**THE RENAISSANCE 1485 – 1625**

The English Renaissance was **a cultural and artistic movement** in England dating from the late 15th and early 16th century to the early 17th century. The beginning of the English Renaissance is often associated with the year **1485** when the War of Roses ended and it was inaugurated the Tudor Dynasty.

**Characteristics of Renaissance:**

* The word Renaissance means **rebirth**; the world was emerging from the Middle or Dark Ages
* The idea of the **Divine Right of kings to rule**
* The development of humanistic ideas, such as the **dignity of man**
* **The focus of attention was no longer God but Man**; for the first time, man was explored as an individual, and the idea that a man could shape his own destiny was widely accepted.
* It was **a time of scientific inquiry and exploration**
* It was the time of the **Protestant Reformation**, and the invention of the **printing press**

**RENAISSANCE LITERATURE**

The writers of the Renaissance not only wanted to imitate art, they hoped to change reality through art. They believed in **the art of imitation**, gravitating toward the Greek and Roman writers and writing styles.

**RENAISSANCE WRITERS**

1. **John Milton** – Paradise Lost
2. **William Shakespeare** – the master of the dramatic genre
3. Edmund Spenser
4. Ben Johnson

**SUMMARY**

The Renaissance was a time of optimism and exploration as the world emerged from the Middle Ages to a time of increased knowledge and global confidence. Renaissance literature change the world forever through writers such as Shakespeare.

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**

**1.THE SONNETS**

A. CONTEXT

The most important playwright of the English Renaissance was born in 1564 in England. His career bridge the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I and he was a favorite of both monarchs.

Shakespeare’s sonnets are very different from Shakespeare’s plays, but they do contain dramatic elements and an overall sense of story. Each of the poems deals with a highly personal theme, and each can be taken on its own or in relation to the poems around it. The sonnets have the feel of autobiographical poems, but we don’t know whether they deal with real events or not, because no one knows enough about Shakespeare’s life to say whether or not they deal with real events and feelings, so we tend to refer to the voice of the sonnets as “the speaker”—as though he were a dramatic creation like Hamlet or King Lear.

There are certainly a number of intriguing continuities throughout the poems. The first 126 of the sonnets seem to be addressed to an unnamed young nobleman, whom the speaker loves very much; the rest of the poems (except for the last two, which seem generally unconnected to the rest of the sequence) seem to be addressed to a mysterious woman, whom the speaker loves, hates, and lusts for simultaneously. The two addressees of the sonnets are usually referred to as the “young man” and the “dark lady”; in summaries of individual poems, I have also called the young man the “beloved” and the dark lady the “lover,” especially in cases where their identity can only be surmised. Within the two mini-sequences, there are a number of other discernible elements of “plot”: the speaker urges the young man to have children; he is forced to endure a separation from him; he competes with a rival poet for the young man’s patronage and affection. At two points in the sequence, it seems that the young man and the dark lady are actually lovers themselves—a state of affairs with which the speaker is none too happy. But while these continuities give the poems a narrative flow and a helpful frame of reference, they have been frustratingly hard for scholars and biographers to pin down. In Shakespeare’s life, who were the young man and the dark lady?

**B.THEMES, MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS**

a)Themes

**1.Different types of romantic love**

The first sonnets written in 13th and 14th century Italy celebrated the poets’ feelings for their beloveds and their patrons. These sonnets were addressed to stylized, lionized women and dedicated to wealthy noblemen, who supported poets with money and other gifts, usually in return for lofty praise in print.

Furthermore, Shakespeare used his sonnets to explore different types of love between the young man and the speaker, the young man and the dark lady, and the dark lady and the speaker. In his sequence, the speaker expresses passionate concern for the young man, praises his beauty, and articulates what we would now call homosexual desire. The woman of Shakespeare’s sonnets, the so-called dark lady, is earthy, sexual, and faithless.

Several sonnets also probe the nature of love, comparing the idealized love found in poems with the messy, complicated love found in real life.

**2.The dangers of lust and love**

In Shakespeare’s sonnets, falling in love can have painful emotional and physical consequences. But many sonnets warn readers about the dangers of lust and love. According to some poems, lust causes us to mistake sexual desire for true love, and love itself causes us to lose our powers of perception.

Several sonnets warn about the dangers of lust, claiming that it turns humans “savage, extreme, rude, cruel” (4), as in Sonnet 129. In his sonnets, however, Shakespeare portrays making love not as a romantic expression of sentiment but as a base physical need with the potential for horrible consequences.

Several sonnets equate being in love with being in a pitiful state: as demonstrated by the poems, love causes fear, alienation, despair, and physical discomfort, not the pleasant emotions or euphoria we usually associate with romantic feelings.

In Sonnet 137, the speaker personifies love, calls him a simpleton, and criticizes him for removing his powers of perception. It was love that caused the speaker to make mistakes and poor judgments. Elsewhere the speaker calls love a disease as a way of demonstrating the physical pain of emotional wounds.

Throughout his sonnets, Shakespeare clearly implies that love hurts. Yet despite the emotional and physical pain, like the speaker, we continue falling in love. Shakespeare shows that falling in love is an inescapable aspect of the human condition—indeed, expressing love is part of what makes us human.

**3.Real beauty vs clichéd beauty**

Traditionally, sonnets transform women into the most glorious creatures to walk the earth, whereas patrons become the noblest and bravest men the world has ever known.

Shakespeare makes fun of the convention by contrasting an idealized woman with a real woman. In Sonnet 130, Shakespeare directly engages—and skewers—clichéd concepts of beauty. Real love, the sonnet implies, begins when we accept our lovers for what they are as well as what they are not.

Other sonnets explain that because anyone can use artful means to make himself or herself more attractive, no one is really beautiful anymore. Thus, since anyone can become beautiful, calling someone beautiful is no longer much of a compliment.

**4.The responsibilities of being beautiful**

Shakespeare portrays beauty as conveying a great responsibility in the sonnets addressed to the young man, Sonnets 1–126. Here the speaker urges the young man to make his beauty immortal by having children, a theme that appears repeatedly throughout the poems: as an attractive person, the young man has a responsibility to procreate.

Later sonnets demonstrate the speaker, angry at being cuckolded, lashing out at the young man and accusing him of using his beauty to hide immoral acts. Sonnet 95 compares the young man’s behavior to a “canker in the fragrant rose” (2) or a rotten spot on an otherwise beautiful flower. In other words, the young man’s beauty allows him to get away with bad behavior, but this bad behavior will eventually distort his beauty, much like a rotten spot eventually spreads. Nature gave the young man a beautiful face, but it is the young man’s responsibility to make sure that his soul is worthy of such a visage.

**b)Motifs**

**1.Art vs time**

Shakespeare, like many sonneteers, portrays time as an enemy of love. Time destroys love because time causes beauty to fade, people to age, and life to end. One common convention of sonnets in general is to flatter either a beloved or a patron by promising immortality through verse. As long as readers read the poem, the object of the poem’s love will remain alive. Through art, nature and beauty overcome time. Several sonnets use the seasons to symbolize the passage of time and to show that everything in nature—from plants to people—is mortal. But nature creates beauty, which poets capture and render immortal in their verse. Nature, art, and beauty triumph over time.

**2.Stopping the march toward death**

Growing older and dying are inescapable aspects of the human condition, but Shakespeare’s sonnets give suggestions for halting the progress toward death. Shakespeare’s speaker spends a lot of time trying to convince the young man to cheat death by having children. The speaker’s words aren’t just the flirtatious ramblings of a smitten man: Elizabethan England was rife with disease, and early death was common. Producing children guaranteed the continuation of the species. Therefore, falling in love has a social benefit, a benefit indirectly stressed by Shakespeare’s sonnets. We might die, but our children—and the human race—shall live on.

**3.The significance of sight**

Shakespeare used images of eyes throughout the sonnets to emphasize other themes and motifs, including children as an antidote to death, art’s struggle to overcome time, and the painfulness of love. For instance, in several poems, the speaker urges the young man to admire himself in the mirror. Noticing and admiring his own beauty, the speaker argues, will encourage the young man to father a child. But our loving eyes can also distort our sight, causing us to misperceive reality. In the sonnets addressed to the dark lady, the speaker criticizes his eyes for causing him to fall in love with a beautiful but duplicitous woman. Ultimately, Shakespeare uses eyes to act as a warning: while our eyes allow us to perceive beauty, they sometimes get so captivated by beauty that they cause us to misjudge character and other attributes not visible to the naked eye.

**c)Symbols**

**1.Flowers and trees**

Flowers and trees appear throughout the sonnets to illustrate the passage of time, the transience of life, the aging process, and beauty. Rich, lush foliage symbolizes youth, whereas barren trees symbolize old age and death. Traditionally, roses signify romantic love, a symbol Shakespeare employs in the sonnets. Sometimes Shakespeare compares flowers and weeds to contrast beauty and ugliness. In these comparisons, marred, rotten flowers are worse than weeds—that is, beauty that turns rotten from bad character is worse than initial ugliness.

**2.Stars**

Shakespeare uses stars to stand in for fate, but also to explore the nature of free will. Many sonneteers resort to employing fate, symbolized by the stars, to prove that their love is permanent and predestined. In contrast, Shakespeare’s speaker claims that he relies on his eyes, rather than on the hands of fate, to make decisions. According to Elizabethan astrology, a cosmic order determined the place of everything in the universe, from planets and stars to people. Although humans had some free will, the heavenly spheres, with the help of God, predetermined fate.

**3.Weather and seasons**

Shakespeare employed the **pathetic fallacy**, or the attribution of human characteristics or emotions to elements in nature or inanimate objects, throughout his plays. Weather and the seasons also stand in for human emotions: the speaker conveys his sense of foreboding about death by likening himself to autumn, a time in which nature’s objects begin to decay and ready themselves for winter, or death.

**SONNET 18**

This sonnet is certainly the most famous in the sequence of Shakespeare’s sonnets. On the surface, the poem is simply a statement of praise about the beauty of the beloved; summer tends to unpleasant extremes of windiness and heat, but the beloved is always mild and temperate.

The language, too, is comparatively unadorned for the sonnets. Sonnet 18 is the first poem in the sonnets not to explicitly encourage the young man to have children. The “procreation” sequence of the first 17 sonnets ended with the speaker’s realization that the young man might *not* need children to preserve his beauty; he could also live, the speaker writes at the end of Sonnet 17, “in my rhyme.”

Sonnet 18, then, is the first “rhyme”—the speaker’s first attempt to preserve the young man’s beauty for all time. An important theme of the sonnet (as it is an important theme throughout much of the sequence) is the power of the speaker’s poem to defy time and last forever, carrying the beauty of the beloved down to future generations. The beloved’s “eternal summer” shall not fade precisely because it is embodied in the sonnet: “So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,” the speaker writes in the couplet, “So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.”

**SONNET 130**

This sonnet compares the speaker’s lover to a number of other beauties—and never in the lover’s favor. This sonnet, one of Shakespeare’s most famous, plays an elaborate joke on the conventions of love poetry common to Shakespeare’s day.

In many ways, Shakespeare’s sonnets subvert and reverse the conventions of the Petrarchan love sequence: the idealizing love poems, for instance, are written not to a perfect woman but to an admittedly imperfect man, and the love poems to the dark lady are anything but idealizing.

Sonnet 130 mocks the typical Petrarchan metaphors by presenting a speaker who seems to take them at face value, and somewhat bemusedly, decides to tell the truth. In the couplet, then, the speaker shows his full intent, which is to insist that love does not need these conceits in order to be real; and women do not need to look like flowers or the sun in order to be beautiful.

**HAMLET**

**Analysis of major characters**

Hamlet has fascinated audiences and readers for centuries, and the first thing to point out about him is that he is enigmatic. There is always more to him than the other characters in the play can figure out. A university student whose studies are interrupted by his father’s death, Hamlet is extremely philosophical and contemplative. He is particularly drawn to difficult questions or questions that cannot be answered with any certainty. It is also important to note that Hamlet is extremely melancholy and discontented with the state of affairs in Denmark and in his own family—indeed, in the world at large. He is extremely disappointed with his mother for marrying his uncle so quickly, and he repudiates Ophelia, a woman he once claimed to love, in the harshest terms. His words often indicate his disgust with and distrust of women in general. At a number of points in the play, he contemplates his own death and even the option of suicide.

**THEMES, MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS**

**A.Themes**

1. **The Impossibility of Certainty**

What separates *Hamlet* from other revenge plays is that the action we expect to see, particularly from Hamlet himself, is continually postponed while Hamlet tries to obtain more certain knowledge about what he is doing. Many people have seen *Hamlet* as a play about indecisiveness, and thus about Hamlet’s failure to act appropriately. It might be more interesting to consider that the play shows us how many uncertainties our lives are built upon, how many unknown quantities are taken for granted when people act or when they evaluate one another’s actions.

**2.The complexity of action**

Directly related to the theme of certainty is the theme of action. How is it possible to take reasonable, effective, purposeful action? In *Hamlet,*the question of how to act is affected not only by rational considerations, such as the need for certainty, but also by emotional, ethical, and psychological factors. Hamlet himself appears to distrust the idea that it’s even possible to act in a controlled, purposeful way. When he does act, he prefers to do it blindly, recklessly, and violently.

**3.The mistery of death**

In the aftermath of his father’s murder, Hamlet is obsessed with the idea of death, and over the course of the play he considers death from a great many perspectives. He ponders both the spiritual aftermath of death, embodied in the ghost, and the physical remainders of the dead, such as by Yorick’s skull and the decaying corpses in the cemetery. Throughout, the idea of death is closely tied to the themes of spirituality, truth, and uncertainty in that death may bring the answers to Hamlet’s deepest questions, ending once and for all the problem of trying to determine truth in an ambiguous world. And, since death is both the cause and the consequence of revenge, it is intimately tied to the theme of revenge and justice—Claudius’s murder of King Hamlet initiates Hamlet’s quest for revenge, and Claudius’s death is the end of that quest.

The question of his own death plagues Hamlet as well, as he repeatedly contemplates whether or not suicide is a morally legitimate action in an unbearably painful world. Hamlet’s grief and misery is such that he frequently longs for death to end his suffering, but he fears that if he commits suicide, he will be consigned to eternal suffering in hell because of the Christian religion’s prohibition of suicide. In his famous “To be or not to be” soliloquy (III.i), Hamlet philosophically concludes that no one would choose to endure the pain of life if he or she were not afraid of what will come after death, and that it is this fear which causes complex moral considerations to interfere with the capacity for action.

**4.The nation as a diseased body**

Everything is connected in *Hamlet,* including the welfare of the royal family and the health of the state as a whole. The play’s early scenes explore the sense of anxiety and dread that surrounds the transfer of power from one ruler to the next. Throughout the play, characters draw explicit connections between the moral legitimacy of a ruler and the health of the nation. Denmark is frequently described as a physical body made ill by the moral corruption of Claudius and Gertrude, and many observers interpret the presence of the ghost as a supernatural omen indicating that “[s]omething is rotten in the state of Denmark” (I.iv.67). The dead King Hamlet is portrayed as a strong, forthright ruler under whose guard the state was in good health, while Claudius, a wicked politician, has corrupted and compromised Denmark to satisfy his own appetites. At the end of the play, the rise to power of the upright Fortinbras suggests that Denmark will be strengthened once again.

**B.Motifs**

**1.Incest and incestuous desire**

The motif of incest runs throughout the play and is frequently alluded to by Hamlet and the ghost, most obviously in conversations about Gertrude and Claudius, the former brother-in-law and sister-in-law who are now married. A subtle motif of incestuous desire can be found in the relationship of Laertes and Ophelia, as Laertes sometimes speaks to his sister in suggestively sexual terms and, at her funeral, leaps into her grave to hold her in his arms. However, the strongest overtones of incestuous desire arise in the relationship of Hamlet and Gertrude, in Hamlet’s fixation on Gertrude’s sex life with Claudius and his preoccupation with her in general.

**2.Misogyny**

Shattered by his mother’s decision to marry Claudius so soon after her husband’s death, Hamlet becomes cynical about women in general, showing a particular obsession with what he perceives to be a connection between female sexuality and moral corruption. This motif of misogyny, or hatred of women, occurs sporadically throughout the play, but it is an important inhibiting factor in Hamlet’s relationships with Ophelia and Gertrude. He urges Ophelia to go to a nunnery rather than experience the corruptions of sexuality and exclaims of Gertrude, “Frailty, thy name is woman” (I.ii.146).

**3.Ears and hearing**

One facet of *Hamlet’*s exploration of the difficulty of attaining true knowledge is slipperiness of language. Words are used to communicate ideas, but they can also be used to distort the truth, manipulate other people, and serve as tools in corrupt quests for power. Claudius, the shrewd politician, is the most obvious example of a man who manipulates words to enhance his own power. The sinister uses of words are represented by images of ears and hearing, from Claudius’s murder of the king by pouring poison into his ear to Hamlet’s claim to Horatio that “I have words to speak in thine ear will make thee dumb” (IV.vi.21). The poison poured in the king’s ear by Claudius is used by the ghost to symbolize the corrosive effect of Claudius’s dishonesty on the health of Denmark. Declaring that the story that he was killed by a snake is a lie, he says that “the whole ear of Denmark” is “Rankly abused. . . .” (I.v.36–38).

**C.Symbols**

**1.Yorick’s skull**

In*Hamlet,* physical objects are rarely used to represent thematic ideas. One important exception is Yorick’s skull, which Hamlet discovers in the graveyard in the first scene of Act V. As Hamlet speaks to the skull and about the skull of the king’s former jester, he fixates on death’s inevitability and the disintegration of the body. He urges the skull to “get you to my lady’s chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favor she must come”—no one can avoid death (V.i.178–179). He traces the skull’s mouth and says, “Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft,” indicating his fascination with the physical consequences of death (V.i.174–175). This latter idea is an important motif throughout the play, as Hamlet frequently makes comments referring to every human body’s eventual decay, noting that Polonius will be eaten by worms, that even kings are eaten by worms, and that dust from the decayed body of Alexander the Great might be used to stop a hole in a beer barrel.

**JULIUS CAESAR**

Analysis of major characters

**1.Brutus**

Brutus emerges as the most complex character in *Julius Caesar* and is also the play’s tragic hero. In his soliloquies, the audience gains insight into the complexities of his motives. He is a powerful public figure, but he appears also as a husband, a master to his servants, a dignified military leader, and a loving friend.

Brutus’s rigid idealism is both his greatest virtue and his most deadly flaw. In the world of the play, where self-serving ambition seems to dominate all other motivations, Brutus lives up to Antony’s elegiac description of him as “the noblest of Romans.” However, his commitment to principle repeatedly leads him to make miscalculations: wanting to curtail violence, he ignores Cassius’s suggestion that the conspirators kill Antony as well as Caesar. In another moment of naïve idealism, he again ignores Cassius’s advice and allows Antony to speak a funeral oration over Caesar’s body. As a result, Brutus forfeits the authority of having the last word on the murder and thus allows Antony to incite the plebeians to riot against him and the other conspirators. Brutus later endangers his good relationship with Cassius by self-righteously condemning what he sees as dishonorable fund-raising tactics on Cassius’s part. In all of these episodes, Brutus acts out of a desire to limit the self-serving aspects of his actions; ironically, however, in each incident he dooms the very cause that he seeks to promote, thus serving no one at all.

**2.Julius Caesar**

The conspirators charge Caesar with ambition, and his behavior substantiates this judgment: he does vie for absolute power over Rome, reveling in the homage he receives from others and in his conception of himself as a figure who will live on forever in men’s minds.

Caesar’s conflation of his public image with his private self helps bring about his death, since he mistakenly believes that the immortal status granted to his public self somehow protects his mortal body. Still, in many ways, Caesar’s faith that he is eternal proves valid by the end of the play: by Act V, scene iii, Brutus is attributing his and Cassius’s misfortunes to Caesar’s power reaching from beyond the grave. Caesar’s aura seems to affect the general outcome of events in a mystic manner, while also inspiring Octavius and Antony and strengthening their determination. As Octavius ultimately assumes the title Caesar, Caesar’s permanence is indeed established in some respect.

**3.Anthony**

Antony proves strong in all of the ways that Brutus proves weak. His impulsive, improvisatory nature serves him perfectly, first to persuade the conspirators that he is on their side, thus gaining their leniency, and then to persuade the plebeians of the conspirators’ injustice, thus gaining the masses’ political support. Not too scrupulous to stoop to deceit and duplicity, as Brutus claims to be, Antony proves himself a consummate politician, using gestures and skilled rhetoric to his advantage. He responds to subtle cues among both his nemeses and his allies to know exactly how he must conduct himself at each particular moment in order to gain the most advantage. In both his eulogy for Caesar and the play as a whole, Antony is adept at tailoring his words and actions to his audiences’ desires. Unlike Brutus, who prides himself on acting solely with respect to virtue and blinding himself to his personal concerns, Antony never separates his private affairs from his public actions.

**THEMES**

**1.Fate versus free will**

*Julius Caesar* raises many questions about the force of fate in life versus the capacity for free will. Cassius refuses to accept Caesar’s rising power and deems a belief in fate to be nothing more than a form of passivity or cowardice.

Ultimately, the play seems to support a philosophy in which fate and freedom maintain a delicate coexistence. Thus Caesar declares: “It seems to me most strange that men should fear, / Seeing that death, a necessary end, / Will come when it will come” (II.ii.35–37). In other words, Caesar recognizes that certain events lie beyond human control; to crouch in fear of them is to enter a paralysis equal to, if not worse than, death. It is to surrender any capacity for freedom and agency that one might actually possess. Indeed, perhaps to face death head-on, to die bravely and honorably, is Caesar’s best course: in the end, Brutus interprets his and Cassius’s defeat as the work of Caesar’s ghost—not just his apparition, but also the force of the people’s devotion to him, the strong legacy of a man who refused any fear of fate and, in his disregard of fate, seems to have transcended it.

**2.Public self versus private self**

Much of the play’s tragedy stems from the characters’ neglect of private feelings and loyalties in favor of what they believe to be the public good. Similarly, characters confuse their private selves with their public selves, hardening and dehumanizing themselves or transforming themselves into ruthless political machines.

Ultimately, neglecting private sentiments to follow public concerns brings Caesar to his death. Although Caesar does briefly agree to stay home from the Senate in order to please Calpurnia, who has dreamed of his murder, he gives way to ambition when Decius tells him that the senators plan to offer him the crown. -Caesar’s public self again takes precedence. Tragically, he no longer sees the difference between his omnipotent, immortal public image and his vulnerable human body. Just preceding his death, Caesar refuses Artemidorus’s pleas to speak with him, saying that he gives last priority to his most personal concerns. He thus endangers himself by believing that the strength of his public self will protect his private self.

**3. Misinterpretations and Misreadings**

Much of the play deals with the characters’ failures to interpret correctly the omens that they encounter. Thus, the night preceding Caesar’s appearance at the Senate is full of portents, but no one reads them accurately: Cassius takes them to signify the danger that Caesar’s impending coronation would bring to the state, when, if anything, they warn of the destruction that Cassius himself threatens. There are calculated misreadings as well: Cassius manipulates Brutus into joining the conspiracy by means of forged letters, knowing that Brutus’s trusting nature will cause him to accept the letters as authentic pleas from the Roman people.

The circumstances of Cassius’s death represent another instance of misinterpretation. Pindarus’s erroneous conclusion that Titinius has been captured by the enemy, when in fact Titinius has reunited with friendly forces, is the piece of misinformation that prompts Cassius to seek death. Thus, in the world of politics portrayed in *Julius Caesar,* the inability to read people and events leads to downfall; conversely, the ability to do so is the key to survival. With so much ambition and rivalry, the ability to gauge the public’s opinion as well as the resentment or loyalty of one’s fellow politicians can guide one to success. Antony proves masterful at recognizing his situation, and his accurate reading of the crowd’s emotions during his funeral oration for Caesar allows him to win the masses over to his side.

**4.Inflexibility versus compromise**

Both Brutus and Caesar are stubborn, rather inflexible people who ultimately suffer fatally for it. In the play’s aggressive political landscape, individuals succeed through adaptability, bargaining, and compromise. Brutus’s rigid though honorable ideals leave him open for manipulation by Cassius. He believes so thoroughly in the purpose of the assassination that he does not perceive the need for excessive political maneuvering to justify the murder. Equally resolute, Caesar prides himself on his steadfastness; yet this constancy helps bring about his death, as he refuses to heed ill omens and goes willingly to the Senate, into the hands of his murderers.

