration for a large number of later Russian writers.
- Till date, *The Overcoat* is considered an ageless work of literature – its representation is mainly related to the present day's more material era and more than anything else, it continues to be a delightfully entertaining story.
- The tale gets on the move when Akaky is forced to put together whatever meager earnings he has and procure a new overcoat. This is the part of the novella where he undergoes sweeping changes because he gets a little respect from his colleagues and is even noticed having champagne at a party.
- This story goes on as something takes place concerning Akaky and the overcoat.

1.5 Key Words

- ***Arabesque:*** A type of design where lines wind around each other
- **Impressionism:** Style of writing and painting
- ***Reminiscence:*** A spoken or written description of something that someone remembers about their past life
- **Tsarist:** The Russian system of government by a czar, which existed before 1917
- **Patronymic:** A name formed from the name of your father or a male ancestor, especially by adding something to the beginning or end of their name
- **Titular counsellor:** A law on state service in the Russian Empire dealing with the relationship of rank (*chin*) to length of state service and with the sequence of advancement in rank
- **Waylay:** To stop someone who is going somewhere, especially in order to talk to them or attack them

- **Xenophobia:** A strong feeling of dislike or fear of people from other countries
- **Verbosity:** The state of using more words than required
- **Labyrinthine:** A complicated series of paths, which it is difficult to find ones way through
- **Highbrow:** That which is concerned with or interested in serious artistic or cultural ideas

1.6 Terminal Questions

1. Comment on the following aspects of *The Overcoat:*
   (i) Grotesque mode of presentation
   (ii) Symbolism
   (iii) As realist fiction
   (iv) Conclusion
   (v) As social satire/ criticism
2. Why does Tolstoy choose to place Ivan's funeral in the first chapter?
3. Some critics believe that *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* is a work of moral fiction, that it is designed primarily to provide moral instruction to its audience. Discuss this claim and provide evidence from the text to support your opinion.
4. Identify and discuss the narrative and structural devices that Tolstoy uses, in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich.*
5. With reference to the *Death of Ivan Ilyich*, comment on the importance of death in Tolstoyean world.
6. Write a brief note on the development of Russian short story with reference to the main practitioners on the two major narrative directions.
7. Discuss the contrast between Gerasim and Ivan Illyich in their attitude towards life.
8. Present a critical note on the symbolism of the black sack.

1.7 Suggested Reading

- Gogol, Nikolai. 1995. *Nikolai Gogol's The Overcoat.* Dramatic Publishing.
- Gogol, Nikolai. 2010. *The Overcoat and Other Stories.* Digireads.com.
- Gogol, Nikolai. *Nikolai Gogol's The Overcoat & Other Stories - Special Edition.* Special Edition Books

1.8 Model Answers to 'Check Your Progress'

Check Your Progress-1

1. Gogol's *The Dead Souls* (1842) is considered to be the first Russian novel in the true sense of the term.
2. During 1840s, Gogol's three major works in three different literary genres established his reputation in this social realist mode. His play, *The Inspector General*, novel, *The Dead Souls* and short stories, *The Nose* and *The Overcoat*, are representative works of this mode in this period.
3. Eichenbaum describes Akaky Akakievich's spiritual world as a fantasy-limited world.

Check Your Progress-2

1. Tolstoy first work, *Childhood* is an account of the life and experiences of a young boy, during this army duty.
2. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886) was Tolstoy's first major fictional work published after his spiritual crisis and conversion.
3. Gerasim possesses qualities that, more than any anything else, produce a joyful existence: a sense of compassion for and empathy with fellow human beings.
4. Tolstoy's preoccupation with death has been manifested in its three basic forms. These were: the fear of death as physical annihilation or animal death of the body; Christian fear of a sinful life coming to sudden end without a redemptive or expiatory reversal and third, the existential fear of not existing anymore or being wiped off at the most widespread sense of the term.

UNIT - 1
FRENCH NOVEL

Structure

1.0 Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the French novel in the twentieth century
- Examine the life and works of Albert Camus
- Analyse the plot, characters, themes and techniques of *The Outsider*

1.1 Introduction

The novel, a principal form of literary expression, continued to dominate the literary scenario in the twentieth century. There were many principal contributors to the twentieth-century French novel. The Inter-war decade saw the publication of two distinctive voices in the French novel, namely that of Louis Ferdinand Celine and Andre Malraux. Both the literary as well as dramatic scene of post-war France was dominated by the Existentialist doctrine. Jean Paul Sartre, who had stated the Existentialist tenet as the human freedom to choose and forge one's own values, eventually emerged as its chief ideological proponent. Albert Camus, a journalist, editor, playwright, director, novelist, author of short stories, political essayist and activist was a Nobel Prize winning author who wrote in the French language. The views of Albert Camus contributed to the rise of the philosophy known as absurdism. *The Outsider* is considered to be a seminal work of French existential literature. Meursault, the protagonist of the novel, is detached and apathetic, and thus, represents the quintessential existential hero.

1.2 The French Novel in the Twentieth Century

France was one of the principal participants in the events of European politics for centuries and the twentieth-century was no exception. Consequently, historical events left a profound mark on the literature of the country. Further, crises of political, philosophical, moral and artistic nature contributed to this development. Various movements with radically different ideas about literature and artistic expression effected tremendous expansion in literary output. Their maverick experimentation enriched the literary output manifold. Regarding theoretical principles, the rising influence of both Freudian psychology and Marxist economics left their lasting influence on the literature of this century. Two world wars, with France at the heart of the European front in both Wars, and various path-breaking technological revolutions brought about significant socio-economic and political changes. Novel, which was the principal form of literary expression, continued to dominate the literary scene in the twentieth century. In such a literary medium, the moral, intellectual and artistic traditions were prone to continuous probing.

There were many principal contributors to the twentieth-century French novel. The tradition of political satire was enriched by Anatole France in his *Penguin Island* (1908; Eng. trans., 1909). The roman-fleuve (cyclical novel) continued to be very popular in early twentieth-century France. Romain Rolland's ten-volume tome, *Jean-Christophe* (1904-12; Eng. trans., 1910-13), was only matched by Jules Romains' even larger *Men of Good Will* series (27 vols., 1932-47; Eng. trans. in 14 vols., 1933-46). This tradition was further consolidated by Marcel Proust's seven volume autobiographical epic, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past* - 1913-27), and Roger Martin du Gard's *Les Thibault* (1922–1940), a novel in eight-part cycle.

However, Gide also engaged in various forms of narrative experimentation. His famous drama, *The Counterfeiters*, explored the limits of traditional novel by depicting a writer toiling hard to write a novel. Not only does the theme of writing in the early twentieth-century encompass and depict the social milieu, it also explores the psychological intricacies of a writer's mind in this finely written narrative. However, Proust's seven-part autobiographical novel achieved a fame and narrative finesse compared to that of James Joyce. Presented in the form of an interior monologue and the reconstructed memory of external sensations in the specific temporal boundary, the novel achieves an epic proportion comparable to psychological insight of Joyce's protagonists.

The Inter-war decade saw the publication of two distinctive voices in the French novel, namely that of Louis Ferdinand Celine and Andre Malraux. Among various other trite observations, Celine's cynical and outrageous *Journey to the End of Night* (1932; Eng. trans., 1934) and *Death on*

the Instalment Plan (1936; Eng. trans., 1938) warned of the impending Fascist regimes. Malraux's overt political radicalism manifested in his complementary volumes of *Man's Fate* (1933; Eng. trans., 1934) and *Man's Hope* (1937; Eng. trans., 1938). Both the literary as well as dramatic scene of post-war France was dominated by the Existentialist doctrine.

