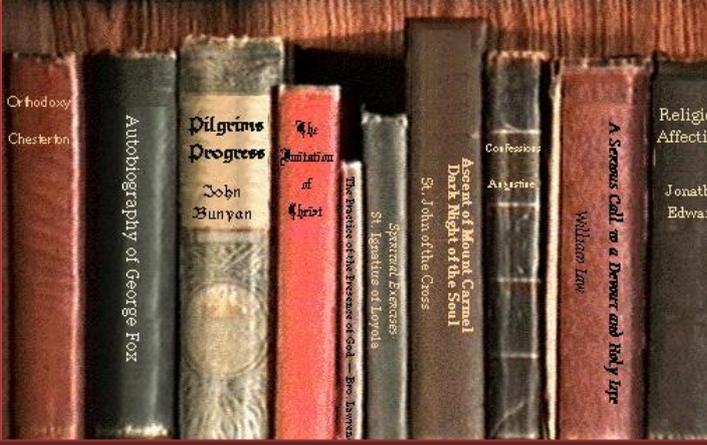




**TEZPUR
UNIVERSITY**



MASTER OF ARTS

ENGLISH

**CENTRE FOR OPEN AND
DISTANCE LEARNING**

MEG 403: Women's Writing in English

BLOCK II

CENTRE FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

TEZPUR UNIVERSITY (A CENTRAL UNIVERSITY)

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MEG 403: Women's Writing in English



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MEG 403: Women's Writing in English

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Published by **The Director** on behalf of the Centre for Open and Distance Learning, Tezpur University, Assam.

BLOCK II

MODULE IV: MARY SHELLY

UNIT 8: INTRODUCTION TO MARY SHELLY

UNIT 9: READING THE TEXT AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS: *FRANKENSTEIN*

MODULE V: VIRGINIA WOOLF

UNIT 10: INTRODUCTION TO VIRGINIA WOOLF

UNIT 11: READING THE TEXT: *TO THE LIGHTHOUSE*

UNIT 12: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF *TO THE LIGHTHOUSE*

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INTRODUCTION: BLOCK II

MEG-403: Women's Writing in English, Block II will focus on three major women writers of different genre, novelists and playwrights, to name. Mary Shelley, Virginia Woolf and Lorraine Hansberry, all three made their mark in the literary world by their unique treatment of theme and trend setting narrative technique. A comparative study of these writers with other writes of their genre will enable you to learn extensively about their style and technique.

Module IV: Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein* covers one of the significant novels of early eighteenth century, *Frankenstein* written by Mary Shelley in two units. **Unit 8: Introduction to Mary Shelley** will emphasis on Mary Shelley who is primarily known for her most popular work *Frankenstein* that not only created a trend in fiction writing, but also for making the use of the word to signify ungrateful predator everyday life. Science fiction in a Gothic setting, of which this novel is a trend setter, found a twist in the hands of Mary Shelley. In this unit we shall throw light on the gothic tradition and Marry Shelley's contribution to the genre. **Unit 9: Reading and Critical Analysis: *Frankenstein*** raises important questions about man, nature and scientific intervention. The unit also will elaborate on the story of Frankenstein that tells how responsibility is related to every creation, avoidance of which may lead to destruction. It also scrutinises the relation between scientist and scientific creation on moral and ethical ground. The novel is infused with elements of the Gothic novel and considered as one of the earliest examples of science fiction, controversies in relation to that being one of the primary discussions.

Module V: Virginia Woolf will elaborately deal with Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. The novel is worth reading as Woolf's novel uses modernist techniques in most innovative ways challenging some of the basic tenets of realist fiction. **Unit 10: Introduction to Virginia Woolf** will acquaint you with Virginia Woolf who can be summarised as a novelist for whom 'there is no plot, no character, no tragedy, no

comedy, no love interest or catastrophe' in novel writing. You will learn how keeping line with the life as a chaotic, confusing and incomplete pattern, novelists like Virginia Woolf structured their novels as formless and without pattern.

Unit 11: Reading the Text: *To the Lighthouse* will introduce you to the details story of the novel along with an extensive analysis of the major characters that contribute to heighten the stream of consciousness technique. **Unit 12: Critical Analysis of *To the Lighthouse*** will explain the complex areas of the novel. Concept of time, art and life are few important aspects this unit will deal with along with the powerful use of symbols in the novel.

Module VI: Lorraine Hansberry the sixth and the final unit in this course, has a play by Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*. The play captures an important aspect of the Black Civil Rights Movement in the United States raising questions about who can really fulfil the great American dream. **Unit 13: Introduction to Lorraine Hansberry** will enable you to learn about the author and her experience of racism which finds a significant reflection in her play. **Unit 14: Reading the Text and Critical Analysis: *A Raisin in the Sun*** will elaborate how Hansberry's objective of writing this play is to give a voice to those who, prior to *Raisin*, had no voice at all or none to hear. This will be done in this unit by critically examining various themes and motifs and symbols used to explore these themes. A detail study of the characters has heightened the intention of the unit's critical approaches.

Learners may take this course as an entry point into the rich and varied world of women's writings and explore with more readings of similar writings by both male and female authors.

MODULE IV: MARY SHELLY: *FRANKENSTEIN*

UNIT 8: INTRODUCTION TO MARY SHELLEY

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Learning Objectives
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8.0 INTRODUCTION

Mary Shelley is primarily known for her most popular work *Frankenstein* that not only created a trend in fiction writing, but also for making the use of the word to signify ungrateful predator everyday life. Science fiction in a Gothic setting, of which this novel is a trend setter, found a twist in the hands of Mary Shelley. It is because the novel is also categorised as a science fiction turned to be a horror story contributing to a gothic atmosphere. In this unit we shall primarily deal with the author and her place in the tradition of gothic fiction by exploring the salient features of the genre and it's treatment in the hands of other fiction writers. With this, we shall prepare you to read *Frankenstein* critically as a unique example of trendsetter in the next unit.

8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to know

- the life and works of Mary Shelley
- the tradition of Gothic fiction

- major contributors of gothic fiction
- Mary Shelley's place in gothic tradition

8.2 MARY SHELLEY: LIFE AND WORKS

Mary Shelley was born Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin on August 30, 1797, in London, England. She was the daughter of philosopher and political writer William Godwin and famed feminist Mary Wollstonecraft—the author of *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Shelley never really knew her mother who died shortly after her birth. Her father William Godwin was left to care for Shelley and her older half-sister Fanny Imlay. Imlay was Wollstonecraft's daughter from a relationship she had with a soldier. The family dynamics soon changed with Godwin's marriage to Mary Jane Clairmont in 1801. Clairmont brought her own two children into the union, and she and Godwin later had a son together. Shelley never got along with her stepmother. She never felt a need to educate Shelley.

The Godwin household had frequent distinguished visitors, including Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth. While she didn't have a formal education, during childhood she did make great use of her father's extensive library and the guests. Shelley could often be found reading, sometimes by her mother's grave. She also liked to daydream, escaping from her often challenging home life into her imagination.

Shelley found a creative outlet in writing. According to *The Life and Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, she once explained that "As a child, I scribbled; and my favourite pastime, during the hours given me for recreation, was to 'write stories.'" She published her first poem, "Mounseer Nongtongpaw," in 1807, through her father's company.

During the summer of 1812, Shelley went to Scotland to stay with an acquaintance of her father William Baxter and his family. There she experienced a type of domestic tranquillity she had never known. Shelley returned to the Baxters'

home the following year. In 1814, Mary began a relationship with poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. Percy Shelley was a devoted student of her father, but he soon focused his attentions on Mary. He was still married to his first wife when he and the teenaged Mary fled England the same year. The couple was accompanied by Mary's stepsister Jane. Mary's actions alienated her from her father who did not speak to her for some time. Mary and Percy Shelley travelled about Europe for a time. They struggled financially and faced the loss of their first child in 1815. Mary delivered a baby girl who only lived for a few days.

The following summer, the Shelleys were in Switzerland with Jane Clairmont, Lord Byron and John Polidori. The group entertained themselves one rainy day by reading a book of ghost stories. Lord Byron suggested that they all should try their hand at writing their own horror story. It was at this time that Mary Shelley began work on what would become her most famous novel, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*.

Later that year, Mary suffered the loss of her half-sister Fanny who committed suicide. Another suicide, this time by Percy's wife, occurred a short time later. Mary and Percy Shelley were finally able to wed in December 1816. She published a travelogue of their escape to Europe, *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* (1817), while continuing to work on her soon-to-famous monster tale. In 1818, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* debuted as a new novel from an anonymous author. Many thought that Percy Bysshe Shelley had written it since he penned its introduction. The book proved to be a huge success. Same year, the Shelleys moved to Italy.

Mary's life was full of hardship. Their union was resulted with adultery and heartache, including the death of two more of their children. Born in 1819, their son, Percy Florence, was the only child to live to adulthood. Mary's life was shaken by another tragedy in 1822 when her husband died by drowning while sailing with a friend in the Gulf of Spezia.

Losing her husband at age 24, Mary Shelley worked hard to support herself and her son. In the meantime, she wrote several more novels, including *Valperga* and the science fiction *The Last Man* (1826). She also devoted herself to promoting her husband's poetry and preserving his place in literary world.

Mary Shelley died of brain cancer on February 1, 1851, at age 53, in London, England. She was buried at St. Peter's Church in Bournemouth, laid to rest alongside her father and mother and with the cremated remains of her late husband's heart.

It was roughly a century after her passing that one of her novels, *Mathilde*, was finally released in the 1950s. Her lasting legacy, however, remains with the classic tale of *Frankenstein*. This struggle between a monster and its creator has been an enduring part of popular culture. Her work has also inspired some spoofs, such as *Young Frankenstein* starring Gene Wilder. Shelley's monster lives on in such modern thrillers as *I, Frankenstein* (2013) as well.

8.3 THE GOTHIC TRADITION AND MARY SHELLEY

The Gothic novel is a literary genre came into existence during mid eighteenth century, though in architecture it was a concept used long back in 12th century. The genre acquired its name from its existence in the medieval period which was creatively used by the gothic novelists to explore a setting of haunt and mystery. Thus, in this type of fiction the prominent features are mystery, doom, decay, old buildings with ghosts in them, madness, hereditary curses and so on. Castles with turrets, vast dungeons, winding passages set in facades with intricate detail and topped by steep spires were typical of gothic architecture. The gothic settings used to roll upon open grounds, castles with mysterious rooms, breath taking atmosphere, creepy dungeons, moving statues and lurking evil. The setting very particularly conveyed a creepy feeling about the upcoming yet concealed dangers. Characters used to explore the untrodden lands with a constant fear of

encountering the invisible. The supernatural and the irrational figured out prominently. Taboo subjects like blasphemy, incest and black magic were the routine elements of Gothic Literature. In simple sense, gothic implies an uncanny atmosphere of wilderness, gloom and horror based on the supernatural or presence of unknowing elements. From this you must have realised that setting, more than the story, plays prominent in a gothic fiction. P. B. Shelley and Lord Byron carried out a long discussion on the *Principles of Life* and gave gothic fiction a new survival.

Though the mentioned characteristics have been used by any standard gothic fiction writer now, it was with the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castel of Otranto-A Gothic Story* in 1754 that this new tradition was set up in fiction writing. It is a story of Isabella, who is supposed to marry Conrad, son of Manfred, prince of Castle Otranto. The marriage is arranged to free the castle from a prophecy of the appearance of its real heir, which Manfred was not, one day. After Conrad's mysterious death on the day of his wedding by a giant helmet, a series of supernatural and strange things, including the appearance by the ghost of his grandfather, a giant armoured leg in the church take place. Incest, rape and battle are part of the story. Finally, the ghost of Alfonso, who is the real prince of Otranto appears from the wall of the castle and declares that his grandson, Theodore, is the true heir of Otranto. Manfred thereupon reveals that his grandfather poisoned Alfonso and usurped his throne. The story end with Isabella's marriage with Theodore.

The setting, thematic treatment, portrayal of supernatural, concept of anti-hero are few standard concepts that later gothic writers used for their novels. If we summerise Walpole's stylistic devices, following characteristics come out as standard form of gothic fiction

Claustrophobic and mysterious Settings: As you are already told "Gothic" refers to a style of architecture in France in the 12th century creating a sense of grand and unfathomable. In Gothic literature, one see lots of abandoned houses,

cobwebbed castles, dilapidated churches fallen into disrepair and that why haunted. You also see dark, cramped, and claustrophobic interiors with hidden doors and secret passageways, settings with hidden skeletons. The outside world in Gothic literature is usually portrayed as being a dark, wild, and treacherous place full of violent weather, mysterious forests, and malevolent graveyards. Medieval period is a favourite setting of these novels. Characters, settings, and objects are weighted heavily with symbolic meaning in Gothic literature.

Past revisiting: In line with its settings, Gothic lit often romanticizes and revisits the past. The past is somehow still living, breathing, and controlling the human action and predicament. Past often revisits in the form of shock, dread, hauntings, insanity, psychological reactions.

Plot structure: Common Gothic plots include revenge, familial secrets, prophecies, and curses, damsels in distress, women as victims, doppelgängers, fallen societies.

Presence of the unknowable: Monsters, demons, witches, ghosts, banshees, vampires, and other supernatural creatures often play parts in Gothic fiction. Horror is an inevitable part of such elements.

Hidden psyche and Sexuality: In Victorian age Gothic literature gave authors and readers an opportunity to explore romance and sexuality, and transgressive thoughts, desires, and impulses. Gothic sexuality is usually somewhat repressed where women are expected to be fragile and pure and men are predatory in nature. It's also patriarchal, with men making moves and women reacting to them.

Anti-Heroes. The Gothic protagonist is often portrayed as a flawed, lonesome, isolated, or outcast figure who has to overcome obstacles in order to rejoin society.

After Walpole, trend of gothic novel flowed in the hands of many authors. Amongst them *The Old English Baron* (1778) by Clara Reeve, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) by Ann Radcliffe, *The Monk* (1796) by Matthew Lewis, *Northanger Abbey* (1817) by Jane Austen, *Frankenstein* (1818) by Mary Shelley, *Wagner, the Wehr-*

Wolf (1846) by George William MacArthur, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) by Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) by Oscar Wilde are few works worth mention.

In literature, Gothic Novel or Gothic Romance writing left behind immense impact focusing upon the darker sides of human character and sensibilities---such as uncontrollable passions, paranoia and evil aspects. Nowadays sexuality and its multiple anxieties, desire and prohibitions- the hidden and psychic elements of human life are central to Gothic tale. Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* published in 1847 can be categorized as one of such. Authors like Willkie Collins, Bram Stoker and even Charles Dickens used Gothic elements in their writing. Edgar Allen Poe terror tales made him one of the popular writers of Gothic literature in the American context where mysterious plays pivot. We see a gothic tradition in American Gothic or Southern gothic where rural or antique Southern settings, plantations, grand antebellum houses, and old churches find place. “Decay, despair, and madness, the lasting effects of slavery and racism, the trials of a dispossessed Southern aristocracy, xenophobia, and class” (Lisa Koski, 2018) are subjects of southern gothics. In William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*, *The Sound and the Fury* or Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* we see the influence of gothic style. Gothic novels paved the path for horror movies like *Dracula* by Bram Stoker and gained immense popularity.

	CHECK YOUR PROGRESS
1. What are the basic aspects that inspire a Gothic setting?	

2. Does *Frankenstein* really fulfil a gothic element?

3. Name few recent century's novels having gothic elements in them

Tracing the advent of *Frankenstein* we find that the age of Enlightenment is an age of prose, reason and good sense. It was an age of progress and all round development. It was the time when science could find the greatest expression. As such Enlightenment thinkers turned to scientific study and scepticism. People were not ready to believe in the God and religion blindly. People started to be governed

by reasons and rationality. The publication of *Frankenstein* targeted at unlimited progress of science and technology but distance from beliefs and religion. In *Frankenstein*, in one of the instances Victor collects bones from the charnel houses and graves. He works in his filthy laboratory which is completely cut off from the rest of the society or any sort of human habitation.

The advent of *Frankenstein* is the time of the unavoidable exercise of the historic Industrial Revolution. It was written at a time when the world faced the transitional phase between change and progress. The Industrial Revolution was like a sharp knife. It had it's function in both the ways. Either it would chop vegetables or cut one's fingers and make one bleed. No doubt it brought immense progress and changed the face of Europe but at the same time it also challenged the life of the agrarian community. England in the 18th and 19th century saw increased trade due to development of machines. It brought new technology to light. The rise of the steam engine changed the entire scenario of the world indeed in terms of science. The monster in *Frankenstein* the rise of Industrial Revolution and marketing of science. It defined the language of wonder and fear at the potential that changed the world. It intended to prosper and reaped the benefits of mechanization but the revolution was also criticized at the same time. Not all were ready to accept the revolution as the symbol of progress. The monster's arrival was also creating the same effect. As such the conflicting attitudes which the revolution brought in the minds of people were reflected in the way the people expressed their attitude towards the monster.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. How, according to you, Enlightenment can be an inspiration for a work like *Frankenstein*?