Antony proves perhaps the most adaptable of all of the politicians: while his speech to the Roman citizens centers on Caesar’s generosity toward each citizen, he later searches for ways to turn these funds into cash in order to raise an army against Brutus and Cassius. Although he gains power by offering to honor Caesar’s will and provide the citizens their rightful money, it becomes clear that ethical concerns will not prevent him from using the funds in a more politically expedient manner. Antony is a successful politician—yet the question of morality remains. There seems to be no way to reconcile firm moral principles with success in politics in Shakespeare’s rendition of ancient Rome; thus each character struggles toward a different solution.

**5.Rhetoric and power**

*Julius Caesar* gives detailed consideration to the relationship between rhetoric and power. The ability to make things happen by words alone is the most powerful type of authority. Words also serve to move hearts and minds, as Act III evidences. Antony cleverly convinces the conspirators of his desire to side with them: “Let each man render me with his bloody hand” (III.i.185). Under the guise of a gesture of friendship, Antony actually marks the conspirators for vengeance. In the Forum, Brutus speaks to the crowd and appeals to its love of liberty in order to justify the killing of Caesar. He also makes ample reference to the honor in which he is generally esteemed so as to validate further his explanation of the deed. Antony likewise wins the crowd’s favor, using persuasive rhetoric to whip the masses into a frenzy so great that they don’t even realize the fickleness of their favor.

**MOTIFS**

1.Omen and portents

Throughout the play, omens and portents manifest themselves, each serving to crystallize the larger themes of fate and misinterpretation of signs. Until Caesar’s death, each time an omen or nightmare is reported, the audience is reminded of Caesar’s impending demise. The audience wonders whether these portents simply announce what is fated to occur or whether they serve as warnings for what might occur if the characters do not take active steps to change their behavior. Whether or not individuals can affect their destinies, characters repeatedly fail to interpret the omens correctly. In a larger sense, the omens in *Julius Caesar* thus imply the dangers of failing to perceive and analyze the details of one’s world.

2.Letters

The motif of letters represents an interesting counterpart to the force of oral rhetoric in the play. Oral rhetoric depends upon a direct, dialogic interaction between speaker and audience: depending on how the listeners respond to a certain statement, the orator can alter his or her speech and intonations accordingly. In contrast, the power of a written letter depends more fully on the addressee; whereas an orator must read the emotions of the crowd, the act of reading is undertaken solely by the recipient of the letter. Thus, when Brutus receives the forged letter from Cassius in Act II, scene i, the letter has an effect because Brutus allows it to do so; it is he who grants it its full power. In contrast, Caesar refuses to read the letter that Artemidorus tries to hand him in Act III, scene i, as he is heading to the Senate. Predisposed to ignore personal affairs, Caesar denies the letter any reading at all and thus negates the potential power of the words written inside.

**SYMBOLS**

1.Women and wives

While one could try to analyze Calpurnia and Portia as full characters in their own right, they function primarily not as sympathetic personalities or sources of insight or poetry but rather as symbols for the private, domestic realm. Both women plead with their husbands to be more aware of their private needs and feelings (Portia in Act II, scene i; Calpurnia in Act III, scene ii). Caesar and Brutus rebuff the pleas of their respective wives, however; they not only prioritize public matters but also actively disregard their private emotions and intuitions. As such, Calpurnia and Portia are powerless figures, willing though unable to help and comfort Caesar and Brutus.

**A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM**

Analysis of major characters

**1.Puck**

Though there is little character development in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and no true protagonist, critics generally point to Puck as the most important character in the play. The mischievous, quick-witted sprite sets many of the play’s events in motion with his magic, by means of both deliberate pranks on the human characters (transforming Bottom’s head into that of an ass) and unfortunate mistakes (smearing the love potion on Lysander’s eyelids instead of Demetrius’s).

**2.Nick Bottom**

Whereas Puck’s humor is often mischievous and subtle, the comedy surrounding the overconfident weaver Nick Bottom is hilariously overt. The central figure in the subplot involving the craftsmen’s production of the Pyramus and Thisbe story, Bottom dominates his fellow actors with an extraordinary belief in his own abilities (he thinks he is perfect for every part in the play) and his comical incompetence (he is a terrible actor and frequently makes rhetorical and grammatical mistakes in his speech). The humor surrounding Bottom often stems from the fact that he is totally unaware of his own ridiculousness; his speeches are overdramatic and self-aggrandizing, and he seems to believe that everyone takes him as seriously as he does himself.

**3.Helena**

Of the other characters, Helena, the lovesick young woman desperately in love with Demetrius, is perhaps the most fully drawn. Among the quartet of Athenian lovers, Helena is the one who thinks most about the nature of love—which makes sense, given that at the beginning of the play she is left out of the love triangle involving Lysander, Hermia, and Demetrius.

**THEMES**

1.Love’s difficulty

The theme of love’s difficulty is often explored through the motif of love out of balance—that is, romantic situations in which a disparity or inequality interferes with the harmony of a relationship. The prime instance of this imbalance is the asymmetrical love among the four young Athenians: Hermia loves Lysander, Lysander loves Hermia, Helena loves Demetrius, and Demetrius loves Hermia instead of Helena—a simple numeric imbalance in which two men love the same woman, leaving one woman with too many suitors and one with too few. The play has strong potential for a traditional outcome, and the plot is in many ways based on a quest for internal balance; that is, when the lovers’ tangle resolves itself into symmetrical pairings, the traditional happy ending will have been achieved. Somewhat similarly, in the relationship between Titania and Oberon, an imbalance arises out of the fact that Oberon’s coveting of Titania’s Indian boy outweighs his love for her. Later, Titania’s passion for the ass-headed Bottom represents an imbalance of appearance and nature: Titania is beautiful and graceful, while Bottom is clumsy and grotesque.

2.Magic

The fairies’ magic, which brings about many of the most bizarre and hilarious situations in the play, is another element central to the fantastic atmosphere of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Shakespeare uses magic both to embody the almost supernatural power of love (symbolized by the love potion) and to create a surreal world. Although the misuse of magic causes chaos, as when Puck mistakenly applies the love potion to Lysander’s eyelids, magic ultimately resolves the play’s tensions by restoring love to balance among the quartet of Athenian youths. Additionally, the ease with which Puck uses magic to his own ends, as when he reshapes Bottom’s head into that of an ass and recreates the voices of Lysander and Demetrius, stands in contrast to the laboriousness and gracelessness of the craftsmen’s attempt to stage their play.

3.Dreams

As the title suggests, dreams are an important theme in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream;*they are linked to the bizarre, magical mishaps in the forest. The theme of dreaming recurs predominantly when characters attempt to explain bizarre events in which these characters are involved.

Shakespeare is also interested in the actual workings of dreams, in how events occur without explanation, time loses its normal sense of flow, and the impossible occurs as a matter of course; he seeks to recreate this environment in the play through the intervention of the fairies in the magical forest. At the end of the play, Puck extends the idea of dreams to the audience members themselves, saying that, if they have been offended by the play, they should remember it as nothing more than a dream. This sense of illusion and gauzy fragility is crucial to the atmosphere of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream,* as it helps render the play a fantastical experience rather than a heavy drama.

**MOTIFS**

1.Contrast

The idea of contrast is the basic building block of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The entire play is constructed around groups of opposites and doubles. Nearly every characteristic presented in the play has an opposite: Helena is tall, Hermia is short; Puck plays pranks, Bottom is the victim of pranks; Titania is beautiful, Bottom is grotesque. Further, the three main groups of characters (who are developed from sources as varied as Greek mythology, English folklore, and classical literature) are designed to contrast powerfully with one another: the fairies are graceful and magical, while the craftsmen are clumsy and earthy; the craftsmen are merry, while the lovers are overly serious. Contrast serves as the defining visual characteristic of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream,* with the play’s most indelible image being that of the beautiful, delicate Titania weaving flowers into the hair of the ass-headed Bottom. It seems impossible to imagine two figures less compatible with each other. The juxtaposition of extraordinary differences is the most important characteristic of the play’s surreal atmosphere and is thus perhaps the play’s central motif; there is no scene in which extraordinary contrast is not present.

**SYMBOLS**

1. **Theseus and Hippolyta**

Theseus and Hippolyta bookend *A Midsummer Night’s Dream,* appearing in the daylight at both the beginning and the end of the play’s main action. Shakespeare uses Theseus and Hippolyta, the ruler of Athens and his warrior bride, to represent order and stability, to contrast with the uncertainty, instability, and darkness of most of the play. Whereas an important element of the dream realm is that one is not in control of one’s environment, Theseus and Hippolyta are always entirely in control of theirs. Their reappearance in the daylight of Act IV to hear Theseus’s hounds signifies the end of the dream state of the previous night and a return to rationality.

**2.The Love Potion**

The love potion is made from the juice of a flower that was struck with one of Cupid’s misfired arrows; it is used by the fairies to wreak romantic havoc throughout Acts II, III, and IV. Because the meddling fairies are careless with the love potion, the situation of the young Athenian lovers becomes increasingly chaotic and confusing (Demetrius and Lysander are magically compelled to transfer their love from Hermia to Helena), and Titania is hilariously humiliated (she is magically compelled to fall deeply in love with the ass-headed Bottom). The love potion thus becomes a symbol of the unreasoning, fickle, erratic, and undeniably powerful nature of love, which can lead to inexplicable and bizarre behavior and cannot be resisted.

**3. The Craftsmen’s Play**

The play-within-a-play is used to represent, in condensed form, many of the important ideas and themes of the main plot. Because the craftsmen are such bumbling actors, their performance satirizes the melodramatic Athenian lovers and gives the play a purely joyful, comedic ending. Pyramus and Thisbe face parental disapproval in the play-within-a-play, just as Hermia and Lysander do; the theme of romantic confusion enhanced by the darkness of night is rehashed, as Pyramus mistakenly believes that Thisbe has been killed by the lion, just as the Athenian lovers experience intense misery because of the mix-ups caused by the fairies’ meddling. The craftsmen’s play is, therefore, a kind of symbol for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* itself: a story involving powerful emotions that is made hilarious by its comical presentation.

**ROMEO AND JULIET**

In [William Shakespeare](http://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/r/romeo-and-juliet/~/link.aspx?_id=EEDC8653EE0E4BFC95A13E8A01AE1C66&_z=z)'s *Romeo and Juliet*, a long feud between the Montague and Capulet families disrupts the city of Verona and causes tragic results for [Romeo](http://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/r/romeo-and-juliet/~/link.aspx?_id=ABA29180B2994C33BEBAEE823D707D88&_z=z) and [Juliet](http://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/r/romeo-and-juliet/~/link.aspx?_id=2BD669520B684E99A61F45D6F5DC7682&_z=z). Revenge, love, and a secret marriage force the young star-crossed lovers to grow up quickly — and fate causes them to commit suicide in despair. Contrast and conflict are running themes throughout Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet* — one of the Bard's most popular romantic tragedies.

**Analysis of major characters**

1.Romeo

During the course of the play, Romeo matures from adolescence to adulthood as a result of his love for [Juliet](http://cliffsnotescms-v1.prd.techspa.com/sitecore/shell/Controls/Rich%20Text%20Editor/~/link.aspx?_id=2BD669520B684E99A61F45D6F5DC7682&_z=z) and his unfortunate involvement in the feud, marking his development from a comic character to a tragic figure. Romeo is initially presented as a *Petrarchan* lover*,* a man whose feelings of love aren't reciprocated by the lady he admires and who uses the poetic language of sonnets to express his emotions about his situation. As the play progresses, Romeo's increasing maturity as a lover is marked by the change in his language. He begins to speak in blank verse as well as rhyme, which allows his language to sound less artificial and more like everyday language.The fated destinies of Romeo and Juliet are foreshadowed throughout the play.

2.Juliet

Juliet, like [Romeo](http://cliffsnotescms-v1.prd.techspa.com/sitecore/shell/Controls/Rich%20Text%20Editor/~/link.aspx?_id=ABA29180B2994C33BEBAEE823D707D88&_z=z), makes the transition from an innocent adolescent to responsible adult during the course of the play. In Juliet's case, however, there is a heightened sense that she has been forced to mature too quickly. The emphasis throughout the play on Juliet's youth, despite her growing maturity, establishes her as a tragic heroine. Juliet is presented as quiet and obedient; however, she possesses an inner strength that enables her to have maturity beyond her years.

**THEMES**

1.Fate

From the beginning, we know that the story of *Romeo and Juliet* will end in tragedy. We also know that their tragic ends will not result from their own personal defects but from fate, which has marked them for sorrow. Emphasizing fate's control over their destinies, the Prologue tells us these "star-cross'd lovers'" relationship is deathmark'd."

In Act I, Scene ii, as Lord Capulet's servant is searching for someone who can read the guest list to him, Benvolio and [Romeo](http://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/r/romeo-and-juliet/critical-essays/~/link.aspx?_id=ABA29180B2994C33BEBAEE823D707D88&_z=z) enter. Completely by chance, Capulet's servant meets Romeo and Benvolio, wondering if they know how to read. This accidental meeting emphasizes the importance of fate in the play. Romeo claims it is his "fortune" to read — indeed, "fortune" or chance has led Capulet's servant to him — and this scene prepares us for the tragic inevitability of the play.

The lovers will be punished not because of flaws within their personalities but because fate is against them. Ironically, the servant invites Romeo to the Capulet's house, as long as he is not a Montague, to "crush a cup of wine." Only fate could manufacture this unlikely meeting with Capulet's illiterate servant, as only fate will allow Romeo to trespass into the Capulet's domain and meet Juliet.

2.Love

Love is another important thematic element in the play, which presents various types of love: the sensual, physical love advocated by the Nurse; the Proper or contractual love represented by Paris; and the passionate, romantic love of Romeo and [Juliet](http://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/r/romeo-and-juliet/critical-essays/~/link.aspx?_id=2BD669520B684E99A61F45D6F5DC7682&_z=z). How do these various types of love relate to one another? Is physical attraction a necessary component of romantic love? Because words are slippery, Juliet worries that Romeo's protestation of love are merely lies. How can we know if love is true?

3.Value and doubleness

Another important theme is the idea of value and doubleness. Just as language is ambiguous, so are value judgments. As the Friar reminds us, "virtue itself turns vice being misapplied, /And vice sometime's by action dignified" (II.iii.17-18). Within a flower, for example lies both poison and medicine. Similarly, the deaths of Romeo and Juliet are tragic but also bring new life to Verona. The Friar's own role in the play contains this ambiguity. Although he tries to help the lovers, his actions lead to their suffering. Shakespeare's message is that nothing is purely good or evil; everything contains elements of both. Ambiguity rules.

4.Meaning of gender

A final theme to be considered is the meaning of gender. In particular, the play offers a variety of versions of masculinity. One example is Mercutio, the showy male bird, who enjoys quarreling, fencing and joking. Mercutio has definite ideas about what masculinity should look like. He criticizes Tybalt for being too interested in his clothes and for speaking with a fake accent. Similarly, he suggests that Romeo's love-melancholy is effeminate, while his more sociable self is properly masculine. Therefore, his happiest when Romeo rejoins his witty, crazy group of male friends: "Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo; now art thou art, by art as well as by nature" (II.iv.89-90).

Romeo's masculinity is constantly questioned. Following Mercutio's death, for example, Romeo fears that his love of Juliet has effeminized him: "Thy beauty hath made me effeminate/And in my temper soften'd valour's steel" (III.i.116-117) so that his reputation as a man is "stain'd" (III.i.1113). In addition, the Friar accuses Romeo of being an "[u]nseemly woman in a seeming man" and says that his tears are "womanish" (III.iii.109-111).

What is the proper role for a man? The play seems to suggest that violence is not the way. Mediating between Mercutio's violent temper and Romeo's passivity, the Prince is possibly the best model of masculine behavior in the play: impartial and fair, he also opposes civil violence.

**SYMBOLS AND MOTIFS**

1.Light and darkness

One of the most often repeated image patterns in the play involves the interplay of light and darkness. The integration of the language indicates an important motif overall. [Romeo](http://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/r/romeo-and-juliet/critical-essays/~/link.aspx?_id=ABA29180B2994C33BEBAEE823D707D88&_z=z) compares [Juliet](http://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/r/romeo-and-juliet/critical-essays/~/link.aspx?_id=2BD669520B684E99A61F45D6F5DC7682&_z=z) to light throughout the play. Upon first sight of her, Romeo exclaims that she teaches "the torches to burn bright" (I.v.43). She is also "the sun" who can "kill the envious moon" (II.ii.3), and later in this scene, Shakespeare says that her eyes are like "[t]wo of the fairest stars in all the heaven" (II.ii.15). But hers is a light that shows best against the darkness; she "hangs upon the cheek of night / As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear" (I.v.44-45).

Romeo is also compared with a light that illuminates the darkness; if Juliet dies, she wants Romeo cut "in little stars/And he will make the face of heaven so fine/That all the world will be in love with night/? And pay no worship to the garish sun" (III.ii.22-25). This quote reminds us that their light shines most brightly in the dark — that it is a muted glow associated primarily with stars, torches, and the dawn, rather than with sunlight, which is almost obscenely bright.

Like their love, darkness is associated with mystery, emotion, and imagination. In fact, the day works against them. At the end of their honeymoon night, Romeo says, "More light and light: more dark and dark our woes" (III.v.36); they must part before the light arrived so that he is not caught and killed.

2.Nighttime

The combination of light and dark makes an interesting motif in Romeo and Juliet. But for our young lovers, the nighttime itself is an important motif as well. The evening hours holds all of the significant moments for Romeo and Juliet. They meet; they pledge their love; they elope; they commit suicide.

Nighttime represents a time when a person can let go of their inhibitions. The same hold true for our title characters. They have a boldness at night that doesn't always show up in the day; this is especially true for Romeo. The night provides privacy and place away from the public's prying eyes, where Romeo and Juliet's love can blossom.

3.Poison

Poison, both sleep inducing and lethal, is the instrument of Romeo and Juliet's deaths. (Technically Juliet stabbed herself, but that never would have happened if not for the sleeping potion.) While poison has a literal purpose in the play, it's also a symbol. The poison symbolizes the Capulet and Montague feud. Not only is the feud deadly in itself, — recall Mercutio's death — it's also the catalyst for Romeo and Juliet's double suicide.

**THE PURITAN, RESTORATION AND AUGUSTAN AGE**

**1625 – 1776**

During this period there were 3 religious groups :

1. The Church of England – the official state Church established by Henry VIII during the Reformation
2. The Roman Catholic Church ( Catholics)
3. Puritans, Presbyterians and Dissenters – also known as nonconformists; they had very strict moral principles and believed that the way to salvation lay in a life of hard work and avoidance of all forms of frivolous entertainment.

**Charles I** believed he had a divine right to rule and his acts were answerable only to God. **(the divine right of kings).** In **1629 he dissolved the Parliament**. When the Parliament demanded control of the army in **1642,** Charles refused him, and this led to **the Civil War** which ended with a **Puritan victory**. After that **the Commonwealth** was founded by the Puritan Oliver Cromwell. After 20 years Charles II made possible the **Restoration** = when the system of government returned to what it had been before the Cromwellian revolution.

During this period took place two events that disturbed the life of the city:

* **The plague in 1665**
* **The great Fire of 1666**

As the 18th century dawned, two of England’s historic conflicts seemed to have been resolved:

* **The Church of England established as the dominant Church in the land**
* **Parliament had gained power at the expense of the monarchy.**

**The 17th century** was a time of constant religious and political fighting and feuding, an age that stabilized the relationships between Church and state, and between Parliament and monarchy.

**During 1702 – 1776** the power of the monarch was limited in favour of the Parliament by the **Glorious revolution** and there were **two political parties:**

1. **The Tory party** which was supported by the old aristocracy and the Church of England
2. **The Whigs party** which was supported by the emerging middle classes

**THE LITERARY BACKGROUND**

The greatest 17th century poet was **JOHN MILTON**, who belongs in spirit to the Puritan age of Cromwell’s Commonwealth, which he supported fervently. His masterpiece was **PARADISE LOST**.

**ROBERT BURTON, SIR THOMAS BROWNE** and **JOHN BUNYAN** are the most representative prose writers of the period. **JOHN BUNYAN** and his masterpiece **THE PILGRIM’S PROGRESS** was the writer who most successfully captured the Puritan spirit.

**THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION** which took place after the Restoration, also played an important part in creating a new and clear, concise prose style. **EMPIRICISM** – the idea that scientific assertions had to be tested by experiment – was becoming increasingly important.

The second half of the 17th century saw the emergence of a new literary form : **THE DIARY.**

**AUGUSTAN LITERATURE**

The 18th century brought with it a general desire for order, clarity and stability. Writers of the period drew inspiration from the Latin poets Virgil, Horace and Ovid who, under the patronage of Emperor Augustus, created the golden age of classical literature. English writers tried to imitate the Latin poets, and the early and mid-eighteenth century became known as **THE AUGUSTAN AGE**. The greatest poet of the Augustan Age was **ALEXANDER POPE**.

The 18th century is also best remembered for the development of prose-writing. The early part of the century witnessed a dramatic rise in prose output in the form of journalism, essay writing, political satire and pamphleteering.

Five dominant literary figures – **DANIEL DEFOE, SAMUEL RICHARDSON, HENRY FIELDING, JONATHAN SWIFT and LAURENCE STERNE** – moulded fictional prose into a literary form that appealed to the 18th century reader. In doing so they created the dominant literary genre of the next three centuries: **THE MODERN NOVEL**.

In the second half of the 18th century, the admiration for the classical ideals which had characterized the Augustan Age began to wane (a fi in declin):

* The grandeur, rationalism and elevated sentiments of the early part of the century gave way to a simpler, more genuine form of expression
* There was a renewed interest in nature and the simple rural life.

**ROBINSON CRUSOE**

CONTEXT

Daniel Defoe was born in 1660, in London and witnessed two of the greatest disasters of the seventeenth century: a recurrence of the plague and the Great Fire of London in 1666. These events may have shaped his fascination with catastrophes and survival in his writing. Defoe developed a taste for travel that lasted throughout his life. His fiction reflects this interest; his characters Moll Flanders and Robinson Crusoe both change their lives by voyaging far from their native England. Defoe attended a respected school in Dorking, where he was an excellent student, but as a Presbyterian, he was forbidden to attend Oxford or Cambridge. He entered a dissenting institution called Morton’s Academy and considered becoming a Presbyterian minister. Though he abandoned this plan, his Protestant values endured throughout his life despite discrimination and persecution, and these values are expressed in *Robinson Crusoe.*  *Robinson Crusoe* was based on the true story of a shipwrecked seaman named Alexander Selkirk and was passed off as history.  His focus on the actual conditions of everyday life and avoidance of the courtly and the heroic made Defoe a revolutionary in English literature and helped define the new genre of the novel. Stylistically, Defoe was a great innovator. Dispensing with the ornate style associated with the upper classes, Defoe used the simple, direct, fact-based style of the middle classes, which became the new standard for the English novel. With *Robinson Crusoe*’s theme of solitary human existence, Defoe paved the way for the central modern theme of alienation and isolation.

**ANALYSIS OF MAJOR CHARACTERS**

1.Robinson Crusoe

While he is no flashy hero or grand epic adventurer, Robinson Crusoe displays character traits that have won him the approval of generations of readers. His perseverance in spending months making a canoe, and in practicing pottery making until he gets it right, is praiseworthy. Additionally, his resourcefulness in building a home, dairy, grape arbor, country house, and goat stable from practically nothing is clearly remarkable. Crusoe’s business instincts are just as considerable as his survival instincts: he manages to make a fortune in Brazil despite a twenty-eight-year absence and even leaves his island with a nice collection of gold. Moreover, Crusoe is never interested in portraying himself as a hero in his own narration. He does not boast of his courage in quelling the mutiny, and he is always ready to admit unheroic feelings of fear or panic, as when he finds the footprint on the beach. Crusoe prefers to depict himself as an ordinary sensible man, never as an exceptional hero.

But Crusoe’s admirable qualities must be weighed against the flaws in his character. Crusoe seems incapable of deep feelings, as shown by his cold account of leaving his family—he worries about the religious consequences of disobeying his father, but never displays any emotion about leaving. Though he is generous toward people, as when he gives gifts to his sisters and the captain, Crusoe reveals very little tender or sincere affection in his dealings with them.

His insistence on dating events makes sense to a point, but it ultimately ends up seeming obsessive and irrelevant when he tells us the date on which he grinds his tools but neglects to tell us the date of a very important event like meeting Friday. Perhaps his impulse to record facts carefully is not a survival skill, but an irritating sign of his neurosis.