Jean Paul Sartre, who had stated the Existentialist tenet as the human freedom to choose and forge one's own values, eventually emerged as its chief ideological proponent. *Nausea* (1938; Eng. trans., 1949), *No Exit* (1944; Eng. trans., 1946), and a trilogy of novels dealing with World War II written by Sartre elaborated on various aspects of the Existentialist doctrine. Such concerns reverberate in the works of Albert Camus' *The Outsider* (1942; Eng. trans., 1946) and *The Plague* (1947; Eng. trans., 1948). In both these works by Camus, meaninglessness of human life and its essential absurdity are emphasized. Sartre's long-time friend and disciple, Simone de Beauvoir, also depicted and shared many of the core existentialist problems in her novels. However, de Beauvoir's main claim to fame rests on *The Second Sex* (1949; Eng. trans., 1952), her best known colossal treatise on the status of women. She also wrote a series of distinguished memoirs capturing the milieu of the mid-century France. In the mid-twentieth century, a group of emerging writers including Nathalie Sarraute, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Marguerite Duras, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Michel Butor, Romain Gary and Roger Vailland experimented with various narrative techniques that ignored or improvised greatly on the conventional novel's narrative form. By discarding conventional ideas of plot, character, style, theme, psychology, chronology and the novelistic responsibility of bearing a message, these radical litterateurs created the *nouveau roman* (new novel), often derided as the anti-novel. By incorporating and aligning itself with the emerging insights of Structuralism, the *nouveau roman* created a distinct style of expression, analysis, and criticism in literary practises. The *nouvelle vague* movement in the contemporary French cinema had many points of direct commonality with the *nouveau roman* literary movement. While the movement forged its own distinctive tradition, it also diminished the stature of French fiction by indulging in a self-referential close frame of reference.

Check Your Progress-1

1. Which famous French novelist enriched the tradition of political satire?
2. Which novels elaborated on various aspects of the Existentialist doctrine?
3. Which novels by Albert Camus emphasize on the meaninglessness and essential absurdity of human life?

1.3 *Albert Camus:* Life and Works

Albert Camus (7 November 1913-4 January 1960) was a Nobel Prize winning author who wrote in the French language. At various points in his life, he was a journalist, editor, playwright, director, novelist, author of short stories, political essayist and activist. Though denied by him, many of his readers also consider him to be a philosopher.

Camus repeatedly talked about his philosophical position of a life-long commitment to oppose the philosophy of nihilism. In *The Rebel*, Camus also confessed his deep concern regarding the issues of individual freedom. In an interview in 1945, Camus explicitly rejected any ideological associations:

> 'No, I am not existentialist. Sartre and I are always surprised to see our names linked.'

However, during his lifetime, Camus is often labeled as the main proponent of Existentialism. Even if he emphatically separated himself from any Existentialist credo, Camus coined the most famous existentialist question of the century in *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

> 'There is only one really serious philosophical question, and that is suicide.'

When Camus won the 1957 Nobel Prize for literature, he was hailed 'for his important literary production, which with clear-sighted earnestness illuminates the problems of the human conscience in our times.'

Camus was born at Dréan (then known as Mondovi) in French Algeria. He belonged to a humble Pied-Noir family. His half-deaf mother was of Spanish descent and his father Lucien was a poor agricultural worker. Their condition was further worsened when his father was killed in the Battle of the Marne in 1914 during the World War I. His father served as a member of the Zouave infantry regiment. This misfortune forced Camus and his mother to the level of subsistence during his childhood in the Belcourt section of Algiers. Camus excelled in academics and earned a scholarship to study at the University of Algiers. Apart from his academic excellence at the University, Camus was a goalkeeper for the university team. However, his potential sporting career was prematurely terminated when Camus was diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1930.

To supplement his income, Camus took various odd jobs as a private tutor, a car parts clerk and an assistant at the Meteorological Institute. He completed his licence de philosophie (equivcalent to BA Honours) in 1935. In the next year, in 1936, he successfully completed and defended his dissertation titled *Plotinus, Néo-Platonisme et Pensée Chrétienne* (Neo-Platonism and Christian Thought), as part of the requirement for his diplôme d'études supérieures (equivalent to an M.A. Thesis). Camus considered a political intervention necessary to 'fight inequalities between Europeans and

natives in Algeria.' To achieve this goal, he joined the French Communist Party in 1935. However, his expectations were rather pragmatic as he wrote during the same period in which 'we might see Communism as a springboard and asceticism that prepares the ground for more spiritual activities.' In keeping with his involvement with the Communist Party, Camus, in 1935, founded the Théâtre du Travail (Worker's Theatre), which was later renamed the Théâtre de l'Equipe (Team's Theatre) in 1937. During the same period, he started reporting on the poor peasants' lives in Kabylie to the socialist organ, *Alger-Républicain.*

During a brief period between 1939-1940, Camus also wrote for a similar paper, *Soir Republican.* Though initially a pacifist, his first-hand experience during the Wehrmacht occupation, particularly that of the execution of Gabriel Peri in 1941, consolidated his anti-German position. Consequently, Camus joined the underground French Resistance called 'Combat' and started contributing regularly to its mouthpiece of the same name. Eventually, he became the paper's editor in 1943. Along with the rest of the staff of *Paris Soir* (where he began to contribute during early stage of World War II), Camus moved to Bordeaux. The same year, Camus completed two of his earliest and most influential works, *The Outsider* and *The Myth of Sisyphus.*

While participating in the dress rehearsal of Sartre's play, *The Flies,* Camus met Sartre in June 1943. As the Allied Force liberated Paris in August 1944, Camus reported the final phase of the war from the frontline. However, Camus' war efforts must be seen in proper perspective and should be seen in connection with his public opposition and disgust at the United States, when they dropped the atomic bomb at Hiroshima. This was an action of singular courage to express justified opinion at such a stage of American hegemony over the European political scene. When the *Combat* turned into a commercial paper in 1947, Camus immediately severed his connection with it. During the post-War decade, Camus started visiting the Café de Flore on the Boulevard Saint-Germain in Paris on a regular basis. This gathering of many contemporary French intellectuals, including Sartre, became one of the most influential ideological collective of the French culture during that period. This was supplemented by his lecture tour of the USA on the major concerns of the French thought.

As his tubercular condition relapsed in 1949, Camus was forced into seclusion from his expanding public engagement. At the end of his seclusion, Camus published his analysis of revolution and rebellion from a philosophical point of view. His book-length essay, *The Rebel,* also records his unambiguous rejection of Communism. This not only marked his separation from the official ideology of the Communist movement, but also a final split from Sartre. This led to condemnation of Camus' works by various public intellectuals. The harsh reaction meted out to him caused a serious feeling

of depression in Camus. Nevertheless, this channelled Camus' energies into newer avenues. His serious engagement with systematic philosophical thought during this phase produced the idea of the absurd. This was not only a highly original idea, but also Camus' most significant contribution to the philosophical thought. For Camus, the absurdist situation arises out of human desire for clarity and meaning within a world and a set of conditions that offers neither. Camus has been formulating these ideas in rudimentary form in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. As he developed these ideas, he integrated these principles into many of his other novels like *The Outsider* and *The Plague*.

During the next decade, Camus became increasingly involved in the international human rights efforts. As the UN-admitted General Franco ruled Spain as a member in 1952, he resigned from his responsibilities in the UNESCO. The very next year, he publicly criticized the Soviet strong-arm techniques to suppress a workers' strike in East Berlin. As similar methods were applied in Poland, Camus drew international attention to it in 1956. The Soviet repression of the Hungarian revolution in October drew a similar reaction from him.