A large rectangular box with a light blue background and a black border. Inside the box, there are ten horizontal dashed lines, providing a space for writing or drawing.

LET US STOP AND THINK



The word ‘Gothic’ originally referred to the Goths, an early Germanic tribe. It meant ‘Germanic’ initially and then ‘Medieval’. “Gothic Architecture” now denotes the medieval for of architecture, characterised by the use of the high pointed arch and vault, flying buttresses, and intricate recesses, which spread through western Europe between the twelfth and sixteenth century (Abrams, 117).

8.4 SUMMING UP

This unit dealt elaborately on the rising of gothic fiction and it gradually gaining immense popularity during 18th century. It should be noted that gothic fictions came into being as a direct reaction to the formal realism of the century that strives to depict everyday life from the internal reaction of any individual. External drama played less role in realistic fiction. Gothic novels took readers to a world which is far away from the reality where external actions decide the outcome. We

also discussed Mary Shelley's contribution along with other writers of gothic tradition. In this discussion we found that *Frankenstein* is typically an outcome of industrial revolution where the character is loaded with symbolism of too much mechanization as an enemy to its own creator or mankind.



8.5 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Give a brief note of Industrial Revolution and its impact on the belief of Victorian society.
2. What is a Gothic fiction? How did it come into emergence? Name few pioneers of gothic fiction along with their representative works.
3. Elaborate the salient features of Gothic fiction. How did they help in achieving an alternative of formal realism?



8.6 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

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UNIT STRUCTURE

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 Learning Objectives
- 9.2 Reading the Novel *Frankenstein*
- 9.3 Major Characters
- 9.4 Major Themes
- 9.5 Narrative Technique
- 9.6 Controversies related to *Frankenstein*
- 9.7 Gender issues in *Frankenstein*
- 9.8 Summing Up
- 9.9 Assessment Questions
- 9.10 References and Recommended Readings

9.0 INTRODUCTION

Frankenstein, the novel tells a tale that stands all alone as the powerful and enduring example of the creative imagination of the human mind. The themes centre upon the social, cultural and scientific domains of society during Shelley's times. The novel also comes up with a fair conclusion that if created without moral responsibilities, scientific creation would create monsters that might demolish the world as well as mental faculties, same as the technological degradation Aldous Huxley too predicted in his novel, *Brave New World*. *Frankenstein* as a novel can be seen as a warning about the transformation of man under the Industrial Revolution. It seems to portray the terrible effects of letting oneself be driven by ambition and losing control over its own possibilities.

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to learn

- the storyline of *Frankenstein*
- major characters of the novel
- major issues that the novel focusses on
- use of three narrators as narrative technique of the novelist
- controversies raised by the novel along with the gender issues dealt

9.2 READING THE NOVEL *FRANKENSTEIN*

Outline of the story

Frankenstein or *The Modern Prometheus* is all about a young scientist named Victor Frankenstein who went on to experiment with his scientific skills of giving life to the lifeless. Victor Frankenstein harnesses a mixture of alchemy, chemistry, and mathematics. And on a November night he succeeds in bringing life to lifeless matter indeed. But when the creature turns up, for the first time, to his utter surprise, Victor runs away in terror and great fear. Victor then realizes that he had created a hideous monster. Every moment there is a constant fear and a feeling of disgust for his hideous creation. He tries to escape from the monster whereas the monster realizes that he has been deserted by his creator. The monster goes out to explore the human society. He realizes that no one is ready to befriend him for his ugly looks. Initially he proceeds with a generous mind but then destiny has something very cruel in its reserve for him. He falls a prey to all sorts of misbehaviour and anxiety. People are not ready to accept his presence in the human world. As a result, the monster turns violent and gives everyone a lesson. He goes on to challenge his creator who transforms him into an orphan. He kills Victor's brother William, his wife and the friend. His last target obviously was his own

creator, Victor. Victor gave him a human body and mind, but did not give him a name, identity, a company, i.e. a female monster as requested by him and most of all the recognition of being created in this world like other human beings. Creator's disinterestedness and abhorrence ended him to an isolated and wasted creation.

The novel is written in an epistolary form that documents a fictional correspondence between Captain Robert Walton and his sister, Margaret Walton Saville. Narrated with the help of three narrators, the novel, thus, gives readers a scope for factual verification of the happenings.

Frankenstein was influenced by the age of Enlightenment and the thinkers of the period who turned to scientific study and scepticism. Language plays a crucial role in the monster's development. By hearing and watching the peasants, the monster learns to speak and read which enable him to come to terms with the world.

The novel is infused with elements of the Gothic novel. It is also considered as one of the earliest examples of science fiction.

LET US STOP AND THINK

	<p>According to Greek mythology, Prometheus (Ancient Greek "Forethinker") is a Titan of Greek mythology, the son of Iapetus and Themis, Prometheus is described as a Trickster who, outwitted Zeus and Gods by stealing fire from heaven and giving it to Mankind. He became a champion for mankind but punished by Zeus to death. Zeus chained the god to a rock on a mountain peak. Every day an eagle tore at Prometheus's body and ate his liver, and every night the liver grew back. Because Prometheus was immortal, he could not die. But he suffered endlessly.</p> <p><i>Frankenstein</i> is subtitled as <i>Modern Prometheus</i>, as like Prometheus, Victor to endlessly suffered for his deed which meant to a contribution to humanity but done without visualising the consequence.</p> <p>https://www.google.com/topic/Prometheus-Greek-god</p>	
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Detail Summary of The Novel

The novel begins with a series of letters from the explorer Robert Walton to his sister, Margaret Saville. Walton, a well-to-do Englishman with a passion for seafaring, sets to an expedition to the North Pole as captain of the ship. In the first letter, he tells his sister of his desire to accomplish “some great purpose”—discovering a northern passage to the Pacific, the source of the Earth’s magnetism. He tells that he is a lonely person without friend and this compels him to go in expeditions. In another letter he writes to his sister how he sees a sledge dragged by a huge monster in the ice. Next day they witness another sledge carrying a man in dying condition. They rescue him and after few days he begins his story. He is the second narrator of the novel, Victor Frankenstein, Walton being the first narrator.

Victor begins his story with an elaborate description of Victor’s childhood with his father Alphonse and mother Caroline, brother William and Ernest. His parents move to Italy for a short period. During this time, Victor was born and lavished with attention. His mother Caroline being very close to the poor of the locality, comes across an impoverished family in need of help and she falls for a beautiful little girl Elizabeth whom she adopts. She is of Victor's age and becomes Victor's adopted cousin and playmate. Caroline strongly desired to get them married in future.

After the birth of his brothers, their parents decide to settle down in Geneva to concentrate on raising their family. Now we introduced to Victor’s friend Henry Clerval, who is going to be a life-long friend. Clerval is described as a creative child having interest in literature and folklore. Victor has interest in science and at the age of 13, Victor discovers the works of Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Albertus Magnus, all alchemists from a very earlier age. As a curious knowledge hunter Victor begins to study science and alchemy.

At age 15, Victor witnesses an electrical storm that peaks his interest in electricity and possible applications for its use. Victor sees how the lightning has

the power of destruction when a tree near their home is destroyed from a lightning strike. This confirms his belief that electricity and "galvanism" are worthy subjects for further study.

It is important to understand what Victor says, "The raising of ghosts or devils was a promise literally accorded by my favorite authors, the fulfillment of which I most eagerly sought." This gives us an idea of where he got the idea to create his own creature. Although the details of the monster's creation are not described later in the book, Shelley hints that Victor uses his knowledge from the science books and electricity to create his monster. Shelley makes Victor's interest in these topics very clear, so that the reader can deduce that he will use this knowledge in his creation.

Victor is now 17 years old and ready to become a student at the University of Ingolstadt in Ingolstadt, Germany. In the meantime he lost his mother Caroline. In the university Victor meets Professor Waldman who gives him a new look towards knowledge. Waldman explains to Victor that alchemy is a false science and teaches him that while the alchemist's pursuits were noble, real scientists do the scientific, valuable work. Interestingly, we come to know that the word Wald means 'woodsman' implying 'forest' or 'wood' and more broadly the world of nature. With Victor's encounter with Waldman, the theme of the Romantic notion that technology is not entirely good, enters the novel at this point.

However, he launches into a new venue of scientific experimentation — creating life from death and reanimating a dead body. He visits morgues and cemeteries for the necessary body parts, though he fails many a times in his endeavour. His strange project carries on throughout the whole year; spring, summer, and winter.

After many failures, finally Victor succeeds in bringing his creation, an eight-foot man, to life.

The monster now begins to take shape, and Victor describes his creation in full detail as "beautiful" yet repulsive with his "yellow skin," "lustrous black, and

flowing" hair, and teeth of "pearly whiteness." Victor describes the monster's eyes, as "watery eyes, that seemed almost the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips." We can relate the irony of this description with God's creation of the first man, Adam. An antithesis of life and destruction is presented by Shelley.

But we see Victor in a dilemmatic situation. He is equally excited and but also disgusted at "the monster" he had created and he runs from the apartment. He begins to neglect it and one day discovers his disappearance from his apartment. At the discovery of the monster disappearing from his apartment, Victor becomes very happy. But we are informed how he becomes a prey of weird dreams and fantasies and unnatural experiences in his laboratory.

It had passed six years since Victor had been away from home. We are also told that two years have passed since the creation of his monster. One day he receives a letter from his father that William is found dead all of a sudden. He was later found "stretched on the grass livid and motionless; the print of the murder's finger was on his neck."

In mean time, Victor caught sight of the monster near Secheron, on Mont Blanc and he was almost sure that everything was done by the monster, though Justine, William's friend is accused of the murder, convicted and punished to be hanged next morning. Dwindling between reality and uncertainty, to ease his troubled mind, Victor undertakes a tour of the nearby Chamounix valley, France. He hopes that a rest and vacation will do him good. The visit is characteristic of Romantic thought in that nature can restore and refresh the soul. In chapter 10 he comments on how nature soothes his pain, "They elevated me from all littleness of feeling, and although they did not remove my grief, they subdued and tranquillised it." He found peace in nature and finds the scenery comfort. This asserts the novel's reliance on romanticism that nature has the ability to restore and heal. And it is in the midst of the comfort of nature that the creator and the creation confront each other once again.

The monster in the middle of nature is an emotional, sensitive human like creature who tells his tragedy of abandonment to its creator. For the first time Victor sees it as a life of flesh and blood and starts to realize that what he has created is not merely the scientific product of an experiment but an actual living being with needs and wants. The margin between physical ugliness, about which readers have only second hand information from Victor, is merged by the beauty of the mind that the creature reveals. We, as readers, are more at the side of the monster than Victor at this stage.

The monster keeps on saying how he discovered many lacks in him while living in the middle of human beings in the village. He has no knowledge of life outside, about food, shelter, language, love etc. This is the reason why other human beings go away from him, are scared of his appearance. The monster's growing understanding of the social significance of family is connected to his sense of otherness and solitude. This also heightens Victor's irresponsible behaviour towards his creation as he abandoned him without bringing adaptability in the social life. The monster also reveals how he comes to know about his creator's abhorrence for him from the stolen pages of Victor's journals and how he relates him with Adam, the first man and God's love for him after reading *Paradise Lost*. All these lead him towards a life of vengeance and revenge. Therefore, he started killing Victor's kins. After saying all these, the monster proposes Victor to create a female monster for him to get rid of further violence.

In spite of knowing the result of another ugly creation, Victor sets to do so. He imagines that the two creatures might have children, creating "a race of devils . . . on the earth." In the midst of these reflections and growing concern, Victor destroys his works which is witnessed by the monster. The excessively angry monster promises to meet Victor on the day of his wedding with Elizabeth.

Victor decides to destroy everything related to the second creation and goes out towards the sea to throw them in the water. Late that evening, he rows out onto the ocean and throws the remains into the water. After executing his job, he decides

to take rest in the boat for a while, but soon affected by a strong and deadly wind. When the winds change and he reaches shore near a town, a group of townspeople rudely informs him that he is the suspected murderer of a dead discovered the previous night.

Much to his surprise the victim is identified as Henry Clerval. But with the black marks of the monster's hands around his neck it becomes clear for Victor who the culprit is. In shock, Victor falls into convulsions and suffers a long illness. Victor remains ill for two months. Upon his recovery, he finds himself still in prison. His father comes to meet him in the prison and soon Victor is released from his imprisonment. They go back and eventually Victor and Elizabeth get married. But on the day of the wedding, the monster kills Elizabeth. Only then Victor realises the true meaning of his challenge. Out of shock and despair, his father dies after few days. Just before the ship is set to head back to England, Victor too dies.

As said earlier, the novel is written in an epistolary form that documents a fictional correspondence between Captain Robert Walton and his sister, Margaret Walton Saville. Several days later of Victor's death, Walton hears a strange sound coming from the room in which Victor's body lies. Following the noise, Walton is shocked to find the monster, as hideous as Victor had described, weeping over his dead creator's body. The monster begins to tell him of all his sufferings, deeply regrets having become an instrument of evil and that, with his creator dead, he is ready to die. He leaves the ship and departs into the darkness.

LET US STOP AND THINK



An epistolary novel is a novel written as a series of documents. It is usually written in the form of letters. But sometimes also gets documented in the form of diaries, newspaper clippings and other form. It can add realism to a story as it imitates the working of real life.

9.3 MAJOR CHARACTERS

Victor Frankenstein

Victor Frankenstein is the protagonist of the novel and also the dedicated creator of the monster. He is the young science student who creates a sentient creature with a heinous facial look and expression out of the dead body parts of corpses. He studies in Ingolstadt and discovers the secret of life. He is a young Swiss boy who grows up in Geneva. Victor spent most of his life in the laboratory to create a monster that was eight feet tall and looked inhuman. He was awe struck at his own devilish creation and resented for his action. That compelled him to escape from his monster forever. He fled away only to receive news of the deaths of near and dear ones in the hands of the monster. Victor's creation exposes the uncontrollable effects of science and technology. That was the time when Industrial Revolution was ripe and found great expression. People had become highly rational and sceptical about religions. This killed the spirituality in man. Victor worked day in and day out only to fashion his creature. One night in the secrecy of his apartment he got his work done. He gives life to the monster. The presence of Victor is very important as the story revolves around the character of victor. He poses as the symbolic representation of the exercise of the pros and cons of science.

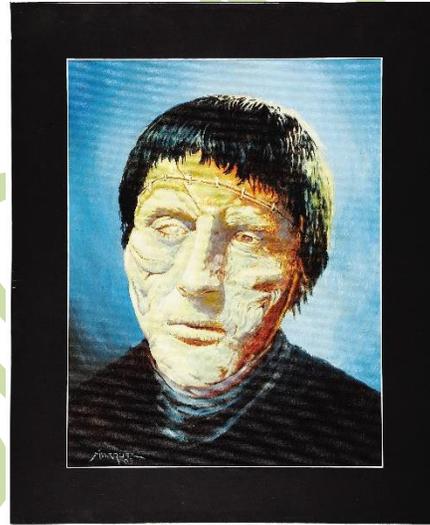
He is assumed to be the real monster in the story as the blemish lies in him. After the gigantic creation Victor should not have left him all alone in this world. He had the physique of a monster but his mind resembled that of a child. He was just like an orphan all alone to survive. He tried to mingle up with people but there again discarded for his notorious looks. He also had asked victor to create a similar female monster for him. Victor resented. As such circumstances compelled him to grow furious with the people and particularly with victor. He killed victor's brother, his wife and his acquaintances. Life seemed all dark and disgusting for the monster. A child grows under the shelter of his parents. He is reared, cuddled by his parents who make every effort to glorify his childhood. The monster was the child of Victor.

Just as he had every right to create and give life, it was also his moral duty and humanity to educate the monster so that he understands the terms and conditions of the world. The monster wanted an identity- a name to realize and stabilize his existence in the world. Destiny had something very cruel in its reserve for him. The monster was revengeful by now and Victor repented a lot for his immaturity and unprecedented decision of creating a monster. Victor now was accustomed to an abnormal life of pain and suffering. He remained under the constant fear of being deciphered at any moment by the monster. Life had taken a reverse turn not only for his creation but also for the creator. Neither could he claim respect and adoration for his marvellous creation nor could he give an identity to his product. His hard work and dedication to his study paid him in a hollow manner. Had he substantiated his knowledge with maturity, Victor would have been able to earn the best name as a responsible scientist of time. His life would have been fruitful and eloquent. This amply justifies the logic behind addressing Victor as the real monster in the story.