Finally, while not boasting of heroism, Crusoe is nonetheless very interested in possessions, power, and prestige.  His teaching Friday to call him “Master,” even before teaching him the words for “yes” or “no,” seems obnoxious even under the racist standards of the day, as if Crusoe needs to hear the ego-boosting word spoken as soon as possible. Overall, Crusoe’s virtues tend to be private: his industry, resourcefulness, and solitary courage make him an exemplary individual. But his vices are social, and his urge to subjugate others is highly objectionable. In bringing both sides together into one complex character, Defoe gives us a fascinating glimpse into the successes, failures, and contradictions of modern man.

2.Friday

Probably the first nonwhite character to be given a realistic, individualized, and humane portrayal in the English novel, Friday has a huge literary and cultural importance. If Crusoe represents the first colonial mind in fiction, then Friday represents not just a Caribbean tribesman, but all the natives of America, Asia, and Africa who would later be oppressed in the age of European imperialism. At the moment when Crusoe teaches Friday to call him “Master” Friday becomes an enduring political symbol of racial injustice in a modern world critical of imperialist expansion.

Aside from his importance to our culture, Friday is a key figure within the context of the novel. In many ways he is the most vibrant character in *Robinson Crusoe,* much more charismatic and colorful than his master. Indeed, Defoe at times underscores the contrast between Crusoe’s and Friday’s personalities, as when Friday, in his joyful reunion with his father, exhibits far more emotion toward his family than Crusoe. Whereas Crusoe never mentions missing his family or dreams about the happiness of seeing them again, Friday jumps and sings for joy when he meets his father, and this emotional display makes us see what is missing from Crusoe’s stodgy heart. Friday’s expression of loyalty in asking Crusoe to kill him rather than leave him is more heartfelt than anything Crusoe ever says or does. Crusoe does not seem to value intimacy with humans much, but he does say that he loves Friday, which is a remarkable disclosure. It is the only time Crusoe makes such an admission in the novel, since he never expresses love for his parents, brothers, sisters, or even his wife. The mere fact that an Englishman confesses more love for an illiterate Caribbean ex-cannibal than for his own family suggests the appeal of Friday’s personality. Crusoe may bring Friday Christianity and clothing, but Friday brings Crusoe emotional warmth and a vitality of spirit that Crusoe’s own European heart lacks.

**THEMES**

1.The ambivalence of mastery

Crusoe’s success in mastering his situation, overcoming his obstacles, and controlling his environment shows the condition of mastery in a positive light, at least at the beginning of the novel. Crusoe lands in an inhospitable environment and makes it his home. His taming and domestication of wild goats and parrots with Crusoe as their master illustrates his newfound control. Moreover, Crusoe’s mastery over nature makes him a master of his fate and of himself. Early in the novel, he frequently blames himself for disobeying his father’s advice or blames the destiny that drove him to sea. But in the later part of the novel, Crusoe stops viewing himself as a passive victim and strikes a new note of self-determination. In building a home for himself on the island, he finds that he is master of his life—he suffers a hard fate and still finds prosperity.

But this theme of mastery becomes more complex and less positive after Friday’s arrival, when the idea of mastery comes to apply more to unfair relationships between humans. In Chapter XXIII, Crusoe teaches Friday the word “[m]aster” even before teaching him “yes” and “no,” and indeed he lets him “know that was to be [Crusoe’s] name.” Crusoe never entertains the idea of considering Friday a friend or equal—for some reason, superiority comes instinctively to him. We further question Crusoe’s right to be called “[m]aster” when he later refers to himself as “king” over the natives and Europeans, who are his “subjects.” In short, while Crusoe seems praiseworthy in mastering his fate, the praiseworthiness of his mastery over his fellow humans is more doubtful. Defoe explores the link between the two in his depiction of the colonial mind.

2.The necessity of repentance

Crusoe’s experiences constitute not simply an adventure story in which thrilling things happen, but also a moral tale illustrating the right and wrong ways to live one’s life. This moral and religious dimension of the tale is indicated in the Preface, which states that Crusoe’s story is being published to instruct others in God’s wisdom, and one vital part of this wisdom is the importance of repenting one’s sins. While it is important to be grateful for God’s miracles, as Crusoe is when his grain sprouts, it is not enough simply to express gratitude or even to pray to God, as Crusoe does several times with few results. Crusoe needs repentance most; Crusoe believes that his major sin is his rebellious behavior toward his father, which he refers to as his “original sin,” akin to Adam and Eve’s first disobedience of God. This biblical reference also suggests that Crusoe’s exile from civilization represents Adam and Eve’s expulsion from Eden.

For Crusoe, repentance consists of acknowledging his wretchedness and his absolute dependence on the Lord. This admission marks a turning point in Crusoe’s spiritual consciousness, and is almost a born-again experience for him. After repentance, he complains much less about his sad fate and views the island more positively. Later, when Crusoe is rescued and his fortune restored, he compares himself to Job, who also regained divine favor. Ironically, this view of the necessity of repentance ends up justifying sin: Crusoe may never have learned to repent if he had never sinfully disobeyed his father in the first place. Thus, as powerful as the theme of repentance is in the novel, it is nevertheless complex and ambiguous.

3.The importance of self-awareness

Crusoe’s arrival on the island does not make him revert to a brute existence controlled by animal instincts, and, unlike animals, he remains conscious of himself at all times. Indeed, his island existence actually deepens his self-awareness as he withdraws from the external social world and turns inward. The idea that the individual must keep a careful reckoning of the state of his own soul is a key point in the Presbyterian doctrine that Defoe took seriously all his life. We see that in his normal day-to-day activities, Crusoe keeps accounts of himself enthusiastically and in various ways.

Crusoe obsessively keeps a journal to record his daily activities, even when they amount to nothing more than finding a few pieces of wood on the beach or waiting inside while it rains. Crusoe feels the importance of staying aware of his situation at all times. We can also sense Crusoe’s impulse toward self-awareness in the fact that he teaches his parrot to say the words, “Poor Robin Crusoe. . . . Where have you been?” This sort of self-examining thought is natural for anyone alone on a desert island, but it is given a strange intensity when we recall that Crusoe has spent months teaching the bird to say it back to him. Crusoe teaches nature itself to voice his own self-awareness.

**MOTIFS**

**1.Counting and measuring**

Crusoe is a careful note-taker whenever numbers and quantities are involved. Counting and measuring underscore Crusoe’s practical, businesslike character and his hands-on approach to life. But Defoe sometimes hints at the futility of Crusoe’s measuring—as when the carefully measured canoe cannot reach water or when his obsessively kept calendar is thrown off by a day of oversleeping. Defoe may be subtly poking fun at the urge to quantify, showing us that, in the end, everything Crusoe counts never really adds up to much and does not save him from isolation.

**2.Eating**

One of Crusoe’s first concerns after his shipwreck is his food supply. Even while he is still wet from the sea in Chapter V, he frets about not having “anything to eat or drink to comfort me.” He soon provides himself with food, and indeed each new edible item marks a new stage in his mastery of the island, so that his food supply becomes a symbol of his survival. His securing of goat meat staves off immediate starvation, and his discovery of grain is viewed as a miracle, like manna from heaven. His cultivation of raisins, almost a luxury food for Crusoe, marks a new comfortable period in his island existence. In a way, these images of eating convey Crusoe’s ability to integrate the island into his life, just as food is integrated into the body to let the organism grow and prosper. But no sooner does Crusoe master the art of eating than he begins to fear being eaten himself. The cannibals transform Crusoe from the consumer into a potential object to be consumed. Life for Crusoe always illustrates this *eat or be eaten* philosophy, since even back in Europe he is threatened by man-eating wolves. Eating is an image of existence itself, just as being eaten signifies death for Crusoe.

**3.Ordeals at sea**

Crusoe’s encounters with water in the novel are often associated not simply with hardship, but with a kind of symbolic ordeal, or test of character. First, the storm off the coast of Yarmouth frightens Crusoe’s friend away from a life at sea, but does not deter Crusoe. Then, in his first trading voyage, he proves himself a capable merchant, and in his second one, he shows he is able to survive enslavement. His escape from his Moorish master and his successful encounter with the Africans both occur at sea. Most significantly, Crusoe survives his shipwreck after a lengthy immersion in water. But the sea remains a source of danger and fear even later, when the cannibals arrive in canoes. The Spanish shipwreck reminds Crusoe of the destructive power of water and of his own good fortune in surviving it. All the life-testing water imagery in the novel has subtle associations with the rite of baptism, by which Christians prove their faith and enter a new life saved by Christ.

**SYMBOLS**

1.The footprint

Crusoe’s shocking discovery of a single footprint on the sand in Chapter XVIII is one of the most famous moments in the novel, and it symbolizes our hero’s conflicted feelings about human companionship. Crusoe has earlier confessed how much he misses companionship, yet the evidence of a man on his island sends him into a panic. Immediately he interprets the footprint negatively, as the print of the devil or of an aggressor. He never for a moment entertains hope that it could belong to an angel or another European who could rescue or befriend him. This instinctively negative and fearful attitude toward others makes us consider the possibility that Crusoe may not want to return to human society after all, and that the isolation he is experiencing may actually be his ideal state.

2.The cross

Concerned that he will “lose [his] reckoning of time” in Chapter VII, Crusoe marks the passing of days “with [his] knife upon a large post, in capital letters, and making it into a great cross . . . set[s] it up on the shore where [he] first landed. . . .” The large size and capital letters show us how important this cross is to Crusoe as a timekeeping device and thus also as a way of relating himself to the larger social world where dates and calendars still matter. But the cross is also a symbol of his own new existence on the island, just as the Christian cross is a symbol of the Christian’s new life in Christ after baptism, an immersion in water like Crusoe’s shipwreck experience. Yet Crusoe’s large cross seems somewhat blasphemous in making no reference to Christ. Instead, it is a memorial to Crusoe himself, underscoring how completely he has become the center of his own life.

3.Crusoe’s bower

On a scouting tour around the island, Crusoe discovers a delightful valley in which he decides to build a country retreat or “bower” in Chapter XII. This bower contrasts sharply with Crusoe’s first residence, since it is built not for the practical purpose of shelter or storage, but simply for pleasure: “because I was so enamoured of the place.” Crusoe is no longer focused solely on survival, which by this point in the novel is more or less secure. Now, for the first time since his arrival, he thinks in terms of “pleasantness.” Thus, the bower symbolizes a radical improvement in Crusoe’s attitude toward his time on the island. Island life is no longer necessarily a disaster to suffer through, but may be an opportunity for enjoyment—just as, for the Presbyterian, life may be enjoyed only after hard work has been finished and repentance achieved.

**GULLIVER’S TRAVELS**

**CONTEXT**

Like almost all the literary men of his time J. Swift, was involved in the struggle between the Whigs and the Tories. His literary work include:

* **Literary satire** – The battle of the books – on the controversy between modern and ancient writers
* **Religious satire** – A tale of a tub
* **Political satire** – A proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture and The Drapier’s letters
* **His masterpiece** – Gulliever’s travels

J. Swift was a pamphleteer of genius. He differs from the other great Tory satirists by the transgressive nature of his satire. His writings are often ferociously subversive, his satire is mingled with sarcasm, invective vituperation and above all a crushing irony which is often extremely destructive.

Swift’s typical tactic is to disguise his satire from the reader behind a fable or fiction of some kind. His style is a model of clarity and precision. Irony is the most powerful instrument of satire and one of the most difficult to use. Swift is a true master of irony and satire, as he is able to say the most shocking things in the most natural possibly way.

**GULLIVER’S TRAVELS** is an anatomy of human nature, a sardonic looking-glass, often criticized for its apparent misanthropy; each of the **4 books** – recounting four voyages to mostly fictional exotic lands – has a different theme, but al are attempts to deflate human pride.

**Swift’s masterpiece can be read at various levels**. It may be seen as:

* An account of imaginary adventures in utopian countries
* A travel book
* An allegorical story
* A satirical essay on the political, social and religious conflicts of the time, as well as on the problems caused by scientific and economic progress
* A tale for children.

**ANALYSIS OF MAJOR CHARACTERS**

**LEMUEL GULLIVER**

Although Gulliver is a bold adventurer who visits a multitude of strange lands, it is difficult to regard him as truly heroic. Even well before his slide into misanthropy at the end of the book, he simply does not show the stuff of which grand heroes are made. He is not cowardly—on the contrary, he undergoes the unnerving experiences of nearly being devoured by a giant rat, taken captive by pirates, shipwrecked on faraway shores, sexually assaulted by an eleven-year-old girl, and shot in the face with poison arrows. Additionally, the isolation from humanity that he endures for sixteen years must be hard to bear, though Gulliver rarely talks about such matters. Yet despite the courage Gulliver shows throughout his voyages, his character lacks basic greatness. This impression could be due to the fact that he rarely shows his feelings, reveals his soul, or experiences great passions of any sort.

What seems most lacking in Gulliver is not courage or feelings, but drive. One modern critic has described Gulliver as possessing the smallest will in all of Western literature: he is simply devoid of a sense of mission, a goal that would make his wandering into a quest. He says that he needs to make some money after the failure of his business, but he rarely mentions finances throughout the work and indeed almost never even mentions home. He has no awareness of any greatness in what he is doing or what he is working toward. In short, he has no aspirations.

We may also note Gulliver’s lack of ingenuity and savvy. Other great travelers, such as Odysseus, get themselves out of dangerous situations by exercising their wit and ability to trick others. Gulliver seems too dull for any battles of wit and too unimaginative to think up tricks, and thus he ends up being passive in most of the situations in which he finds himself. He is held captive several times throughout his voyages, but he is never once released through his own stratagems, relying instead on chance factors for his liberation. Once presented with a way out, he works hard to escape, as when he repairs the boat he finds that delivers him from Blefuscu, but he is never actively ingenious in attaining freedom. This example summarizes quite well Gulliver’s intelligence, which is factual and practical rather than imaginative or introspective.

Gulliver is gullible, as his name suggests. For example, he misses the obvious ways in which the Lilliputians exploit him. While he is quite adept at navigational calculations and the humdrum details of seafaring, he is far less able to reflect on himself or his nation in any profoundly critical way. Traveling to such different countries and returning to England in between each voyage, he seems poised to make some great anthropological speculations about cultural differences around the world, about how societies are similar despite their variations or different despite their similarities. But, frustratingly, Gulliver gives us nothing of the sort. He provides us only with literal facts and narrative events, never with any generalizing or philosophizing. He is a self-hating, self-proclaimed Yahoo at the end, announcing his misanthropy quite loudly, but even this attitude is difficult to accept as the moral of the story. Gulliver is not a figure with whom we identify but, rather, part of the array of personalities and behaviors about which we must make judgments.

**THEMES**

**1.Might versus right**

*Gulliver’s Travels* implicitly poses the question of whether physical power or moral righteousness should be the governing factor in social life. Gulliver experiences the advantages of physical might both as one who has it, as a giant in Lilliput where he can defeat the Blefuscudian navy by virtue of his immense size, and as one who does not have it, as a miniature visitor to Brobdingnag where he is harassed by the hugeness of everything from insects to household pets.  But overall, the novel tends to show that claims to rule on the basis of moral righteousness are often just as arbitrary as, and sometimes simply disguises for, simple physical subjugation.

**2.The individual versus society**

Like many narratives about voyages to nonexistent lands, *Gulliver’s Travels* explores the idea of utopia—an imaginary model of the ideal community. The idea of a utopia is an ancient one, going back at least as far as the description in Plato’s *Republic* of a city-state governed by the wise and expressed most famously in English by Thomas More’s *Utopia.* Swift nods to both works in his own narrative, though his attitude toward utopia is much more skeptical, and one of the main aspects he points out about famous historical utopias is the tendency to privilege the collective group over the individual. The children of Plato’s *Republic* are raised communally, with no knowledge of their biological parents, in the understanding that this system enhances social fairness. Swift has the Lilliputians similarly raise their offspring collectively, but its results are not exactly utopian, since Lilliput is torn by conspiracies, jealousies, and backstabbing.

***Gulliver’s Travels*** could in fact be described as one of the first novels of modern alienation, focusing on an individual’s repeated failures to integrate into societies to which he does not belong.

**3.The limits of human understanding**

The idea that humans are not meant to know everything and that all understanding has a natural limit is important in *Gulliver’s Travels.* Swift singles out theoretical knowledge in particular for attack: his portrait of the disagreeable and self-centered Laputans, who show blatant contempt for those who are not sunk in private theorizing, is a clear satire against those who pride themselves on knowledge above all else. Practical knowledge is also satirized when it does not produce results, as in the academy of Balnibarbi, where the experiments for extracting sunbeams from cucumbers amount to nothing. Swift insists that there is a realm of understanding into which humans are simply not supposed to venture. Thus his depictions of rational societies, like Brobdingnag and Houyhnhnmland, emphasize not these people’s knowledge or understanding of abstract ideas but their ability to live their lives in a wise and steady way.

Swift also emphasizes the importance of self-understanding. Gulliver is initially remarkably lacking in self-reflection and self-awareness. He makes no mention of his emotions, passions, dreams, or aspirations, and he shows no interest in describing his own psychology to us. Accordingly, he may strike us as frustratingly hollow or empty, though it is likely that his personal emptiness is part of the overall meaning of the novel. By the end, he has come close to a kind of twisted self-knowledge in his deranged belief that he is a Yahoo. Swift may thus be saying that self-knowledge has its necessary limits just as theoretical knowledge does, and that if we look too closely at ourselves we might not be able to carry on living happily.

**MOTIFS**

**1.Excrement**

While it may seem a trivial or laughable motif, the recurrent mention of excrement in Gulliver’s Travels actually has a serious philosophical significance in the narrative. It symbolizes everything that is crass and ignoble about the human body and about human existence in general, and it obstructs any attempt to view humans as wholly spiritual or mentally transcendent creatures. Swift suggests that the human condition in general is dirtier and lowlier than we might like to believe it is.

**2.Foreign languages**

Gulliver appears to be a gifted linguist, knowing at least the basics of several European languages and even a fair amount of ancient Greek. This knowledge serves him well, as he is able to disguise himself as a Dutchman in order to facilitate his entry into Japan, which at the time only admitted the Dutch. But even more important, his linguistic gifts allow him to learn the languages of the exotic lands he visits with a dazzling speed and, thus, gain access to their culture quickly. He learns the languages of the Lilliputians, the Brobdingnagians, and even the neighing tongue of the Houyhnhnms.

**3.Clothing**

Critics have noted the extraordinary attention that Gulliver pays to clothes throughout his journeys. Every time he gets a rip in his shirt or is forced to adopt some native garment to replace one of his own, he recounts the clothing details with great precision. These descriptions are obviously an easy narrative device with which Swift can chart his protagonist’s progression from one culture to another: the more ragged his clothes become and the stranger his new wardrobe, the farther he is from the comforts and conventions of England. But the motif of clothing carries a deeper, more psychologically complex meaning as well. Gulliver’s intense interest in the state of his clothes may signal a deep-seated anxiety about his identity, or lack thereof.

**SYMBOLS**

**1.Lilliputians**

he Lilliputians symbolize humankind’s wildly excessive pride in its own puny existence. Swift fully intends the irony of representing the tiniest race visited by Gulliver as by far the most vainglorious and smug, both collectively and individually. There is more backbiting and conspiracy in Lilliput than anywhere else, and more of the pettiness of small minds who imagine themselves to be grand. All in all, the Lilliputians symbolize misplaced human pride, and point out Gulliver’s inability to diagnose it correctly.

**2.Brobdingnagians**

The Brobdingnagians symbolize the private, personal, and physical side of humans when examined up close and in great detail. The philosophical era of the Enlightenment tended to overlook the routines of everyday life and the sordid or tedious little facts of existence, but in Brobdingnag such facts become very important for Gulliver, sometimes matters of life and death. The Brobdingnagians do not symbolize a solely negative human characteristic, as the Laputans do. They are not merely ridiculous—some aspects of them are disgusting, like their gigantic stench and the excrement left by their insects, but others are noble, like the queen’s goodwill toward Gulliver and the king’s commonsense views of politics. More than anything else, the Brobdingnagians symbolize a dimension of human existence visible at close range, under close scrutiny.

**3.Laputans**

The Laputans represent the folly of theoretical knowledge that has no relation to human life and no use in the actual world. Laputa symbolizes the absurdity of knowledge that has never been tested or applied, the ludicrous side of Enlightenment intellectualism. Even down below in Balnibarbi, where the local academy is more inclined to practical application, knowledge is not made socially useful as Swift demands. Indeed, theoretical knowledge there has proven positively disastrous, resulting in the ruin of agriculture and architecture and the impoverishment of the population. Even up above, the pursuit of theoretical understanding has not improved the lot of the Laputans. They have few material worries, dependent as they are upon the Balnibarbians below. But they are tormented by worries about the trajectories of comets and other astronomical speculations: their theories have not made them wise, but neurotic and disagreeable. The Laputans do not symbolize reason itself but rather the pursuit of a form of knowledge that is not directly related to the improvement of human life.

**4.Houyhnhnms**

The Houyhnhnms represent an ideal of rational existence, a life governed by sense and moderation of which philosophers since Plato have long dreamed. As in Plato’s ideal community, the Houyhnhnms have no need to lie nor any word for lying. They do not use force but only strong exhortation. Their subjugation of the Yahoos appears more necessary than cruel and perhaps the best way to deal with an unfortunate blot on their otherwise ideal society. In these ways and others, the Houyhnhnms seem like model citizens, and Gulliver’s intense grief when he is forced to leave them suggests that they have made an impact on him greater than that of any other society he has visited. His derangement on Don Pedro’s ship, in which he snubs the generous man as a Yahoo-like creature, implies that he strongly identifies with the Houyhnhnms. They have no names in the narrative nor any need for names, since they are virtually interchangeable, with little individual identity. Their lives seem harmonious and happy, although quite lacking in vigor, challenge, and excitement. Indeed, this apparent ease may be why Swift chooses to make them horses rather than human types like every other group in the novel. He may be hinting, to those more insightful than Gulliver, that the Houyhnhnms should not be considered human ideals at all. In any case, they symbolize a standard of rational existence to be either espoused or rejected by both Gulliver and us.

**5.England**

As the site of his father’s disappointingly “small estate” and Gulliver’s failing business, England seems to symbolize deficiency or insufficiency, at least in the financial sense that matters most to Gulliver. England is where Gulliver’s wife and family live, but they too are hardly mentioned. Yet Swift chooses to have Gulliver return home after each of his four journeys instead of having him continue on one long trip to four different places, so that England is kept constantly in the picture and given a steady, unspoken importance. By the end of the fourth journey, England is brought more explicitly into the fabric of *Gulliver’s Travels* when Gulliver, in his neurotic state, starts confusing Houyhnhnmland with his homeland, referring to Englishmen as Yahoos. The distinction between native and foreign thus unravels—the Houyhnhnms and Yahoos are not just races populating a faraway land but rather types that Gulliver projects upon those around him. The possibility thus arises that all the races Gulliver encounters could be versions of the English and that his travels merely allow him to see various aspects of human nature more clearly.

**THE ROMANTIC AGE**

**BRITAIN 1776 – 1837**

George III was king of Great Britain and Ireland from 1760 to 1820. During this extremely long reign Britain continued to develop economically and politically. The population was divided into three social classes:

1. The landowners and aristocracy
2. The businessmen and industrialists
3. The masses

All these social classes played their part in building a thriving economy. By 1800 Britain was the most industrialized country in the world.

The war with France lasted for 20 years; the 2 nations were fighting for domination on the world’s markets trade and trade routes in Europe, America, India and Africa. Victories in the Battle of the Nile (1798), the Battle of Trafalgar (1805) and the decisive victory at Waterloo in 1815 eventually gave Britain the upper hand. As the Empire grew, Britain was facing a new era, the Victorian Age.

**THE LITERARY BACKGROUND**

By the end of the century, many poets and artists had started reacting against the dehumanization and regimentation of the new urban industrial society. They believed in the importance of the individual and of personal experience. These artists were called ROMANTICS. This word was used to describe the expression of personal feelings and emotions.

In England, Romanticism found its greatest expression in the poetry of WILLIAM BLAKE, WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE, GEORGE GORDON BYRON, SHELLEY and JOHN KEATS.

IMAGINATION and NATURE had a special role for the Romantics. They viewed the artist as a creator, who used his imagination to explore the unfamiliar and the unseen and they considered nature to be morally uplifting – a kind of a spiritual experience. They expressed the idea that the man had a deep relationship with the natural world, which was a living mirror to the soul and believed that it could be a better teacher than the scholarly learning.