In keeping with his original pacifist stance, Camus was also a major voice against capital punishment in the world. On this issue, he collaborated in a series of influential essays with Arthur Koestler, the writer and founder of the League against Capital Punishment. The Algerian War in1954 put Camus in a moral dilemma. While he personally identified with the Pied-Noirs (poor people like his own parents) and defended the French government's actions against the revolt, his argument that the Algerian uprising was an integral part of the 'new Arab imperialism' led by Egypt and an 'anti-Western' offensive orchestrated by Russia to 'encircle Europe' and 'isolate the United States' could not stand the test of objective logical rigour. Both the warring factions rejected the idea of a civil truce that spared the civilians advocated by Camus, calling it a foolish gesture. Dejected, he devoted his energies to the defence of the imprisoned Algerians facing death penalty. At the same time, Camus continued to express his opinions regarding pressing public concerns in *L'Express*.

In 1957, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. The Nobel Prize citation acknowledged his 'important literary production, which with clear-sighted earnestness illuminates the problems of the human conscience in our times.'

Camus either ignored or opposed all forms of systematic philosophy. As he had little faith in rationalist practices, he did not care to logically build his arguments. Hence, he asserted rather than argued many of his principal ideas. For many others, he presented them in metaphors. His main preoccupation was with the immediate and personal experience that led him to brood continuously over questions regarding the meaning of life in the face of death.

He died a premature death at the age of forty-six in a car accident on 4 January 1960 near Sens, Le Grand Fossard, in the small town of Villeblevin. He was survived by his wife and twin son and daughter, Jean and Catherine. Statistically speaking, Camus was the second-youngest recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature, older only to Rudyard Kipling. He is also the shortest-lived of any Nobel literature laureate to date, as he died just after two years of receiving the award.

Among the two of Camus's posthumously published novels, *A Happy Death* (1970), featuring a character named Patrice Mersault, bears a close resemblance to the protagonist of *The Outsider*. The other novel, *The First Man*, which Camus left unfinished due to his sudden death, presented an autobiographical perspective of his Algerian childhood.

1.3.1 Major Works of Albert Camus

The major works of Albert Camus are discussed below.

Novels:

The Outsider (*L'Étranger*, 1942)

The Plague (*La Peste*, 1947)

The Fall (*La Chute*, 1956)

A Happy Death (*La Mort heureuse*, written 1936–1938, published posthumously 1971)

The First Man (*Le premier home*, incomplete, published posthumously 1995)

Plays:

Caligula (performed 1945, written 1938)

The Misunderstanding (*Le Malentendu*, 1944)

The State of Siege (*L' Etat de Siege*, 1948)

The Just Assassins (*Les Justes*, 1949)

Requiem for a Nun (*Requiem pour une nonne*, adapted from William Faulkner's novel by the same name, 1956)

The Possessed (*Les Possédés*, adapted from Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel by the same name, 1959)

Short stories:

The Silent Men (*Les Muets*)

Jonas or the Artist at Work (*Jonas ou l'artiste au travail*)

The Adulterous Woman (*La Femme adultère*)

The Guest (*L'Hôte*)

Exile and the Kingdom (*L'exil et le royaume*, 1957)

The Renegade or a Confused Spirit (*Le Renégat ou un esprit confus*)

The Growing Stone (*La Pierre qui pousse*)

Non-fiction books:

Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism (1935)

Betwixt and Between (*L'envers et l'endroit*, also translated as *The Wrong Side and the Right Side*, 1937)

Nuptials (*Noces*, 1938)

The Myth of Sisyphus (*Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, 1942)

The Rebel (*L'Homme révolté*, 1951)

Notebooks 1935–1942 (published, 1962)

Notebooks 1943–1951 (published, 1965)

Notebooks 1951–1959 (Published as *Carnets Tome III: Mars 1951 – December 1959*, 1989)

Essays:

The Crisis of Man (Lecture at Columbia University, 1946)

Neither Victims Nor Executioners (Combat, 1946)

Why Spain (Essay for the theatrical play *L' Etat de Siege*, 1948)

The Ancient Greek Tragedy (Parnassos lecture in Greece, 1956)

Create Dangerously (Essay on Realism and Artistic Creation, 1957)

Reflections on the Guillotine (Réflexions sur la guillotine, Extended essay, 1957)

Resistance, Rebellion, and Death (1961, a collection of essays selected by the author)

Lyrical and Critical Essays (1970)

Youthful Writings (1976)

Between Hell and Reason (Essays from the Resistance Newspaper *Combat*, 1944–1947, published 1991)

Camus at *Combat*: Writing 1944–1947 (2005)

Albert Camus Contre la Peine de Mort (2011)

1.3.2 Camus and Absurdism

In his essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus presents a philosophy that contests philosophy itself, thus posing us with the various paradoxical elements in his approach to philosophy. Although Camus denied being an existentialist, his essay is rooted in the philosophical tradition of existentialism. While he rejected the idea of a philosophical system, the key terms of absurdity and rebellion, in face of such absurdity, constructed the original edifice of Camus' philosophical system. As a result, his philosophical works, *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel*, are cynical of conclusions about the significance of life. However, both works affirm dispassionately convincing answers to key questions about ways of living. Camus argues that though the question 'What is the meaning of existence?' is inescapable, a definite answer to this question also remains unachievable. Consequently, he rejects all possibility of a scientific, metaphysical, or human-created purposeful end that would provide a satisfactory answer.

Therefore, since the natural world and the universe in which the human enterprise operates remain quiet regarding the rationale of existence, Camus urges one to bear an emptiness deeply embedded in the sceptical position and one that can never be resolved. It is this contradictory situation, flanked by our propensity to enquire definitive questions and the impossibility of finding any sufficient answer, that Camus termed 'the absurd', and his doctrine of the absurd investigate the results arising from this fundamental paradox. Camus's view of absurdity of human condition is best represented in an image of the Greek mythical character, Sisyphus, spraining to move his huge rock up the mountain, seeing it roll down, then sliding after the rock to start all over again, in an incessant cycle. Like Sisyphus, humans compulsively carry on asking questions about the meaning of life, only to find their answers topple back down.

Camus takes his scepticism to the extreme point of methodical doubt. He begins from a supposition of scepticism until he uncovers the foundation of a non-sceptical close. The process of building a distinctive philosophical structure, whose territory is often left undefined and which is not at all times elaborated clearly, is built up in discrete phases over the course of Camus' brief lifetime. To answer the questions posed by *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 'Why should I not kill myself?', and by *The Rebel*, 'Why should I not kill others?', Camus' doctrine can be interpreted as an unrelenting attempt to express and not just declare what is involved in the absurdity of human existence. Camus, in his criticism of existentialists in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, disagrees against the specific philosophical trend with which Nietzsche is often related as a pioneer. *The Myth of Sisyphus* is overtly in opposition to existentialists such as Jaspers, Kierkegaard, Shestov and Heidegger, along with the phenomenology of Husserl. Camus agreed that he shares one

of their fundamental premises in which they all, in one way or another, confirm to the absurdity of the human condition. However, he discards what he considers as their eventual escapism and illogicality, asserting that:

'They deify what crushes them and find reason to hope in what impoverishes them. That forced hope is religious in all of them' (*The Myth of Sisyphus* -MS, 24).

Sartre was also targeted by Camus' criticisms. Although some of the ideas in *The Myth of Sisyphus* drew on Sartre's *Nausea* in 1942, Sartre was not yet considered an 'existentialist'. However, as Sartre's philosophy matured, he went on to investigate how human action amounts to building a significant world from the meaningless, chaotic and brute existence, and in the process, the absurdity of *Nausea* becomes the contingency of *Being and Nothingness*. According to Sartre, the absurd is:

> 'The universal contingency of being which is, but which is not the basis of its being; the absurd is the given, the unjustifiable, primordial quality of existence.'