The Monster

Another important character who also plays the role of the protagonist as well is the Monster. The monster evolves as a creation of Victor's hazardous hard work, patience and perseverance. The monster is eight feet tall who is born in the laboratory. He is born out of dead body parts assembled together under various chemical reactions. After his birth, Victor is completely taken by surprise at his ugly looks and fails to address him as his creator. He immediately flees away from the place which leaves the monster all alone and without any identity. The monster has a troubled and painful life on earth. After his arrival in the human society and encounter with people, we find that the people are never ready to behave well with him. Initially he tries a lot to understand the conditions of the people; he even helps a girl from drowning. Instead of rewarding him or expressing their gratitude for the help, no one was sympathetic towards his lonely existence. He was bewildered and found himself lost in the world of man without a name. His was an existence which

was unknown. He was just like an alien to the earthly beings. No one bothered about him. His master who should have taken the place of his father leaves him isolated. The monster had also asked Victor to create a similar female creature for his company. But Victor turned a deaf ear to his pleadings. Initially Victor was very positive to his claim. Gradually he realized that the birth of another monster will ruin and demolish the human kingdom. He cannot destroy human society, robbing it of its morality by encouraging the process of monster procreation. The monster symbolizes the hazardous limitless and negative use of science. Science should encourage a promising growth of science and technology. It should also adhere to the norms of the society. Whereas Victor discarded the norms of society and the value of mankind. He forgot the place of religion and tried to strengthen a society lost in spirituality. And there lies the consequence. The monster was born with a baby's mind. Its mind was like a blank slate or *tabula rasa*. He just needed the scope to develop into a being. He was not given that chance. He faced the world of revenge and responded in the same way.



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(The Monster in the imagination of Artist)

Source: <https://comics.ha.com/itm/original-comic-art/paintings/don-marquez-frankenstein-painting-original-art-2003-/a/829-42378.s>

The novel reveals the story of a man's thirst for knowledge which has no substantial bearing with the practical world. He creates a monster to his utter dismay that is ugly and ferocious. The story over and above revolves around the monster.

Walton

Walton is the most important character if not the protagonist of the story. The presence and the narration of the story by him help the readers to get acquainted with the story of Victor and his monster. His letters to his sister in the form of a frame around the main narrative explains Victor's tragic story. He is the captain of

a north-bound ship that gets trapped between sheets of ice. He is left with the presence of a weak fellow, Victor who narrates his tragic tale and dies in Walton's hands. Walton shared a strong bond of affection and friendship with Victor. Secondly it was Walton who was vocal enough to narrate, analyse and criticize the actions of Victor. Like Victor he was also an explorer who liked to adventure and explore the untrodden lands of the globe. He liked to possess the unprocessed knowledge and territories of life.

9.4 MAJOR THEMES

Knowledge

The theme of knowledge is cultivated for multiple purposes. These include the effects of scientific advances, the demystification of nature, nature's revenge and social relation in the Romantic era. Victor's pursuit of knowledge proves dangerous as his act of creation results in the destruction. Had he proved himself as someone more matured and not acted against nature, his fate would not have been like this. Victor had challenged the voice of God or spirituality. He tried to challenge the natural process of procreation. He should have never tried to substitute motherhood or femininity. His scientific knowledge cherished in creating the monster whereas the consequence or the sense of realization is another knowledge that fed him with maturity and repentance. Victor now comes to understand the importance of love, family and friendship.

Identity

The story revolves around the theme of identity crisis. It is due to the lack of an identity that the monster becomes revengeful against his creator. After the creation of the monster, he wanted his master to establish his existence in the world, so to christen him and teach him about the world. The monster found pretty tough to come in terms with his existence for his survival and also with the people he met. He was deprived of motherly affection that he pined for from Victor. Nor he got the

opportunity to share any moment with Victor. Just like how Victor explored his knowledge to reassert his identity in the world of fame and knowledge, in the same way the monster also explored for his own identity and claimed a name to assert his existence in the human world.

Revenge

Revenge is highlighted as another theme in the novel. The monster was revengeful and killed everyone as he was rejected by the society for his looks. The society never took the pain to understand his ignorant heart at any cost. Evil was what he learnt from his existence there on earth. The evils and the darker side of the society had an evil bearing in his mind. He educated his mind with the bleak and devilish possessions of human nature. As such language of revenge was what he learnt from everyone.

Birth and creation

God created Adam and Eve and asked them to go and multiply. Victor, an ambitious scientist eliminated both God and woman. God symbolized morality, spirituality and the entire human race. Woman represented the natural scheme of procreation and birth. She also represented the power of love and motherhood associated with it therefore. A mother's love knows no bounds. It is the most selfless form of love and relation of time. Victor on the other hand was deprived of such love and care which transformed his life and impressions all through. Victor seemed to disrupt the normal family harmony and the responsibilities of a woman. He challenged the position of a woman and disgraced her existence in the society. There is every attempt made to violate the rules that govern nature.

The showcase of women in the novel is almost ambiguous. The birth or the scheme of procreation in the hands of Victor, a male is itself like concealing or subjugating the importance a woman she holds in society. No woman has been presented in a strong manner in the novel. The refusal to create a woman as a mate holds true to certain extent. According to some feminist critics, prevention of the process of procreation by women establishes the patriarchal society. Man can now

assert his patriarchy as he can also give birth! He does not need the assistance of a female. But this did not succeed under any circumstance. Mary Shelley did not have an inspiring motherhood as she had to accept a number of miscarriages. She has almost tried to skip the painful process of procreation. But the mechanized process of birth produces consequences like the monster. The monster symbolizes utter technological disgrace. It was constructed assembling body parts of dead bodies. Not a very healthy way of revival. It was emotionless as it was deprived of motherly love and care. A mother's love for her child is selfless and not conditioned. Had the monster been borne out of the natural process of procreation, it would have received all the care and love by his mother, no matter how it looked. The monster would have been able to view the world in a more positive and appealing manner. He would have learnt to condition himself with his fellow beings and realized the society in a healthy way. His master, Victor instead of embracing his creation, left him all alone to face the real world of complexities and confusions. The monster learnt the language of revenge.

Isolation

Isolation can also be considered as a crucial theme in the novel as the devastation is somehow related with the isolation of the monster. In one of the episodes it is observed that the monster requests his creator to create a female monster to serve the purpose of his companion. Victor did not do that as he thought the arrival of another monster would demolish the human world and eradicate the true values in man. Victor had no intention to mechanize the importance of man and the process of creation. The monster on the other hand, was revengeful towards his creator and killed his wife, Elizabeth on the wedding night. He was isolated and deprived of many virtues and motherly love and affection. He could never feel the presence of a support or understand the worth of human relations like friendship. He was only introduced to the language of revenge so far. Had he been accepted in a normal way by the common people, the monster no doubt would not have grown so ferocious and difficult to handle.

Celebration of Nature

Nature played a pivotal role in the novel and enveloped the concerns of the characters. Victor's description of the Orkneys is cold, barren, grey and rough. In contrast to that he recalls Switzerland as colourful, lively. Orkney was the setting where he attempted to mantle the various parts of dead bodies and construct the female monster. It was a place that represented horror, disgust and unhealthy environment. The very important and noteworthy point that we can gather from the story is that imagination has its due role to play. The story revolves around fantastic panoramic sights. The setting has been very dramatic and appealing to readers. It is for sure that the story promotes the invaluable contribution of science and a scientific temperament at the time but science can never replace or substitute Nature. Some critics were of the view that it challenged femininity and thereby the entire process of procreation or birth. The natural scheme of birth in the hands of female could not be challenged.

The story also promotes the importance of earthly values and sentiments. The monster in one of the instances speaks that initially it tried to befriend the people that it encountered but no one was ready to accept him along with his own master who was his guardian and father. He then saw his own reflection in water and realized his grotesque look. He saved the child from drowning but people failed to accept him. He also promised his master that after the construction of his mate he would fly off to some far away land but his promise was not respected. All these instances compelled him to be bitter. But for us it helped us to realize the value of affection, love and friendship. Had the monster been accepted with love and sensibility, he would not have turned cruel and uncontrollable. Mary Shelley here tries to glorify the importance of values which were getting lost by the time of Industrial revolution.

Autobiographical elements in the novel

The novel also highlights certain autobiographical elements in the story. Mary Shelley the author could never experience a happy motherhood during her lifetime as she had a number of miscarriages and still births. Or else some of them died very young. She could never feel the experience of being a mother and dotting her child all through. She was always the grieving mother mourning for her dead child. Another point in the novel that strikes our attention is that Mary Shelley's own mother had died due to child birth. She grew up as the motherless child pining for the selfless love. As such, critics have pointed out the link between the themes of creation of birth and death in the novel along with Mary Shelley's real life and pre occupation with pregnancy, labour, maternity and death.

9.5 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

The novel follows gothic tradition. There are three narrators—Walton, Victor and Monster. The novel opens with an epistolary form (told through the use of letters). Everything is told through Walton's letters to his sister. Victor tells him of his own life of misery and anxiety and relates the monster's tale to Walton. We are informed of the complete happenings only through Walton. Victor's narrative begins by telling of his childhood. He was born in Naples into a wealthy Geneva Family. Walton assumes the position of a mouth piece narrating the events with all transparency and bewilderment. Mary Shelley uses a multiple narrative technique in Frankenstein using the voice of multiple characters within the text. Tracing the originality we locate that the novel opens with four letters written by Walton to his sister. The letters are written in first person. At the end of letter 4, Walton agrees to hear the stranger's tale. The narration takes a crucial turn from chapter 11 -16. They are attributed to the creature. The story is given full play in the hands of Walton. While the reader understands the narrative voice to belong to the creature, it is

actually Walton telling Victor's tale of recollection. Readers are hearing three voices at a time. Walton's voice is three fold in narration. While the reader understands the narrative voice to belong to the creature, it is actually Walton telling Victor's recollection of the creature's tale. Readers are hearing three voices at a time. As chapter 17 opens, Victor reclaimed the narration (using Walton's recording of Victor's tale. Victor declared that his destiny was determined by fate. Understanding the austerity of the situation, Walton decides to take notes on the story. As such this sets the trend of Walton narrating Victor's story. At the end of the novel, Walton reclaims the narrative again through the letters to his sister.

LET US STOP AND THINK



A **frame story** is that piece of writing where the story opens and ends with the person telling the tale. A frame tale/frame narrative is a literary technique that sometimes serves as a companion piece to a story within a story where an introductory narrative is presented in part for setting the stage for a more focused second narrative or for a set of shorter stories. The frame stories lead readers from a story into other smaller one or several ones into it. *Frankenstein* is framed as a series of letters written by explorer Robert Walton to his sister, Margaret Saville in England. Victor dies after telling the story to Walton.

9.6 CONTROVERCIES RELATED TO FRANKENSTEIN

Since its publication nearly 200 years ago, Shelley's gothic novel has drawn critical attention of the readers as well critics. It is primarily because the story metaphorically seemed to present a cautionary tale of the conflicting ground of Nature vs. Science and thus, the dangers of creation and scientific experimentation,

a fear of the unintended social consequences of scientific discoveries and new technologies.

What accused the character of Victor Frankenstein is of 'playing God', creation is in the hands of God that cannot be undertaken by human beings. The novel says how creation of the monster was like God creating his first man, Adam and how after being successful in his scientific experiment, Victor feels like a God. But how can a human being create a life? Secular and religious, critic and journalist of her time alike have outright dismissed the term.

But is it what the novel wants to convey? Should the controversy in modern times be about creation of life? This leads to revisit some of the most useful scientific inventions of modern times like stem cells, genetically modified crops, recombinant DNA, geoengineering, and gene editing, IVF (In-vitro Fertilization) that brought smile to many couples incapable of having a child in natural process. Obviously, Mary Shelley is not questioning 'playing God' over such constructive scientific creations. Then why the controversy is for?

The novel tells us how Victor, after many failures, created something ghastly, 'hideous wretch'. He said, "Now that I had finished," "the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart." Mary Shelley takes some pains to show that the real problem is not what Victor Frankenstein made, but how he reacted to it. The response of the monster comes from the rejection he experiences from Victor Frankenstein and the rest of humanity. The creator refuses to admire his own creation. The creator is not sure about the outcome of his own experiment and once the result is out, he denies to take the responsibility of the destructive outcome his experiment may offer.

What Shelley intends is not an unwillingness of creating life or imitating God. She rather hints at neglecting the outcomes of experimentation and discovery and shedding of the responsibility of a creator. Dr. Frankenstein, disgusted by the

gruesomeness of his creation, cruelly abandons his invention, leaving him without the care and education to become a moral being. The lesson may be; scientific and technological inventions, without proper guidance and applicability are bound to be harmful and deadly for the humanity. The monster's murderous rampage is the result this lack of guidance.

The lesson for contemporary science, then, is not hinting at ceasing creation and discovery to enlarge current human knowledge. It's that scientists and technologists should not forget their role in the society by taking responsibility of social and ethical consequences their works. *Frankenstein* more often asks challenging questions about scientific inventions causing interventions in human life, addresses the unsavory implications of their technologies, but certainly does not suggest to abjure such endeavours.

9.7 GENDER ISSUES IN FRANKENSTEIN

One of the primary focusses of the critics on this novel was the gender issue the novel almost tacitly dealt with. A close reading of the novel clearly makes its reader feel the dominance of male characters and the docile presence of the female characters under the shadow male chauvinism. It is also very evident that female characters do not have independent role to play, rather they are created for the purpose of the reflection of male superiority. That all the three narrators are male, is a good evidence of it.

Is *Frankenstein* a feminist text or what makes it to discuss as a feminist text? There is a range of female characters starting from the soft spoken Elizabeth, Victor's love interest, to the strong-willed Safie, and above all, the near creation female Monster whose creation was stopped due to some reasons as explained by the novel which is subject to further scrutiny by the critics.

It is interesting to observe that female characters are deliberately portrayed as something weak, disposable, and subservient to men. Elizabeth is always used

playfully and for purpose of other characters intention. As we come to know how she was adopted by Victor's mother as a company to her boy and planned to make her his wife later on.

Elizabeth's primary role within the novel is to expose the way in which women are viewed and treated by men and society as a whole: submissive, docile, and present for the sole purpose of men's pleasure and convenience. The image of a child and mute animals is what reflected in the following description where she is given a non-human status--

“She was docile and good tempered, yet gay and playful as a summer's insect” and describing their interactions with comments like “I loved to tend on her, as I should on a favourite animal...” (Shelley 20).

Elizabeth dehumanization is further heightened by the fact that she was used as a prop in the Monster's foul play when seeking revenge against Victor.

The character that asked for most critical attention is the female monster that Victor had agreed to create as a companion for the Monster at his demand. But what Victor thinks of his creation even before its creation is very significant

She who, in all probability, was to become a thinking and reasoning animal, might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation. They might even hate each other; the creature who already lived loathed his own deformity, and might he not conceive a greater abhorrence for it when it came before his eyes in the female form? She also might turn with disgust from him to the superior beauty of man; she might quit him, and he be again alone, exasperated by the fresh provocation by being deserted by one of his own species. (118)

Most of the critics interpreted Victor anticipated fear as a fear of female supremacy which the novel's settings do not approve. A thinking female with a capacity of

independent thought and decision is a threat to male superior existence. A wise female counterpart is never desired. Victor is also afraid of the prospect of a woman who might be disobedient to men, unlike his experience with the female characters around him. The female monster would wish to procreate, a decision not always in the hands of women, is another matter of concern, not because that will result in “a race of devils [that] would be propagated upon the earth” (Shelley 119), but also because this notion of a headstrong, sexually liberated female contorts Victor’s obvious perception of women as docile and submissive.

Interestingly, Victor immediate decision to destroy the female monster and flowing the remaining in the water is suggestive of his assertion of male superiority, of control over females and dismantle the possibility of creating something that is not within the realm of an “ideal” woman. Victor, violently dismembered, literally torn limb from limb of the female monster, both literally and metaphorically demonstrate female predicament.

9.8 SUMMING UP

In this unit you have learned the major happenings of the novel that is presented through a detail summary of the story. With this, we have given you an elaborate study of the important characters that have contributed to the development of the action. *Frankenstein* is novel with manifold meanings and thematic concerns. It is very important to know various themes that intersect the plot, apart from reading it as a mere science fiction. The novel faced a lot of critical comments due to this fact which have been discussed in this unit as well.



9.9 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the various shifts in the narrative perspective. What is the effect of presenting different characters’ viewpoints?
2. Showcase the presentation of women in the novel
3. Discuss the birth of the monster in the backdrop of the Industrial Revolution.

4. Explain the narrative point of view in the novel.
5. Analyse the character of Victor in the novel.
6. Do you think the monster was right in his actions towards the society?
7. Who is the real monster in the story?



9.10 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

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PROVISIONAL

MODULE V: VIRGINIA WOOLF: *TO THE LIGHTHOUSE*

UNIT 10: INTRODUCTION TO VIRGINIA WOOLF

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.0 Introduction

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Virginia Woolf: Life and Works

10.2.1 Modern Fiction and Virginia Woolf

10.2.2 Impact of World War I and The Rising Amnesties of the Age

10.2.3 Changing attitude towards Sexuality

10.3 Stream of Consciousness and Virginia Woolf

10.4 Summing Up

10.5 Assessment Questions

10.6 References and Recommended Readings

10.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit and the consecutive ones will introduce you to another major women writer of modern fiction, Virginia Woolf and her most discussed novel *To The Lighthouse*. As a novelist Woolf belongs to the group of D H Lawrence, Dorothy Richardson and James Joyce who revolted against the old concepts of plot, character, theme, point of view and acted as innovators against a well-knit plot of the logical arrangement of events. Keeping line with the life as a chaotic, confusing and incomplete pattern, novelists like Virginia Woolf structured their novels as formless and without pattern.