Two important elements in Romanticism were THE CULT OF CHILDHOOD – the child was pure and uncorrupted; the children were close to God, had powerful creative imagination and could be the father of the man – and THE PAST.

**ROMANTIC FICTION**

By the beginning of the 19th century the novel had become a major literary form. Three types of novel flourished in the Romantic period:

1. The historical novel
2. The gothic novel
3. The novel of manners

SIR WALTER SCOTT is generally regarded as THE INVENTOR OF THE HISTORICAL NOVEL.

The greatest Gothic novel of the Romantic period is MARRY SHELLEY’S FRANKENSTEIN, OR THE MODERN PROMETHEUS. GOTHIC ELEMENTS can be found in the works of 19th century writers, such as DICKENS and the BRONTE SISTERS, and WILLIAM FAULKNER and ANGELA CARTER in the 20th.

Although little influence by the Romantic trends of her period, JANE AUSTEN stands out as the ONE OF THE ROMANTIC AGE’S GREATEST WRITERS. She developed a type of fiction that is referred to as THE NOVEL OF MANNERS, where characterization and plot are very important. In her work hierarchies are reflected in manners and conversation described with gentle irony and balance, while there is very little description of the wider social, political or historical context. Her novels also contain penetrating psychological insights into young female consciousness. The novel of manners is basically a classical form and doesn’t leave much room for Romantic passion, imagination or sentimentalism.

**PRIDE AND PREJUDICE – JANE AUSTEN**

**CONTEXT**

Jane Austen was born in Steventon, England, in 1775, where she lived for the first twenty-five years of her life.

The social milieu of Austen’s Regency England was particularly stratified, and class divisions were rooted in family connections and wealth. In her work, Austen is often critical of the assumptions and prejudices of upper-class England. She distinguishes between internal merit (goodness of person) and external merit (rank and possessions). Though she frequently satirizes snobs, she also pokes fun at the poor breeding and misbehavior of those lower on the social scale. Nevertheless, Austen was in many ways a realist, and the England she depicts is one in which social mobility is limited and class-consciousness is strong.

Socially regimented ideas of appropriate behavior for each gender factored into Austen’s work as well. While social advancement for young men lay in the military, church, or law, the chief method of self-improvement for women was the acquisition of wealth. Women could only accomplish this goal through successful marriage, which explains the ubiquity of matrimony as a goal and topic of conversation in Austen’s writing. Though young women of Austen’s day had more freedom to choose their husbands than in the early eighteenth century, practical considerations continued to limit their options.

The critiques she makes of class structure seem to include only the middle class and upper class; the lower classes, if they appear at all, are generally servants who seem perfectly pleased with their lot. This lack of interest in the lives of the poor may be a failure on Austen’s part, but it should be understood as a failure shared by almost all of English society at the time.

In general, Austen occupies a curious position between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Austen’s novels also display an ambiguity about emotion and an appreciation for intelligence and natural beauty that aligns them with Romanticism. In their awareness of the conditions of modernity and city life and the consequences for family structure and individual characters, they prefigure much Victorian literature (as does her usage of such elements as frequent formal social gatherings, sketchy characters, and scandal).

Austen was the first novelist to portray realistic characters by using the direct method of telling a story in which dialogue and comment take an important place. She used the method to dissect the hypocrisy of individuals and the society in which they played their games of love and courtship.

From the beginning, Austen’s literature centered on character studies, where a person’s common sense (or lack of it ) was developed in detail. The chosen setting was always limited to a small social group of the upper classes and composed of a few families. Family life was always central to her works. Her novels also portrayed traditional values and a belief in rationality, responsibility and restraint. But she often viewed the human condition with its many weaknesses, through humour, irony and sarcasm, with her undesirable characters portrayed as ignorant, proud, or silly human beings, not evil villains.

ANALYSIS OF MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Elizabeth Bennet**

The second daughter in the Bennet family, and the most intelligent and quick-witted, Elizabeth is the protagonist of *Pride and Prejudice*and one of the most well-known female characters in English literature. Her admirable qualities are numerous—she is lovely, clever, and, in a novel defined by dialogue, she converses as brilliantly as anyone. Her honesty, virtue, and lively wit enable her to rise above the nonsense and bad behavior that pervade her class-bound and often spiteful society. Nevertheless, her sharp tongue and tendency to make hasty judgments often lead her astray; *Pride and Prejudice* is essentially the story of how she (and her true love, Darcy) overcome all obstacles—including their own personal failings—to find romantic happiness. Elizabeth must not only cope with a hopeless mother, a distant father, two badly behaved younger siblings, and several snobbish, antagonizing females, she must also overcome her own mistaken impressions of Darcy, which initially lead her to reject his proposals of marriage. Her charms are sufficient to keep him interested, fortunately, while she navigates familial and social turmoil. As she gradually comes to recognize the nobility of Darcy’s character, she realizes the error of her initial prejudice against him.

**Fitzwilliam Darcy**

The son of a wealthy, well-established family and the master of the great estate of Pemberley, Darcy is Elizabeth’s male counterpart. The narrator relates Elizabeth’s point of view of events more often than Darcy’s, so Elizabeth often seems a more sympathetic figure. The reader eventually realizes, however, that Darcy is her ideal match. Intelligent and forthright, he too has a tendency to judge too hastily and harshly, and his high birth and wealth make him overly proud and overly conscious of his social status. Indeed, his haughtiness makes him initially bungle his courtship. When he proposes to her, for instance, he dwells more on how unsuitable a match she is than on her charms, beauty, or anything else complimentary. Her rejection of his advances builds a kind of humility in him. Darcy demonstrates his continued devotion to Elizabeth, in spite of his distaste for her low connections, when he rescues Lydia and the entire Bennet family from disgrace, and when he goes against the wishes of his haughty aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, by continuing to pursue Elizabeth. Darcy proves himself worthy of Elizabeth, and she ends up repenting her earlier, overly harsh judgment of him.

**Jane Bennet and Charles Bingley**

Elizabeth’s beautiful elder sister and Darcy’s wealthy best friend, Jane and Bingley engage in a courtship that occupies a central place in the novel. They first meet at the ball in Meryton and enjoy an immediate mutual attraction. They are spoken of as a potential couple throughout the book, long before anyone imagines that Darcy and Elizabeth might marry. Despite their centrality to the narrative, they are vague characters, sketched by Austen rather than carefully drawn. Indeed, they are so similar in nature and behavior that they can be described together: both are cheerful, friendly, and good-natured, always ready to think the best of others; they lack entirely the prickly egotism of Elizabeth and Darcy. Jane’s gentle spirit serves as a foil for her sister’s fiery, contentious nature, while Bingley’s eager friendliness contrasts with Darcy’s stiff pride. Their principal characteristics are goodwill and compatibility, and the contrast of their romance with that of Darcy and Elizabeth is remarkable. Jane and Bingley exhibit to the reader true love unhampered by either pride or prejudice, though in their simple goodness, they also demonstrate that such a love is mildly dull.

**Mr. Bennet**

Mr. Bennet is the patriarch of the Bennet household—the husband of Mrs. Bennet and the father of Jane, Elizabeth, Lydia, Kitty, and Mary. He is a man driven to exasperation by his ridiculous wife and difficult daughters. He reacts by withdrawing from his family and assuming a detached attitude punctuated by bursts of sarcastic humor. He is closest to Elizabeth because they are the two most intelligent Bennets. Initially, his dry wit and self-possession in the face of his wife’s hysteria make him a sympathetic figure, but, though he remains likable throughout, the reader gradually loses respect for him as it becomes clear that the price of his detachment is considerable. Detached from his family, he is a weak father and, at critical moments, fails his family. In particular, his foolish indulgence of Lydia’s immature behavior nearly leads to general disgrace when she elopes with Wickham. Further, upon her disappearance, he proves largely ineffective. It is left to Mr. Gardiner and Darcy to track Lydia down and rectify the situation. Ultimately, Mr. Bennet would rather withdraw from the world than cope with it.

**Mrs. Bennet**

Mrs. Bennet is a miraculously tiresome character. Noisy and foolish, she is a woman consumed by the desire to see her daughters married and seems to care for nothing else in the world. Ironically, her single-minded pursuit of this goal tends to backfire, as her lack of social graces alienates the very people (Darcy and Bingley) whom she tries desperately to attract. Austen uses her continually to highlight the necessity of marriage for young women. Mrs. Bennet also serves as a middle-class counterpoint to such upper-class snobs as Lady Catherine and Miss Bingley, demonstrating that foolishness can be found at every level of society. In the end, however, Mrs. Bennet proves such an unattractive figure, lacking redeeming characteristics of any kind, that some readers have accused Austen of unfairness in portraying her—as if Austen, like Mr. Bennet, took perverse pleasure in poking fun at a woman already scorned as a result of her ill breeding.

**THEMES**

**1.Love**

*Pride and Prejudice* contains one of the most cherished love stories in English literature: the courtship between Darcy and Elizabeth. As in any good love story, the lovers must elude and overcome numerous stumbling blocks, beginning with the tensions caused by the lovers’ own personal qualities. Elizabeth’s pride makes her misjudge Darcy on the basis of a poor first impression, while Darcy’s prejudice against Elizabeth’s poor social standing blinds him, for a time, to her many virtues.

 Darcy and Elizabeth’s realization of a mutual and tender love seems to imply that Austen views love as something independent of these social forces, as something that can be captured if only an individual is able to escape the warping effects of hierarchical society. Austen does sound some more realist (or, one could say, cynical) notes about love, using the character of Charlotte Lucas, who marries the buffoon Mr. Collins for his money, to demonstrate that the heart does not always dictate marriage. Yet with her central characters, Austen suggests that true love is a force separate from society and one that can conquer even the most difficult of circumstances.

**2.Reputation**

*Pride and Prejudice* depicts a society in which a woman’s reputation is of the utmost importance. A woman is expected to behave in certain ways. Stepping outside the social norms makes her vulnerable to ostracism. This theme appears in the novel, when Elizabeth walks to Netherfield and arrives with muddy skirts, to the shock of the reputation-conscious Miss Bingley and her friends. The happy ending of *Pride and Prejudice* is certainly emotionally satisfying, but in many ways it leaves the theme of reputation, and the importance placed on reputation, unexplored. One can ask of*Pride and Prejudice,*to what extent does it critique social structures, and to what extent does it simply accept their inevitability?

**3.Class**

The theme of class is related to reputation, in that both reflect the strictly regimented nature of life for the middle and upper classes in Regency England. The lines of class are strictly drawn. While the Bennets, who are middle class, may socialize with the upper-class Bingleys and Darcys, they are clearly their social inferiors and are treated as such. Austen satirizes this kind of class-consciousness, particularly in the character of Mr. Collins, who spends most of his time toadying to his upper-class patron, Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

Through the Darcy-Elizabeth and Bingley-Jane marriages, Austen shows the power of love and happiness to overcome class boundaries and prejudices, thereby implying that such prejudices are hollow, unfeeling, and unproductive. Austen does criticize class structure but only a limited slice of that structure.

**MOTIFS**

**1.Courtship**

In a sense, *Pride and Prejudice* is the story of two courtships—those between Darcy and Elizabeth and between Bingley and Jane.  Courtship therefore takes on a profound, if often unspoken, importance in the novel. Marriage is the ultimate goal, courtship constitutes the real working-out of love. Courtship becomes a sort of forge of a person’s personality, and each courtship becomes a microcosm for different sorts of love (or different ways to abuse love as a means to social advancement).

**2.Journeys**

Nearly every scene in *Pride and Prejudice* takes place indoors, and the action centers around the Bennet home in the small village of Longbourn. Nevertheless, journeys—even short ones—function repeatedly as catalysts for change in the novel. Elizabeth’s first journey, by which she intends simply to visit Charlotte and Mr. Collins, brings her into contact with Mr. Darcy, and leads to his first proposal. Her second journey takes her to Derby and Pemberley, where she fans the growing flame of her affection for Darcy. The third journey, meanwhile, sends various people in pursuit of Wickham and Lydia, and the journey ends with Darcy tracking them down and saving the Bennet family honor, in the process demonstrating his continued devotion to Elizabeth.

**SYMBOLS**

**1.Pemberley**

*Pride and Prejudice* is remarkably free of explicit symbolism, which perhaps has something to do with the novel’s reliance on dialogue over description. Nevertheless, Pemberley, Darcy’s estate, sits at the center of the novel, literally and figuratively, as a geographic symbol of the man who owns it. Elizabeth visits it at a time when her feelings toward Darcy are beginning to warm; she is enchanted by its beauty and charm, and by the picturesque countryside, just as she will be charmed, increasingly, by the gifts of its owner.

Pemberley even offers a symbol-within-a-symbol for their budding romance: when Elizabeth encounters Darcy on the estate, she is crossing a small bridge, suggesting the broad gulf of misunderstanding and class prejudice that lies between them—and the bridge that their love will build across it.

**THE VICTORIAN AGE**

**1837 – 1901**

The early part of the 19th century had seen Britain consolidate its position as a world power following the defeat of Napoleon. The rest of the 19th century was to see Britain reach heights of wealth, power and prestige that were unmatched at any other time in its history. This golden age is often referred to as the **VICTORIAN ERA** because it corresponded with the reign of one of the country’s best-loved queens, Victoria.

One of the great achievements of the century was the gradual construction of a system of parliamentary democracy that was backed up by a permanent civil service which took care of the day-to-day running the state. The system was much admired abroad because it provided stability and social cohesion at a time of rapid economic expansion.

**VICTORIAN LITERATURE**

The Victorian period was an age of powerful contrasts and paradoxes. Scientific and technological advances paved the way for a better future as traditional religious beliefs began to crumble under the weight of new scientific discovery.

**THE VICTORIAN NOVEL**

As the Renaissance is identified with drama and Romanticism with poetry, the Victorian age is identified with the **NOVEL.**

**SERIALISATION**

The Victorian age also abounded in journals, periodicals and pamphlets. Many early Victorian novels first appeared in serialized form in periodicals.

**REALISM**

Victorian realism observed and documented everyday life, drew its characters from all social classes and explored areas of life usually ignored by the arts. The writer who is most representative of the Victorian period is **CHARLES DICKENS**. Although they were contemporaries of Dickens, **THE BRONTE SISTERS** belong to an earlier literary tradition. Their works, which contain Gothic elements and explores the extremes of passion and violence, are distinctly Romantic in temperament.

**LATER VICTORIANS**

This term is used to refer to writers in the last two decades of Victoria’s reign. A spirit of rebellion developed against Victorian materialism, optimism and self-confidence. Unlike Dickens and other early Victorian writers who criticized society, but believed in the possibility of finding solutions, an air of gloomy pessimism pervaded the work of later Victorian writers. Perhaps the writer who best represents the period is **THOMAS HARDY.** His stories are so closely linked to this rural setting that they are referred to as **REGIONAL NOVELS.**

**AESTHETICISM**

The crises of faith and morality which characterized the latter half of the Victorian period gave rise in the 1880s and 1890s to an artistic movement known as **AESTHETICISM – a term which comes from the Greek word meaning to perceive or to feel. Aesthetes believed that sensation should be the source of art, and that the role of the artist was to make the public share his feelings**.

It is now, in the 19th century, that we witness the manifestation of industrialization, England being the first industrialized country in the world. Basically**, industrialization** refers to the substitution of man by the machine in the economic process and the mass production of consumption goods.

Industrialization represents the engine of the capitalist society and the premise of a long series of social, cultural, economic and psychological transformations of the human community.

**1.THE HISTORICAL EFFECT OF THE INDUSTRIALIZATION**. The traditional English society can be imagined in the form of a pyramid which concentrates its absolute power at the top in the symbolic persona of the king or queen. The dominant class is the **aristocracy.** Authority is inherited and not conquered by personal merits and the king represents God on earth and his unnatural, violent elimination from the top may push the whole pyramid into chaos (this happens in Hamlet and Macbeth).

Industrialization brings competition among the rules of socio-economic organization of the system. Authority is no more inherited by birth, bur conquered through personal merits. **The pyramid is transformed into a circle** where margins can have access to the center.

**2.THE POLITICAL EFFECT OF INDUSTRIALIZATION.** Politically, this huge transformation in the life of the English society should be linked to the beginnings of the modern democracy in Europe. The Parliament becomes more democratic and opens its door to other social categories. The monarchy is no longer absolute and authoritarian, but liberal and subject to the Parliament.

**3.THE ECONOMIC EFFECT OF THE INDUSTRIALIZATION**. Economically speaking, Great Britain develops tremendously as a result of the industrialization. Colonialism expands and England gets supremacy in the world.

**4.THE SOCIAL EFFECT OF THE INDUSTRIALIZATION**. Socially, industrialization represents a turning point in the life of England and Europe generally speaking. It marks the birth of a new and powerful class – the **BURGEOISIE.** The representatives of this social category are the direct beneficiaries of the industrial progress and they use their financial power to substitute the **TRADITIONAL ARISTOCRACY** from its positions of authority. The **STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE BURGEOISIE AND THE ARISTOCRACY** represents a favourite topic in the Victorian novel.

**5.THE CULTURAL EFFECT OF INDUSTRIALIZATION**. Many philosophers are preoccupied now with the mental effects of the clash between **THE MARGIN** and **THE CENTER. HEGEL** introduces two philosophical categories in order to explain the tension between the margin and the center – **THE SERVANT** and **THE MASTER**. They are the margin of the system and the center respectively. The Servant is dominated, never dominates, recognizes the Master, is never recognized, and is defined by work for the Master and fear of the Master. The Master is recognized and never recognizes, dominates and is never dominated. The Servant develops a **SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS** and this is the beginning of the revolution, since he realizes his condition and will want to change it with that of the Master. The Servant begins thus his migration from margin to center. In Victorian terms, the Servant is the bourgeoisie and the Master is the traditional aristocracy.

**6.THE AESTHETIC EFFECT OF INDUSTRIALIZATION**. The main effect of industrialization in literature is **MODERNIZATION.** In a sense, industrialization marks aesthetically the beginning of **MODERNISM**. The traditional pyramid loses its authority and turns gradually into a circle ruled by competition. In a way, this is generated by the **ALIENATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL** inflicted on the community by industrialization. The same alienation can be noted in the epic and should be translated not as a loss of authority, but rather as a loss of authorship. In other words, **THE TRADITIONAL OMNISCIENT AUTHOR** (the God-like creator who plays with the destinies of his characters as if they were puppets, the one who knows all about everything and whose will is wish in the novel) dies out – **THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR** – and is substituted by **NARRATORS,** actual characters, autonomous from the caprices of the writer.

**NARRATORS** have their own subjectivities, sensitivity, sensibility, emotional structure and level of knowledge. They cannot be objective, and frequently distort reality. So, Realism no longer consists of the **IMITATION OF A GIVEN WORLD**, but the **TRANSFORMATION OF A CERTAIN UNIVERSE ACCORDING TO THE SUBJECTIVITY OF A NARRATOR.**

The Victorian narrator (in Dickens, Brontes or in James) is an observer of a **metaphorical cube**, being unable in spite of his efforts to give us the overall picture of the reality he comes to be confronted with. This situation also creates the premises of an **IMPERSONALITY OF WRITING**, in the sense that the auctorial voice disappears.

The Victorian novel will confront us, too, with the **BEGINNING OF PSYCHOLOGICAL REALISM,** the **BEGINNING OF FEMINISM** and the **BEGINNING OF THE MODERN TRAGEDY.** These can also be considered the aesthetic consequences of industrialization.

**ALICES’S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND – LEWIS CAROLL**

**CONTEXT**

Lewis Carroll was the pseudonym of Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, a lecturer in mathematics at Christ Church, Oxford, who lived from 1832 to 1898. Carroll’s physical deformities, partial deafness, and irrepressible stammer made him an unlikely candidate for producing one of the most popular and enduring children’s fantasies in the English language. Carroll’s keen grasp of mathematics and logic inspired the linguistic humor and witty wordplay in his stories. Additionally, his unique understanding of children’s minds allowed him to compose imaginative fiction that appealed to young people.

**ANALYSIS OF MAJOR CHARACTERS**

**Alice**

Alice is a sensible prepubescent girl from a wealthy English family who finds herself in a strange world ruled by imagination and fantasy. Alice feels comfortable with her identity and has a strong sense that her environment is comprised of clear, logical, and consistent rules and features. Alice’s familiarity with the world has led one critic to describe her as a “disembodied intellect.” Alice displays great curiosity and attempts to fit her diverse experiences into a clear understanding of the world. Alice approaches Wonderland as an anthropologist, but maintains a strong sense of noblesse oblige that comes with her class status. She has confidence in her social position, education, and the Victorian virtue of good manners.

The tension of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* emerges when Alice’s fixed perspective of the world comes into contact with the mad, illogical world of Wonderland. Alice’s fixed sense of order clashes with the madness she finds in Wonderland.

Most significantly, Wonderland challenges her perceptions of good manners by constantly assaulting her with dismissive rudeness. Alice’s fundamental beliefs face challenges at every turn, and as a result Alice suffers an identity crisis. She persists in her way of life as she perceives her sense of order collapsing all around her. Alice must choose between retaining her notions of order and assimilating into Wonderland’s nonsensical rules.

**THEMES**

**1.The tragic and inevitable loss of childhood innocence**

Throughout the course of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice goes through a variety of absurd physical changes. The discomfort she feels at never being the right size acts as a symbol for the changes that occur during puberty. Alice finds these changes to be traumatic, and feels discomfort, frustration, and sadness when she goes through them. She struggles to maintain a comfortable physical size.

**2.Life as a meaningless puzzle**

In *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice encounters a series of puzzles that seem to have no clear solutions, which imitates the ways that life frustrates expectations. Alice expects that the situations she encounters will make a certain kind of sense, but they repeatedly frustrate her ability to figure out Wonderland.

In every instance, the riddles and challenges presented to Alice have no purpose or answer. Even though Lewis Carroll was a logician, in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* he makes a farce out of jokes, riddles, and games of logic. Alice learns that she cannot expect to find logic or meaning in the situations that she encounters, even when they appear to be problems, riddles, or games that would normally have solutions that Alice would be able to figure out. Carroll makes a broader point about the ways that life frustrates expectations and resists interpretation, even when problems seem familiar or solvable.

**3.Death as a constant and underlying menace**

Alice continually finds herself in situations in which she risks death, and while these threats never materialize, they suggest that death lurks just behind the ridiculous events of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* as a present and possible outcome.

Alice takes risks that could possibly kill her, but she never considers death as a possible outcome. Over time, she starts to realize that her experiences in Wonderland are far more threatening than they appear to be. As the Queen screams “Off with its head!” she understands that Wonderland may not merely be a ridiculous realm where expectations are repeatedly frustrated. Death may be a real threat, and Alice starts to understand that the risks she faces may not be ridiculous and absurd after all.

**MOTIFS**

**1.Dream**

*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* takes place in Alice’s dream, so that the characters and phenomena of the real world mix with elements of Alice’s unconscious state. The dream motif explains the abundance of nonsensical and disparate events in the story. As in a dream, the narrative follows the dreamer as she encounters various episodes in which she attempts to interpret her experiences in relationship to herself and her world.

**2.Subversion**

Alice quickly discovers during her travels that the only reliable aspect of Wonderland that she can count on is that it will frustrate her expectations and challenge her understanding of the natural order of the world. In Wonderland, Alice finds that her lessons no longer mean what she thought, as she botches her multiplication tables and incorrectly recites poems she had memorized while in Wonderland. Even Alice’s physical dimensions become warped as she grows and shrinks erratically throughout the story. Wonderland frustrates Alice’s desires to fit her experiences in a logical framework where she can make sense of the relationship between cause and effect.

**3.Language**

Carroll plays with linguistic conventions in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, making use of puns and playing on multiple meanings of words throughout the text. Carroll invents words and expressions and develops new meanings for words. Alice’s exclamation “Curious and curiouser!” suggests that both her surroundings and the language she uses to describe them expand beyond expectation and convention. Anything is possible in Wonderland, and Carroll’s manipulation of language reflects this sense of unlimited possibility.

**4.Curious, nonsense and confusing**

Alice uses these words throughout her journey to describe phenomena she has trouble explaining. Though the words are generally interchangeable, she usually assigns *curious* and *confusing* to experiences or encounters that she tolerates. She endures is the experiences that are curious or confusing, hoping to gain a clearer picture of how that individual or experience functions in the world. When Alice declares something to be *nonsense*, as she does with the trial in Chapter 12, she rejects or criticizes the experience or encounter.