On the contrary, for Camus, absurdity is not a quality of existence, but an indispensable characteristic of our association with the larger world. Rejecting the 'classical pessimism' and 'disillusionment', Sartre finds 'disillusionment' in Camus. Furthermore, according to Sartre, Camus develops a complete worldview on the basic postulation that absurdity is an insurmountable connection between humans and their world. He puts forward an unavoidable separation between human consciousness, with its 'wild longing for clarity' and the 'unreasonable silence of the world.' Following this elaboration, Camus sees the world as unreasonable and its workings incomprehensible by rational exercise. According to Camus, all existentialists betrayed their original discernment in their quest of appealing to something more than the confines of human perception, thus taking recourse to the transcendent.

Camus postulates that even if we evade what Camus depicts to be escapist attempts and carries on living, lacking its irrational demands, the craving to do so is built into our awareness and eventually, our humanity. Our inability to disentangle from 'this desire for unity, this longing to solve, this need for clarity and cohesion' is built into one of the basic human tendencies. However, it is imperative that one does not yield to these urges and instead, accept absurdity as a given condition. In contrast to existentialism, 'The absurd is lucid reason noting its limits.' Camus clearly considers that the existentialist philosophers are misguided, but does not dispute in opposition to them, because he deems that 'there is no truth but merely truths.' His difference takes the subtler and less self-assured form of an inherent critique, showing that each thinker's existentialist philosophy concludes to be incompatible with its own point of origin, and 'starting from a philosophy of

the world's lack of meaning, it ends up by finding a meaning and depth in it.'

Check Your Progress-2

1. In which novel does Camus confess his deep concern regarding the issues of individual freedom?
2. In which year was Albert Camus awarded the Nobel Prize in literature?
3. Enumerate the various novels written by Albert Camus.

1.4 *The Outsider*: Plot Summary

The opening line of *The Outsider* is considered as one of the all-time classics in literary history:

'Maman died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don't know.'

Though the exact spirit of the statement might be lost in the intricacies of translating from the right French register and tone, undoubtedly, the reaction to one's mother's death in such terms generates a great deal of curiosity and controversy in readers. In the opening sequence of the novel, a telegram reaches Meursault, the I-narrator and protagonist of the novel, informing him of his mother's death at the old-age home she was staying. Meursault arrives at the old-age home in Marengo, outside of Algiers, where his mother spent her last days, but repeatedly refuses to see her mother's corpse for the final time. Instead, he makes note of external information, such as funeral services being shorter in the countryside as bodies decompose more quickly in the heat. He finds such information to be 'interesting and [makes] sense.' He hardly remembers anything of the funeral, except for the discomfiture caused by the heat.

The next day, Meursault goes swimming at a public beach, where he meets one of his former colleagues, Marie Cardona, and flirts with her the entire afternoon. She is quite taken aback to know that Meursault's mother was buried just a day earlier, but quickly forgets about it, and after watching a movie together, Marie spends the night with Meursault. The next day, Meursault wakes up after Maria has left. He lazes around in bed until noon, and then squanders the whole afternoon in his balcony, smoking, eating and observing the humdrum of people on the street as they approach, giving an impression that his mother's death had hardly affected the course of his daily life.

When Meursault joins his office, he is indifferent to the sympathetic reactions from his boss and colleagues regarding his mother's death. After work, Meursault comes across his neighbour, Salamano, with his dog on the stairs. Meursault observes that Salamano beats his dog and swears at it all the time while walking it twice a day. Meursault is invited to dinner by another neighbour, Raymond Sintes. During dinner, Raymond asks for Mersault's assistance regarding his suspicion of his mistress cheating on him. He also admits that he beat her on suspicion, and subsequently compelled her to leave him. Meursault finds out that this altercation led Raymond to fight with his mistress's Arab brother. Raymond is still attracted to her, but also wants to chastise her for her unfaithfulness. Raymond elaborates on his idea of writing a letter to provoke remorse and make her come back to him. He devises sleeping with her, and 'right at the last minute', spitting in her face. When Raymond requests Meursault to write the letter, Meursault replies that he would not mind doing it. As Meursault goes back to his room, he hears Salamano's dog crying gently.

The following Saturday, Meursault meets Marie and goes swimming again. They hurry back to Meursault's apartment after swimming to have sex. Marie spends the night and stays for lunch the following day, during which, Meursault tells her the story of Salamano and his dog. When Marie questions Meursault on whether he loves her, he bluntly responds that:

'It [doesn't] mean anything; he [doesn't] think so.'

Subsequently, Marie and Meursault overhear an argument in Raymond's apartment. When a police officer arrives, Raymond's mistress complains that Raymond beats her regularly. The police officer slaps Raymond and orders him to wait in his apartment until the police summon him to the police station. Later that afternoon, Raymond calls Meursault to his apartment and requests him to go to the police station to testify against his mistress and tell them about her infidelity. After an evening out, Meursault agrees to help him, and as the two men return to their apartment building, they find Salamano desperately searching for his dog. The dog had run away from him when he had taken it for a walk in the Parade Ground. Salamano curses the dog, but later that night, Meursault hears Salamano crying in his room.

Meursault and Marie receive an invitation from Mason, a friend of Raymond, to spend the following Sunday at his beach house with him, his wife, and Raymond. Marie asks Meursault if he wishes to marry her, to which Meursault responds that it would hardly affect him in any manner. When she asks Meursault if he loves her, he repeats his previous assertion. Though Marie thinks that Meursault was quite peculiar, she comes to a decision that she wanted to marry him nonetheless. She laughs when Meursault does not react at her refusal to not have dinner with him

that night. After dinner, Meursault returns home and finds a sad and confused Salamano waiting outside his door, apparently distraught at the loss of his dog.

The following Sunday, Meursault and Raymond set out to take a bus to Masson's beach house. As they head for the bus stand, they notice a group, which included Raymond's mistress's brother, staring at them. Meursault refers to Raymond's mistress's brother as 'the Arab'. They are relieved when the group of Arabs do not board the bus.

Masson's beach house is a small, wooden bungalow where Meursault meets Masson's wife for the first time. Upon seeing her, Meursault starts thinking about what marrying Marie would be like. Masson, Meursault and Marie swim till lunchtime. After lunch, while the two women clean the dishes, Masson, Raymond and Meursault go for a stroll. Suddenly they find a group of three men, including Raymond's mistress's brother, following them at a distance. Soon, a brawl breaks out, in which 'the Arab' slashes Raymond's veins and mouth with a knife. Masson and Meursault carry the injured Raymond back to the bungalow.

As the women panic and Raymond is taken to a nearby doctor by Masson, Meursault silently smokes and stares at the sea. Later that afternoon, Raymond comes back to the bungalow, draped in bandages. When Raymond visits the beach, accompanied by Meursault, they find the two Arabs lying down beside a small rapid. As the two Arabs stare at Raymond, he nervously fingers the gun which he has carried with him. Meursault dissuades Raymond from shooting at them, and eventually, convinces Raymond to hand over the gun to him for safe-keeping. Meursault walks back with Raymond to the beach house. The heat is oppressive and gives Meursault a headache.

After leaving Raymond back at the beach house, he heads back to the spring with an intention to cool himself. At the spring, he once again comes face to face with the brother of Raymond's mistress and reflexively puts his hand on the gun. Seeing Meursault stepping towards the cool water of the spring, the Arab draws his knife. Meursault is dazed by the reflected sunlight from the blade that flashes into his eyes. His eyes are already stinging with sweat and heat. Impulsively, Meursault fires the gun to kill the Arab. He pauses for a few minutes and again fires at the Arab's corpse four more times.

The lawyer appointed by the court visits Meursault in his prison cell and notifies him that after the investigators checked into Meursault's private life, they learned that he 'show[ed] insensitivity' on the day of his mother's funeral.' To the lawyer's enquiry on whether Meursault was bereaved at his mother's death and burial, he replies that he does not scrutinize his own actions very often.

As the young lawyer, who is appalled by Meursault's apathy to his mother's death, departs, Meursault says:

> 'I felt the urge to reassure [the lawyer] that I was . . . just like everybody else.'