In other words, Virginia Woolf can be summarised as a novelist for whom ‘there is no plot, no character, no tragedy, no comedy, no love interest or catastrophe’ in novel writing.

This unit will introduce you to few more aspects related to Virginia Woolf and her age which will enable you to understand her style and technique that we are going to discuss in the succeeding units.

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- familiarize yourself with the life and works of Virginia Woolf
- understand the social, political and intellectual background to the author
- know the changing and unconventional attitude towards life that finds manifestation in fiction writing
- learn Virginia Woolf's place in modern fiction as an exponent of psychological writing

10.2 VIRGINIA WOOLF: LIFE AND WORKS

Virginia Woolf was born on January 25, 1882 in London. She was a daughter to Sir Leslie Stephen, the late Victorian critic, philosopher, biographer and scholar. She grew up as a member of a large and talented family, educating herself in her father's library and meeting many eminent Victorians who strongly influenced her life. Her father had a powerful influence upon her who told her "to read what one liked because one liked it, never to pretend what one did not". According to him the only lesson in the art of writing was to write in the fewest possible words as clearly as possible exactly what one meant. After her father's death in 1904, she settled with her sister and two brothers in Bloomsbury, a district in London which later became associated with her and the group among whom she moved. The Bloomsbury Group included Lytton Strachey, the biographer who wrote "Eminent Victorians", J.M. Keynes, the noted economist, Roger Fry, the art critic and E.M. Forster, the novelist.

In 1912, she married Leonard Woolf, journalist, essayist and political thinker. Collectively they founded the Hogarth Press in 1917.

Virginia Woolf displayed her craftsmanship in some of her best novels like *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and *Between the Acts* (1941). Her aim in life was to capture “the fluidity of life itself... The semi-transparent envelope...” which she felt could be done when the character is also observed through the eyes of other characters. *Between the Acts* appeared in 1941 which was the last novel written by Virginia Woolf. During her life she had made a couple of attempts to commit suicide. The earliest attempt was made in 1904. When she could not conquer her fits of depression, she brought an end to her life on the 28th March, 1941 by drowning herself in the river Ouse near her home at Rodmell, Sussex. This seemed to be tremendously pathetic for such a writer of genius.

LET US STOP AND THINK



Hogarth Press was a press that was founded by the Bloomsbury Group in 1917. It was a press which published some of the most interesting literature of the modern times that included T.S. Eliot's poems as well as Woolf's own novels.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What *Mrs. Dalloway* is all about?

2. Which one is the last novel of Virginia Woolf?

3. What is the Bloomsbury Group?

4. who are the members of The Bloomsbury Group?

10.2.1 Modern Fiction and Virginia Woolf

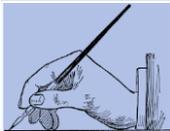
Before coming to the novel *To the Lighthouse*, let me get you introduced to the age of modern fiction. A brief introduction of the age will help you to generate an overall idea behind it.

The twentieth century is the age of English novel. It is an age which welcomed the versatility of forms, radical experimentation and play with language, style contributing thoroughly to the flourish of bourgeois novels. The twentieth century has been an age of ups and downs owing to the excessive tempo of changing human values. Novel was not only a dominant literary form in the Victorian Period to say, but also in the twentieth century because of the engagement of the abundant reading public. Yet there was a marked shift in the way the form was tackled to present the experience of modernity as well as challenge the Victorian norms. The entire European society underwent a drastic upheaval in the post Victorian age due to certain socio-economic

and religious transformations. Supplementing these were two World Wars, whose outcome was a new enthusiasm for values and identity. While coping with the transition of values and systems, the English novelists came up with innovative practices, sincerely adapted themselves to the new frames and also voiced against the disturbing social values of life. Thus, we have witnessed the emergence of some great novelists such as E. M. Forster, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, George Orwell, Graham Greene and William Golding. They reflected the trends of their respective periods through mosaic of themes, experimenting with newer techniques with a view to expressing the ideas relevantly. This was an age that was governed by new psychological inclinations and upliftment. New ideas, therefore, favoured the multiplicity of consciousness and sub consciousness in which past experiences were retained to determine the whole of personality. Marcel Proust in France explored ways of presenting the past as contained in the present so as to develop a new face of the character. The truth about a character is diagnosed as the sum total of his whole emotional experience. Considering Woolf's novels, we observe that there is a gradual development depth wise rather than lengthwise. Henry James had proved that human mind is all complex, describing the different states of mind. It was observed that the alienation of individual consciousness was the most important psychological fact in a world where every human being was a prisoner of his unique stream of consciousness. Our private past conditions our living present. This was seen in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. The difference between the private and public selves is also noticed in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). In *Ulysses*, we see the true state of Stephen's consciousness occurring side by side with his public conversation, focusing upon loneliness of man. Virginia Woolf begins where Joyce ends. She took the privilege of being a woman to deal with the evolution of female protagonists in the complex social surrounding. Her novels are therefore, better psychological explorations than that of Joyce. With the advent of modern psychological explorations, the conception of life had undergone a drastic change. The focus shifted from the conscious to the subconscious and then even to the unconscious. She believed that in writing of novels,

there should not be any traditional linear method of approach. The flow of thoughts was more important than anything else. This flow of thoughts is naturally not well knitted. They arise in fragments in our minds. Woolf states that form is not vital in a novel but then she had to give form and pattern to her novels in the unconventional way. The form in her novels enabled her to move from mind to mind without confusion, to prevent diversity of experience within a single design.

Woolf's writing bears the mark of her literary pedigree as well as her struggle to explore meaning of her own isolated existence. Written in a poised and elegant style, her work justifies the structure of human life from the nature of relationship to the experience of time. Her writing addresses issues relevant to her contemporary period. Her work is a celebration of the Bloomsbury values of aestheticism, feminism and independence. She is always credited of being unique in the sense that she tried to give a language to the often unacknowledged thoughts in the mind. Woolf was not only bold as a writer but also quite expressive as a woman. This personality on the part of Woolf was reflected in many of her writings when we find her voicing against submission of woman. She felt every woman should build her own identity. After getting a background on the age and the writer, let us try to find out the concrete reasons that influenced the age.

	CHECK YOUR PROGRESS
1. Jot down few characteristics of modern fiction.	
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2. Name few major novelists of modern fiction.

10.2.2 Impact of World War 1 and the rising amnesties of the age

As we know that war puts all traditional values into the melting pot, it was with the First World War, that all amount of grievances were put against all forms of authority. Lord Action said, “Power corrupts; Absolute power corrupts absolutely.” A general scepticism became the order of the day. At the personal level, parental authority got challenged; children revolted against parental orders and were at their free will to go. At a society level, there was a great deal of questioning about the role of state and other institutions sponsored by state patronage. A sense of gloom was hovering in the sky. Along with the air of doubt and indecision were economic depression, mass unemployment, acute shortages and overpopulation that ate into the scarce resources. The traditional and organized sort of life got challenged in the hands of time. Nothing was stable. People were not ready to observe their life with rose coloured spectacles.

10.2.3 Changing attitude towards Sexuality

Late nineteenth century onwards we see a changing attitude towards sexuality. Overall changes in all dimensions had a profound impact on moral attitudes, particularly in matters of sex. Freud had shown that repressed sex instincts were the root causes of much neurosis and other symptoms of abnormality. Study of

the subconscious became a major theme of modern literature. More than intellect, feeling and intuition became the guiding principle of human behaviour. The French writer, Anais Nin in her chapter: “Proceed from the Dream Outward” in *The Novel of the Future* said, “For the writer the conscious mind may be the great inhibitor, the great censor. The conscious mind is created by social mores, education environment, family pressures, and conventions. For creativity it is necessary to work with the unconscious which accumulates pure experience, reactions, impressions, intuitions, images, memories--- an unconscious mind freed from the negative effect of societal evaluations. The conscious mind can only act later as critic, selector, and discarder.”

So, as we read the novel, using “stream of consciousness”, there are two words we need to keep in mind: ‘livingness’ and ‘flow’.

While dealing with the changing attitude towards sex, we should know a little about “Oedipus complex” that had a profound impact on private and family relationships. In psychoanalytical theory, it implies the normal emotional crisis brought about an early stage of psychosexual development by the sexual impulses of a boy towards his mother and jealousy of his father. The resultant guilt feelings precipitate the development of the *superego*. Its female counterpart is the Electra complex. Both these concepts are worked into the modern novels which will help us to recognize its influence in shaping the novel.

10.3 STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND VIRGINIA WOOLF

We have already discussed Stream of Consciousness in relation to William Faulkner and D H Lawrence in our previous units. Therefore, we are not going to elaborate the definition and technique in this unit. We suggest the learners to go back to the MEG-303 for details. Let us refresh a little.

The phrase was first used by William James in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890) to describe the continuous flow of perceptions, thoughts and feelings. It explains long passages of introspection in which the narrator tries to record what goes in his mind. It became the way of analysing human psyche accurately and

realistically. The novelist was now more interested in drawing out the inner reality and creates something original and innovative. James Joyce was a pioneer in using the technique in his novels of which the best known are *Ulysses* and *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Freud paved the way for the study of psychology as an important genre in the study of literature. He emphasized the power of unconscious as an important factor influencing human lives. Opinions became the rational translations of emotional needs. Human beings were not as they are mechanically made out to be. They are consciously guided by the unconscious. Jung and Henry Bergson carried out Freud's studies forward. As a result, a new dimension was added to examine human behaviour. Another phrase, "interior monologue" was coined to describe the inner movement of consciousness in the mind of the character. Glaring example is the opening lines of *Mrs Dalloway*. By using these two literary devices, the author represents the flux of a character's thoughts, impressions and emotions without any logical sequence.

As already said, stream of consciousness emerges as an effective narrative technique due to the modern novelists' attempt to present reality in terms of the characters' consciousness and psychological movement. The psychological problem is related to the nature of consciousness and its relation to time. Time in this respect is not linear as to think of consciousness as moving in a straight chronological line from one point to the next is unrealistic. Thus, story telling or rather the presentation of the events is non-linear. Memory plays an important role in unfolding the consciousness of a character. Interior monologue, soliloquy etc are used to unfold the complex world of human mind. Images and symbols are devices that effectively heightens the novelist's intention.

Virginia Woolf believes that individual's consciousness in the any present situation is affected by his past experiences. It follows that everyone is in some sense a prisoner of his own past. It therefore means that 'reality' itself is a matter of personal impression rather than generalized codification. It is also impossible to give

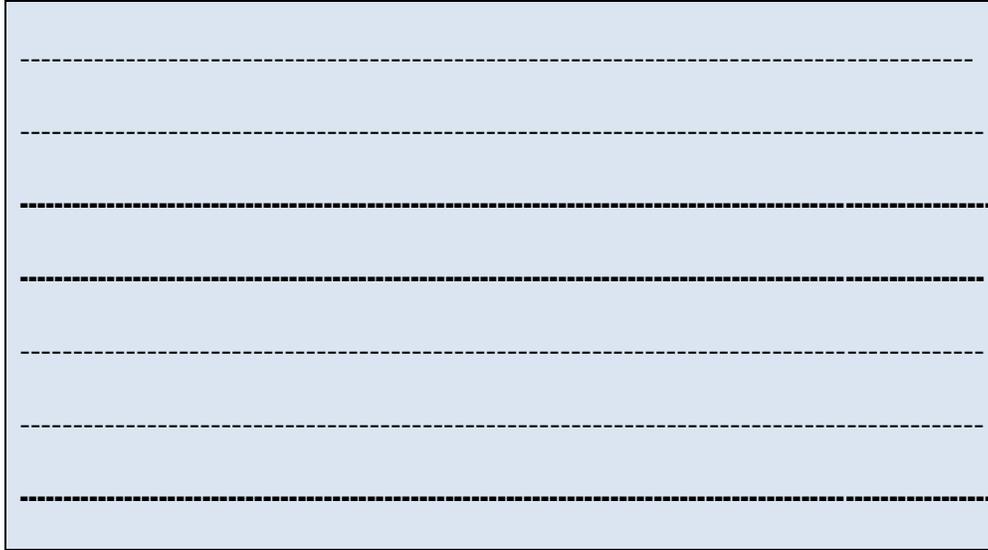
a psychologically accurate account of what a man is at any given moment, either by static description of his character, or by describing a group of chronologically arranged reactions to a series of circumstances. She is interested in those aspects of consciousness which are essentially dynamic rather than static in nature and are independent of the given moment. Time may be squeezed to a moment or stretched to eternity and thus, the tyranny of the time denounced. But by probing deep into the mind and its fluent movements the author is able to give us a complete picture of the character, both historically and psychologically.

For example, Virginia Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway*, by relating the story of one day in the life of a middle aged woman, and following her ‘stream of consciousness’ up and down in the past and the present, has not only given complete picture of Mrs. Dalloway’s character, but also she has made the reader feel by the end of the book that he knows not only what Mrs. Dalloway is, and has been; but what she might have been, all the unfulfilled possibilities in her character.

To the Lighthouse again squeezes and stretches time as per requirement, but very usefully to explore the thought and lingering of the characters. We see the women’s worldview as well as men’s fear, insecurity, for himself and his family. Thus, stream of consciousness in this novel also helps in scrutinising men’s and women’s thought process. More details of the use of this technique will come in the succeeding units.

	CHECK YOUR PROGRESS
1. Who and where did the phrase Stream of Consciousness first use?	

2. Mention some important ingredients of stream of consciousness technique.	



10.4 SUMMING UP

In this unit we have discussed not only about Virginia Woolf's major works, but also her position in period she belongs to. Another trait of the discussion was the changing attitude of the age towards life and its reality, understanding of sex and human relationship which greatly impacted novel writings of the period. Stream of consciousness as the most popular form of narrative technique to explore human mind as a major concern of analysis of this unit.

Hope you have acquired a comprehensive idea about the author of *To the Lighthouse* and her unique style of narration and depiction of characters by using this style. This will certainly prepare you for the next unit in which we are going to give a detail of the storyline and more of the critical aspects in relation to the novel .



10.5 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Write a short note on modern fiction discussing the issues that led to its birth. Also try to cite references from the novel, *To the Lighthouse*, prescribed in your syllabus.

2. Give analysis of the stream of consciousness as a technique used by other modern novelists.



10.6 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

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UNIT 11: READING *TO THE LIGHTHOUSE*

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 11.0 Introduction
- 11.1 Learning Objectives
- 11.2 Reading *To the Lighthouse*
- 11.3 Analysis of the major characters
- 11.4 Summing Up
- 11.5 Assessment Questions
- 11.6 References and Recommended Readings

11.0 INTRODUCTION

To the Lighthouse was published in 1927, two years after *Mrs Dalloway* was written. It is credited to be Woolf's *magnum opus* amidst novels which helped her carve a niche in the history of modern fiction. *To the Lighthouse* is a complex work of art where the stream of consciousness technique was aptly applied to explore the inner thoughts and consciousness of the characters.

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to learn

- the detail summary of the novel
- major characters that contribute to the action of *To the Lighthouse*

11.2 READING THE NOVEL *TO THE LIGHTHOUSE*

To the Lighthouse is set in the island of Skye in the Hebrides which lie on the west coast of Scotland. The Ramsays around whom the story revolves have a summer

home and they have come here with their eight children and several guests. The islands is isolated, the two or three main characters are forced to look within themselves which enable her to present well rounded characters. The story chiefly concerns a woman, Mrs Ramsay, who is the protagonist in the novel. The other important characters are Mr Ramsay, her husband and Lily Briscoe, an artist who is the friend of the Ramsays. The Ramsays have eight children-- four sons and four daughters. The sons are Andrew, Jasper, Roger and James; and the daughters are Prue, Nancy, Rose and Cam. We also have an elderly botanist, Mr William Bankes who happens to be a friend to Lily Briscoe. Mr Augustus Carmichael, an old widower without any children, Mr Charles Tansley, a promising young scholar who aims to be a university professor, Mr Paul Rayley, a fine looking young man without much intellect and Miss Minta Doyle, a young girl, who is the daughter of a member of Parliament. The novel also bears a strong element of autobiography which more or less pervades in the different dimensions of the novel. Interestingly, two different ideas are explained by James' behaviour with the lapse of years. We have seen that James' behaviour and approach towards life undergoes a serious turn which he had attained with age. The emotional child of six has now grown into a rational young boy of sixteen. Though lost in the past, he is well conscious of the present. He steers the boat very skilfully since the boat is passing through a dangerous phase where three persons were drowned. Mr Ramsay looks at it and after some calculations tells him, "well done". His father's impressive comment is enough to satisfy James. The long cherished misunderstanding between the two is now replaced by feelings of harmony and affection. So long Mrs Ramsay was alive, union between the father and the son was impossible. As such no strong bond could be expected between James and Mr Ramsay. After her demise, James got a chance to explore the psychology of Mr Ramsay and establish a final union. It is observed that the hindrance to relationship is Mrs Ramsay. James as a child was governed by the "pleasure principle" but as he grew in years, he confronted with the inevitable truth of life. Initially he could not understand his father but with age he gained a maturity that

helped him to understand his father in the right context and perspective. Death gives birth to knowledge and exploration. *To the Lighthouse* is a complex work of art which gives birth to certain philosophies, perceptions and understandings often neglected or not recorded by a conscious mind.