**SYMBOLS**

**1.The garden**

Nearly every object in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* functions as a symbol, but nothing clearly represents one particular thing. The garden may symbolize the Garden of Eden, an idyllic space of beauty and innocence that Alice is not permitted to access. On a more abstract level, the garden may simply represent the experience of desire, in that Alice focuses her energy and emotion on trying to attain it. The two symbolic meanings work together to underscore Alice’s desire to hold onto her feelings of childlike innocence that she must relinquish as she matures.

**2.The Caterpillar’s mushroom**

Like the garden, the Caterpillar’s mushroom also has multiple symbolic meanings. Some readers and critics view the Caterpillar as a sexual threat, its phallic shape a symbol of sexual virility. The Caterpillar’s mushroom connects to this symbolic meaning. Alice must master the properties of the mushroom to gain control over her fluctuating size, which represents the bodily frustrations that accompany puberty. Others view the mushroom as a psychedelic hallucinogen that compounds Alice’s surreal and distorted perception of Wonderland.

**GREAT EXPECTATIONS – CHARLES DICKENS**

Dickens is the first 19th century English writer who visibly moves from the social phase, in the development of the novel, to the more sophisticated psychological and phenomenological phases. His originality derives at least from three major innovations of his epic:

1. **The investigation of human nature** – he breaks up with the classical prejudice according to which characters should embody principles, and therefore be **unidirectional** (either good or evil). In the traditional novel and drama, characters are either **heroes** or **villains**, displaying constantly either **virtues** or **vices.** Life forces us to accept the fact that the human nature is **contradictory**, being impossible to fit in one unidirectional typology only. In reality, people are morally ambiguous, psychologically unpredictable and structurally dual, swinging between **good** and **evil.**
2. **The perception of reality in the novel** – the author gives up entirely the use of an **omniscient perspective** in favour of the **first person narrative** (the use of a narrator who sees reality through his own eyes, according to his subjectivity, degree of knowledge, sensitivity, sensibility and strategies). This represents a revolution in the English novel, marking the beginning of Modernism. It is a new type of Realism which doesn’t focus much on the imitation of nature and society, but rather in being true-to-life itself.
3. **The ironic constructions of his dramatic plots** – irony can be defined as a conflict between **what is said** and **what is meant**, between **appearance** and **reality**. Dickens’s major novels should be regarded as essentially ironic constructs, since they illustrate a permanent oscillation between appearance and realities. His dramatic plots rely fundamentally on an ironic design. Consequences of his irony are the humour, the satirical critique, the grotesque characters.

Dickens’s work has **two phases**:

1. **A phase of formation**
2. **A phase of maturity**

The **distinction** between these two moments of Dickens’s artistic evolution is **stylistic** and **psychological**. If, **in the former period** of creation, the author’s style is much indebted to his journalistic beginnings and his heroes seem to be tributary to the tradition**, in the latter**, his style is more elaborate, announcing one of the greatest prose writers in the history of world literature. Both periods influence crucially the development of Victorian culture.

The absolute masterpiece is **Great Expectations**. This is the novel in which – by means of a first person narrator – Dickens announces the beginning of a new form of epic that can be easily characterized as modernist. The text is partly autobiographic and has the elements of a **Bildungsroman**. Although similar to Dickens himself (he is an orphan), Pip – the only autobiographical suggestion of the novel – should not be mistaken, however, for the author. Pip behaves exactly like a narrator, displaying an acute subjectivity. He filters reality through his own consciousness and everything we see in the novel consists of what he actually sees and interprets for us. Nothing is properly objective, since it is adapted to Pip’s subjectivity. The narrative strategy becomes obvious at the very outset of the story when the reader gets introduced to the narrator of the text: Pip. Pip is just a five year old boy in this introductory scene and **he observes things according to his age.** There are moments when **we – the readers – seem to know more than the narrator, as our experience is, evidently, much wider.** **He confesses he sees the church turning upside down.** This remains a highly metaphorical scene. It has a double significance. On the one hand, it anticipates **the evolution of facts in the novel** (Magwitch will turn Pip’s life at one point upside down). On the other hand and more importantly, it suggests to us the **Pip is the independent narrator of the novel**. We are going to see reality through **his eyes only.**

**1.The first turning point is Pip’s experience in the house of Ms. Havisham.** Ms. Havisham wants to protect Estella from the mistakes she committed as a young woman. So, she teaches her how to hate men. Pip – innocent and good-natured – is a perfect victim. He becomes an instrument of this weird educational process.

**2.The second turning point in Pip’s formation is his meeting with Jaggers, Ms. Havisham’s lawyer**.

**3.The third turning point in the novel is Pip’s encounter with his real benefactor, Magwitch**. The escaped convict wanted to pay back his debt to Pip, he wanted to prove that his money is as good as anyone else’s money. Pip failed to observe the outside reality, becoming a prisoner of his inner universe, the universe of his emotions and aspirations.

**4.The fourth turning point of the narrative is Pip’s ultimate formation.** Completely mature now, he renounces his dreams about Estella ( who has been morally mutilated by Ms. Havisham) and gives up Magwitch’s money, starting a business of his own. The evil character, Compeyson who deserted Ms. Havisham in their wedding day and corrupted Magwitch, influenced directly or indirectly, in a negative way, all the destinies of the novel.

This last part of the novel resembles more the traditional melodramas, because of its highly emotional content. **Great Expectations** is an ironic novel that deconstructs the idea of the traditional authorship.

Everything starts with Pip’s subjectivity and is shaped out according to his wish, without the intervention of the author. Pip’s love for Estella is like an axis of the epic. Ms. Havisham looks initially like a good mother and a benefactor. Later on, Magwitch replaces her as the **actual** father and benefactor. The whole text becomes thus a clash between **appearance and reality.** In the middle we have Jaggers who knows all about everything and everyone. He turns out to be the actual **alter-ego** of the omniscient author. He is a **deus otiosus** who no longer interferes with the lives of his creatures. This is one of the strongest pre-modernist metaphors about the lost authorship in the English novel. Therefore, the novel is in fact a pyramid articulated **from bottom (text) to top (author).**

**CONTEXT**

Many of the events from Dickens’s early life are mirrored in *Great Expectations,* which, apart from *David Copperfield,* is his most autobiographical novel. Pip, the novel’s protagonist, lives in the marsh country, works at a job he hates, considers himself too good for his surroundings, and experiences material success in London at a very early age, exactly as Dickens himself did. In addition, one of the novel’s most appealing characters, Wemmick, is a law clerk, and the law, justice, and the courts are all important components of the story.

*Great Expectations*is set in early Victorian England, a time when great social changes were sweeping the nation. The Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had transformed the social landscape, enabling capitalists and manufacturers to amass huge fortunes. Although social class was no longer entirely dependent on the circumstances of one’s birth, the divisions between rich and poor remained nearly as wide as ever. London, a teeming mass of humanity, lit by gas lamps at night and darkened by black clouds from smokestacks during the day, formed a sharp contrast with the nation’s sparsely populated rural areas. More and more people moved from the country to the city in search of greater economic opportunity. Throughout England, the manners of the upper class were very strict and conservative: gentlemen and ladies were expected to have thorough classical educations and to behave appropriately in innumerable social situations.

These conditions defined Dickens’s time, and they make themselves felt in almost every facet of *Great Expectations*. Pip’s sudden rise from country laborer to city gentleman forces him to move from one social extreme to another while dealing with the strict rules and expectations that governed Victorian England. Ironically, this novel about the desire for wealth and social advancement was written partially out of economic necessity.

In form, *Great Expectations* fits a pattern popular in nineteenth-century European fiction: the bildungsroman, or novel depicting growth and personal development, generally a transition from boyhood to manhood such as that experienced by Pip. The genre was popularized by Goethe with his book *Wilhelm Meister*(1794–1796) and became prevalent in England with such books as Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe,*Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre,*and Dickens’s own *David Copperfield*. Each of these works, like *Great Expectations,*depicts a process of maturation and self-discovery through experience as a protagonist moves from childhood to adulthood.

**Analysis of major characters**

**1.Pip**

As a bildungsroman, *Great Expectations* presents the growth and development of a single character, Philip Pirrip, better known to himself and to the world as Pip. As the focus of the bildungsroman, Pip is by far the most important character in *Great Expectations*: he is both the protagonist, whose actions make up the main plot of the novel, and the narrator, whose thoughts and attitudes shape the reader’s perception of the story. As a result, developing an understanding of Pip’s character is perhaps the most important step in understanding *Great Expectations*. Because Pip is narrating his story many years after the events of the novel take place, there are really two Pips in *Great Expectations*: Pip the narrator and Pip the character—the voice telling the story and the person acting it out.

As a character, Pip’s two most important traits are his immature, romantic idealism and his innately good conscience. On the one hand, Pip has a deep desire to improve himself and attain any possible advancement, whether educational, moral, or social. His longing to marry Estella and join the upper classes stems from the same idealistic desire as his longing to learn to read and his fear of being punished for bad behavior: once he understands ideas like poverty, ignorance, and immorality, Pip does not want to be poor, ignorant, or immoral. Pip the narrator judges his own past actions extremely harshly, rarely giving himself credit for good deeds but angrily castigating himself for bad ones.

On the other hand, Pip is at heart a very generous and sympathetic young man, a fact that can be witnessed in his numerous acts of kindness throughout the book (helping Magwitch, secretly buying Herbert’s way into business, etc.) and his essential love for all those who love him. Pip’s main line of development in the novel may be seen as the process of learning to place his innate sense of kindness and conscience above his immature idealism.

The fact that he comes to admire Magwitch while losing Estella to the brutish nobleman Drummle ultimately forces him to realize that one’s social position is not the most important quality one possesses, and that his behavior as a gentleman has caused him to hurt the people who care about him most. Once he has learned these lessons, Pip matures into the man who narrates the novel, completing the bildungsroman.

**2.Estella**

Estella is a supremely ironic creation, one who darkly undermines the notion of romantic love and serves as a bitter criticism against the class system in which she is mired. Raised from the age of three by Miss Havisham to torment men and “break their hearts,” Estella wins Pip’s deepest love by practicing deliberate cruelty. Unlike the warm, winsome, kind heroine of a traditional love story, Estella is cold, cynical, and manipulative.

Ironically, life among the upper classes does not represent salvation for Estella. Instead, she is victimized twice by her adopted class. Rather than being raised by Magwitch, a man of great inner nobility, she is raised by Miss Havisham, who destroys her ability to express emotion and interact normally with the world. And rather than marrying the kindhearted commoner Pip, Estella marries the cruel nobleman Drummle, who treats her harshly and makes her life miserable for many years. In this way, Dickens uses Estella’s life to reinforce the idea that one’s happiness and well-being are not deeply connected to one’s social position: had Estella been poor, she might have been substantially better off.

Despite her cold behavior and the damaging influences in her life, Dickens nevertheless ensures that Estella is still a sympathetic character. By giving the reader a sense of her inner struggle to discover and act on her own feelings rather than on the imposed motives of her upbringing, Dickens gives the reader a glimpse of Estella’s inner life, which helps to explain what Pip might love about her.

Finally, Estella’s long, painful marriage to Drummle causes her to develop along the same lines as Pip—that is, she learns, through experience, to rely on and trust her inner feelings. In the final scene of the novel, she has become her own woman for the first time in the book. As she says to Pip, “Suffering has been stronger than all other teaching. . . . I have been bent and broken, but—I hope—into a better shape.”

**THEMES**

**1.Ambition and self-improvement**

The moral theme of *Great Expectations* is quite simple: affection, loyalty, and conscience are more important than social advancement, wealth, and class. Dickens establishes the theme and shows Pip learning this lesson, largely by exploring ideas of ambition and self-improvement—ideas that quickly become both the thematic center of the novel and the psychological mechanism that encourages much of Pip’s development. At heart, Pip is an idealist; whenever he can conceive of something that is better than what he already has, he immediately desires to obtain the improvement. When he sees Satis House, he longs to be a wealthy gentleman; when he thinks of his moral shortcomings, he longs to be good; when he realizes that he cannot read, he longs to learn how. Pip’s desire for self-improvement is the main source of the novel’s title: because he believes in the possibility of advancement in life, he has “great expectations” about his future.

Ambition and self-improvement take three forms in *Great Expectations*—moral, social, and educational; these motivate Pip’s best and his worst behavior throughout the novel. First, Pip desires moral self-improvement. He is extremely hard on himself when he acts immorally and feels powerful guilt that spurs him to act better in the future.

Second, Pip desires social self-improvement. He entertains fantasies of becoming a gentleman. The working out of this fantasy forms the basic plot of the novel; it provides Dickens the opportunity to gently satirize the class system of his era and to make a point about its capricious nature. Significantly, Pip’s life as a gentleman is no more satisfying—and certainly no more moral—than his previous life as a blacksmith’s apprentice. Third, Pip desires educational improvement. This desire is deeply connected to his social ambition and longing to marry Estella: a full education is a requirement of being a gentleman. Pip learns that social and educational improvement are irrelevant to one’s real worth and that conscience and affection are to be valued above erudition and social standing.

**2.Social class**

Dickens explores the class system of Victorian England, ranging from the most wretched criminals (Magwitch) to the poor peasants of the marsh country (Joe and Biddy) to the middle class (Pumblechook) to the very rich (Miss Havisham). The theme of social class is central to the novel’s plot and to the ultimate moral theme of the book—Pip’s realization that wealth and class are less important than affection, loyalty, and inner worth.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember about the novel’s treatment of social class is that the class system it portrays is based on the post-Industrial Revolution model of Victorian England. Dickens generally ignores the nobility and the hereditary aristocracy in favor of characters whose fortunes have been earned through commerce.

**3.Crime, guilt and innocence**

The theme of crime, guilt, and innocence is explored throughout the novel largely through the characters of the convicts and the criminal lawyer Jaggers. The imagery of crime and criminal justice pervades the book, becoming an important symbol of Pip’s inner struggle to reconcile his own inner moral conscience with the institutional justice system. In general, just as social class becomes a superficial standard of value that Pip must learn to look beyond in finding a better way to live his life, the external trappings of the criminal justice system (police, courts, jails, etc.) become a superficial standard of morality that Pip must learn to look beyond to trust his inner conscience.

**MOTIFS**

**1.Doubles**

Dickens’s plots involve complicated coincidences, extraordinarily tangled webs of human relationships, and highly dramatic developments in which setting, atmosphere, event, and character are all seamlessly fused.

 From the earliest scenes of the novel to the last, nearly every element of *Great Expectations* is mirrored or doubled at some other point in the book. There are two convicts on the marsh (Magwitch and Compeyson), two invalids (Mrs. Joe and Miss Havisham), two young women who interest Pip (Biddy and Estella), and so on. There are two secret benefactors: Magwitch, who gives Pip his fortune, and Pip, who mirrors Magwitch’s action by secretly buying Herbert’s way into the mercantile business. Finally, there are two adults who seek to mold children after their own purposes: Magwitch, who wishes to “own” a gentleman and decides to make Pip one, and Miss Havisham, who raises Estella to break men’s hearts in revenge for her own broken heart. Interestingly, both of these actions are motivated by Compeyson: Magwitch resents but is nonetheless covetous of Compeyson’s social status and education, which motivates his desire to make Pip a gentleman, and Miss Havisham’s heart was broken when Compeyson left her at the altar, which motivates her desire to achieve revenge through Estella. The relationship between Miss Havisham and Compeyson—a well-born woman and a common man—further mirrors the relationship between Estella and Pip. This doubling of elements ads to the sense that everything in Pip’s world is connected.

**2.Comparison of characters to inanimate objects**

Throughout *Great Expectations,*the narrator uses images of inanimate objects to describe the physical appearance of characters—particularly minor characters, or characters with whom the narrator is not intimate. For example, Mrs. Joe looks as if she scrubs her face with a nutmeg grater, while the inscrutable features of Mr. Wemmick are repeatedly compared to a letter-box. This motif, which Dickens uses throughout his novels, may suggest a failure of empathy on the narrator’s part, or it may suggest that the character’s position in life is pressuring them to resemble a thing more than a human being. The latter interpretation would mean that the motif in general is part of a social critique, in that it implies that an institution such as the class system or the criminal justice system dehumanizes certain people.

**SYMBOLS**

**1.Satis house**

In Satis House, Dickens creates a magnificent Gothic setting whose various elements symbolize Pip’s romantic perception of the upper class and many other themes of the book. On her decaying body, Miss Havisham’s wedding dress becomes an ironic symbol of death and degeneration. The wedding dress and the wedding feast symbolize Miss Havisham’s past, and the stopped clocks throughout the house symbolize her determined attempt to freeze time by refusing to change anything from the way it was when she was jilted on her wedding day. The brewery next to the house symbolizes the connection between commerce and wealth: Miss Havisham’s fortune is not the product of an aristocratic birth but of a recent success in industrial capitalism. Finally, the crumbling, dilapidated stones of the house, as well as the darkness and dust that pervade it, symbolize the general decadence of the lives of its inhabitants and of the upper class as a whole.

**2.The mists on the marshes**

The setting almost always symbolizes a theme in *Great Expectations* and always sets a tone that is perfectly matched to the novel’s dramatic action. The misty marshes near Pip’s childhood home in Kent, one of the most evocative of the book’s settings, are used several times to symbolize danger and uncertainty. Whenever Pip goes into the mists, something dangerous is likely to happen. Significantly, Pip must go through the mists when he travels to London shortly after receiving his fortune, alerting the reader that this apparently positive development in his life may have dangerous consequences.

**3.Bentely Drummle**

Although he is a minor character in the novel, Bentley Drummle provides an important contrast with Pip and represents the arbitrary nature of class distinctions. In his mind, Pip has connected the ideas of moral, social, and educational advancement so that each depends on the others. The coarse and cruel Drummle, a member of the upper class, provides Pip with proof that social advancement has no inherent connection to intelligence or moral worth. Drummle is a lout who has inherited immense wealth, while Pip’s friend and brother-in-law Joe is a good man who works hard for the little he earns. Drummle’s negative example helps Pip to see the inner worth of characters such as Magwitch and Joe, and eventually to discard his immature fantasies about wealth and class in favor of a new understanding that is both more compassionate and more realistic.

**TESS OF THE D’URBERVILLES – THOMAS HARDY**

Thomas Hardy – an architect former – is one of the outstanding Victorian writers primarily because of his most important cultural experiment. He reactivated the **classical tragedy** in a **modern artistic context**. The main artistic intention – in his epic – is to create **traditional tragedies** with **classical heroes**.

**A tragedy is always a conflict whose forces cannot be reconciled; the conflict** always leads to the annihilation/termination/destruction of the character who **is caught at the core of the opposition; the tragic represents the aesthetic object of tragedy**. From a cultural and historical viewpoint, we have several forms of tragedy:

1. **The tragedy of destiny** – is the Greek ancient form of tragedy, depicted by Aristotle in his Poetics. It is the tragedy of bad fate (**fatum malus)** (= the overwhelming destiny which follows the hero everywhere, finally destroying him). The character can’t escape his fate, wherever he may run or whatever he may do.
2. **The tragedy of duality** – is the neo – classical form of tragedy. It is the tragedy of the split personality, referring to **an inner conflict** between psychological forces linked to the nature/personality of the hero. The traditional example of clash is the opposition between **passion** and **duty** or **instinct** and **reason.** There are other antinomies which can produce tragedies of psychological duality: appearance/reality, innocence/guilt, love/hatred; this type of tragedy is **internal,** focusing on the hero’s divided psychology.
3. **The tragedy of hybris/hubris** – is a modern type of tragedy in which the clash may be equally internal and **external**. **Hybris** is connected with **pride.** The hero, in other words, is so proud, that he provokes his given **limits.** These limits – once broken – turn against the character and make him a tragic victim. The limit can be **inner** (connected to the hero’s spiritual, cultural or moral possibilities) or **outer** (linked to an obstacle of the exterior world, which the hero wants, unsuccessfully, to pass).

Another extremely important tragic concept is the **tragic flaw**, which represent a personal defect or shortcoming of the character. **The tragic flaw facilitates the manifestation of the tragedy, allowing it to happen.** One other important concept is **the tragic situation,** which illustrates the conflictual position of a character in a tragedy. This conflictual position is also called a **tragically jeopardizing situation** – by this, **the philosopher means the fact that a tragic hero doesn’t have the possibility to choose, all his options being fatal.**

Thomas Hardy combined all three forms of tragedy and elements of tragedy, leaving behind one of the most original Victorian literary construction. **His novels insist much on character and environment, being sometimes romances or fantasies or, other times, melodramas and tragedies.**

Tess of the D’Urbervilles represents, similarly, a combination of the three forms of tragedy: destiny, duality and **hybris**. In intention the novel is a tragedy of duality (Tess is dual, like Jude; she is torn between her passion that makes her surrender to Alec and her spirit which makes her appealing to Angel; as the author says, she is simultaneously a child and a woman, Mary and Magdalene; her tragic flaw is her **uncontrolled instinct** which makes her resonate to Alec’s advances and, finally, kill a man) and **hybris**, too ( Tess provokes her social and moral limit when she accepts Alec the second time, becoming a sort of urban mistress).

**CONTEXT**

Thomas Hardy was born on June 2, 1840, in Higher Bockhampton in Dorset, a rural region of southwestern England that was to become the focus of his fiction. Although he built a reputation as a successful novelist, Hardy considered himself first and foremost a poet. To him, novels were primarily a means of earning a living. But Hardy cannot solely be labeled a Victorian novelist. Nor can he be categorized simply as a Modernist, in the tradition of writers like Virginia Woolf or D. H. Lawrence, who were determined to explode the conventions of nineteenth-century literature and build a new kind of novel in its place. In many respects, Hardy was trapped in the middle ground between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, between Victorian sensibilities and more modern ones, and between tradition and innovation.

In*Tess of the d’Urbervilles* and other novels, Hardy demonstrates his deep sense of moral sympathy for England’s lower classes, particularly for rural women. He became famous for his compassionate, often controversial portrayal of young women victimized by the self-righteous rigidity of English social morality. Perhaps his most famous depiction of such a young woman is in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles.*

Hardy lived and wrote in a time of difficult social change, when England was making its slow and painful transition from an old-fashioned, agricultural nation to a modern, industrial one. Businessmen and entrepreneurs, or “new money,” joined the ranks of the social elite, as some families of the ancient aristocracy, or “old money,” faded into obscurity. Tess’s family in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* illustrates this change, as Tess’s parents, the Durbeyfields, lose themselves in the fantasy of belonging to an ancient and aristocratic family, the d’Urbervilles. Hardy’s novel strongly suggests that such a family history is not only meaningless but also utterly undesirable. Hardy’s views on the subject were appalling to conservative and status-conscious British readers, and *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* was met in England with widespread controversy.

**Analysis of major characters**

**1.Tess**

Intelligent, strikingly attractive, and distinguished by her deep moral sensitivity and passionate intensity, Tess is indisputably the central character of the novel that bears her name. But she is also more than a distinctive individual: Hardy makes her into somewhat of a mythic heroine. Her name, formally Theresa, recalls St. Teresa of Avila, another martyr whose vision of a higher reality cost her her life. Other characters often refer to Tess in mythical terms, as when Angel calls her a “Daughter of Nature” in Chapter XVIII, or refers to her by the Greek mythological names “Artemis” and “Demeter” in Chapter XX. The narrator himself sometimes describes Tess as more than an individual woman, but as something closer to a mythical incarnation of womanhood.

In part, Tess represents the changing role of the agricultural workers in England in the late nineteenth century. Tess is a symbol of unclear and unstable notions of class in nineteenth-century Britain, where old family lines retained their earlier glamour, but where cold economic realities made sheer wealth more important than inner nobility.

Beyond her social symbolism, Tess represents fallen humanity in a religious sense, as the frequent biblical allusions in the novel remind us. Just as Tess’s clan was once glorious and powerful but is now sadly diminished, so too did the early glory of the first humans, Adam and Eve, fade with their expulsion from Eden, making humans sad shadows of what they once were. Tess thus represents what is known in Christian theology as *original sin,* the degraded state in which all humans live, even when—like Tess herself after killing Prince or succumbing to Alec—they are not wholly or directly responsible for the sins for which they are punished. This torment represents the most universal side of Tess: she is the myth of the human who suffers for crimes that are not her own and lives a life more degraded than she deserves.

**2.Alec D’Urberville**

Alec is the nemesis and downfall of Tess’s life. His first name, Alexander, suggests the conqueror—as in Alexander the Great—who seizes what he wants regardless of moral propriety. Yet he is more slippery than a grand conqueror. His full last name, Stoke-d’Urberville, symbolizes the split character of his family, whose origins are simpler than their pretensions to grandeur. After all, Stokes is a blunt and inelegant name. Indeed, the divided and duplicitous character of Alec is evident to the very end of the novel, when he quickly abandons his newfound Christian faith upon remeeting Tess.