That afternoon, the examining Magistrate asks Meursault the reason for his pausing between the first shot and remaining shots at the Arab, as the Magistrate finds this particular element of the murder most puzzling.

When Meursault does not answer, the magistrate shows him a crucifix and asks if he believes in God. His blunt negative answer leads the Magistrate to assert that his own life's meaning hinges on the existence of God. He further concludes that Meursault has an incorrigibly toughened spirit and address him as 'Monsieur Antichrist', with an almost cordial air.

As Meursault's trial begins the next summer, he is surprised to find the courtroom packed with people, mostly as a result of the unwanted publicity which the press gave his case. When asked about the reason for placing his mother in an old-age home, Meursault points to his financial conditions, which made it difficult for him to take care of his mother personally. Meursault further declares that as both he and his mother had no mutual expectations from each other, they had soon become habituated to their new situations. The testimonials of the director of the old-age home, the caretaker and one of his assistants provided the prosecutor with an opportunity to deride Meursault as a disloyal son, indifferent even to his mother's death. Celeste, on the other hand, ascribes Meursault's killing of the Arab to ill-fortune, while Marie's testimony discloses Meursault's plans to marry her.

Contrary to prosecutor's accusations, a few more favourable statements of Meursault's decency and honesty is offered by Masson, and Meursault's kindness to Salamano's dog is recounted by Salamano. Raymond's testimony further highlights the sudden turn of events which involved Meursault in this unfortunate chain of events.

After his trial, the newspapers portray the circumstances of a condemned man in terms of a 'debt owed to society', but Meursault cares only about escaping the 'machinery of justice'. The chaplain visits against Meursault's wishes and Meursault reasserts his ambiguity regarding God's existence to him, which leads the chaplain to state that Meursault's attitude is a result of 'extreme despair'. The chaplain's insistent suggestion that Meursault spend the rest of his life thinking about God irritates him immensely. In a fit of rage, Meursault grabs the chaplain and shouts that the only perceived certainty in the whole of human existence is death. After the guards separate them, Meursault realizes that his mother initiated her romance with Thomas Perez in order to live life all over again. He deems that mourning over her would

simply be an insult to her. As Meursault sheds any glimmer of hope regarding his release, he opens himself to the 'gentle indifference of the world' as:

> '[F]or the first time, in that night alive with signs and stars, I opened myself to the gentle indifference of the world. . . For everything to be consummated, for me to feel less alone, I had only to wish that there be a large crowd of spectators the day of my execution and that they greet me with cries of hate.'

1.4.1 Major Characters

Menrsault

On the surface, Meursault appeals to be an ordinary, lower-middle class French colonial in Algeria. He lives a typical day to day routine of a normal man, eats his lunch in small cafes, attends films, and swims during free time. He is diligent but not exceptional at his perfectly ordinary job. Meursault lives his life almost unconsciously on a readymade structure that his society has provided him. The story of the novel *The Outsider* is named after him as he is the stranger to the society. He is a person who remains aloof from his surrounding and does not act as the society expects of him so is termed as a stranger. He expresses his views and comments about what happens around him from a removed position. Meursault remains apathetic to people around him. He remains more concerned about the physical aspects of life rather than about the emotional and sentimental bonds the society demands of him. First he shows his indifference at the death of his mother. He does not feel the deep sense bereavement usually one feels on such occasions. At the funeral of his mother he is concerned more about the physical discomfort while walking in the hot sun than any real grief at the death of his mother. Meursault acts quite casually after the funeral of his mother without any semblance of grief quite contrary to what the society expects of him. He develops an affair with Marie Cardona but when she asks him whether he loves him or not he replies in an enigmatic manner "I don't know" normally not expected from a man who apparently is in love with a woman. He unnecessarily gets embroiled in the quarrel between Raymond, a man of questionable credentials, and the Arabs on the beach. He testifies in the court that he killed the Arab because sunshine got reflected into his eyes from the knife of the Arab, a weird defense for a crime as serious as murder.

He does not abide by the moral code of conduct of the society. He kills the Arab for no apparent reason for which he has to face trial. The focus of Meursault's trial soon shifts from the murder to his attitudes and beliefs. His atheism and lack of grief at his mother's death, lack of feeling for his beloved Marie Cardona throw serious challenges to the accepted rationale and moral code of the society of which he is a part. The events

like falling in love or the death of a parent is usually considered as significant events in one's life. However, for Meursault such events hold no importance at all. He implicitly challenges society's accepted moral standards which demands expression of grief over the death of a mother. Society also demands that love should culminate in a formal solemnization of marriage. Since Meursault does not confirm to the accepted code of conduct of the society it brands him as an outsider. He does not make any distinction between good and bad in his own mind. Besides being an atheist he perceives the world around him from his own removed point of view. While in prison on the charges of murdering the Arab he broods over his life and understands that as he is indifferent to the world around him, the world too is totally apathetic to human life. He realizes that peoples' lives have no meaning and their actions have no tangible effect on the universe. This realization of 'the gentle indifference of the world' brings peace of mind and reconciliation in Meursault.

Marie Cardona

Marie Cardona is the woman who starts an affair with Meursault a day after his mother's funeral, Meursault is attracted to her for her physical features. He has no other attraction towards her nor does his love have any sentimentality attached to it. But she fails to understand the complexity of Meursault nevertheless finds him interesting for his peculiarities. Meursault fails to give any commitment of marriage to her yet she stands by him during his prison tenure. This shows a deep sense of attachment for him on the part of Marie, Meursault and Marie both find delight in the physical aspects of love. But for Marie making a public display of physical affection is a pail of her showing deeper sentimental and emotional love for Meursault whereas for Meursault it is simply a mechanical affair bereft of any feeling. She loves Meursault from a pragmatic point of view because she enjoys considerable freedom even while remaining within her relationship with Meursault as he never questions her loyalty nor is concerned about her personal life. On the other hand Marie displays an unflinching loyalty even while Meursault is in prison and faces trial for the murder of the Arab. Marie is presented as a contrasting character to Meursault. She never understands the indifference of the universe to human life as Meursault does. She has faith in the belief system of the society she lives in and expects Meursault to Jive in conformity to the accepted ways of society but fails in her attempt. In the final part of the novel Meursault comprehends the meaninglessness of human existence and attains reconciliation. However, Marie never reaches at any such understanding with life. Camus makes an attempt to present Marie as having a lesser understanding of the deeper meanings of universe and hence is less enlightened than Meursault.

Raymond Sintes

Raymond Sintes is a man of questionable credentials who claims to be a 'warehouse guard' but is known to all as a pimp. He is the neighbour of Meursault. He suspects that his Arab mistress is having an affair with another person and cheating on him. So he wants to avenge the perceived cheating of his mistress. He uses Meursault in his mission of taking revenge against her by convincing him to write a letter inviting his mistress to his house and have sex with her as means of revenge. In fact, Raymond serves as a foil to Meursault. Unlike Meursault's calm, and detached way of dealing with affairs of life, Raymond is impetuous and highly emotional. Meursault never makes any moral judgement on anybody. Raymond by making Meursault write the letter seems to be a very manipulative and crafty person. Raymond plans to use sex as a tool of humiliation and revenge of his mistress but for Meursault sex is a source of delight much as the same way he responds to other physical aspects of life.

Meursault-Raymond relationship is a relationship of contrasting personalities. It is an ambiguous relationship too. Raymond uses Meursault in his scheme of taking revenge on his mistress and also convinces him to testify for him in the police station after he beats his mistress. But he also returns the favour by testifying for Meursault in the court after he is accused of murdering the Arab. But the whole event leading to the killing of the Arab is also the making of Raymond. His actions have led to this fatal accident in which Meursault quite unnecessarily gets embroiled. However, Raymond shows a great sense of loyalty *in* friendship.