A capsule of information has been provided for the readers so that they get a grasp of the ultimate implications. As readers it is always important for them to know the subjective implications of Woolf's novels. The literary techniques used here bear a challenge to the traditional approach of a novel. The story is divided into three parts: The Window; Time Passes; The Lighthouse.

First part: *The Window*

Mr and Mrs Ramsay and her eight children, along with guests are on a holiday in the island of Skye, in the Hebrides by the west coast of Scotland. They have their own house. When the novel opens, James the youngest of the eight children is sitting with his mother by the window which overlooks the lawn and the sea at a distance. For some time now, James had been looking forward to visit the lighthouse, visible from the island of Skye. Mrs Ramsay proposes that if the weather happens to be fine, James would be taken to visit the lighthouse. "But" said his father, stopping in front of the drawing room window, "it won't be fine." Young James is furious. Had there been an axe ready, he would have gashed a hole in his father, Mr Ramsay's breast and killed him. Such was the extreme of emotion that Mr Ramsay excited in his children's breasts by his mere presence, standing lean as a knife and narrow as the blade. Mr Ramsay could never accept untruth. He never tampered with a fact. He was an intellectual man. Here Virginia Woolf had tried to show us the animosity between James and his father, in fact with all his children. Mr Ramsay's opinion about the weather is supported by Charles Tansely who is his student. Tansely is writing a thesis on "the influence of somebody on somebody." Children dislike him, call him an atheist and laugh behind his back. Only Mrs Ramsay is sympathetic to him and tries to make him comfortable. Mrs Ramsay is worried that her children were so critical at such a young age and that they have deep prejudices and differences of

opinion. After the meals, Mrs Ramsay asked Tansely to accompany her to the market. She also asked Mr Carmichael whether he needed anything from the town. He said that he did not. Mr Carmichael had made a mess of life. He was a frustrated man who took no interest in life and spent his day lounging around on the lawn.

Second part: *Time Passes*

The second part begins in a very unconventional way. Here we find Mr Banks, Andrew, Prue, Lily discussing upon the future ceaselessly, referring to Walter Scott. They all retire for the night excepting Mr Carmichael who keeps up late reading Virgil. The opening section, the “darkness” is a metaphor for inner life. Everyone is lost in this darkness of life except Mr Carmichael who keeps the candle burning longer than the others. The search for inner reality is the basic theme which will have to go through both joys and sorrows, through night and day. The nights are now full of destruction. The trees plunge and bend; the leaves fly here and there until the lawn is plastered with them. Mr Ramsay fumbles his hand, one dark morning, stretched his arms out but Mrs Ramsay having died, suddenly the night before, his arms though stretched out, remain empty. It is a metaphor for the way life is lived: ups and downs, the unpredictability of what will happen next. Part II, as the title goes, *Time passes*, it recalls the time span of ten years between the first and second parts. The second part is actually a trip down the memory lane. Past events get recalled when marriages, births and deaths are recalled and recorded. Night comes and the guests have retired for the night. Ten years of life are recalled. Eventually this section is a hint to the passing of time and indicates the hopelessness and meaninglessness of life. Woolf here highlights the eternal forces at work in opposition to human society as time and nature break up the community and begins to erode the house. The chapter here tries to unfold the inevitable truths of life such as death.

Third part: *The Lighthouse*

Coming to the last part of the novel, we find that as morning dawns, the guest returns to the summer house along with their basket of memories. James starts off for

the lighthouse, along with his sister Cam and his father, while Lily Briscoe, sets up her easel where it must have stood ten years ago and completes her painting realizing her vision just as James reaches the lighthouse and realizes his dreams. The last part concentrates upon Lily Briscoe. She sits alone among the cups at the long table. She felt isolated among people, amidst crowd. The house, the place, the morning, all seemed strange to her. She felt no relations existing. Everything looked unreal, chaotic and aimless. "It's not in the cupboard; it's on the landing," someone cried. She felt as if the link that bound things together had been cut. She looked at her empty coffee cup. Mrs Ramsay's dead; Andrew killed; Prue dead too; All the incidents that take place on the way To the Lighthouse create vibes in Lily Briscoe's mind. Lily Briscoe felt that Mrs Ramsay had not been treated well in all her life by Mr Ramsay though he received all the sympathy from her. She was too submissive which she should not have been. Lily realized that painting was the only form of intellectual and artistic outlet by which one can compensate for in a world of chaos and uncertainty. Mr Ramsay was now a broken man. Lily felt as if Mrs Ramsay was inspiring her to give all sympathy that he pined for.

11.3 ANALYSIS OF THE MAJOR CHARACTERS

Being a novel dealing with the psychological process of its characters, the behaviour and the reaction of these characters become indispensable in the novel. It can be said that *To the Lighthouse* is more a character oriented than action oriented novel. Because the whole worldview in the novel's context is presented through the consciousness of a character's reaction to it. A character's consciousness also helps in unfolding other characters revolving around him or her.

Mrs Ramsay

Mrs Ramsay is a unifying presence in the novel. She is the protagonist in her presence as well as her absence during various course of the novel. The story revolves around her. She is already fifty when the novel opens and the mother of eight

children. We can observe her versatility when she promotes herself as a loving mother; a dutiful and caring wife. She is also an excellent hostess who strives to make all her guests feel at home. We find Mrs Ramsay always catering to the needs of her children and husband. She has no time for herself. She is the storehouse of energy and vitality and emerges as a statue of kindness and tolerance. Her primary goal is to preserve her youngest son, James' sense of hope and wonder surrounding the lighthouse. Her presence in the novel is very significant in the sense that all the other characters receive inspiration and nourishment for their mental faculties. Her maternal instincts become evident when she says that she would always like the idea of having a baby and she is happiest when she is carrying a baby in her arms. In spite of distancing herself from intellectuality, she exhibits a more stable and patient attitude than her husband. She always encourages her husband's intellectual and philosophical ideas with much delicacy. Her sympathetic nature has led her to become a social worker. She pays visit to the poor and the destitute. There was a sense of realization within Mrs Ramsay that unknowingly she carved a niche in the society due to her vibrant physical beauty. Marriage has got to play a very important role according to Mrs Ramsay. Her presence was felt even after her death in the form of a vision that tries to bring harmony amongst people. In a world noted by the ravages of time there is no greater gift than unity. Lily and other characters find themselves grasping for this unity after Mrs Ramsay's death.

Mr Ramsay

He is a professor in philosophy and an author of repute. He is the head of the Ramsay family around which the story revolves. He is an egoist. He tries to assert his authority and masculinity everywhere. He loved his wife immensely though he never showed it when she was alive. Woolf somewhere in the novel describes him as "lean as a knife, narrow as the blade of one," which conjures both his physical presence and implies the sharpness of his mind. He processed his life based on many calculations and this quality got reflected in his son, James. Mr Ramsay was more of an intellectual and less a man of the society. He could not achieve many things in his

life that he aspired for. He was a man with a practical bent of mind. Amidst all these practicalities he felt that life meant something more. Life is not so organized always.

Lily Briscoe

Lily Briscoe is a passionate artist. She undergoes a drastic transformation over the course of the novel evolving from a woman who can't make sense of the shapes and colours that she tried to reproduce into an artist, who achieves her vision and overcomes the anxieties that have kept her from it. She also represents a sense of completeness as a whole in her vision of life and through her painting. Lily looks at her canvas, draws a line in the centre and completes the picture that had begun ten years ago. Lily's painting symbolizes reconciliation of antagonistic and disruptive forces. The novel should have ended with the landing at the lighthouse but Woolf volunteers to add one more section to show the relation between art and life through Lily's painting. Lily's painting is symbolic of the relationship of art and life. Art survives when life ends. Lily felt that art gives an expression to life.

James

He is the youngest child in the family and also the most sensitive one. He was gripped by a love for his mother that is overpowering, complete and hatred for his father. He had a long cherished desire to go To the Lighthouse. He shared his interest with his mother. Though his mother was encouraging towards him and showed her willingness but his father objected to his so called childish desire. James got angry and had there been a knife with him, he would have gashed a hole in his father's chest. That was the extremity of anger within him. In due course of time, he starts identifying himself in the footsteps of his father. When he sails to the Lighthouse, accompanied by his father, James is withdrawn, moody and easily offended. His need to be admired as noted by Cam, his sister, reflects his father's dying need for sympathy and love. The James of six years undergoes a drastic change within a time span of ten years and develops into a more sincere and rational being.

Leaving aside the major characters, the minor characters also have their respective roles to play. The minor characters include the Ramsay children, Paul

Rayley, Minta Doyle, Mr Charles Tansley, Mr William Bankes and Mr Augustus Carmichael. The role played by every minor character is important to promote the major characters.

Mr Tansley

Mr Tansley is a scholar engaged in writing a dissertation and having an ambition to become a reader and then a professor at a university. He hails from a poor family but he does not feel ashamed of this fact. Mr Tansley feels happy in Mrs Ramsay's company. Lily Briscoe has a mixed feeling towards Tansley. She wants to please him but she cannot forget his disagreeable remark that women cannot paint and write.

Mr Bankes

He is a dedicated scientist. His field of study and research is Botany. He is a widower now. Mr Bankes forms a stable relationship with Lily Briscoe though he does not marry her. The relationship is based on intellectuality of thought. They mainly exchange ideas on art, people and foreign travel. His friendship with Mr Ramsay breaks at one point of the novel. He still admires his intellectuality but also calls him a "a bit of a hypocrite".

11.4 SUMMING UP

In this unit an elaborate synopsis of the novel *To the Lighthouse* is presented before you. This will give you a fair idea of the whatabouts of the novel. To make it clearer, a detail analysis of the characters is also given here. After all these, a reading of the text will be certainly much easier for you which will enable you to see each and every aspect of the novel critically and analytically. This will also help you to understand the critical assessment of the text's issues we are going to discuss in the next unit.



11.5 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. What makes the section “Time Passes” so different from the rest of the novel?
2. Write a short note on Mrs. Ramsay.
3. Give a character sketch of Mr Ramsay.
4. How is James important in the novel?
5. How can you associate the character of Lily Briscoe with art in the novel?
6. How is Lily’s presence as much important in the novel as the presence of other characters? Justify it
7. Give the significance of the last part, *To the lighthouse*.
8. How far is it important to introduce the minor characters? Justify their position.



11.5 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

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UNIT 12: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF *TO THE LIGHTHOUSE*

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 12.0 Introduction
- 12.1 Learning Objectives
- 12.2 Critical analysis of the themes
- 12.3 Major narrative technique: Stream of Consciousness
- 12.4 Symbolism in *To the Lighthouse*
- 12.5 Summing Up
- 12.6 Assessment Questions
- 12.7 References and Recommended Readings

12.0 INTRODUCTION

To the Lighthouse is an unconventional novel in the sense that it aims to depict the reality through human consciousness, by travelling in the minds of its characters and then unfolding truths that lie beneath it. How does the author achieve all these is a major concern for the critics of Virginia Woolf. In this unit we are going to discuss all these in relation to the narrative technique and symbolism used by the novelist to reject objective realism and attain the impressionistic representation of life. Characters play a major part in the process as we see through them, feel with them. This unit will emphasize all these intricate issues that attract the readers so long.

12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to

- understand the narrative technique of the novel presented by means of stream of consciousness, interior monologue, soliloquy etc.
- learn the importance of the passage of time as a major concept in the novel.

- know the symbols that effectively works as important device in the thought process of the characters

12.2 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE THEMES

Coming to themes at a simple level, we see that some of the dominating themes are love, married life and family. At a deeper level, it handles the relationship of personality, death and time. So, we need not restrict ourselves as far as interpretations are concerned. The novel also illuminates a potent contrast between the rational and logical approach against the emotional and intuitive approach towards problems of life. It also pin points the relation of art and life.

Concept of Time

Jeff Wallace in *Beginning Modernism* says in modernist literature, “Time comes to be conceived as a complex phenomenon composed of different temporalities or speeds, and in which past, present and future interpenetrate” (Wallace, 136) . This truly interprets James Joyce’s *Ulysses* which emphasises the close connection between time and matter. Joyce and also Virginia Woolf used stream of consciousness as major narrative technique in their fictions which give emphasis more to the time lived in terms of thought and impressions than the clock time of everyday life.

To the Lighthouse explores time at every scale, tracking the intricate thoughts and impressions within a single lived moment and also leading readers to regard the concept of time in terms of thoughts rather than how it works in the external world. The most important aspect of the novel is the exploration of every moment when people live their lives not in terms of conventional concept of past, present and future, rather *in* time or just in their own minds. Thus, there is two types of time in the novel, one is the ‘clock time’ or ‘real time’ while the other is the time characters live in their thought. More than the first type, the second type that blurs the concept of past, present and future, is more important to serve the narrative purpose of the novelists.

As we have already mentioned, the novelist is more interested to probe deep into the consciousness of the characters than what they actually do in this physical world.

Among the three sections of the novel, *The Window* and *The Lighthouse*, that is, Part 1 and Part 2 deals with the “clock time,” or ‘real time’ as the sections concentrate on physical activities more or less. The time period depicted in the sections almost substantiates the action described. During this period of time reader is allowed to observe each character, their personality and their perspectives in immense details. This physical time is used for everyday and minute activities of the characters to prepare us for the unique specificity of each moment. The Part 2 called *Time Passing* spans a whole decade in just a few pages. This part is characterised by events and in matter of time lacks the particularity and complexity of individual experiences. Significantly, Mrs. Ramsay’s, Prue’s, and Andrew’s deaths, and the first World War, all are compressed in few pages.

Except for the children, most of the other characters in the novel are stuck with ‘time’ in some way or another. But it also important to observe that the concept of time for these characters is primarily individual, independent and flexible experience. Among them Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe are particularly mindful of the importance of each moment. Mrs. Ramsay lives in ‘real time’ and obsessed with the quick transformation of present to past. She wants to stop the clock for her children as time will make them grow and suffer, “never wanted James to grow a day older or Cam either” [6]. This is the reason why This provides another explanation as to why Mrs. Ramsay pursues entities in the external world and chooses to position herself in the present. Contrary to that Lily goes back and forth to the past to find meaning of the present. Her incomplete painting gets a structure when in the future she goes back to live with the memory of Mrs Ramsay. Mr Ramsay’s fixation is with the future. He is equally aware of the ephemeral quality of time like that of Mrs Ramsay, but his thoughts roam in the future. In the present he is preoccupied with the future, in the same way Mrs Ramsay is, but in their own individual concepts.

In *To the Lighthouse*, “the notion of time as a linear and diachronic entity of homogenous and measureable quality, as instanced by clock and calendar time, comes under severe scrutiny”(Wallace, 136) Woolf’s idea that time is worthless unless it has a sense of commemoration and personal importance. Lily being able to complete her painting with which she used to fight a lot in the beginning is of great significance. It is Lily’s memories, specially of Mrs Ramsay, that brings her vision into focus and she accomplishes her final artistic dream.

To the Lighthouse clearly indicates the concept that a lifetime is not measured by its length but is given meaning by the experiences and achievements of its possessor, how meaningfully the moments are lived. In that sense the novel speaks of the inadequacy of ‘clock time’ The symbolic division of the sections signify that life is not felt in an orderly way, minute by minute. If a moment can be dragged on an eternity, decades can be squeezed to a moment’s consciousness.