This duplicity of character is so intense in Alec, and its consequences for Tess so severe, that he becomes diabolical. The first part of his surname conjures associations with fiery energies, as in the stoking of a furnace or the flames of hell. His devilish associations are evident when he wields a pitchfork while addressing Tess early in the novel, and when he seduces her as the serpent in Genesis seduced Eve. Additionally, like the famous depiction of Satan in Milton’s *Paradise Lost,* Alec does not try to hide his bad qualities. In fact, like Satan, he revels in them. In Chapter XII, he bluntly tells Tess, “I suppose I am a bad fellow—a damn bad fellow. I was born bad, and I have lived bad, and I shall die bad, in all probability.” There is frank acceptance in this admission and no shame. Some readers feel Alec is too wicked to be believable, but, like Tess herself, he represents a larger moral principle rather than a real individual man. Like Satan, Alec symbolizes the base forces of life that drive a person away from moral perfection and greatness.

**3.Angel Clare**

Angel represents a rebellious striving toward a personal vision of goodness. He is a secularist who yearns to work for the “honor and glory of man,” as he tells his father in Chapter XVIII, rather than for the honor and glory of God in a more distant world. A typical young nineteenth-century progressive, Angel sees human society as a thing to be remolded and improved, and he fervently believes in the nobility of man. He rejects the values handed to him, and sets off in search of his own. His love for Tess, a mere milkmaid and his social inferior, is one expression of his disdain for tradition. This independent spirit contributes to his aura of charisma and general attractiveness that makes him the love object of all the milkmaids with whom he works at Talbothays.

As his name—in French, close to “Bright Angel”—suggests, Angel is not quite of this world, but floats above it in a transcendent sphere of his own. The narrator says that Angel shines rather than burns and that he is closer to the intellectually aloof poet Shelley than to the fleshly and passionate poet Byron. His love for Tess may be abstract, as we guess when he calls her “Daughter of Nature” or “Demeter.” Tess may be more an archetype or ideal to him than a flesh and blood woman with a complicated life. Angel’s ideals of human purity are too elevated to be applied to actual people: Mrs. Durbeyfield’s easygoing moral beliefs are much more easily accommodated to real lives such as Tess’s. Angel awakens to the actual complexities of real-world morality after his failure in Brazil, and only then he realizes he has been unfair to Tess. His moral system is readjusted as he is brought down to Earth. Ironically, it is not the angel who guides the human in this novel, but the human who instructs the angel, although at the cost of her own life.

**THEMES**

**1.The injustice of existence**

Unfairness dominates the lives of Tess and her family to such an extent that it begins to seem like a general aspect of human existence in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles.*Tess does not mean to kill Prince, but she is punished anyway, just as she is unfairly punished for her own rape by Alec. Nor is there justice waiting in heaven. Christianity teaches that there is compensation in the afterlife for unhappiness suffered in this life, but the only devout Christian encountered in the novel may be the reverend, Mr. Clare, who seems more or less content in his life anyway. For others in their misery, Christianity offers little solace of heavenly justice. Mrs. Durbeyfield never mentions otherworldly rewards. The converted Alec preaches heavenly justice for earthly sinners, but his faith seems shallow and insincere. Generally, the moral atmosphere of the novel is not Christian justice at all, but pagan injustice. The forces that rule human life are absolutely unpredictable and not necessarily well-disposed to us. The pre-Christian rituals practiced by the farm workers at the opening of the novel, and Tess’s final rest at Stonehenge at the end, remind us of a world where the gods are not just and fair, but whimsical and uncaring. When the narrator concludes the novel with the statement that “‘Justice’ was done, and the President of the Immortals (in the Aeschylean phrase) had ended his sport with Tess,” we are reminded that justice must be put in ironic quotation marks, since it is not really just at all. What passes for “Justice” is in fact one of the pagan gods enjoying a bit of “sport,” or a frivolous game.

**2.Changing ideas of social class in Victorian England**

*Tess of the d’Urbervilles* presents complex pictures of both the importance of social class in nineteenth-century England and the difficulty of defining class in any simple way. Certainly the Durbeyfields are a powerful emblem of the way in which class is no longer evaluated in Victorian times as it would have been in the Middle Ages—that is, by blood alone, with no attention paid to fortune or worldly success. Indubitably the Durbeyfields have purity of blood, yet for the parson and nearly everyone else in the novel, this fact amounts to nothing more than a piece of genealogical trivia. In the Victorian context, cash matters more than lineage, which explains how Simon Stokes, Alec’s father, was smoothly able to use his large fortune to purchase a lustrous family name and transform his clan into the Stoke-d’Urbervilles. The d’Urbervilles pass for what the Durbeyfields truly are—authentic nobility—simply because definitions of class have changed. The issue of class confusion even affects the Clare clan, whose most promising son, Angel, is intent on becoming a farmer and marrying a milkmaid, thus bypassing the traditional privileges of a Cambridge education and a parsonage. His willingness to work side by side with the farm laborers helps endear him to Tess, and their acquaintance would not have been possible if he were a more traditional and elitist aristocrat. Thus, the three main characters in the Angel-Tess-Alec triangle are all strongly marked by confusion regarding their respective social classes, an issue that is one of the main concerns of the novel.

**3.Men dominating women**

One of the recurrent themes of the novel is the way in which men can dominate women, exerting a power over them linked primarily to their maleness. Sometimes this command is purposeful, in the man’s full knowledge of his exploitation, as when Alec acknowledges how bad he is for seducing Tess for his own momentary pleasure. Alec’s act of abuse, the most life-altering event that Tess experiences in the novel, is clearly the most serious instance of male domination over a female. But there are other, less blatant examples of women’s passivity toward dominant men.

Even Angel’s love for Tess, as pure and gentle as it seems, dominates her in an unhealthy way. Angel substitutes an idealized picture of Tess’s country purity for the real-life woman that he continually refuses to get to know. When Angel calls Tess names like “Daughter of Nature” and “Artemis,” we feel that he may be denying her true self in favor of a mental image that he prefers. Thus, her identity and experiences are suppressed, albeit unknowingly. This pattern of male domination is finally reversed with Tess’s murder of Alec, in which, for the first time in the novel, a woman takes active steps against a man. Of course, this act only leads to even greater suppression of a woman by men, when the crowd of male police officers arrest Tess at Stonehenge. Nevertheless, for just a moment, the accepted pattern of submissive women bowing to dominant men is interrupted, and Tess’s act seems heroic.

**MOTIFS**

**1.Birds**

Images of birds recur throughout the novel, evoking or contradicting their traditional spiritual association with a higher realm of transcendence. Tess occasionally hears birdcalls on her frequent hikes across the countryside; their free expressiveness stands in stark contrast to Tess’s silent and constrained existence as a wronged and disgraced girl. These birds offer images of hope and liberation. Yet there is irony attached to birds as well, making us doubt whether these images of hope and freedom are illusory.

It may be that freedom for one creature entails hardship for another, just as Alec’s free enjoyment of Tess’s body leads her to a lifetime of suffering. In the end, when Tess encounters the pheasants maimed by hunters and lying in agony, birds no longer seem free, but rather oppressed and submissive. These pheasants are no Romantic songbirds hovering far above the Earth—they are victims of earthly violence, condemned to suffer down below and never fly again.

**2.The book of genesis**

The Genesis story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is evoked repeatedly throughout *Tess of the d’Urbervilles,* giving the novel a broader metaphysical and philosophical dimension. The roles of Eve and the serpent in paradise are clearly delineated: Angel is the noble Adam newly born, while Tess is the indecisive and troubled Eve. When Tess gazes upon Angel in Chapter XXVII, “she regarded him as Eve at her second waking might have regarded Adam.” Alec, with his open avowal that he is bad to the bone, is the conniving Satan. He seduces Tess under a tree, giving her sexual knowledge in return for her lost innocence. The very name of the forest where this seduction occurs, the Chase, suggests how Eve will be chased from Eden for her sins. This guilt, which will never be erased, is known in Christian theology as the original sin that all humans have inherited. Just as John Durbeyfield is told in Chapter I that “you don’t live anywhere,” and his family is evicted after his death at the end of the novel, their homelessness evokes the human exile from Eden. Original sin suggests that humans have fallen from their once great status to a lower station in life, just as the d’Urbervilles have devolved into the modern Durbeyfields. This Story of the Fall—or of the “Pure Drop,” to recall the name of a pub in Tess’s home village—is much more than a social fall. It is an explanation of how all of us humans—not only Tess—never quite seem to live up to our expectations, and are never able to inhabit the places of grandeur we feel we deserve.

**3.Variant names**

Names matter in this novel. Tess knows and accepts that she is a lowly Durbeyfield, but part of her still believes, as her parents also believe, that her aristocratic original name should be restored. Another character who renames himself is Simon Stokes, Alec’s father, who purchased a family tree and made himself Simon Stoke-d’Urberville. The question raised by all these cases of name changing, whether successful or merely imagined, is the extent to which an altered name brings with it an altered identity. Alec acts notoriously ungentlemanly throughout the novel, but by the end, when he appears at the d’Urberville family vault, his lordly and commanding bearing make him seem almost deserving of the name his father has bought, like a spoiled medieval nobleman. Hardy’s interest in name changes makes reality itself seem changeable according to whims of human perspective.

**SYMBOLS**

**1.Prince**

Like the horse, Tess herself bears a high-class name, but is doomed to a lowly life of physical labor. Interestingly, Prince’s death occurs right after Tess dreams of ancient knights, having just heard the news that her family is aristocratic. In an odd way, Tess’s dream of medieval glory comes true, and her horse dies a heroic death.  The death of the horse symbolizes the sacrifice of real-world goods, such as a useful animal or even her own honor, through excessive fantasizing about a better world.

**2.The D’Urberville family vault**

A double-edged symbol of both the majestic grandeur and the lifeless hollowness of the aristocratic family name that the Durbeyfields learn they possess, the d’Urberville family vault represents both the glory of life and the end of life.

**3.Brazil**

Brazil is thus more than a geographical entity on the map in this novel: it symbolizes a fantasyland, a place where dreams come true. As Angel’s name suggests, he is a lofty visionary who lacks some experience with the real world, despite all his mechanical know-how in farm management.  His fiasco teaches him that ideals do not exist in life, and this lesson helps him reevaluate his disappointment with Tess’s imperfections, her failure to incarnate the ideal he expected her to be. For Angel, Brazil symbolizes the impossibility of ideals, but also forgiveness and acceptance of life in spite of those disappointed ideals.

**WUTHERING HEIGHTS – EMILY BRONTE**

**Context**

Emily Brontë lived an eccentric, closely guarded life. She was born in 1818, two years after Charlotte and a year and a half before her sister Anne, who also became an author. Her father worked as a church rector, and her aunt, who raised the Brontë children after their mother died, was deeply religious.

Today, *Wuthering Heights* has a secure position in the canon of world literature, and Emily Brontë is revered as one of the finest writers—male or female—of the nineteenth century. Like Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights* is based partly on the Gothic tradition of the late eighteenth century, a style of literature that featured supernatural encounters, crumbling ruins, moonless nights, and grotesque imagery, seeking to create effects of mystery and fear. But *Wuthering Heights* transcends its genre in its sophisticated observation and artistic subtlety. The novel has been studied, analyzed, dissected, and discussed from every imaginable critical perspective, yet it remains unexhausted. And while the novel’s symbolism, themes, structure, and language may all spark fertile exploration, the bulk of its popularity may rest on its unforgettable characters. As a shattering presentation of the doomed love affair between the fiercely passionate Catherine and Heathcliff, it remains one of the most haunting love stories in all of literature.

**Analysis of major characters**

**1.Heathcliff**

 He resembles a hero in a romance novel. Traditionally, romance novel heroes appear dangerous, brooding, and cold at first, only later to emerge as fiercely devoted and loving. Considering this historical context, Heathcliff seems to embody the anxieties that the book’s upper- and middle-class audience had about the working classes. The reader may easily sympathize with him when he is powerless, as a child tyrannized by Hindley Earnshaw, but he becomes a villain when he acquires power and returns to Wuthering Heights with money and the trappings of a gentleman. This corresponds with the ambivalence the upper classes felt toward the lower classes—the upper classes had charitable impulses toward lower-class citizens when they were miserable, but feared the prospect of the lower classes trying to escape their miserable circumstances by acquiring political, social, cultural, or economic power.

**2.Catherine**

The location of Catherine’s coffin symbolizes the conflict that tears apart her short life. Catherine is buried “in a corner of the kirkyard, where the wall is so low that heath and bilberry plants have climbed over it from the moor.” Moreover, she is buried with Edgar on one side and Heathcliff on the other, suggesting her conflicted loyalties. Her actions are driven in part by her social ambitions, which initially are awakened during her first stay at the Lintons’, and which eventually compel her to marry Edgar. However, she is also motivated by impulses that prompt her to violate social conventions—to love Heathcliff, throw temper tantrums, and run around on the moor. Isabella Linton—Catherine’s sister-in-law and Heathcliff’s wife, who was born in the same year that Catherine was—serves as Catherine’s foil. The two women’s parallel positions allow us to see their differences with greater clarity. Catherine represents wild nature, in both her high, lively spirits and her occasional cruelty, whereas Isabella represents culture and civilization, both in her refinement and in her weakness.

**THEMES**

**1.The destructiveness of a love that never changes**

Catherine and Heathcliff’s passion for one another seems to be the center of*Wuthering Heights,*given that it is stronger and more lasting than any other emotion displayed in the novel, and that it is the source of most of the major conflicts that structure the novel’s plot. The book is actually structured around two parallel love stories, the first half of the novel centering on the love between Catherine and Heathcliff, while the less dramatic second half features the developing love between young Catherine and Hareton. In contrast to the first, the latter tale ends happily, restoring peace and order to Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. The differences between the two love stories contribute to the reader’s understanding of why each ends the way it does. The most important feature of young Catherine and Hareton’s love story is that it involves growth and change. Catherine and Heathcliff’s love, on the other hand, is rooted in their childhood and is marked by the refusal to change. Moreover, Catherine and Heathcliff’s love is based on their shared perception that they are identical. Given that Catherine and Heathcliff’s love is based upon their refusal to change over time or embrace difference in others, it is fitting that the disastrous problems of their generation are overcome not by some climactic reversal, but simply by the inexorable passage of time, and the rise of a new and distinct generation. Ultimately, *Wuthering Heights* presents a vision of life as a process of change, and celebrates this process over and against the romantic intensity of its principal characters.

**2.The precariousness of social class**

As members of the gentry, the Earnshaws and the Lintons occupy a somewhat precarious place within the hierarchy of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British society. At the top of British society was the royalty, followed by the aristocracy, then by the gentry, and then by the lower classes, who made up the vast majority of the population. Although the gentry, or upper middle class, possessed servants and often large estates, they held a nonetheless fragile social position. The social status of aristocrats was a formal and settled matter, because aristocrats had official titles. Members of the gentry, however, held no titles, and their status was thus subject to change.

**MOTIFS**

**1.Doubles**

Brontë organizes her novel by arranging its elements—characters, places, and themes—into pairs. Catherine and Heathcliff are closely matched in many ways, and see themselves as identical. Catherine’s character is divided into two warring sides: the side that wants Edgar and the side that wants Heathcliff. Catherine and young Catherine are both remarkably similar and strikingly different. The two houses, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, represent opposing worlds and values. The novel has not one but two distinctly different narrators, Nelly and Mr. Lockwood. The relation between such paired elements is usually quite complicated, with the members of each pair being neither exactly alike nor diametrically opposed. For instance, the Lintons and the Earnshaws may at first seem to represent opposing sets of values, but, by the end of the novel, so many intermarriages have taken place that one can no longer distinguish between the two families.

**2.Repetition**

Repetition is another tactic Brontë employs in organizing *Wuthering Heights*. It seems that nothing ever ends in the world of this novel. Instead, time seems to run in cycles, and the horrors of the past repeat themselves in the present. The way that the names of the characters are recycled, so that the names of the characters of the younger generation seem only to be rescramblings of the names of their parents, leads the reader to consider how plot elements also repeat themselves.

**3.The conflict between nature and culture**

In *Wuthering Heights,* Brontë constantly plays nature and culture against each other. Nature is represented by the Earnshaw family, and by Catherine and Heathcliff in particular. These characters are governed by their passions, not by reflection or ideals of civility. Correspondingly, the house where they live—Wuthering Heights—comes to symbolize a similar wildness. On the other hand, Thrushcross Grange and the Linton family represent culture, refinement, convention, and cultivation.

**SYMBOLS**

**1.Moors**

The constant emphasis on landscape within the text of *Wuthering Heights* endows the setting with symbolic importance. This landscape is comprised primarily of moors: wide, wild expanses, high but somewhat soggy, and thus infertile. Moorland cannot be cultivated, and its uniformity makes navigation difficult. It features particularly waterlogged patches in which people could potentially drown. (This possibility is mentioned several times in *Wuthering Heights*.) Thus, the moors serve very well as symbols of the wild threat posed by nature. As the setting for the beginnings of Catherine and Heathcliff’s bond (the two play on the moors during childhood), the moorland transfers its symbolic associations onto the love affair.

**2.Ghosts**

Ghosts appear throughout *Wuthering Heights,* as they do in most other works of Gothic fiction, yet Brontë always presents them in such a way that whether they really exist remains ambiguous. Thus the world of the novel can always be interpreted as a realistic one. Certain ghosts—such as Catherine’s spirit when it appears to Lockwood in Chapter III—may be explained as nightmares. The villagers’ alleged sightings of Heathcliff’s ghost in Chapter XXXIV could be dismissed as unverified superstition. Whether or not the ghosts are “real,” they symbolize the manifestation of the past within the present, and the way memory stays with people, permeating their day-to-day lives.

**THE PRE / POSTCOLONIALIST NOVEL**

**- JOSEPH CONRAD**

Even by his profession – Conrad was a ship captain - , he was exposed to a continuous cultural experience. Therefore**, the clash of civilization** came to be one of his favourite fictional topics. At a subtler level, Conrad’s aesthetic and psychological preoccupation is **the individual identity** caught inside **the collective mechanism.**

On the other hand, Conrad, like James, is a representative of the transition of the British novel from Victorianism to Modernism. He has a fundamental interest in the development of **the narrative strategies** (especially of the status of the narrator) and, also, shows concern for **the structure of epic** (which becomes extremely complex in Conrad’s novels, announcing the beginning of Modernism).

Conrad is interested in a more general mental confrontation that engages **the primitive world** and **the civilized universe**. The protagonists of his cultural conflict are **the traditional archaic man** and **the modernized Euro-American fellow.**

**Conrad’s major cultural point is that the modern man annihilates the spirituality of the would-be primitive archaic individual and transforms the traditional civilization – otherwise sophisticated, but in ways which are not evident to modern colonizers – into an artificial, elementary society, good only for being exploited.** In an anticipatory manner, Conrad deals – in his cultural novels – with Nietzsche’s notion of **the death of God.**

Some of Conrad’s novels can, therefore, be read as modern allegories about **the loss of the self.** From a cultural viewpoint, one may divide Conrad’s texts into two categories: **novels of depersonalization** and **novels of destruction.**

**The novels of depersonalization** refer to those few cases in which the colonist (the modern man, the exponent of the Euro-American universe) loses his identity under the influence of **the colonized** (the primitive man, the exponent of the traditional Asian or African universe) and becomes a depersonalized tragic fellow. We witness such situations in **Lord Jim** and **Heart of Darkness**.

**The novels of destruction** are Conrad’s traditional novels of anti-colonialism in which the modern civilization annihilates and destroys the primitive world and leads, symbolically, to the death of God (to the termination of the archetypal spirit). Such cases of cultural clash appear, again, in **Lord Jim** and **Heart of Darkness**. One may consider Conrad an anticipator of the postcolonial concept of **the double critique**. This notion refers to the double identity individuals and communities develop as a result of colonialism.

Conrad uses **3 major narrative strategies**:

1. **The oblique point of view** – implies the transfer of narrative authority from an omniscient author to a first person narrator or to a group of narrators who, in their turn, may transfer the perspective to other possible narrators.
2. **The disseminated narrative perspective** – is a direct consequences of the oblique point of view. It refers to the multiplicity of narrative variants one witnesses in Conrad’s fiction.
3. **The partial reflector** – links Conrad to the Victorian tradition and especially to James’s innovative epic techniques. His reflectors are limitative, subjective and unreliable.

Conrad’s absolute masterpieces are **Lord Jim** and **Heart of Darkness**. Lord Jim is a novel of introspection and identity in which the character discovers – during an initiation-like process – that his adolescent heroic dreams do not fit in the reality of adulthood.

In Heart of Darkness we deal again with an allegorical novel about the intervention of the modern civilization in the archetypal spirituality and the primitive world. Kurtz is a Nietzschean God **avant la lettre**, who dies symbolically at the beginning of modernity. Heart of Darkness is an anti-colonial novel concentrated on the idea of destruction.

**LORD JIM – JOSEPH CONRAD**

**CONTEXT**

Joseph Conrad was born in the Ukraine in 1857. *Lord Jim* is the first of his major novels. It appeared in 1900, the year after *Heart of Darkness,* which is perhaps his best-known work.  Conrad was writing at the very moment when the Victorian Age was disappearing and the modern era was emerging. Victorian moral codes still influenced the plots of novels, but such principles were no longer absolute. Novelists and poets were beginning to experiment with form. The jumbled time sequence and elaborate narrative frames of *Lord Jim* are part of this movement. *Lord Jim* nevertheless situates itself in a world where national differences are often reduced to the dichotomy of "us" and "them," where the term "us" can encompass a surprisingly heterogeneous group. Both economic and racial versions of the colonial dynamic come into play in this novel.

**Analysis of major characters**

**1.Lord Jim**

 Also known as "Lord Jim," or "Tuan Jim." The hero of our story, Jim is a young man who, inspired by popular literature, goes to sea dreaming of becoming a hero. He gets his chance when the ship he is aboard gets damaged, and fails utterly by abandoning ship with the rest of the crew. Haunted by his failure and stripped of his officer's certificate, he wanders from job to job, finally becoming the manager of a remote trading post. He falls in love with Jewel, a beautiful, half-native girl, and, by defeating a local bandit, becomes leader of the people. His dreams of heroism lead to his failure to kill a marauding white pirate, Gentleman Brown, which in turn leads to the death of Dain Waris, his best friend and son of Doramin, the local chief. Jim allows Doramin to shoot him in retribution.

**2.Marlow**

The narrator of this story and a ship's captain. Marlow first encounters Jim at the inquiry where Jim loses his certification. Feeling that Jim is "one of us," he takes an interest in him, first helping him find employment as a water clerk and as a trading post manager for Stein, then compulsively piecing together Jim's story and perpetuating it through various retellings. It is Marlow who filters and interprets most of the narrative for the reader.

**SYMBOLISM, IMAGERY & ALLEGORY**

**[Brierly's Pocketwatch](http://www.shmoop.com/lord-jim/brierlys-pocketwatch-symbol.html)**

[When Brierly commits suicide by jumping ship, he leaves his pocketwatch hanging on the rail. Let's take a look at that scene:'There's a funny thing. I don't like to touch it.' It was Captain Brierl...](http://www.shmoop.com/lord-jim/brierlys-pocketwatch-symbol.html)

**[Imagination](http://www.shmoop.com/lord-jim/imagination-symbol.html)**

[The fear grows shadowy; and Imagination, the enemy of men, the father of all terrors, unstimulated, sinks to rest in the dullness of exhausted emotion. Jim saw nothing but the disorder of his tosse...](http://www.shmoop.com/lord-jim/imagination-symbol.html)

**[Butterflies](http://www.shmoop.com/lord-jim/butterflies-symbol.html)**

[Stein collects butterflies, which may seem like just a passing hobby. But we think there just might be something more to it. Let's take a look at Stein's description of his favorite pasttime: "When...](http://www.shmoop.com/lord-jim/butterflies-symbol.html)

**[Water Imagery](http://www.shmoop.com/lord-jim/water-imagery.html)**

[We've got a novel about sailors in Lord Jim, which means that water and the sea are like characters in and of themselves. Marlow spends a fair amount of time pondering the sea and its moods, person...](http://www.shmoop.com/lord-jim/water-imagery.html)

**[Darkness Imagery](http://www.shmoop.com/lord-jim/darkness-imagery.html)**

[It seems like half this novel takes place at night. The Patna sinks at night, Jim confesses his shameful actions to Marlow under the cover of darkness, Marlow relates his story to an audience over...](http://www.shmoop.com/lord-jim/darkness-imagery.html)

**ANALYSIS: SETTING**

**Where It All Goes Down**

*Patna*, the Malabar Hotel, Patusan, Southeast Asia, Late 19th century

*Lord Jim* is technically a British novel, though almost none of the novel's action takes place in Jolly Old England. This novel really belongs more to the British empire, specifically Southeast Asia and the Pacific Ocean. As a former sailor, Conrad kept the action in places familiar to him – on boats at sea, at seaports, and on islands. This is a novel written by a sailor about sailors, so it makes sense that the bulk of the action takes place at in the more watery corners of the world.