1.4.2 Themes and Techniques in *The Outsider*

There are various themes and techniques used by Albert Camus in *The Outsider*.

I. Absurdist Standpoint

The Outsider is considered to be a seminal work of French existential literature. Meursault, the protagonist of the novel, is detached and apathetic, and thus 'represents the quintessential existential hero.' Meursault believes that '[a] person's identity does not exist in anything except that person's actions.' As such, Meursault 'is outside of the bounds of social order [and ultimately] alienated even from those closest to him.' As he truly embraces the idea that there is no greater meaning of human existence, Meursault not only discards all hope for the future, but also acknowledges the innate senselessness of the world and asserts that nothing in life matters since everyone would certainly die sooner or later.

As in other non-fictional works of Camus, life has no logical importance or sequence. According to Camus, human beings struggle to find meaning

where none exists, our resistance emanating from our inability to deal with this notion itself, and continually enticing us to locate a logical constitution and implement it in our lives.

Absurdist philosophy, which is often invoked to describe the literary works by Albert Camus, states that assertion by religion, science, philosophy and morality to unearth fixed universal principles and values is rendered fundamentally inconceivable by the random nature of death and chance as well as the dreariness of human motives. Such claims also negate all likelihood of a transcendental significance.

As Meursault awaits his execution in his solitary cell, he realizes that apart from the way he has lived his own life, there could be many more ways in which he might have lived his life. However, ultimately, none of it matters for in the end, life is absurd in nature. Existentialists deny external forces any power to govern our way of life. Similarly, Meursault 'does not hesitate to draw the inevitable conclusions from a fundamental absurdity.' For example, after being present at his mother's funeral, it transpires to Meursault that:

> 'One more Sunday was over, that Maman was buried now, that [he] was going back to work, and that, really, nothing had changed.'

Representing a life of 'normality', Marie stands for the happy life that Meursault wishes to lead. On the other hand, being a person of existential judgment and temperament, Meursault:

> 'Confronts issues [such as]...the apparent randomness of violence and death [and] the emptiness of a social morality in the face of an irrational world.'

Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*, in a similar vein, presents 'happiness and the absurd are two sons of the same earth. They are inseparable.' If there is any reason for Meursault's regret in committing the crime, it is Marie. Nevertheless, in categorical terms, Meursault repeatedly denies that love '[doesn't] mean anything [and] that [he] didn't think [he loved her]', even if his affection to Marie is sometimes displayed unambiguously. Almost in the same vein, during the only visit Marie makes to Meursault's prison cell, he hardly has anything to tell her.

During this short and expectantly emotionally charged meeting, Meursault is preoccupied with the clamour and perplexity around him, and centres chiefly on the corporeal desires produced by her. With the intention to protract her visit, Meursault compels himself to spell out a few answers 'mainly just to say something.' His shooting the Arab marks a conscious point of departure in Meursault's viewpoint on life. Interestingly for Meursault, the incident is 'a beginning rather than an end, even though he has lost his freedom', and as Meursault puts it, the incident 'shattered the harmony of the day, the exceptional silence of a beach where I'd been happy.' Though Meursault denies offering any more explanation for the additional four shots

at the Arab, his habitual pattern of impulsive, instinctive and unconscious behaviour is manifested in this act as well. In Meursault's own words, 'it was like knocking four quick times on the door of unhappiness.'

With an unavoidable and imminent conviction looming large on him, Meursault's offence is more pronounced due to his indifference at his mother's funeral than on his murder of the Arab. His confinement to the prison makes very little changes him. He thinks that:

> 'if [he] had to live in the trunk of a dead tree, with nothing to do but look up at the sky flowering overhead, little by little, [he] would have gotten used to it.'

As the symbolic order of meaning completely stripped-off his perception, Meursault is essentially 'un-punishable'. As each of the actions is complete and meaningless in themselves, their condition of existence does not lead to any retribution or rewards.

In the second half of *The Outsider*, the novel ironically narrates society's attempt to justify Meursault's actions. Camus depicts the judicial process to be an absurd one, in which the judge, prosecutors, lawyers and jury try to find meaning where none is to be found. In this context, we may be reminded of the other great twentieth-century classic, *The Trial,* which also depicts absurdity of the juridical process. Meursault, meanwhile, accepts his inevitable death and execution with an uncanny calmness, in effect, committing what Camus describes 'philosophical suicide'. The moral order of the society is a necessary condition to wish for continuity of live. However, as Meursault essentially is wilfully indifferent to the moral order of the society where he is condemned, he lacks the desire to continue living in it. In The *Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus asks:

> 'Is one going to die, escape by the leap, rebuild a mansion of ideas and forms to one's own scale? Is one, on the contrary, going to take up the heart-rending and marvellous wager of the absurd?'

An 'indifference to the activities of the outside world', compounded by fatigue and boredom, constitute the steady base of Meursault's feelings. As Camus himself said, the reader perceives that 'a novel is [only] a philosophy put into images' and no image is more affecting than Meursault's philosophical suicide, whereby his sustained nonchalance towards the world eventually leads to his demise.

II. An Irrational Universe

A strong resonance of Camus's philosophical notion of absurdity is found in *The Outsider*, even if it is a work of fiction. Lack of any rational meaning in human existence has been emphasized by Camus in his philosophical essays. Naturally, being a part of that larger, meaningless scheme of things, individual lives also lose any possible meaning it might have. In his opinion,

people find this idea rather disorienting and forcibly endeavour to categorize or produce logical organization and sense in their lives.

Camus wanted to draw attention to the idea of 'absurdity' that depicts humanity's vain endeavour to discover logical organization where none exists. Though the notion of absurdity is directly invoked to bear upon the workings of the novel, many major creeds of absurdity function covertly within the novel. Rational world-order fails to make any headway into either Meursault's external or internal world. No discernible rationality directs his actions. The randomness that dictates his actions, like marrying Marie and killing the Arab, can only be associated with absurdist meaninglessness.

The sense of being unsettled by an apparent lack of logical scaffolding, however, is not only an individual feeling, it aggregates into a collective sense of unease as well. Consequently, it tries to construct or inflict rational explanations for Meursault's irrational behaviour. The disruptive and threatening nature of events produced by their irrationality produce a psychosis in the collective conscience of the society. Society's endeavour to produce a logical organization is manifested most evidently in the the judgement sequence in the second part of the novel. Following the binding principle of causality, both the prosecutor and Meursault's lawyer offer logical justifications regarding Meursault's offence.

However, all these contribute only to build up an attempt to fend-off the frightening idea of an irrational universe by hovering around the known territory of causal action and description. Thus, the narrative effect of the sequence is to render the whole trial into an example of absurdity, an occasion of mankind's vain effort to enforce logic on an illogical cosmos. In this context, Franz Kafka's *The Trial* may be recalled as another kind of futile exercise, both by individual human beings as well the society in general. As discussed above, this idea of meaninglessness in life was presented in most poignant terms in Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Though Meursault slowly inches toward this understanding all through the novel, he does not completely realize its import until after his disagreement with the chaplain in the final chapter.

Meursault recognizes that his indifferent attitude is a matter of reciprocity, that is, the larger universal operative categories as well as individuals of the larger human society are totally indifferent towards him. The universal pattern of birth and death will merely be repeated in his life, and thus, have no additional consequence. Apparently, this realization produces a paradoxical effect on Meursault. Once he gains this ostensibly dismal awareness, he achieves contentment. As he comes to an understanding with the unavoidability of death, he realizes that the method, whether he is executed or dies due to old age, does not alter the consequence of death. This realization allows Meursault to set aside his delusive imagination of escaping execution

by successfully presenting a legal petition. He realizes that such deceptive expectations, which had bothered him earlier, would do little more than produce a fake understanding that death might after all be avoidable. This false hope for continued life suddenly becomes an encumbrance for Meursault. His deliverance from this misleading assumption signifies his freedom to live life for what it is, and to make the most of his days alive.