LET US STOP AND THINK

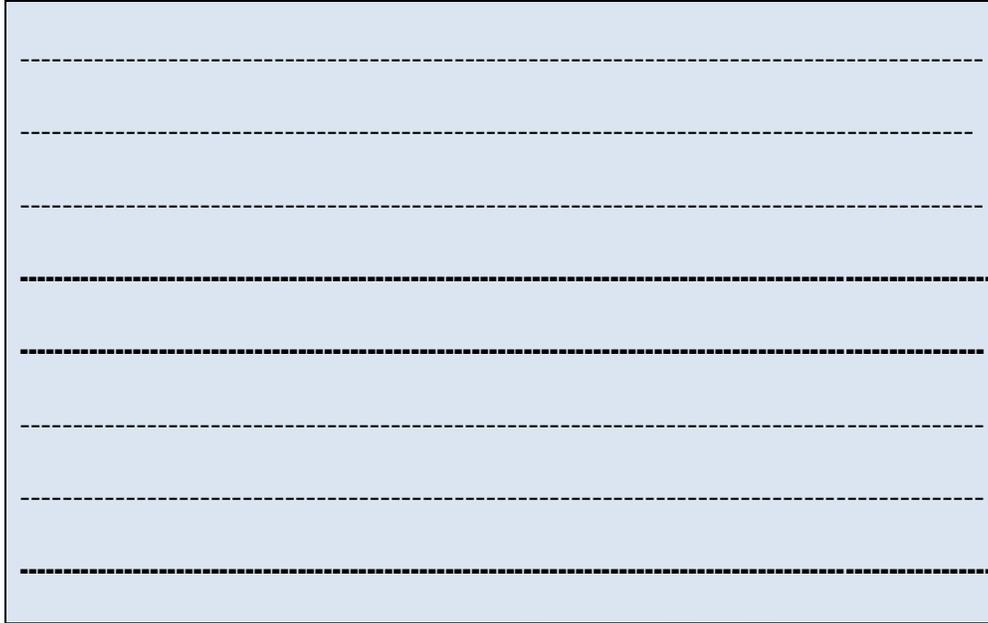


Henri Bergson (1859-1941) is the son of a Polish Jewish musician and an English mother. He studied in France. He is known for his work *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the data of consciousness* (1910). In this work, Bergson makes a distinction between duration or time as experienced, wholly fluid and continuous and the mechanized clock time of scientific thinking which we misrepresent. For Bergson, the real world is a flux, actually experienced; the mechanical world described by science is a fiction. We can rather say that to understand the “stream of consciousness” in Virginia Woolf’s novels, one needs a reading of Bergson’s main ideas.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. How do the three sections of the novel suggestively signify the passage of time?



Transitory aspects of life and work

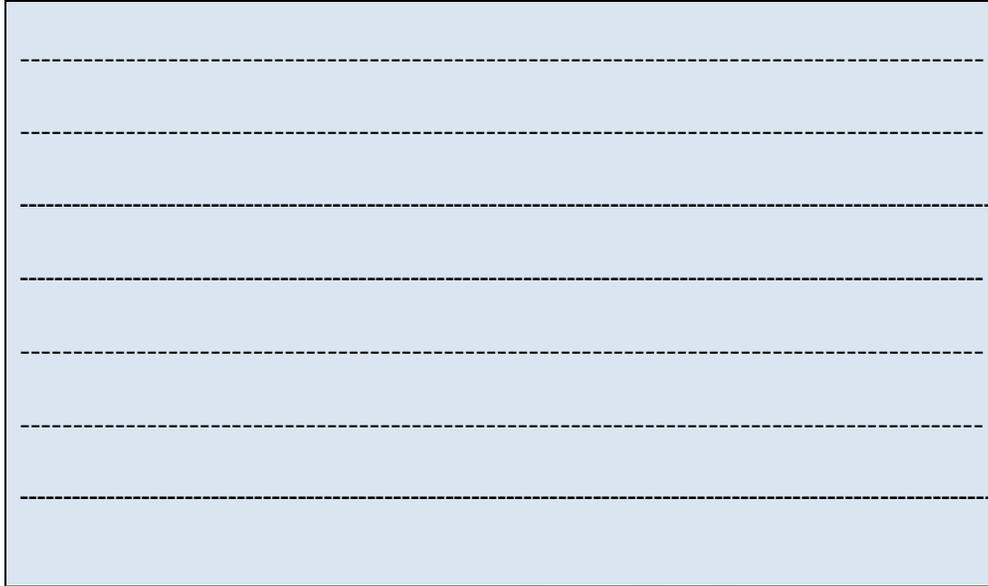
To the Lighthouse in many ways upholds the idea of transitoriness of time as well as life. Though the approach towards life is completely different for both Mr and Mrs. Ramsay, their common realization is that the world around them is not permanent. Nothing lasts forever. That is why Mrs. Ramsay want to live in the present and each moment of it. Her mind is consciousness is filled with the need to make her life memorable. She tries to make every moment special and precious though she lags behind Mr Ramsay's intellectuality. Her husband on the other hand, with all amount of intellectuality tries to live every moment, spread knowledge and wisdom but never could organize his abilities. Their love, fun everything perishes with time and life seems utter useless after a number of deaths in the family. Lily Briscoe, in the later part of the novel mostly lives in the past. Thus, ephemerality of life is closely related to memory to give it a permanency. So, the novel, as well as the characters linger in the memory that remains after the experience. Temporality is captured by the permanency of memory. Linear memory of 'Time Passing', circular memory of Mrs. Ramsay constantly going back and forth to her childhood and her children's childhood and maturity. For her the ephemerality is overcome by future

memories, and feeling life to be a cycle of marriage and childbearing as life passed on from generation to generation. There is the living memory of Mrs. McNab and Lily as their recollected images of Mrs. Ramsay appear visible on the surface of the present world.

Art as a means of preservation

Amidst a world of chaos and disunity, when people hanker after peace and tranquility, Mr and Mrs. Ramsay employ different strategies to make life meaningful and pleasant. Mrs. Ramsay with her admirably pleasing behaviour and Mr Ramsay with his intellectuality could never preserve their experiences. Only Lily Briscoe finds a way out to do so through her painting. Lily begins her portrait of Mrs. Ramsay at the beginning of the novel, when Woolf notes the scope of the project.

The whole novel highlights a journey down the memory lane of the major characters. The novel is divided into three parts and each part is eloquent enough to reflect the themes in the novel. The first part, *the window* actually gives a permit to the readers to peep into the lifestyle and sensibility of the characters. We get to know what is contained therein within the novel. We are carried to the various compartments where each character lives in his own world, tries to create some space of his own. The second part, *time passes*, indicates the long span of ten years which is of paramount importance in the novel for the readers. The second part surely gives a chance to the confused mind of the reader to understand that with age, James, the youngest son, builds a personality never before expected by any family member. He was the most adorable child to Mrs. Ramsay. As such she often encouraged his supposed fleeting thoughts. Mr Ramsay who was cross with his youngest son, James over the issue of going To the Lighthouse, calms down and James also undergoes a change with the passing phase of time. The events of one single afternoon constitute over half a book while the events of the following ten years are compressed into a few pages. Coming to the third part or the last part, *the lighthouse*, it centres on the character, Lily Briscoe. It is through her that as readers, we are made to feel the absence of Mrs Ramsay. This whole section and all the little incidents that take place



12.3 MAJOR NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE: STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

As we have already discussed that Woolf's technique is completely unconventional in her novels which keep pace with the pace of human mind which linear. Authors found the stream-of-consciousness technique very befitting to delineate the consciousness thought of their characters.

In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf completely denies the scope of using the structure of external events to depict the condition of her characters. Rather she uses a series of selected moments of consciousness and impressions. Thus, action is replaced by the reaction or response of the characters to a certain event. Consequently, little space remained for the narrator, which we generally see in the conventional novels, to comment on a particular event. The most befitting techniques used by the author to meet this are the employment of interior monologue and free association.

Robert Humphrey, defines interior monologue as a "technique used in fiction for representing the psychic content and processes of character, partly or

entirely unuttered, just as these processes exist at various levels of conscious control before they are formulated for deliberate speech”.

Following example of indirect interior monologue from *To the Lighthouse* will make the purpose of interior monologue clear to you:

"He was incapable of untruth, never tampered with a fact; never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being, least of all of his own children, who sprang from his loins, should be aware from his childhood that life is difficult; facts uncompromising; and the passage to that fabled land where our brightest hopes are extinguished, our frail barks founder in darkness (here Mr. Ramsay would straighten his back and narrow his little blue eyes upon the horizon) one needs above all, courage, truth, and the power to ensure". (*Lighthouse*,4)

In an interior monologue generally the author's direct involvement is missing. But in *The lighthouse* the reader is made to enter into the character's mind or consciousness through the author. The monologue also gives an opportunity to read, feel and analysis freely the inner most feelings of the character, not only by the reader but also different persons associated with the character through the medium of feeling. As we see in the above excerpt. Mr Ramsay's thoughts are practical, unpolluted by added sweetness to reality. But the children always find Mr. Ramsay a spoilsport though he is often correct in his thoughts and predictions. They also consider him as a man who hates their mother though it is not always like that. His son James contemplation of his father's death due to the above feeling again leads us to see another trait in James' personality, with a touch of Freudian psychology - a son's preference for the mother and ventured hatred of the father.

Contrary to the children, Mr Ramsay's thought rather brings the thought of the Lighthouse keeper and his children to the mind of this most generous character of

the novel, Mrs. Ramsay. The analysis of her children appears meaningless to her, "They were so critical, her children. They talked such nonsense. (9). Interestingly, in the novel's context Mrs. Ramsay's monologues reveal her universal compassion, her intuitive vision of unity in a world of diversity.

Lily Briscoe, being an artist, has completely different vision of life. She sees the scattered lives of people around her. Therefore, her dream is to make a painting that will paint a complete picture of life where life will be complete and in full artistic form. While depicting the character of Lily and her struggle to give her painting a full artistic form, the author also unfolds the struggle of art and reality and giving it a proper structure.

"she could see it all so clearly, so commandingly when she looked it was in what moment's flight between the picture and her canvas that the demons set on her who often brought her to the verge of tears, and made this passage from conception to work as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child. Such she often felt herself struggling against terrific odds to maintain her courage, to say "But this is what I see, this is what I see" and so to clasp some miserable remnant of her vision to her breast, which a thousand forces did their best to pluck from her."(21-22)

Thus, it can be said that stream of consciousness not only reveals the psychic process of the characters, but also helps the reader to encounter a chain of revelations in relation to other characters. Another effective device used is soliloquy where revelation is made when characters speak to themselves.

12.4 SYMBOLISM IN *TO THE LIGHTHOUSE*

The sea

There is an all through reference to the sea. It is a symbol of the external flux of life and time. The ever changing waves reminds us of the movement of time.

Time gives a scope to human beings to learn about and understand life as it should be. Time is the basic truth of life which also shatters us of our most beautiful possessions. The sea constantly changes its mood and face. At one point it sounds soothing and consoling like a song sung to an infant in a cradle. At another moment it becomes a force that brings destruction, has the power to devastate the island. Mr. Ramsay rightly observes, “Eats away the ground we stand on”. In the novel it is a powerful reminder of the temporariness and delicacy of human life and accomplishments. Whereas at another level it also signified rays of hope, vitality in human spirit in the novel, a link between past and present of the characters. The sea, in their second visit, reminds Mr Ramsay of his wife and the memory brings a realization his wife’s love and hospitality when alive. In addition to this, Mrs Ramsay’s departure brought union and harmony between James and his father to which the sea becomes a unifying factor and also a witness.

The lighthouse

“It stands alone and tall in both light and darkness and it, along with its beacon, is a focal point which symbolizes strength, guidance and safe harbour it is spiritual hermit guiding all those who are travelling by sea...”

Apparently the tall, haughty and fearless structure of the lighthouse enduring all fierceness of the sea symbolises stability. It is sometimes interpreted as the symbol of feminine creative principle. It also symbolizes order and stability in the Ramsay family. In the first part, every character showed a hidden desire to visit the lighthouse. By the last part, with Mrs. Ramsay’s death, the aspirations are given a language and they prepare for the voyage to the Lighthouse. Amidst all confusions and inevitable troubles of life, the lighthouse stands all alone symbolizing permanence of life. The title ‘To the Lighthouse’ itself symbolizes a quest for life, a desire to attain the invincible. It also signifies completion of one’s duty. If we apply to character of the novel, each character has different meaning of the lighthouse. Mr. Ramsay, he sees the lighthouse as source of stability and comfort. It stands as strong feelings of ownership. To Mrs. Ramsay it symbolises a sense of

security, a predictability that governs life. To James it is like a dream, a strongest desire. The novel begins and ends with a trip to the lighthouse. When finally at the end he and Mr Ramsay reach the destination, "The Lighthouse was then a silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye...." (276)

The lighthouse as an entity is most meaningful for Lily Briscoe. For her, the lighthouse becomes a goal of her final artistic vision. We see how she watches Mr. Ramsay's boat gradually reaching at the lighthouse. This is the moment of attainment for her as she approaches the solution of how to finish her painting. The moment "the Lighthouse had become almost invisible, had melted away into a blue haze" (308), all her confusions disappear.

The way the lighthouse directs distracted ships and their captains to find a path in the vast, dark and miraculous sea, in the same way in the novel also the lighthouse acts as a unifying factor, a completion of duty and a pathfinder for all destitute souls.

Lily's painting

One of the most symbolic and ambiguous subjects in the novel is Lily Briscoe's painting. Charles Tinsley's statement in relation to Lily's effort that, "women can't paint or write", has great significance in the novel's context as the novel is not only about an artist's struggle with her painting, a woman's struggle with her predicaments in a patriarchal society, but also a writers struggle with her words, all of which are experienced by Virginia Woolf as a woman and artist. Lily's vision as an artist depends on balance and synthesis, how to bring together disparate thing in harmony, to togetherness. Thus, this mirror Woolf's writing creed – "the novel is both a critique and a tribute to the enduring power of Mrs. Ramsay".

In the beginning of the novel Lily is confused and hesitant, constantly comparing it to how other painters would have depicted it, not wanting others to look at it. But when she learns to see art of life through the lenses of Mrs. Ramsay's

extraordinary power of harmonizing human relationship, which is “almost like a work of art”.

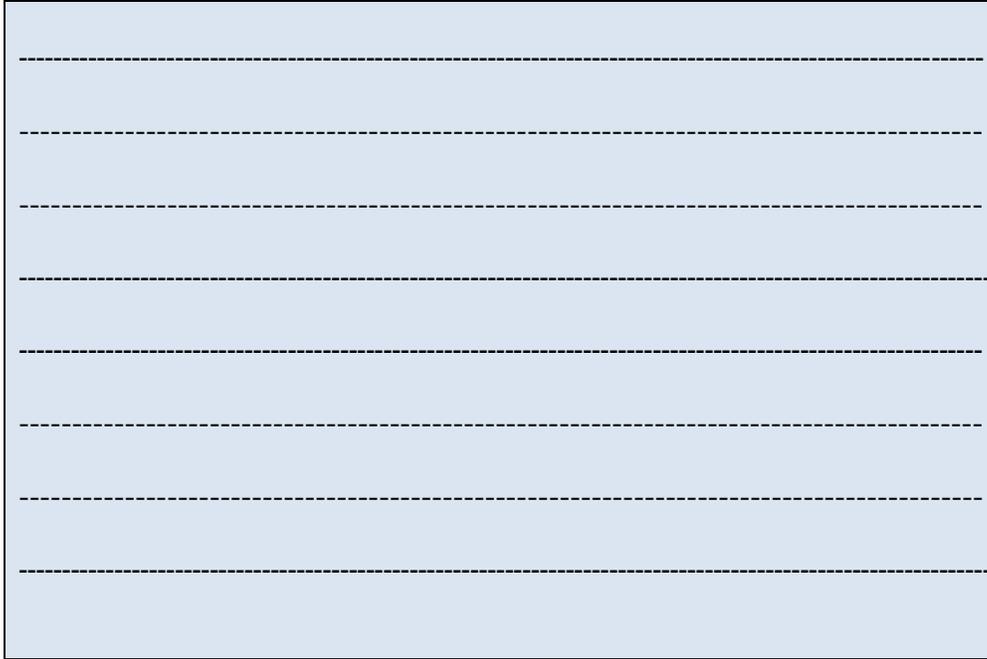
The boar’s skull

The boar’s skull is shown hanging on the nursery wall, sight of which disturbs the children, but Mrs. Ramsay realizes that it was the ultimate alarm to death during the best of moments. It shows the reality and universal truth of death as ultimate reality. It stands for flux of time and its ever alarming reminder of the end of everything.

Ramsays’ Summer House

The house stands for the collective consciousness of those who stay in it. At times the characters long to escape it, while at other times it serves as refuge. In the midst of every change, it is the house which gives some refuse to the characters as they share their views and emotions in terms of each other. The house is shown from every angle to build an idea of it and its visitors, from the dinner party till the journey to the Lighthouse.

	CHECK YOUR PROGRESS
1. Lily’s completion of the painting serves a major symbolic aspect in the novel. What is that?	
<hr/>	
2. How is the lighthouse a powerful symbol in relation to the novel’s primary theme?	



12.5 SUMMING UP

So far as Virginia Woolf's novel is concerned we can sum up that it is not just a conventional novel in the real sense of the term. As such we never find a traditional plot and setting which generally define all novels. Moreover, we also do not find any linearity in the sequences of actions or events. Practically nothing happens that one can call as "incident". Everything takes place in the mind of the character. For writers like Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, who are the torch bearers of modern fiction and belong to this genre, conscious mind is the great inhibitor and also the great censor, to their writing. The conscious mind is framed by certain social obligations, education, environment and conventions. It proceeds keeping in mind certain pre conceived ideas. But for the exercise of creativity, one needs to break through the conscious mind and work with the unconscious which has stored pure experiences, reactions, impressions, intuitions, nostalgia freed from the clutches of a conscious mind. The novel bears the authenticity of portraying the genius within Woolf. The way she handled the various emotions on the part of the

characters, shifting the thoughts from the mind to the pen deserves praise and admiration.