**Backdrops and Backgrounds**

Unfortunately, Conrad doesn't seem all that interested in painting a vivid picture of these environs. He's much more interested in Jim's story. Perhaps that's why he doesn't go into much detail when it comes to the locations where events go down.

The bulk of the novel takes place on board the *Patna*, at the anonymous port where Jim's trial takes place, at Stein's house, and on Patusan. These places are all tropical and filled with eclectic individuals, but ultimately they are fairly forgettable. They're merely backdrops for the more exciting human dramas going on. And even when Conrad does give us details about the setting, it's often the human element that draws his attention.

At a description of Jim's trial, the characters seem to become part of the setting itself. Conrad tends to define places by the people in them.

*[T]he big framework of punkahs moved gently to and fro high above his head, and from below many eyes were looking at him out of dark faces, out of white faces, out of red faces, out of faces attentive, spellbound, as if all these people sitting in orderly rows upon narrow benches had been enslaved by the fascination of his voice. [...] The light of a broad window under the ceiling fell from above on the heads and shoulders of the three men, and they were fiercely distinct in the half-light of the big court-room where the audience seemed composed of staring shadows.* (4.1)

These nameless faces provide the backdrop against which the trial occurs. Though these faces are, of course, people, who they are and what they are saying isn't of huge importance. Conrad is more interested in the image because it helps him set the scene

The setting for Jim's trial is relatively generic – it could be taking place at any number of locations in the South Pacific. What's important isn't so much the location as the mood, the people involved, and the overall atmosphere defined by people. The same is true for the other settings of the novel, which are filled with tropical "stock footage."

**Setting the Mood**

The setting details we do get are often very atmospheric and mirror the characters' moods and emotions. Take, for example, this description of Stein's house:

*We passed through empty dark rooms, escorted by gleams from the lights Stein carried. They glided along the waxed floors, sweeping here and there over the polished surface of a table, leaped upon a fragmentary curve of a piece of furniture, or flashed perpendicularly in and out of distant mirrors, while the forms of two men and the flicker of two flames could be seen for a moment stealing silently across the depths of a crystalline void.* (20.37)

Dreamy, right? Swirls of light and darkness, empty rooms, a crystalline void. That doesn't sound like any house Shmoop has been to. But it does set an otherworldly tone for Marlow's encounter with Stein. And it reemphasizes the fact that this entire story is made up of memories, which are always a bit dreamlike and unstable.

That instability comes into play in Conrad's descriptions of the *Patna*as well:

*And all is still. No thunder, no wind, no sound; not a flicker of lighting. Then in the tenebrous immensity a livid arch appears; a swell or two like undulations of the very darkness run past, and, suddenly, wind and rain strike together with a peculiar impetuosity as if they had burst through something solid. Such a cloud had come up while they weren't looking.* (9.3)

Conrad's descriptions highlight *what* is happening more than *where* it's happening here, which just goes to show that settings matter in the novel only so much as they affect and reflect the characters.

**The Sun Never Sets…... On the British Empire.**

Before you go thinking, *okay, so the setting is no big deal*, it's important to stop for a second and think about the larger setting in which the novel takes place. It's a little thing we like to call the [British Empire](http://www.victorianweb.org/history/empire/Empire.html), and it's not so little at all. Conrad wrote his novels when British (and European) imperialism was at its height, and European influence was felt in just about every corner of the world.

With that imperialism comes a whole boatload of issues, all of which our characters are grappling with. First and foremost, race relations between white imperialists and their local subjects were tense at the best of times, and violent at the worst. We see this tension hinted at all over *Lord Jim*, but the novel rarely puts race at center stage.

The Empire, though, is always in the spotlight, with its remote outposts (like Patusan) and innumerable ships (like the *Patna*). So while we may become totally engrossed with Jim's story, it's important to remember the larger story of the British Empire. After all, Jim's story would never have happened without it.

**ANALYSIS: NARRATOR POINT OF VIEW**

Who is the narrator, can she or he read minds, and, more importantly, can we trust her or him?

**Third Person, Limited Omniscient/ Marlow. Or First Person.**

We'll just level with you here: the narrative technique of *Lord Jim* is confusing to say the least.

**Third Person… Sort of**

First, we have Marlow, who is the main narrator of the novel. But as he tells Jim's story, other voices creep into the mix as the characters he meets share what they know of Jim. It's as if Marlow is channeling a story with multiple voices into one narrative stream. Plus, there's the fact Marlow is not actually the narrator of the novel at all.

Yep, that's right. There's a whole other, unidentified person who is sitting on the verandah listening to Marlow, and interrupting every once in a while to remind us that Marlow, too, is a character:

*Marlow paused to put new life into his expiring cheroot, seemed to forget all about the story, and abruptly began again.*(8.10)

Weird, right? Plus, there's the anonymous narrator of the first five chapters, which document Jim's early life. If your head is already spinning, don't worry. Shmoop has your back.

**First Person... Sort of**

For the sake of sheer practicality, we're going to go ahead and call *Lord Jim* a first person narrative, because the bulk of the novel is told in Marlow's words. As Conrad's go-to narrator (Marlow also narrated Conrad's first novel, *Chance*, and his most famous novel, [*Heart of Darkness*](http://www.shmoop.com/heart-of-darkness/)), Marlow has his work cut out for him. *Lord Jim* has a great many stories woven together, and we need someone to tell them to us. That gargantuan task falls to Marlow.

After the first four anonymously narrated chapters, we meet our storyteller at the end of Chapter Four. Every chapter after that uses quotation marks around the paragraphs to indicate that Marlow is speaking. For much of the novel, it's a pretty straightforward narrative; Marlow tells us Jim's story, and how he came to find out about it (through his many, many sources, far and wide).

The only wrench that ever gets thrown is that pesky third person we've already mentioned. Why not have Marlow just narrate the whole darn story?

Part of the reason might be thematic – *Lord Jim*is largely about storytelling, and Conrad uses multiple storytellers throughout the narrative who all interpret one another and repeat one another. The novel shows us how stories can get filtered and distorted through different people's perspectives, including Marlow's.

Also, the outside narrator means that Marlow functions both as a narrator and an independent character. Bonus, right? Instead of seeing the whole world of *Lord Jim* through Marlow's eyes, we get one layer of removal that gives us a good dose of perspective. Every time that other narrator rears his anonymous head, we're reminded to take Marlow's words with a grain of salt, because he's only *human*.

**Too Many Cooks in the Kitchen**

Marlow's voice glides in and out of the story, and we get frequent instances where Marlow slips over to quoting Jim, or Stein, or the French Lieutenant, or, well, you get the picture:

*[W]hile his brain and his heart together were pierced as with daggers by panic-stricken screams, "Let go! For God's sake, let go! Let go! She's going." Following upon that the boat-falls ripped through the blocks, and a lot of men began to talk in startled tones under the awnings. "When these beggars did break out, their yelps were enough to wake the dead," he said.* (9.21)

Marlow is both paraphrasing Jim and quoting his young protege. How could he possibly know that Jim's brain and heart were pierced with dagger-like screams? Either Marlow is projecting feelings onto Jim, or Jim has described his experience this way, and Marlow is merely restating what he said (perhaps with a little color added). This back-and-forth makes it difficult to suss out who is really saying what, and, more important, who is *feeling* what.

As it turns out, another reason for not having Marlow be a first-person narrator may be Conrad's interest in the way, by telling a story, we use and reinterpret other peoples voices. Jim's story is complicated, and Marlow has to wrangle it out of various people, put it into his own words, then share it with an audience who may go on to retell it in their own way.

The narrative technique puts us in the same position as Marlow's audience in the story, trying to sort out what he and others are saying, wondering what's true. We're on shaky ground here, and we can't help but think that's exactly where Conrad wants us.

**ANALYSIS: GENRE**

**Adventure, Modernism, Psychological Thriller and Suspense**

**Adventure**

At first glance, *Lord Jim* might not seem like adventure material. Frankly, the bulk of the novel involves people sitting around and talking. Of course it's what they're talking about that matters, otherwise we might have to write this one off as big ol' snooze. But at its heart, *Lord Jim*is an imperial adventure tale, filled with swashbuckling, nautical hijinks, and even a little romance. And in its day, it was published in serial form in *Blackwood's Magazine*, alongside stories and articles on hunting in Africa, deep-sea fishing, and exciting battles. (Check out the "[In a Nutshell](http://www.shmoop.com/lord-jim/)" section for more on *Blackwood's Magazine.*)

The only snag we might hit in calling this one an adventure tale is the sad fact that Jim doesn't get to sail off into the sunset with his girl in the end. Oh well. You can't have everything.

**Modernism**

What do we talk about when we talk about Modernism? "Modernist Literature" is a hefty phrase that pretty much refers to literature written between 1899 and 1945, and involving experimentation with the traditional novel format. Modernist literature plays all kinds of games with time and order, perspective, and point of view. There was a lot of play with form, and it was more common to see a fragmented plot than, say, a clear beginning, middle, and end.

Modernism and adventure don't normally go together, but in *Lord Jim*, they absolutely do. Conrad was a big fan of experimenting with style, and many critics consider him a precursor to modernism. He used a lot of modernist tricks in his narratives, including stream of consciousness; unreliable, biased narrators; a focus on characters' inner lives; and a fairly cynical view of the world – all of which we see in *Lord Jim*at one time or another. Plus, there is the whole fragmented nature of Jim's story, which is told in snippets that are incomplete and out of order. We're left to do the dirty work of piecing it all together.

**Psychological Thriller and Suspense**

In *Lord Jim*, Conrad has a tricky habit of witholding information from us reders to build suspense. Consider, for example, the beginning of the novel, where we get hint after hint of the *Patna*scandal and Jim's role in it, but we don't find out what actually went down until several chapters in.

Add to that the novel's obsession with these characters' inner turmoil and you've got all the ingredients for a psychological thriller. After all, Marlow is always trying to analyze Jim – to get inside his head, so to speak. And we readers never quite know what Jim will do next, because we can see that his torment drives him to make rash decisions. His actions haunt him his whole life, just as many characters' pasts do in your typical thriller.

**HEART OF DARKNESS – JOSEPH CONRAD**

**Context**

*Heart of Darkness* in particular, provide a bridge between Victorian values and the ideals of modernism. Like their Victorian predecessors, these novels rely on traditional ideas of heroism, which are nevertheless under constant attack in a changing world and in places far from England. *Heart of Darkness* is as much about alienation, confusion, and profound doubt as it is about imperialism. Imperialism is nevertheless at the center of *Heart of Darkness.* *Heart of Darkness* suggests that this is the natural result when men are allowed to operate outside a social system of checks and balances: power, especially power over other human beings, inevitably corrupts.  *Heart of Darkness,* thus, at its most abstract level, is a narrative about the difficulty of understanding the world beyond the self, about the ability of one man to judge another. *Heart of Darkness* was one of the first literary texts to provide a critical view of European imperial activities, it was initially read by critics as anything but controversial.

**Analysis of major characters**

**1.Marlow**

Although Marlow appears in several of Conrad’s other works, it is important not to view him as merely a surrogate for the author. Marlow is a complicated man who anticipates the figures of high modernism while also reflecting his Victorian predecessors. Marlow is in many ways a traditional hero: tough, honest, an independent thinker, a capable man. Yet he is also “broken” or “damaged,” like T. S. Eliot’s J. Alfred Prufrock or William Faulkner’s Quentin Compson. The world has defeated him in some fundamental way, and he is weary, skeptical, and cynical. Marlow also mediates between the figure of the intellectual and that of the “working tough.” While he is clearly intelligent, eloquent, and a natural philosopher, he is not saddled with the angst of centuries’ worth of Western thought. At the same time, while he is highly skilled at what he does—he repairs and then ably pilots his own ship—he is no mere manual laborer. Marlow can also be read as an intermediary between the two extremes of Kurtz and the Company. He is moderate enough to allow the reader to identify with him, yet open-minded enough to identify at least partially with either extreme. Thus, he acts as a guide for the reader.

**2.Kurtz**

Kurtz, like Marlow, can be situated within a larger tradition. Kurtz resembles the archetypal “evil genius”: the highly gifted but ultimately degenerate individual whose fall is the stuff of legend. Kurtz is related to figures like Faustus, Satan in Milton’s *Paradise Lost, Moby-Dick’*s Ahab, and *Wuthering Heights’*s Heathcliff. Like these characters, he is significant both for his style and eloquence and for his grandiose, almost megalomaniacal scheming. In a world of mundanely malicious men and “flabby devils,” attracting enough attention to be worthy of damnation is indeed something. Kurtz can be criticized in the same terms that *Heart of Darkness*is sometimes criticized: style entirely overrules substance, providing a justification for amorality and evil.

**Themes**

**1.The hypocrisy of imperialism**

*Heart of Darkness* explores the issues surrounding imperialism in complicated ways. As Marlow travels from the Outer Station to the Central Station and finally up the river to the Inner Station, he encounters scenes of torture, cruelty, and near-slavery. At the very least, the incidental scenery of the book offers a harsh picture of colonial enterprise. However, for Marlow as much as for Kurtz or for the Company, Africans in this book are mostly objects: Marlow refers to his helmsman as a piece of machinery, and Kurtz’s African mistress is at best a piece of statuary.  While *Heart of Darkness* offers a powerful condemnation of the hypocritical operations of imperialism, it also presents a set of issues surrounding race that is ultimately troubling.

**2.Madness as a result of imperialism**

Madness is closely linked to imperialism in this book. Africa is responsible for mental disintegration as well as physical illness. Madness has two primary functions. First, it serves as an ironic device to engage the reader’s sympathies. Kurtz, Marlow is told from the beginning, is mad. However, as Marlow, and the reader, begin to form a more complete picture of Kurtz, it becomes apparent that his madness is only relative, that in the context of the Company insanity is difficult to define. Thus, both Marlow and the reader begin to sympathize with Kurtz and view the Company with suspicion. Madness also functions to establish the necessity of social fictions. Although social mores and explanatory justifications are shown throughout *Heart of Darkness* to be utterly false and even leading to evil, they are nevertheless necessary for both group harmony and individual security. Madness, in *Heart of Darkness,* is the result of being removed from one’s social context and allowed to be the sole arbiter of one’s own actions. Madness is thus linked not only to absolute power and a kind of moral genius but to man’s fundamental fallibility: Kurtz has no authority to whom he answers but himself, and this is more than any one man can bear.

**3.The absurdity of evil**

This novella is, above all, an exploration of hypocrisy, ambiguity, and moral confusion. It explodes the idea of the proverbial choice between the lesser of two evils. As the idealistic Marlow is forced to align himself with either the hypocritical and malicious colonial bureaucracy or the openly malevolent, rule-defying Kurtz, it becomes increasingly clear that to try to judge either alternative is an act of folly.

**Motifs**

**1.Observation and eavesdropping**

Marlow gains a great deal of information by watching the world around him and by overhearing others’ conversations, as when he listens from the deck of the wrecked steamer to the manager of the Central Station and his uncle discussing Kurtz and the Russian trader. This phenomenon speaks to the impossibility of direct communication between individuals: information must come as the result of chance observation and astute interpretation. Words themselves fail to capture meaning adequately, and thus they must be taken in the context of their utterance. Another good example of this is Marlow’s conversation with the brickmaker, during which Marlow is able to figure out a good deal more than simply what the man has to say.

**2.Interiors and exteriors**

Comparisons between interiors and exteriors pervade *Heart of Darkness.* As the narrator states at the beginning of the text, Marlow is more interested in surfaces, in the surrounding aura of a thing rather than in any hidden nugget of meaning deep within the thing itself. This inverts the usual hierarchy of meaning: normally one seeks the deep message or hidden truth. The priority placed on observation demonstrates that penetrating to the interior of an idea or a person is impossible in this world. Thus, Marlow is confronted with a series of exteriors and surfaces—the river’s banks, the forest walls around the station, Kurtz’s broad forehead—that he must interpret. These exteriors are all the material he is given, and they provide him with perhaps a more profound source of knowledge than any falsely constructed interior “kernel.”

**3.Darkness**

Darkness is important enough conceptually to be part of the book’s title. However, it is difficult to discern exactly what it might mean, given that absolutely everything in the book is cloaked in darkness. Africa, England, and Brussels are all described as gloomy and somehow dark, even if the sun is shining brightly. Darkness thus seems to operate metaphorically and existentially rather than specifically. Darkness is the inability to see: this may sound simple, but as a description of the human condition it has profound implications. Failing to see another human being means failing to understand that individual and failing to establish any sort of sympathetic communion with him or her.

**Symbols**

**1.Fog**

Fog is a sort of corollary to darkness. Fog not only obscures but distorts: it gives one just enough information to begin making decisions but no way to judge the accuracy of that information, which often ends up being wrong. Marlow’s steamer is caught in the fog, meaning that he has no idea where he’s going and no idea whether peril or open water lies ahead.

**2.The Whited Sepulchre**

The “whited sepulchre” is probably Brussels, where the Company’s headquarters are located. A sepulchre implies death and confinement, and indeed Europe is the origin of the colonial enterprises that bring death to white men and to their colonial subjects; it is also governed by a set of reified social principles that both enable cruelty, dehumanization, and evil and prohibit change. The phrase “whited sepulchre” comes from the biblical Book of Matthew. In the passage, Matthew describes “whited sepulchres” as something beautiful on the outside but containing horrors within (the bodies of the dead); thus, the image is appropriate for Brussels, given the hypocritical Belgian rhetoric about imperialism’s civilizing mission. (Belgian colonies, particularly the Congo, were notorious for the violence perpetuated against the natives.)

**3.Women**

Both Kurtz’s Intended and his African mistress function as blank slates upon which the values and the wealth of their respective societies can be displayed. Marlow frequently claims that women are the keepers of naïve illusions; although this sounds condemnatory, such a role is in fact crucial, as these naïve illusions are at the root of the social fictions that justify economic enterprise and colonial expansion. In return, the women are the beneficiaries of much of the resulting wealth, and they become objects upon which men can display their own success and status.

**4.The river**

The Congo River is the key to Africa for Europeans. It allows them access to the center of the continent without having to physically cross it; in other words, it allows the white man to remain always separate or outside. Africa is thus reduced to a series of two-dimensional scenes that flash by Marlow’s steamer as he travels upriver. The river also seems to want to expel Europeans from Africa altogether: its current makes travel upriver slow and difficult, but the flow of water makes travel downriver, back toward “civilization,” rapid and seemingly inevitable. Marlow’s struggles with the river as he travels upstream toward Kurtz reflect his struggles to understand the situation in which he has found himself. The ease with which he journeys back downstream, on the other hand, mirrors his acquiescence to Kurtz and his “choice of nightmares.”

**EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY AND MODERNISM**

**1901 – 1950**

**BRITAIN 1901 – 1950**

Queen Victoria’s death corresponded with the start of the new century, and Britain entered a new era in which its supremacy on the world stage come to an end as the result of two ruinous global wars.

Despite the economic gloom that characterized the first fifty years of the 20th century, British society was by no means dormant, since both World Wars acted as catalysts for profound cultural and social changes. The most significant change was **the new role of women in society.** The dutiful, housebound Victorian lady was being replaced by a young, fun-loving and liberated woman.

The first fifty years of the 20th century saw the end of the British Empire and of the Industrial Revolution. The two wars had meant that Britain would play a less prominent role in a world dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union.

**British literature**

Between 1910 and 1930 the impetus towards innovation and experimentation gathered pace as Modernist writers published ground-breaking works that made this period one of the most memorable in the history of English literature. They tried to find forms of expression that reflected the complexity of 20th century life.

Although the Modernist revolution instigated by **Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf** was the most notable development in the world of early 20th century fiction, most writing during the period respected more traditional stylistic and organizational norms.

**The Bloomsbury Group**, so called because it met in the Bloomsbury area of London, included **E. M. Forster** and **Virginia Woolf.** **They followed in the aesthetic tradition of the late 19th century and totally rejected the moral and artistic restrictions of the Victorians. Forster, along with Rudyard Kipling and Joseph Conrad, dealt with colonialism as the first breaches began to appear in the defences of the Empire**.

Born in the USA, **Henry James** became a British subject shortly before his death and is perhaps the first writer to be equally claimed on both sides of the Atlantic.

A contrasting view of the British in India is given by **E. M. Forster** in A passage to India. His condemnation of the ruling British elite leaves little room for any hope that the gap between governors and governed can be closed.

**Modernist writers believed that nothing could be taken for granted in literary form and that no theme or subject matter was unsuitable for fiction.** Writers like **Joyce, Woolf, Lawrence and Conrad** applied psychoanalytic theory to their work so that the inner psychology of man became as important as the external world. Modernist works are deliberately open to myriad of interpretation, and they experiment with time shifts. Joseph Conrad was one of the earliest writers to experiment with time shifts. Virginia Woolf applied her acute feminine sensibility to the examination of the inner workings of the human mind, and brilliantly exposed the spontaneous flow of her characters’ thoughts, impressions and emotions. She uses the technique of the interior monologue.

**The writer who best symbolizes the Modernist revolution in fiction is James Joyce**, who experimented with the form, technique and subject matter of the novel.

**CONCLUSION**

Rapid political and social change marked the period between the 2 world wars:

* The British Empire was in decline
* Countries like India were beginning to question Britain’s colonial rule
* The Labour Party was beginning to challenge the Conservative Party
* Women were demanding equal rights, which leads to the new role of women in society
* The end of the Industrial Revolution
* The forms of expression were trying to reflect the complexity of 20th century life.

**THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY – HENRY JAMES**

**Context**

Henry James was born in New York City in 1843 and was raised in Manhattan. By his mid- twenties James was considered one of the most skilled writers in America. In novels such as *The American,* *The Europeans,* and *Daisy Miller,* James perfected a unique brand of psychological realism, taking as his primary subject the social maneuverings of the upper classes, particularly the situation of Americans living in Europe. For James, America represented optimism and innocence, while Europe represented decadence and social sophistication; James himself moved to Europe early on in his professional career and was naturalized as a British citizen in 1915 to protest America's failure to enter World War I.

Throughout his career, James earned criticism for the slow pacing and uneventful plotting of his novels, as well as for his elliptical technique, in which many of a work's important scenes are not narrated, but only implied by later scenes.

First written in the 1880s and extensively revised in 1908, *The Portrait of a Lady* is often considered to be James's greatest achievement. In it, he explored many of his most characteristic themes, including the conflict between American individualism and European social custom and the situation of Americans in Europe. It also includes many of his most memorable characters, including the lady of the novel's title, Isabel Archer, the indomitable Mrs. Touchett, the wise and funny Ralph Touchett, the fast-talking Henrietta Stackpole, and the sinister villains, Gilbert Osmond and Madame Merle.

**The Portrait of a Lady** is recognized as one of the greatest of the many great works of [Henry James](http://www.bartleby.com/311/1000.html). Why? Well, there are the obvious answers: the novel, which was released in installments in the [Atlantic Monthly](http://www.theatlantic.com/) magazine in 1880, was an instant hit; critics then and now praise its attention to psychological detail and realistic situations. It is widely acknowledged to be the masterpiece of James’s early period.   
Then, there are the more intimate reasons. The characters are, in a word, unforgettable. It’s easy to find yourself deeply involved in a personal relationship with Isabel or Ralph, or to imagine yourself confronting Madame Merle or Osmond. The novel’s characters so brim with life, they seem like they can step off the page and into our lives. James’s vibrant, living, breathing microcosm of society still feels like an incredible achievement, and it’s what keeps this novel feeling so contemporary and compulsively readable.

**Analysis of major characters**

**1.Isabel**

 The novel's protagonist, the Lady of the title. Isabel is a young woman from Albany, New York, who travels to Europe with her aunt, Mrs. Touchett. Isabel's experiences in Europe—she is wooed by an English lord, inherits a fortune, and falls prey to a villainous scheme to marry her to the sinister Gilbert Osmond—force her to confront the conflict between her desire for personal independence and her commitment to social propriety. Isabel is the main focus of *Portrait of a Lady,* and most of the thematic exploration of the novel occurs through her actions, thoughts, and experiences. Ultimately, Isabel chooses to remain in her miserable marriage to Osmond rather than to violate custom by leaving him and searching for a happier life.