III. The Significance of the Corporeal World

Consequent to Meursault's awareness of the mutability of human life and universe is a heightened involvement with the physical world surrounding him. More than emotional or social aspects of the world around him, Meursault is far more concerned with the physical aspects of the world surrounding him.

The novel's affirmation that there is no higher significance or organization than human life inverts the focus on the sensory world. Repeatedly in the narrative structure of the novel, Meursault's is found to be engrossed in his attention towards the weather, and on other physical elements including his own body and his relationship with Marie. For example, the high temperature during the funeral service causes Meursault far more discomfort and pain than did his mother's bereavement. The sun at the beach torments Meursault more than the disturbing presence of the Arabs.

Though apparently an illogical answer, Meursault's identification of his torment under the blazing sun as the reason for killing the Arab brings home his attention and deep involvement with the physical manifestation of the world around him. The narrative style also replicates his engagement in the physical aspects of the world surrounding him. His language becomes vibrant and elaborate when he talks about nature and the weather, even though under other circumstances, he uses curt, unadorned appellatives when recounting emotional or social situations.

IV. Death

A vast range of attitudes towards death and decay is displayed in *The Outsider*. Salamano loves his rotting, scab-covered dog and he values his camaraderie greatly, even though most others find this attachment to a dying dog quite disgusting. Meursault's society expected specific modes of expressing grief and mourning his mother's death. Even though Meursault is satisfied in considering that physical decease stand for the absolute and final conclusion of existence, the chaplain holds steady to the idea of a life after death.

As mentioned above, a necessary component of Meursault's individuation in the novel is his effort to come to terms with his own approach to death. At the narrative conclusion, he ultimately accepts that death is the

one inescapable actuality of human life, and he succeeds in accepting the actuality of his imminent execution with no anguish.

V. Surveillance

Throughout the novel, Meursault keeps watch on a number of characters. In turn, he is also watched by many of them. This motif of watch or observation recalls quite a few tenets of Camus's absurdist philosophy. The steady surveillance in *The Outsider* may suggest humanity's unending hunt for rationale. This, in turn, stresses the significance of the concrete, evident particulars of the physical world in a universe where there is no larger or deeper significance lying in the profundity of unseen structures behind its visible world.

Meursault's scrutiny of the passers-by on the street from his balcony is a passive action that does not entail any judgemental action on behalf of him. On the contrary, during the trial episode, spectators in the courtroom observe Meursault as an element of the process of verdict and condemnation. At the same time, it may be observed that a great deal of Meursault's earlier behaviour was being scrutinized without mutual awareness. The implicit antagonism with which the Arabs watch Raymond and his friends as they walk to the bus can only be an extreme manifestation of the visual judgement being passed by the audience in the courtroom. Only petty curiosity and disinterested concern is manifested in Raymond's neighbours' action as onlookers to his disagreement with his mistress and the police officer. At other times, surveillance or watching is a mystifying action. For example when Meursault watches the woman at Celeste's, and later when she watches him in court, there is no specific causal explanation to such action, but readers may sense a strong narrative built-up in such moments.

VI. The Courtroom

The courtroom is an important seat of action in the novel. The court in the trial scene in the second part of the novel symbolizes the society as a whole. The will of the people is manifested in the functions of the public as the jury offers its ruling by representing the whole society.

As all the minor characters from the first half of the novel reappear as witnesses in the courtroom, the 'court-as-society' symbolism is emphasized. Again, the efforts to create a rational justification for Meursault's offence through trial and investigation signify humanity's efforts to seek logical justification for the illogical proceedings of the universe. These efforts, which Camus believed to be fruitless, demonstrate the absurdity that Camus delineates in his philosophy.

It is a good idea to compare this presentation with Kafka's presentation of the courtroom and legal process in the previous unit. It will be apparent that

both these novelists brought the idea of law and legality with attendant ideas of causality and rationality to bear upon two fundamental representations of human condition.

VII. The Crucifix

The crucifix that the investigative magistrate brandishes at Meursault denotes the organized religion of Christianity, which stands in conflict with Camus's absurdist world view. While absurdist ideas developed from the thought that human life is illogical and meaningless, Christianity and all such organized religion envisage of a just and reasonable universal order supported by a divine design and course. It provides human life with superior metaphysical significance, contrary to the absurdist philosophy's total rejection of any such teleology. Though there is an inherent contradiction between the structures of rationality and belief, most religious try to present a logical and causal system in which good is rewarded and evil is punished.

In this novel, the crucifix represents a logical conviction in an organization in general. The chaplain's persistence that Meursault turn to God does not essentially signify that Meursault accepts particular Christian values, so much so that he accepts the belief of a consequential universe encoded in religiosity in general. When Meursault disobeys the magistrate by rebuffing Christianity, he wholly rejects all schemes that try to find and characterize a logical organization within human life. This disobedience depicts Meursault being written-off as a danger to the social organization. However, the same action emphatically and with finality drives home Meursault's absurdist and rebelliously isolationist worldview.

Check Your Progress-3

1. Who is the I-narrator and main protagonist of The Outsider?
2. Why did Raymond beat his mistress?

1.5 Let Us Sum Up

- France was one of the principal participants in the events of European politics for centuries and the twentieth-century was no exception. Consequently, historical events left a profound mark on the literature of the country.
- Various movements with radically different ideas about literature and artistic expression effected tremendous expansion in literary output. Their maverick experimentation enriched the literary output manifold.

- Novel, which was the principal form of literary expression, continued to dominate the literary scene in the twentieth century. In such a literary medium, the moral, intellectual and artistic traditions were prone to continuous probing.
- There were many principal contributors to the twentieth-century French novel. The tradition of political satire was enriched by Anatole France in his *Penguin Island* (1908; Eng. trans., 1909).
- The roman-fleuve (cyclical novel) continued to be very popular in early twentieth-century France. Romain Rolland's ten-volume tome, *Jean-Christophe* (1904-12; Eng. trans., 1910-13), was only matched by Jules Romains' even larger *Men of Good Will* series (27 vols., 1932-47; Eng. trans. in 14 vols., 1933-46).
- This tradition was further consolidated by Marcel Proust's seven volume autobiographical epic, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past* -1913-27), and Roger Martin du Gard's *Les Thibault* (1922–1940), a novel in eight-part cycle.
- The Inter-war decade saw the publication of two distinctive voices in the French novel, namely that of Louis Ferdinand Celine and Andre Malraux. Among various other trite observations, Celine's cynical and outrageous *Journey to the End of Night* and *Death on the Instalment Plan* warned of the impending Fascist regimes.
- Jean Paul Sartre, who had stated the Existentialist tenet as the human freedom to choose and forge one's own values, eventually emerged as its chief ideological proponent. *Nausea*, *No Exit*, and a trilogy of novels dealing with World War II written by Sartre elaborated on various aspects of the Existentialist doctrine.
- In the mid-twentieth century, a group of emerging writers including Nathalie Sarraute, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Marguerite Duras, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Michel Butor, Romain Gary and Roger Vailland experimented with various narrative techniques that ignored or improvised greatly on the conventional novel's narrative form.
- By discarding conventional ideas of plot, character, style, theme, psychology, chronology and the novelistic responsibility of bearing a message, these radical litterateurs created the *nouveau roman* (new novel), often derided as the anti-novel.
- By incorporating and aligning itself with the emerging insights of Structuralism, the *nouveau roman* created a distinct style of expression, analysis, and criticism in literary practices. The *nouvelle vague* movement in the contemporary French cinema had many points of direct commonality with the *nouveau roman* literary movement.