12.6 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. *To the Lighthouse* opens with a portrayal of the oedipal struggle between James and Mr Ramsay. How is the conflict shaped by the end?
2. What does the lighthouse symbolize? How can you associate it with the novel?
3. What are some of the symbols used in the novel? Can you justify the significance of any of the symbols?
4. Do you feel each and every major character adds marvels to the plot?
5. Had one of the characters been missing, do you feel the real essence of Woolf's writing would have experienced an intellectual fracture?
6. What is Stream of consciousness? To what extent was it used to portray the character of Mrs. Ramsay?



12.7 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

MODULE VI: LORRAINE HANSBERRY: *A RAISIN IN THE SUN*

UNIT 13: INTRODUCTION TO LORRAINE HANSBERRY

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 13.0 Introduction
- 13.1 Learning Objectives
- 13.2 Lorraine Hansberry: Life and Works
- 13.3 Reading the play *A Raisin in the Sun*
- 13.4 Structure of the play
- 13.5 Summing Up
- 13.6 Assessment Question
- 13.7 References and Recommended Readings

13.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit you will be able to learn a classic play by African-American woman playwright Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*. The reading will enable you to understand the social, political and cultural background that shapes the lives of black people in general and black women in particular in America. The play can be seen also as autobiographical in the sense that it is based on the childhood experiences of Hansberry in a white neighborhood. The popularity of the play can be gauged from the fact that apart from several stage performances, it was also made into a film in 1961 and a teleplay in 1989.

13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to

- familiarize yourself with the life and works of Lorraine Hansberry
- read the detail summary of the play
- grasp the structural features of the play

13.2 LORRAINE VIVIAN HANSBERRY: LIFE AND WORKS

Lorraine Vivian Hansberry was a celebrated African-American playwright. Born on 19th May 1930, Hansberry was the youngest of four children of Carl Augustus Hansberry, a prominent real-estate broker and Nannie Lousie. The family lived in the Washington Park subdivision of Chicago, a place that was mostly populated by white residents. The Hansberrys were the regular recipients of much racial abuse and discrimination in their neighborhood. This, coupled with their constant interaction with Black intellectuals such as W.E.B. Du Bois, fueled young Lorraine with a burning desire to speak for Black rights. Throughout her life Hansberry was an active spokesperson for equal rights and status for the Blacks. She worked in close collaboration with James Baldwin, Paul Robeson and W. E. B. Du Bois concentrating on the African struggle for freedom.

Hansberry attended public schools rather than private ones as a mark of protest against the segregation laws practiced against the Blacks. She studied art at the University of Wisconsin and in Mexico. In Wisconsin, she joined the Young Progressives of America and later the Labor Youth League. In 1924 she attended a school performance of Irish playwright Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* which inspired her to become a writer. Later she worked as an associate editor of Paul Robeson's radical black magazine called *Freedom*. She also interacted with Langston Hughes, the famous Harlem Renaissance poet, whose work had deeply influenced her.

Hansberry started writing at a very young age. She was the first African-American woman to write a play that was eventually performed on Broadway in 1959. This play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, opened at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre on 11th March 1959. The title of the play was taken from the poem "Montage of a Dream Deferred" (1951) by Langston Hughes:

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
Like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
Like a heavy load.
Or does it explode?

The play brought many accolades to its playwright including the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for the Best Play. The play focuses on the lives of African-Americans living in Chicago who are subjected to racial prejudice and segregation, and their efforts to defend their dignity in such circumstances. The stupendous success of the play resulting in it being translated into thirty-five languages and was performed worldwide to much critical and popular acclaim. In 1963 Hansberry was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Despite undergoing two surgeries, she died on 12th January 1965 at the young age of thirty-four.

5.2 READING THE PLAY *A RAISIN IN THE SUN*

Background of The Play

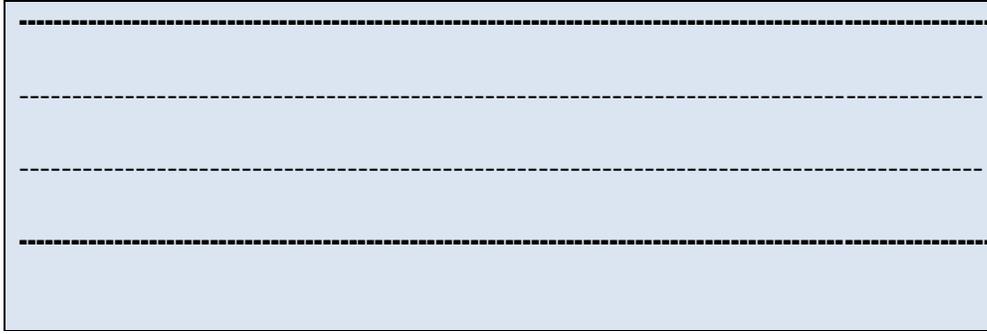
Lorraine Hansberry had famously declared, “I was born black and female.” As a writer and an African-American woman, these twin identities of race and gender dominated her life and her work. She defiantly rejected racial and gender confines and through her work emphasized on the meaning and socio-cultural status of a black woman. The historical background of *A Raisin in the Sun* is important to place the play in context. In 1954 in the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case the United States Supreme Court ordained “separate but equal” status of education in the South. This meant that until 1954 white children and Black children were sent to different schools, and this arrangement extended to other public facilities such as parks and theatres. Such racial segregation was not practiced under any rule but

local statutes governed them. Any attempts to defy or challenge such rules resulted in arrest and abuse.

The civil rights activities of the 1950s and the *Brown vs. Board of Education* verdict challenged and changed all this. Dr Martin Luther King Jr. passionate advocating for equal rights and opportunities for the Blacks was greatly welcomed by the already discriminated people. Rosa Parks' brave challenge of white norms established her as a hero and inspired other Blacks to speak for their rights. Braving humiliation and harassment the Black people endlessly strove to make their voice heard and their presence felt in the white-dominated scenario. Although it was some time before such equality could be actually practiced, the stage had been set for new changes that would soon disrupt and dismantle the existing order of the whites. *A Raisin in the Sun* is a scathing statement against racial discrimination and continues to remain a groundbreaking work of the pan-American culture.

 **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. In what context do you think *A Raisin* is autobiographical?



ACT I, SCENE I

The play opens on a Friday morning when the Younger family gets ready for a new day at work and school. Their small apartment, in one of the poorer areas of Southside Chicago, is described as “furniture crowded” where space is further constricted by its five occupants. Amidst discussions of a series of bombings in the news, the morning conversation veers towards an insurance check of \$10,000 that the family would soon receive. Walter Lee wants to invest the money in a liquor store venture in partnership with two of his friends. His wife Ruth is unwell (she is expecting her second child but this is revealed only in the next scene) and Walter is unable to make ends meet as a chauffeur. The couple already has a son named Travis. Unable to provide for his family adequately, Walter thinks of starting a liquor business and hopes to use the insurance sum for the same.

Mama Younger is opposed to Walter’s plans. A deeply religious woman, Mama believes that liquor drinking is a sin. Walter’s wife Ruth has no say in the matter as the poor woman is already overworked and exhausted looking after the house and child. She therefore takes no interest in her husband’s schemes, despite his attempts to talk to her about it. Part of the reason for Ruth’s disinterest stems from her dislike of Walter’s friends who would be partners in the liquor business. Although she dreams of a better life of respectability, she is not sure she is supportive of Walter’s ways to gain it. Walter feels Ruth does not understand her and this creates discomfort in the husband-wife relationship.

Mama Younger has other plans to use the money. She wants to invest in a house, a symbol of security, and makes her plans clear to the family. She also hopes to use part of the money for her daughter, Beneatha's education at medical school, and this becomes a point of debate between Beneatha and Walter. While Walter understands his sister's desire to study secretly he feels that Beneatha should stop expecting the family make sacrifices for her sake. Beneatha is skeptical of her brother's attitude but like the other woman of the family she too does not want Walter to get involved in the liquor business.

The opening scene of the play is premised on money that eventually leads to arguments and disagreements. Nevertheless, the reader gets to sense a strong family bond because even though the women disapprove Walter's plans, they do wish and hope that he becomes successful in whatever business he undertakes. Mama also expresses disapproval and concern over Beneatha's male friends and reprimands her for talking back to her elders. The scene ends with Mama discovering that Ruth, who is preparing to go to work as a cleaning woman, has fainted and is lying on the floor.

ACT I, SCENE 2

The following morning is Saturday, a day of cleaning the house. This particular Saturday is much anticipated by the Youngers because the much-coveted insurance check is expected to arrive. Beneatha and Mama are busy in cleaning the house while Walter is over the phone discussing his business plans with his friend, Wille Harris. Beneath too gets a call from her friend Joseph Asagai, a Nigerian student who has just returned from Canada.

Ruth arrives from outside and announces sadly that she is pregnant. She had been to an abortionist and is contemplating an abortion. Her sadness pains Mama. Joseph Asagai arrives with a gift for Beneatha —some African records and a Nigerian robe. Meanwhile, the check arrives in the mailbox and Travis who is sent downstairs to collect it. Walter arrives and immediately enquires whether the check has arrived. On learning that it has, he wastes no time in discussing his business

plans again. His mother ignores him completely which makes Walter feel that nobody in the family is interested in what he has to say. She is surprised that Walter is so engrossed with his plans that he does not listen to what Ruth has to say. Eventually she informs him of Ruth's pregnancy and objects to his treatment of her. Both Mama and Ruth are surprised that Walter's desire for money overshadows all concern for his wife and their unborn child.

ACT II, SCENE I

Towards the later part of the day Ruth is seen ironing clothes. Beneatha tries out her new Nigerian outfit and even dances to African music. Ruth enjoys her sister-in-law's antics.

Walter arrives home drunk and joins Beneatha. He drunken energy leads him to sing exaggeratedly and even dances on top of the kitchen table. George Murchison arrives in the midst of all this. He wants to take Beneatha to a play but is surprised to find her dressed so differently and dancing in abandon. Beneatha reveals her new hair-cut which she calls "Afro". Murchison disapproves and declares that she looks eccentric, leading to a heated debate with Beneatha.

Walter joins the argument and in a state of drunken fervor attacks Murchison for his lifestyle and complacent attitude. Murchison retorts by making fun of Walter's business plans and his big dreams. They argue over the history of the Black people which Murchison dismisses as insignificant. Soon, Murchison and Beneatha leave for the play.

Left alone Ruth and Walter discuss their early days when they were romantically in love, and also rue the fact that now they seem to be so distanced from each other. They realize that their constant bickering has taken a toll on their relationship and "it's all started slipping away from us."

Soon Mama Younger returns and announces that she has paid a down payment for their future house in Clybourne Park, an all-white neighborhood. Ruth becomes very happy on hearing this—to her this meant that they would have more

living space. They would finally escape the spatial constraints of their overcrowded apartment. Ruth's optimism is in sharp contrast to Walter's shock—he is shattered by the news and feels that his mother had “butchered his dream.”

ACT II SCENE 2

This action in this scene takes on a Friday night a few weeks later. The apartment is filled with packing crates as the Youngers prepare to move to their new home. Beneatha and Murchison are sitting on the couch, the latter wanting to kiss Beneatha who wants to discuss their future plans instead. When Murchison becomes insistent, Beneatha asks him to leave.

Meanwhile, we are introduced to the Younger's neighbour, Mrs. Johnson. She tells the Youngers of the many bombing of a black family in an all-white neighborhood. Beneath the veil of goodwill Mrs. Johnson hides her displeasure that the Youngers are moving to a better place. Through her conversation she seeks to deride their move.

Mama Younger decides to hand over the rest of the insurance money to Walter who is overjoyed.

ACT II SCENE 3

This scene begins one week later when the family is moving to their new home. The entire family is happy and excited. Ruth shares with Beneatha the change that has come over her husband so much so that the previous day they had even gone on a date to the movies. Walter comes in just then. Soon a white man visits them to discuss a matter of importance. Since Mama was not at home, Walter takes over the mantle of the head of the family.

This man is Karl Lindner who acts as a representative of the Clybourne Park Improvement Association. He is sent by New Neighbors Orientation Committee with a generous offer to buy the Youngers' new home. This was a ploy on the part of the residents to prevent the Youngers (who are Blacks) into their all-white neighborhood. Lindner's offer angers Walter who tells the latter to leave. On

Mama's return the family avoids telling her about the events that happened during her absence and instead present her with housewarming gifts (gardening tools).

A little later Walter's friend Bobo arrives with the news that Willy, their partner in the liquor store, has ran off with their money. This tremendously angers Mama and shocks Walter. Angry at her husband's money being misused Mama strikes Walter repeatedly on the face until Beneatha begs her to stop.

ACT III

The final Act of the play begins an hour later. Joseph Asagai comes over to help with the packing but is instead met with a dejected Beneatha who updates him on the recent developments. Her conversation is filled with a sense of self-pity and reflects her fear of her future as she is now unsure of completing medical school. Asagai tries to reason with her but ends up yelling at her. He tells her that people in the part of the world that he comes from (Nigeria) are suffering in far more worse conditions and her problems are actually nothing in comparison. Beneatha however refuses to relent and does not say anything. Finally, Asagai proposes marriage to her and tells her that she could go to Nigeria with him where she could complete her studies.

Although confused, Beneatha agrees to consider the proposal.

After Joseph leaves Walter comes in. Shocked and helpless at his sudden loss, he searches frantically for Lindner's telephone number. Beneatha taunts him for his situation but he is too worked up to respond to her.

After Walter leaves Mama and Ruth arrive. The former tries to be cheerful about the unpacking and staying on in their cramped apartment but this upsets Ruth greatly, although she does not say anything. Mama senses Ruth's desperation and tries to tell her that there are times when they must let go of their dreams.

Shortly Walter arrives and informs the family that he had discussed the matter with Lindner and is willing to accept his proposal. The family is shock at this and silently listens to Walter's monologue on the way he would negotiate the

deal with Lindner. Mama and Beneatha are filled with revulsion. The latter also decries her brother's dignity and questions his right to make the decision.

As the moving men arrives Walter gets ready with his legal papers. In the middle of the conversation with Lindner Walter suddenly remembers his father who had almost beaten a man to death for calling him bad names. He talks about his family's pride to Lindner and also mentions his sister's dream of becoming a doctor. He ends his speech by telling Lindner to leave because "we don't want your money."

Happy and excited by the sudden turn of events, the family springs into action and begins to pack. Beneatha informs her mother of Asagai's proposal but is told by her mother that she is too young to think of marriage yet. The play ends with Mama telling Ruth of the change that has come over her son and both women bond in a moment of pride. As the family waits downstairs, Mama takes one last look at the apartment that had been her home. She goes out, comes back and grabbing her plant leaves the apartment forever.

5.5 STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY

Lorraine Hansberry understood that the dialects of black communities were distinctly different from the dialects of other communities, for she has her characters speak in the very real language of their community. Although Hansberry's own immediate family were all college educated and spoke Standard English all the time at home, Hansberry herself spent a lot of time in poor Southside households that were similar to that of the Younger family in Raisin. Naturally Mama's speech is different from Beneatha's. However, there are even subtle differences between the speech patterns of Mama and Walter and Ruth and Bobo.

The language of many of the characters of *Raisin* is unconventionally non-Standard English. The black characters are not merely speaking English that is ungrammatical; rather, they are speaking a dialect common in the black

communities that are heavily populated by migrants from the South. Their dialect, although similar to the white southern dialect, is distinctly different in that it is mostly an outgrowth of the period of slavery. At that time, slaves were forbidden a formal education and therefore mimicked whatever English they heard, ending up with a "Pidgin English" not unlike the English spoken by many of the Native-American population.

It is natural to superimpose one's known grammatical structure upon a language that one is attempting to learn. The slaves, many of whom were from West Africa, superimposed their own grammatical structure upon their new master's language, ending up with what linguists define today as "Black English." Broadly explained, Black English has its own grammatical structure — even though it is non-Standard English. It is not solely "bad grammar," for in some cases, the "errors" are intentional for effect.

The most prominent example of this dialect is in the "abuse" of the verb "to be." Blacks have always "abused" the grammatical form of the verb "to be" in whatever language slaves were forced to learn — be it English, French, Spanish, or Dutch. These "abuses" are even found in Surinam, which proves the result of the African continuum, for many West African languages have a habitual tense which translates as "to be." Note the following examples of this habitual tense:

Harry be waiting for me every night when I come home.

You can never reach Mary because she be talking on the phone.

Donald be so tired when he leaves work.

In each of the above examples, the word "be" means "all of the time." However, in the following examples, forms of the verb "to be" are purposely omitted in order to express a different meaning:

The answer to the question: "What is Harry doing right now?" might be, "He waiting."