- Albert Camus was a Nobel Prize winning author who wrote in the French language. At various points in his life, he was a journalist, editor, playwright, director, novelist, author of short stories, political essayist and activist. Though denied by him, many of his readers also consider him to be a philosopher.
- Camus repeatedly talked about his philosophical position of a life-long commitment to oppose the philosophy of nihilism. In *The Rebel*, Camus also confessed his deep concern regarding the issues of individual freedom.
- Camus considered a political intervention necessary to 'fight inequalities between Europeans and natives in Algeria.' To achieve this goal, he joined the French Communist Party in 1935.
- 1 In keeping with his involvement with the Communist Party, Camus, in 1935, founded the Théâtre du Travail (Worker's Theatre), which was later renamed the Théâtre de l'Equipe (Team's Theatre) in 1937. During the same period, he started reporting on the poor peasants' lives in Kabylie to the socialist organ, *Alger-Républicain*.
- In 1957, Camus was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. The Nobel Prize citation acknowledged his 'important literary production, which with clear-sighted earnestness illuminates the problems of the human conscience in our times.'
- Camus either ignored or opposed all forms of systematic philosophy. As he had little faith in rationalist practices, he did not care to logically build his arguments. Hence, he asserted rather than argued many of his principal ideas. For many others, he presented them in metaphors.
- Statistically speaking, Camus was the second-youngest recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature, older only to Rudyard Kipling. He is also the shortest-lived of any Nobel literature laureate to date, as he died just after two years of receiving the award.
- In his essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus presents a philosophy that contests philosophy itself, thus posing us with the various paradoxical elements in his approach to philosophy. Although Camus denied being an existentialist, his essay is rooted in the philosophical tradition of existentialism.
- Camus takes his scepticism to the extreme point of methodical doubt. He begins from a supposition of scepticism until he uncovers the foundation of a non-sceptical close.
- Sartre was also targeted by Camus' criticisms. Although some of the ideas in *The Myth of Sisyphus* drew on Sartre's *Nausea* in 1942, Sartre was not yet considered an 'existentialist'.

- *The Outsider* is considered to be a seminal work of French existential literature. Meursault, the protagonist of the novel, is detached and apathetic, and thus 'represents the quintessential existential hero.'
- Absurdist philosophy, which is often invoked to describe the literary works by Albert Camus, states that assertion by religion, science, philosophy and morality to unearth fixed universal principles and values is rendered fundamentally inconceivable by the random nature of death and chance as well as the dreariness of human motives. Such claims also negate all likelihood of a transcendental significance.
- A strong resonance of Camus's philosophical notion of absurdity is found in *The Outsider*, even if it is a work of fiction. Lack of any rational meaning in human existence has been emphasized by Camus in his philosophical essays. Naturally, being a part of that larger, meaningless scheme of things, individual lives also lose any possible meaning it might have.
- Camus wanted to draw attention to the idea of 'absurdity' that depicts humanity's vain endeavour to discover logical organization where none exists. Though the notion of absurdity is directly invoked to bear upon the workings of the novel, many major creeds of absurdity function covertly within the novel.
- Consequent to Meursault's awareness of the mutability of human life and universe is a heightened involvement with the physical world surrounding him. More than emotional or social aspects of the world around him, Meursault is far more concerned with the physical aspects of the world surrounding him.
- The novel's affirmation that there is no higher significance or organization than human life inverts the focus on the sensory world. Repeatedly in the narrative structure of the novel, Meursault's is found to be engrossed in his attention towards the weather, and on other physical elements including his own body and his relationship with Marie.
- Throughout the novel, Meursault keeps watch on a number of characters. In turn, he is also watched by many of them. This motif of watch or observation recalls quite a few tenets of Camus's absurdist philosophy. The steady surveillance in *The Outsider* may suggest humanity's unending hunt for rationale.
- The courtroom is an important seat of action in the novel. The court in the trial scene in the second part of the novel symbolizes the society as a whole. The will of the people is manifested in the functions of the public as the jury offers its ruling by representing the whole society.

- The crucifix that the investigative magistrate brandishes at Meursault denotes the organized religion of Christianity, which stands in conflict with Camus's absurdist world view. While absurdist ideas developed from the thought that human life is illogical and meaningless, Christianity and all such organized religion envisage of a just and reasonable universal order supported by a divine design and course.

1.6 Key Words

- ***Roman-fleuve*:** The *roman-fleuve* (French, literally 'river-novel') refers to an extended sequence of novels of which the whole acts as a commentary for a society or an epoch, and which continually deals with a central character, community or a saga within a family.
- **Tome:** A **tome** is a large book, especially one volume of a multi-volume scholarly work.
- **Existentialism:** Existentialism is a term applied to the work of a number of late 19th- and 20th-century philosophers who, despite profound doctrinal differences, shared the belief that philosophical thinking begins with the human subject—not merely the thinking subject, but the acting, feeling, living human individual.
- ***Nouveau roman:*** The *nouveau roman* (*new novel*) is a type of 1950s French novel that diverged from classical literary genres.
- **Nihilism: Nihilism** is the philosophical doctrine suggesting the negation of one or more putatively meaningful aspects of life.
- **Pied-Noir: Pied-Noir** is a term referring to French and other European citizens who lived in French Algeria before independence.

1.7 Terminal Questions

1. Write an elaborate note on the twentieth-century French novel.
2. Examine in detail the literary accomplishments of Albert Camus.
3. Would you consider *The Outsider* to be an existential novel? Illustrate your position with references from the text.
4. Write a short note on the symbolism of the Courtroom. Do you find any similarity with the Courtroom presented in Franz Kafka's *The Trial*? Elucidate.
5. Explain how irrationality and isolation are developed as major themes of the novel.
6. Why do you think Meursault reacted to the news of his mother's death with such indifference? Considering his subsequent actions,

would you consider him to be a selfish and indifferent person? Illustrate your answer with examples from the text.

7. Describe the encounter between Meursault and the Cardinal.
8. Comment on the elements of absurdism this novel.

1.8 Suggested Reading

- Ellison, David. *Understanding Albert Camus*. Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1990.
- McBride, Joseph. *Albert Camus: Philosopher and Litterateur*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992.
- Bachman, V. J. *Camus's Rebellious Thought*. Cahoes, New York: Talus Titles, 1999.
- Bronner, Stephen Eric. *Albert Camus: The Thinker, the Artist, the Man*. Danbury, Connecticut: Franklin Watts, 1996.
- Olafson, Frederick A. 'Albert Camus.' *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. New York: Collier MacMillan Publishers, 1972.

1.9 Model Answers to 'Check Your Progress'

Check Your Progress-1

1. Anatole France, a famous French novelist, enriched the tradition of political satire in his *Penguin Island*.
2. *Nausea* (1938; Eng. trans., 1949), *No Exit* (1944; Eng. trans., 1946), and a trilogy of novels dealing with World War II elaborated on various aspects of the Existentialist doctrine.
3. *The Outsider* (1942; Eng. trans., 1946) and *The Plague* (1947; Eng. trans., 1948) by Albert Camus emphasize on the meaninglessness and essential absurdity of human life.

Check Your Progress-2

1. Camus confesses his deep concern regarding the issues of individual freedom in his novel, *The Rebel*.
2. Albert Camus was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1957.
3. The various novels written by Albert Camus include *The Outsider* (*L'Étranger*, 1942), The Plague (*La Peste*, 1947), The Fall (*La Chute*, 1956), *A Happy Death* (*La Mort heureuse*, written 1936–1938, published posthumously 1971) and *The First Man* (*Le premier home*, incomplete, published posthumously 1995).

Check Your Progress-3

1. Meursault is the I-narrator and main protagonist of *The Outsider*.
2. Raymond beat his mistress as he was suspicious of her cheating on him with someone else.