The answer to the question: "What is Mary doing right now?" might be, "She talking on the phone."

Note that in the above examples, there are distinctly different meanings. When the word "be" is used in the above constructions, the meaning is "all the time." Omitting the main verb before the participle means the action is taking place "right now." So, in the black dialect, "He talking" means something completely different from "He be talking." Hansberry had to have been aware of the semantic subtleties of the black dialect in order to have made these points in *Raisin*.

Note the following examples from various scenes of *Raisin*.

Walter: I can't be bein' late to work on account of him fooling around in there.

Ruth: Oh, no he ain't going to be getting up no earlier no such thing!

Ruth: Walter, don't be dragging me in it.

Also, in the black dialect, one moves directly from the subject to its adjective, getting to the point more quickly by having eliminated any forms of the verb "to be." For example, one might hear someone say in black dialect, "Don't bother Lisa 'cause she tired." One might also hear "She pretty," "He ugly," or "They smart."

Note the following from various scenes in *Raisin*:

Walter: You tired, ain't you? Tired of everything . . .

Walter: We one group of men tied to a race of women with small minds . . .

Mama: But [Beneatha] you so thin . . .

Mama: We ain't no business people, Ruth. We just plain working folks.

Mama: Ruth honey — what's the matter with you — you sick?

Ruth: You think you a woman, Bennie — but you still a little girl.

In the black dialect, the word "done" means something completely different from the Standard English past participle of the verb "to do." Note the following examples:

It's too late to ask her cause she done gone.

Mrs. Jackson done burned the cabbage again.

I done told you — I didn't do it!

In the above examples, "done" means "has already" or "have already." Note the following examples from *Raisin*:

Ruth: You done spoiled that boy so . . .

Mama: What done got into you, girl? Walter Lee done finally sold you on investing?

Mama: And all that money they pour into these churches when they ought to be helping you people over there drive out them French and Englishmen done taken away your land.

Mama: Much baking powder as she done borrowed from me all these years, she could of done gone into the baking business.

Mama: [The check] . . . you mean it really done come?

Ruth: Girl, you done lost your natural mind?

Another intentional Standard English deviation is the overuse of the negative in order to emphasize that negative, as in the following: "Nobody ain't never seen no ghost nowhere."

In Raisin, this construction abounds as in the following examples taken from various scenes:

Mama: Now here come you and Beneatha talking 'bout things we ain't never even thought about

hardly . . .

Mama: I'm waiting to see you stand up and . . . say we done give up one baby to poverty and that we ain't going to give up nary another one . . .

Bobo: Willy didn't never show up . . .

Ruth: Walter, that ain't none of our money . . .

In addition to the obvious lack of formal education noted in Mama's speech, her speech is also flavored with "southernisms" which are absent from Walter's speech. Even though Walter does not have as much education as Beneatha, he is not as unschooled as Mama, nor does he use the southernisms that define Mama. Ruth, however, proves through her speech that she has not had even as much formal education as Walter, for her speech is as flavored with southernisms as Mama's. Because Ruth makes far more Standard English errors than Walter does, her speech makes her sound as though she is older than her thirty years. Ruth sounds more like Mama than any of the other characters in the play. The neighbor, Mrs. Johnson, proves that her roots are also southern by her speech, and Bobo also reveals his obvious southern upbringing when he speaks to Ruth and is overly polite in deference to her gender:

Bobo: Well, h'you, Miss Ruth.

Mrs. Johnson: I finds I can't close my eyes right lessen I done had that last cup of coffee . . .

Mama: My children and they tempers . . .

Ruth: If you don't take this comb and fix [your hair], you better!

Mama: Who that 'round here slamming doors at this hour?

Mama: This all the packing got done since I left out of here this morning
— I testify before God . . .

Mama: Tell that youngun to get himself up here . . .

The luxuriousness of Hansberry's writing is apparent in her scene descriptions prior to Act I. An example of ordinary writing might be "The room was overcrowded with old, outdated furniture." Note, as a contrast, Hansberry's more poetic way of saying the same thing: "The Younger living room would be a comfortable and well-ordered room if it were not for a number of indestructible contradictions to this state of being. Its furnishings are typical and undistinguished and their primary feature now is that they have clearly had to accommodate the living of too many people for too many years — and they are tired."

As another example, ordinary writing might be: "The furnishings of this room used to be beautiful but are now faded, ugly, and even tasteless." Hansberry, however, says it this way: "Still, we can see that at some time, a time probably no longer remembered by the family (except perhaps for Mama), the furnishings of this room were actually selected with care and love and even hope — and brought to this apartment and arranged with taste and pride. That was a long time ago. Now the once loved pattern of the couch upholstery has to fight to show itself from under acres of crocheted doilies and couch covers which have themselves finally come to be more important than the upholstery."

An ordinary way of describing the worn out carpet might be to say: "Although they tried, they could not hide the worn out look of the old carpet." Now, note Hansberry's description: "And here a table or a chair has been moved to disguise the worn places in the carpet; but the carpet has fought back by showing its weariness, with depressing uniformity, elsewhere on its surface."

So too, this example: Ordinary: "Everything in this room looks old and unattractive." In contrast, Hansberry: "Weariness has, in fact, won in this room. Everything has been polished, washed, sat on, used, scrubbed too often. All

SUMMING UP

This unit attempts to give you a detail summary of the play so that this may lead to better understanding of various critical aspects associated with the play's plot. Narrative technique plays pivotal in heightening the play's major theme of family tie and the bond of African origin. A close reading of the play will certainly enable you to critically analyse *A Raisin in the Sun* its various issues that to be discussed in the next unit.



ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. How does the personification of the furniture in Act 1, Scene 1 of *A Raisin in the Sun* develop the setting?
2. In *A Raisin in the Sun*'s first scene how does Travis show that he is trying to be a man?
3. In Act 1, Scene 1 of *A Raisin in the Sun* how does Ruth's statement "Eat your eggs" and Walter's reply to it demonstrate their contrasting goals?
4. What does Beneatha's physical description reveal about her character?
5. What parallels does Hansberry draw between Mama and African women in *A Raisin in the Sun*?
6. How does food represent care and hospitality in *A Raisin in the Sun*?



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PROVISIONAL

UNIT 14: READING THE TEXT AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS: A RAISIN IN THE SUN

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 14.0 Introduction
- 14.1 Learning Objectives
- 14.2 Major Themes in *A Raisin in the Sun*
- 14.3 Major Characters
- 14.4 Major Motifs
- 14.5 Symbolism in the play
- 14.6 Summing Up
- 14.7 Assessment Questions
- 14.8 References and Recommended Readings

14.0 INTRODUCTION

Produced in 1959, the audience of *A Raisin in the Sun* passed unnoticed many important issues in the play at the time. Robert Nemiroff in his introduction in *A Raisin in the Sun* says that the play “speaks to issues that are now inescapable: value systems of the black family; concepts of African American beauty and identity; class and generational conflicts; the relationships of husbands and wives, black men and women; the outspoken (if then yet unnamed) feminism of the daughter; and, in the penultimate scene between Beneatha and Asagai, the larger statement of the play—and the ongoing struggle it portends (Nemiroff, *Introduction*)

14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to

- major characters and their contribution to the plot development

- critically view various thematic concerns of the play such as American dream, racial discrimination, question of liberty
- learn about black family and family values as black solidarity
- know 'home' as a galvanizing force and crucial to the family's unity
- major symbols that heighten the play's message to its readers/audience

14.2 MAJOR THEMES

Political

On its performance *A Raisin in the Sun* received wide critical acclaim. The play brings into the fore certain important issues pertaining to the independence of the blacks. The chief issue raised is the Blacks right to dream. Do they dare to nurture any dreams at all, given the fact that they would always be persecuted by the dominant white culture? To this Hansberry's answer is an emphatic yes. Through the play she reveals that it is only the hope and dream of a better future that would motivate the Blacks to envision a better life.

The play is infused with a number of motifs to give it more meaning. Apart from the more pressing political concerns other important issues that are raised include feminism and the role of woman in the family. Mama Younger is the matriarch of the house with holds very strong opinions about how the family should live. She is the moral guardian of the family. Ruth is the more silent character who nurtures her dreams but is unable to speak about them to others. However, she does talk to her husband about her feelings. Beneatha is the most educated woman in the family, as a result of which she has very strong (and sometimes misinformed) opinion on most matters. It is interesting to note that she wants to become a doctor, a profession that was generally male-dominated.

It is therefore significant that Hansberry chooses to borrow her title from Hughes poem. Hughes says that when dreams are postponed the purpose is lost.

Although the play moves in the direction of lost dreams, it ends on an optimistic note.

The Value and Purpose of Dreams

A Raisin in the Sun is essentially about dreams, as the main characters struggle to deal with the oppressive circumstances that rule their lives. The title of the play references a conjecture that Langston Hughes famously posed in his poem “Dream Deferred” where he wrote about dreams that were forgotten or put off. He wonders whether those dreams shrivel up “like a raisin in the sun.” Every member of the Younger family has a separate, individual dream—Beneatha wants to become a doctor, for example, and Walter wants to have money so that he can afford things for his family. The Youngers struggle to attain these dreams throughout the play, and much of their happiness and depression is directly related to their attainment of, or failure to attain, these dreams. By the end of the play, they learn that the dream of a house is the most important dream because it unites the family.

The Need to Fight Racial Discrimination

The character of Mr. Lindner makes the theme of racial discrimination prominent in the plot as an issue that the Youngers cannot avoid. The governing body of the Youngers’ new neighborhood, the Clybourne Park Improvement Association, sends Mr. Lindner to persuade them not to move into the all-white Clybourne Park neighborhood. Mr. Lindner and the people he represents can only see the color of the Younger family’s skin, and his offer to bribe the Youngers to keep them from moving threatens to tear apart the Younger family and the values for which it stands. Ultimately, the Youngers respond to this discrimination with defiance and strength. The play powerfully demonstrates that the way to deal with discrimination is to stand up to it and reassert one’s dignity in the face of it rather than allow it to pass unchecked.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Compare and contrast the American dream and racial discrimination in *A Raisin in the Sun* with *Topdog/Underdog* and *Fences* that you are reading in MEG-404.

Handwriting practice area with multiple sets of dashed lines for writing.

The Importance of Family

The Youngers struggle socially and economically throughout the play but unite in the end to realize their dream of buying a house. Mama strongly believes in the importance of family, and she tries to teach this value to her family as she struggles to keep them together and functioning. Walter and Beneatha learn this lesson about family at the end of the play, when Walter must deal with the loss of

the stolen insurance money and Beneatha denies Walter as a brother. Even facing such trauma, they come together to reject Mr. Lindner's racist overtures. They are still strong individuals, but they are now individuals who function as part of a family. When they begin to put the family and the family's wishes before their own, they merge their individual dreams with the family's overarching dream.

 **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. Examine how 'family' is an important concept in African American's life?

14.3 MAJOR CHARACTERS

Walter Lee Younger

Walter is Lena Younger's (Mama) son. He is the husband of Ruth, the father of Travis and the brother of Beneatha. A man in his mid-thirties Walter is employed as a chauffeur. He enjoys drinking, and this is the reason that he wants to invest in

a liquor store with the money that his mother will receive. His obsession with the store mirrors his strong ambition to become independent and responsible earning member of his family.

Beneatha Younger

In her twenties, Beneatha is Mama Younger's daughter and Walter's sister. A college student, she hopes to join the medical school. She is the only member of her family to pursue higher studies.

Lena Younger (Mama)

Lena is the matriarch of the family, the mother of Walter and Beneatha, mother-in-law of Ruth, and grandmother of Travis. In her sixties, Mama is filled with a deep sense of love and responsibility for her family, Mama Younger is deeply religious and compassionate. Her plans to use the money to buy a house for her family mirrors her concern for the general welfare of her family. A strong motivational force in the family, Mama Younger does not possess much material wealth but is proud and of noble bearing. She lives for her family and her dream of owning a house is motivated only by her desire for better living conditions for her family. Having lost her husband and baby quite early Mama is a strong woman not bowed down by the hardships of life. Her religious convictions give her strength to face all trials.

Ruth Younger

Ruth is Walter's wife and Travis' mother. A calm woman, she is often the peacemaker in most conflicting family situations. Non-aggressive and quiet, she represents the "worn-out wife" whose life is routine and mundane. At thirty Ruth has simple dreams. She contemplates an abortion because she does not want to bring on any additional burden to the already financially-stretched family. She is hopeful of her failing marriage despite her differences with her husband.

Travis Younger

Travis is the ten-year-old son of Walter and Ruth Younger. The youngest member of the family, Travis is witness to the many disagreements within the family but also the recipient of much love and affection to the extent of being spoilt. He gets an additional fifty cents besides the one required at school. Although mischievous he is a likeable child.

George Murchison

George is another college student interested in Beneatha. Unlike the Youngers George comes from a wealthy background which makes him snobbish and indifferent to Beneatha's poverty.

Mrs. Johnson (Mrs. Wilhelmina Othella Johnson)

Mrs. Johnson is the Youngers' neighbor. An insensitive nosy and jealous woman, she wastes no time or opportunity to point out to the Youngers' the effects of their decision to move to Clybourne Park.

Karl Lindner

A middle-aged white man, Lindner acts as the spokesman for the white community of Clybourne Park. He visits the Youngers to persuade them to rethink their decision and even offers monetary incentive to revoke their decision.

Walter Younger Sr.

Walter Younger Sr. is Lena Younger's husband and the father of Walter Lee and Beneatha. His death sets the action for the play as it is only after his death that the matter of the insurance money comes up which leads all family members to make their own plans.

14.4 MAJOR MOTIFS

The Home

The Younger apartment is the only setting throughout the play, emphasizing the centrality of the home. The lighting seems to change with the mood, and with only one window, the apartment is a small, often dark area in which all the

14.5 MAJOR SYMBOLS

“Eat Your Eggs”

This phrase appears early in the play, as an instruction from Ruth to Walter to quiet him. Walter then employs the phrase to illustrate how women keep men from achieving their goals—every time a man gets excited about something, he claims, a woman tries to temper his enthusiasm by telling him to eat his eggs. Being quiet and eating one’s eggs represents an acceptance of the adversity that Walter and the rest of the Youngers face in life. Walter believes that Ruth, who is making his eggs, keeps him from achieving his dream, and he argues that she should be more supportive of him. The eggs she makes every day symbolize her mechanical approach to supporting him. She provides him with nourishment, but always in the same, predictable way.

Mama’s Plant

The most overt symbol in the play, Mama’s plant represents both Mama’s care and her dream for her family. In her first appearance onstage, she moves directly toward the plant to take care of it. She confesses that the plant never gets enough light or water, but she takes pride in how it nevertheless flourishes under her care. Her care for her plant is similar to her care for her children, unconditional and unending despite a less-than-perfect environment for growth. The plant also symbolizes her dream to own a house and, more specifically, to have a garden and a yard. With her plant, she practices her gardening skills. Her success with the plant helps her believe that she would be successful as a gardener. Her persistence and dedication to the plant fosters her hope that her dream may come true.

Beneatha’s Hair

When the play begins, Beneatha has straightened hair. Midway through the play, after Asagai visits her and questions her hairstyle, she cuts her Caucasian-seeming hair. Her new, radical Afro look represents her embracing of her heritage. Beneatha’s cutting of her hair is a very powerful social statement, as she

symbolically declares that natural is beautiful, prefiguring the 1960s cultural credo that ‘black is beautiful’. Rather than force her hair to conform to the style society dictates, Beneatha opts for a style that enables her to more easily reconcile her identity and her culture. Beneatha’s new hair is a symbol of her anti-assimilationist beliefs as well as her desire to shape her identity by looking back to her roots in Africa.

 **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. How does symbols heightens the thematic treatment of the play? Give three examples

14.6 SUMMING UP

In writing *A Raisin in the Sun* Hansberry’s objective was to give a voice to those who, prior to *Raisin*, had no voice at all or none to hear. The play is a

significant achievement in the sense that prior to the publication and performance of the play the thought that anyone outside of the black community was sensitive enough to learn about the struggles of a black family in Southside Chicago. As a work of art it is important because not only did Hansberry choose as the voice of her theme a poor, peripheral black family, but simultaneously weaved the fabric of her play with information about Africa, the origin of the blacks.

So, by now you must have realized the depth and power of Hansberry's play and also understand the trying conditions in which the black people try to survive. We hope that you will turn to other such plays not only by African American women, but women playwrights in other languages as well.



14.7 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. How does *A Raisin in the Sun* reflect the situation of the Blacks in America?
2. Discuss the thematic concerns of Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun*?
3. Critically examine the role of women in the play and the way the play comments of the gender politics of its time.
4. Comment of the title of the play and its significance.
5. The characters in the play nurture different dreams. How do these reflect their longings within the unjust social conditions within which they live?
6. Walter's transformation towards the end of the play results in a major turn-about in the narrative. What are the reasons that lead to this?



14.8 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

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JOT DOWN IMPORTANT POINTS

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