**2.Gilbert Osmond**

A cruel, narcissistic gentleman of no particular social standing or wealth, who seduces Isabel and marries her for her money. An art collector, Osmond poses as a disinterested aesthete, but in reality he is desperate for the recognition and admiration of those around him. He treats everyone who loves him as simply an object to be used to fulfill his desires; he bases his daughter Pansy's upbringing on the idea that she should be unswervingly subservient to him, and he even treats his long-time lover Madame Merle as a mere tool. Isabel's marriage to Osmond forces her to confront the conflict between her desire for independence and the painful social proprieties that force her to remain in her marriage.

**3.Ralph Touchett**

 Isabel's wise, funny cousin, who is ill with lung disease throughout the entire novel, which ends shortly after his death. Ralph loves life, but he is kept from participating in it vigorously by his ailment; as a result, he acts as a dedicated spectator, resolving to live vicariously through his beloved cousin Isabel. It is Ralph who convinces Mr. Touchett to leave Isabel her fortune, and it is Ralph who is the staunchest advocate of Isabel remaining independent. Ralph serves as the moral center of *Portrait of a Lady*: his opinions about other characters are always accurate, and he serves as a kind of moral barometer for the reader, who can tell immediately whether a character is good or evil by Ralph's response to that character.

**Themes**

**1. American versus European character**

The contrast between the American character and the European character is a theme that appears throughout James's work. This is not surprising, since it is a contrast he observed throughout his life as an American who spent most of his adulthood in Europe. According to James, Americans tend to be naive, energetic, practical, sincere, direct, and spontaneous, and they value the individual above society. Conversely, Europeans are sophisticated, lethargic, formal, insincere, obtuse, and scheming, and they value society above the individual.

This theme is especially interesting in The Portrait of a Lady because most of its characters are Americans who have been living in Europe for varying periods of time. In general, the longer an American-born character has been in Europe, the more European traits he or she has. Gilbert has lived nearly his whole life on the Continent and is completely European in character. James uses him to personify the worst manifestations of European traits. At the other end of the spectrum is Isabel, who is just arriving in Europe as the novel opens. The things that make her distinctively American, such as her energy and independent attitude, are fresh and interesting to the European characters. They are also, however, the things that lead to her downfall. By refusing to take the counsel of those who care about her, Isabel falls prey to the more sophisticated Europeans who manipulate her for their own purposes.

James does make a moral judgment about which culture produces better people; he clearly portrays the Americans as having more integrity. But he also shows that, taken as individuals, most Americans and Europeans alike have both good and bad qualities. While Isabel is almost wholly admirable and Gilbert is almost wholly despicable, the other characters are drawn in shades of grey. Henrietta is an example of an American whom James portrays less positively. Her American qualities are exaggerated so that her directness is actually rudeness. Her lack of regard for society and convention is so extreme that she offends as routinely as Isabel enchants. Lord Warburton, on the other hand, exemplifies European qualities in their most positive form. He is sophisticated and conventional, but he is also courteous, sensitive, and gracious even in defeat. Ralph is also a positive European character, a physically weak man who is nevertheless morally strong.

**2.Social and Emotional Maturation**

Isabel's social and emotional development is thrown into high relief by James's contrast of American and European natures. Yet Isabel's experiences and the wisdom she gains from them are certainly not unique to American women coming of age in European society. Isabel's naiveté is common among young women in all cultures, which is one reason why the novel remains popular. It is almost a rule that young women make poor romantic choices. In fact, they often make exactly the mistake that Isabel makes: they choose a man who is charming and seductive, yet self-centered, over one who is less worldly but more substantial and caring. This oft-repeated error of youth has been the subject of many works of literature. Perhaps the best-known is Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility, which contrasts the naive Marianne and her wiser sister, Elinor.

In The Portrait of a Lady, James uses one theme, the contrasts between Americans and Europeans, to intensify another, more universal theme of a woman's development from naive youth to mature wisdom as she suffers the consequences of a poor romantic choice.

**The Realism of Henry James**

Henry James has had a tremendous influence on the development of the novel. Part of this influence has been through the type of realism that he employs. On the other hand, the most frequent criticism against James has been that he is not realistic enough. Many critics have objected that James does not write about life, that his novels are filled with people whom one would never meet in this world. One critic (H. L. Mencken) suggested that James needed a good whiff of the Chicago stockyards so as to get a little life into his novels. Others have suggested that James' world is too narrow and incomplete to warrant classification as a realistic depiction of life.

Actually, James' realism is of a special sort. By the early definitions, James is not a realist. The early definitions stated that the novelist should accurately depict life, and the novel should "hold up a mirror to life"; in other words, the early realist was supposed to make an almost scientific recording of life.

But James was not concerned with all aspects of life. There is nothing of the ugly, the vulgar, the common, or the pornographic in James. He was not concerned with poverty or with the middle class who had to struggle for a living. Instead, he was interested in depicting a class of people who could afford to devote themselves to the refinements of life.

What then is James special brand of realism? When we refer to James' realism, we mean James' fidelity to his own material. To best appreciate his novels and his realism, we must enter into James' special world. It is as though we ascended a ladder and arrived at another world. Once we have arrived at this special world and once we accept it, then we see that James is very realistic. That is, in terms of his world, he never violates his character's essence. Thus, James' realism, in the truest sense, means being faithful to his characters. In other words, characters from other novels often do things or commit acts that don't seem to blend in with their essential nature. But the acts of the Jamesian character are always understandable in terms of that character's true nature.

James explained his own realism in terms of its opposition to romanticism. For James the realistic represents those things which, sooner or later, in one way or another, everyone will encounter. But the romantic stands for those things which, with all the efforts and all the wealth and facilities of the world, we can never know directly. Thus, it is conceivable that one can experience the same things that the characters are experiencing in a James novel; but one can never actually encounter the events narrated in the romantic novel.

When James, therefore, creates a certain type of character early in the novel, this character will act in a consistent manner throughout the entire book. This is being realistic. The character will never do anything that is not logical and acceptable to his realistic nature, or to our conception of what that character should do.

In later years, James, in writing about realism, maintained that he was more interested in a faithful rendition of a character in any given situation than in depicting all aspects of life. Therefore, when he has once drawn Isabel Archer's character in one situation, the reader can anticipate how she will act in any other given situation. Her actions are not unexplainable. We are able to logically understand all of her actions. Thus James' realism would never allow the characters to perform actions which would be inconsistent with their true natures.

**A PASSAGE TO INDIA – E. M. FORSTER**

**Context**

Edward Morgan Forster was born into a comfortable London family in 1879. His father, an architect, died when Forster was very young, leaving the boy to be raised by his mother and great‑aunt. Forster proved to be a bright student, and he went on to attend Cambridge University, graduating in 1901. He spent much of the next decade traveling and living abroad, dividing his time between working as a journalist and writing short stories and novels.

Long before Forster first visited India, he had already gained a vivid picture of its people and places from a young Indian Muslim named Syed Ross Masood, whom Forster began tutoring in England starting in 1906. Forster and Masood became very close, and Masood introduced Forster to several of his Indian friends. Echoes of the friendship between the two can be seen in the characters of Fielding and Aziz in *A Passage to India.* By the time Forster first visited India, in 1912, the Englishman was well prepared for his travels throughout the country.

Forster began writing *A Passage to India*in 1913, just after his first visit to India. The novel was not revised and completed, however, until well after his second stay in India, in 1921, when he served as secretary to the Maharajah of Dewas State Senior. Published in 1924, *A Passage to India* examines the racial misunderstandings and cultural hypocrisies that characterized the complex interactions between Indians and the English toward the end of the British occupation of India.

Forster’s style is marked by his sympathy for his characters, his ability to see more than one side of an argument or story, and his fondness for simple, symbolic tales that neatly encapsulate large‑scale problems and conditions. These tendencies are all evident in *A Passage to India*, which was immediately acclaimed as Forster’s masterpiece upon its publication. It is a traditional social and political novel, unconcerned with the technical innovation of some of Forster’s modernist contemporaries such as Gertrude Stein or T.S. Eliot. *A Passage to India* is concerned, however, with representing the chaos of modern human experience through patterns of imagery and form. In this regard, Forster’s novel is similar to modernist works of the same time period, such as James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) and Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925).

*A Passage to India* was the last in a string of Forster’s novels in which his craft improved markedly with each new work. After the novel’s publication, however, Forster never again attained the level of craft or the depth of observation that characterized his early work. In his later life, he contented himself primarily with writing critical essays and lectures, most notably *Aspects of the Novel* (1927). In1946, Forster accepted a fellowship at Cambridge, where he remained until his death in 1970.

**Analysis of major characters**

**1.Dr. Aziz**

Aziz seems to be a mess of extremes and contradictions, an embodiment of Forster’s notion of the “muddle” of India. Aziz is impetuous and flighty, changing opinions and preoccupations quickly and without warning, from one moment to the next. His moods swing back and forth between extremes, from childlike elation one minute to utter despair the next. Aziz even seems capable of shifting careers and talents, serving as both physician and poet during the course of *A Passage to India.* Aziz’s somewhat youthful qualities, as evidenced by a sense of humor that leans toward practical joking, are offset by his attitude of irony toward his English superiors.

Forster, though not blatantly stereotyping, encourages us to see many of Aziz’s characteristics as characteristics of Indians in general. Aziz, like many of his friends, dislikes blunt honesty and directness, preferring to communicate through confidences, feelings underlying words, and indirect speech. Aziz has a sense that much of morality is really social code. He therefore feels no moral compunction about visiting prostitutes or reading Fielding’s private mail—both because his intentions are good and because he knows he will not be caught. Instead of living by merely social codes, Aziz guides his action through a code that is nearly religious, such as we see in his extreme hospitality. Moreover, Aziz, like many of the other Indians, struggles with the problem of the English in India. On the one hand, he appreciates some of the modernizing influences that the West has brought to India; on the other, he feels that the presence of the English degrades and oppresses his people.

**2. Cyril Fielding**

Of all the characters in the novel, Fielding is clearly the most associated with Forster himself. Among the Englishmen in Chandrapore, Fielding is far and away most the successful at developing and sustaining relationships with native Indians. Though he is an educator, he is less comfortable in teacher-student interaction than he is in one-on-one conversation with another individual. This latter style serves as Forster’s model of liberal humanism—Forster and Fielding treat the world as a group of individuals who can connect through mutual respect, courtesy, and intelligence.

Fielding, in these viewpoints, presents the main threat to the mentality of the English in India. He educates Indians as individuals, engendering a movement of free thought that has the potential to destabilize English colonial power. Furthermore, Fielding has little patience for the racial categorization that is so central to the English grip on India. He honors his friendship with Aziz over any alliance with members of his own race—a reshuffling of allegiances that threatens the solidarity of the English. Finally, Fielding “travels light,” as he puts it: he does not believe in marriage, but favors friendship instead. As such, Fielding implicitly questions the domestic conventions upon which the Englishmen’s sense of “Englishness” is founded. Fielding refuses to sentimentalize domestic England or to venerate the role of the wife or mother—a far cry from the other Englishmen, who put Adela on a pedestal after the incident at the caves.

**3.Adela Quested**

Adela arrives in India with Mrs. Moore, and, fittingly, her character develops in parallel to Mrs. Moore’s. Adela, like the elder Englishwoman, is an individualist and an educated free thinker. These tendencies lead her, just as they lead Mrs. Moore, to question the standard behaviors of the English toward the Indians. Adela’s tendency to question standard practices with frankness makes her resistant to being labeled—and therefore resistant to marrying Ronny and being labeled a typical colonial English wife. Both Mrs. Moore and Adela hope to see the “real India” rather than an arranged tourist version. However, whereas Mrs. Moore’s desire is bolstered by a genuine interest in and affection for Indians, Adela appears to want to see the “real India” simply on intellectual grounds. She puts her mind to the task, but not her heart—and therefore never connects with Indians.

**4.Mrs. Moore**

As a character, Mrs. Moore serves a double function in *A Passage to India,*operating on two different planes. She is initially a literal character, but as the novel progresses she becomes more a symbolic presence. On the literal level, Mrs. Moore is a good-hearted, religious, elderly woman with mystical leanings. The initial days of her visit to India are successful, as she connects with India and Indians on an intuitive level. Whereas Adela is overly cerebral, Mrs. Moore relies successfully on her heart to make connections during her visit. Furthermore, on the literal level, Mrs. Moore’s character has human limitations: her experience at Marabar renders her apathetic and even somewhat mean, to the degree that she simply leaves India without bothering to testify to Aziz’s innocence or to oversee Ronny and Adela’s wedding.

After her departure, however, Mrs. Moore exists largely on a symbolic level. Though she herself has human flaws, she comes to symbolize an ideally spiritual and race-blind openness that Forster sees as a solution to the problems in India. Mrs. Moore’s name becomes closely associated with Hinduism, especially the Hindu tenet of the oneness and unity of all living things. This symbolic side to Mrs. Moore might even make her the heroine of the novel, the only English person able to closely connect with the Hindu vision of unity. Nonetheless, Mrs. Moore’s literal actions—her sudden abandonment of India—make her less than heroic.

**Themes**

**1.The difficulty of English Indian friendship**

*A Passage to India* begins and ends by posing the question of whether it is possible for an Englishman and an Indian to ever be friends, at least within the context of British colonialism. Forster uses this question as a framework to explore the general issue of Britain’s political control of India on a more personal level, through the friendship between Aziz and Fielding. At the beginning of the novel, Aziz is scornful of the English, wishing only to consider them comically or ignore them completely. Yet the intuitive connection Aziz feels with Mrs. Moore in the mosque opens him to the possibility of friendship with Fielding. Through the first half of the novel, Fielding and Aziz represent a positive model of liberal humanism: Forster suggests that British rule in India could be successful and respectful if only English and Indians treated each other as Fielding and Aziz treat each other—as worthy individuals who connect through frankness, intelligence, and good will.

Yet in the aftermath of the novel’s climax—Adela’s accusation that Aziz attempted to assault her and her subsequent disavowal of this accusation at the trial—Aziz and Fielding’s friendship falls apart. The strains on their relationship are external in nature, as Aziz and Fielding both suffer from the tendencies of their cultures. Aziz tends to let his imagination run away with him and to let suspicion harden into a grudge. Fielding suffers from an English literalism and rationalism that blind him to Aziz’s true feelings and make Fielding too stilted to reach out to Aziz through conversations or letters. Furthermore, their respective Indian and English communities pull them apart through their mutual stereotyping. As we see at the end of the novel, even the landscape of India seems to oppress their friendship. Forster’s final vision of the possibility of English-Indian friendship is a pessimistic one, yet it is qualified by the possibility of friendship on English soil, or after the liberation of India. As the landscape itself seems to imply at the end of the novel, such a friendship may be possible eventually, but “not yet.”

**2.The Unity of All Living Things**

Though the main characters of *A Passage to India* are generally Christian or Muslim, Hinduism also plays a large thematic role in the novel. The aspect of Hinduism with which Forster is particularly concerned is the religion’s ideal of all living things, from the lowliest to the highest, united in love as one. This vision of the universe appears to offer redemption to India through mysticism, as individual differences disappear into a peaceful collectivity that does not recognize hierarchies. Individual blame and intrigue is forgone in favor of attention to higher, spiritual matters. Professor Godbole, the most visible Hindu in the novel, is Forster’s mouthpiece for this idea of the unity of all living things. Godbole alone remains aloof from the drama of the plot, refraining from taking sides by recognizing that all are implicated in the evil of Marabar. Mrs. Moore, also, shows openness to this aspect of Hinduism. Though she is a Christian, her experience of India has made her dissatisfied with what she perceives as the smallness of Christianity. Mrs. Moore appears to feel a great sense of connection with all living creatures, as evidenced by her respect for the wasp in her bedroom.

Yet, through Mrs. Moore, Forster also shows that the vision of the oneness of all living things can be terrifying. As we see in Mrs. Moore’s experience with the echo that negates everything into “boum” in Marabar, such oneness provides unity but also makes all elements of the universe one and the same—a realization that, it is implied, ultimately kills Mrs. Moore.

3.**The “Muddle” of India**

Forster takes great care to strike a distinction between the ideas of “muddle” and “mystery” in *A Passage to India.* “Muddle” has connotations of dangerous and disorienting disorder, whereas “mystery” suggests a mystical, orderly plan by a spiritual force that is greater than man. Fielding, who acts as Forster’s primary mouthpiece in the novel, admits that India is a “muddle,” while figures such as Mrs. Moore and Godbole view India as a mystery. The muddle that is India in the novel appears to work from the ground up: the very landscape and architecture of the countryside is formless, and the natural life of plants and animals defies identification. This muddled quality to the environment is mirrored in the makeup of India’s native population, which is mixed into a muddle of different religious, ethnic, linguistic, and regional groups.

**4.The Negligence of British Colonial Government**

Though *A Passage to India* is in many ways a highly symbolic, or even mystical, text, it also aims to be a realistic documentation of the attitudes of British colonial officials in India. Forster spends large sections of the novel characterizing different typical attitudes the English hold toward the Indians whom they control. Forster’s satire is most harsh toward Englishwomen, whom the author depicts as overwhelmingly racist, self-righteous, and viciously condescending to the native population. Some of the Englishmen in the novel are as nasty as the women, but Forster more often identifies Englishmen as men who, though condescending and unable to relate to Indians on an individual level, are largely well-meaning and invested in their jobs. For all Forster’s criticism of the British manner of governing India, however, he does not appear to question the right of the British Empire to rule India. He suggests that the British would be well served by becoming kinder and more sympathetic to the Indians with whom they live, but he does not suggest that the British should abandon India outright. Even this lesser critique is never overtly stated in the novel, but implied through biting satire.

**Motifs**

*1.***The Echo**

The echo begins at the Marabar Caves: first Mrs. Moore and then Adela hear the echo and are haunted by it in the weeks to come. The echo’s sound is “boum”—a sound it returns regardless of what noise or utterance is originally made. This negation of difference embodies the frightening flip side of the seemingly positive Hindu vision of the oneness and unity of all living things. If all people and things become the same thing, then no distinction can be made between good and evil. No value system can exist. The echo plagues Mrs. Moore until her death, causing her to abandon her beliefs and cease to care about human relationships. Adela, however, ultimately escapes the echo by using its message of impersonality to help her realize Aziz’s innocence.

**2.Eastern and Western Architecture**

Forster spends time detailing both Eastern and Western architecture in *A Passage to India.* Three architectural structures—though one is naturally occurring—provide the outline for the book’s three sections, “Mosque,” “Caves,” and “Temple.” Forster presents the aesthetics of Eastern and Western structures as indicative of the differences of the respective cultures as a whole. In India, architecture is confused and formless: interiors blend into exterior gardens, earth and buildings compete with each other, and structures appear unfinished or drab. As such, Indian architecture mirrors the muddle of India itself and what Forster sees as the Indians’ characteristic inattention to form and logic. Occasionally, however, Forster takes a positive view of Indian architecture. The mosque in Part I and temple in Part III represent the promise of Indian openness, mysticism, and friendship. Western architecture, meanwhile, is described during Fielding’s stop in Venice on his way to England. Venice’s structures, which Fielding sees as representative of Western architecture in general, honor form and proportion and complement the earth on which they are built. Fielding reads in this architecture the self-evident correctness of Western reason—an order that, he laments, his Indian friends would not recognize or appreciate.

**3.Godbole’s Song**

At the end of Fielding’s tea party, Godbole sings for the English visitors a Hindu song, in which a milkmaid pleads for God to come to her or to her people. The song’s refrain of “Come! come” recurs throughout *A Passage to India*, mirroring the appeal for the entire country of salvation from something greater than itself. After the song, Godbole admits that God never comes to the milkmaid. The song greatly disheartens Mrs. Moore, setting the stage for her later spiritual apathy, her simultaneous awareness of a spiritual presence and lack of confidence in spiritualism as a redeeming force. Godbole seemingly intends his song as a message or lesson that recognition of the potential existence of a God figure can bring the world together and erode differences—after all, Godbole himself sings the part of a young milkmaid. Forster uses the refrain of Godbole’s song, “Come! come,” to suggest that India’s redemption is yet to come.

**Symbols**

*1.***The Marabar Caves**

The Marabar Caves represent all that is alien about nature. The caves are older than anything else on the earth and embody nothingness and emptiness—a literal void in the earth. They defy both English and Indians to act as guides to them, and their strange beauty and menace unsettles visitors. The caves’ alien quality also has the power to make visitors such as Mrs. Moore and Adela confront parts of themselves or the universe that they have not previously recognized. The all-reducing echo of the caves causes Mrs. Moore to see the darker side of her spirituality—a waning commitment to the world of relationships and a growing ambivalence about God. Adela confronts the shame and embarrassment of her realization that she and Ronny are not actually attracted to each other, and that she might be attracted to no one. In this sense, the caves both destroy meaning, in reducing all utterances to the same sound, and expose or narrate the unspeakable, the aspects of the universe that the caves’ visitors have not yet considered.

**2.The Green Bird**

Just after Adela and Ronny agree for the first time, in Chapter VII, to break off their engagement, they notice a green bird sitting in the tree above them. Neither of them can positively identify the bird. For Adela, the bird symbolizes the unidentifiable quality of all of India: just when she thinks she can understand any aspect of India, that aspect changes or disappears. In this sense, the green bird symbolizes the muddle of India. In another capacity, the bird points to a different tension between the English and Indians. The English are obsessed with knowledge, literalness, and naming, and they use these tools as a means of gaining and maintaining power. The Indians, in contrast, are more attentive to nuance, undertone, and the emotions behind words. While the English insist on labeling things, the Indians recognize that labels can blind one to important details and differences. The unidentifiable green bird suggests the incompatibility of the English obsession with classification and order with the shifting quality of India itself—the land is, in fact, a “hundred Indias” that defy labeling and understanding.

**3.The Wasp**

The wasp appears several times in *A Passage to India,* usually in conjunction with the Hindu vision of the oneness of all living things. The wasp is usually depicted as the lowest creature the Hindus incorporate into their vision of universal unity. Mrs. Moore is closely associated with the wasp, as she finds one in her room and is gently appreciative of it. Her peaceful regard for the wasp signifies her own openness to the Hindu idea of collectivity, and to the mysticism and indefinable quality of India in general. However, as the wasp is the lowest creature that the Hindus visualize, it also represents the limits of the Hindu vision. The vision is not a panacea, but merely a possibility for unity and understanding in India.

**A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN – JAMES JOYCE**

**Context**

James Joyce was born on February 2, 1882, in the town of Rathgar, near Dublin, Ireland, and is considered to be a champion of Modernism. Published in serial form in 1914–1915, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* draws on many details from Joyce's early life. The novel's protagonist, Stephen Dedalus, is in many ways Joyce's fictional double—Joyce had even published stories under the pseudonym "Stephen Daedalus" before writing the novel. Like Joyce himself, Stephen is the son of an impoverished father and a highly devout Catholic mother. Also like Joyce, he attends Clongowes Wood, Belvedere, and University Colleges, struggling with questions of faith and nationality before leaving Ireland to make his own way as an artist. Many of the scenes in the novel are fictional, but some of its most powerful moments are autobiographical: both the Christmas dinner scene and Stephen's first sexual experience with the Dublin prostitute closely resemble actual events in Joyce's life.

In addition to drawing heavily on Joyce's personal life, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* also makes a number of references to the politics and religion of early-twentieth-century Ireland.  In addition to political strife, there was considerable religious tension: the majority of Irish, including the Joyces, were Catholics, and strongly favored Irish independence. The Protestant minority, on the other hand, mostly wished to remain united with Britain.

 In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* the young Stephen's friends at University College frequently confront him with political questions about this struggle between Ireland and England.

Today, Joyce is celebrated as one of the great literary pioneers of the twentieth century. He was one of the first writers to make extensive and convincing use of stream of consciousness, a stylistic form in which written prose seeks to represent the characters' stream of inner thoughts and perceptions rather than render these characters from an objective, external perspective.

Another stylistic technique for which Joyce is noted is the epiphany, a moment in which a character makes a sudden, profound realization—whether prompted by an external object or a voice from within—that creates a change in his or her perception of the world. Joyce uses epiphany most notably in *Dubliners,* but *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is full of these sudden moments of spiritual revelation as well. Most notable is a scene in which Stephen sees a young girl wading at the beach, which strikes him with the sudden realization that an appreciation for beauty can be truly good. This moment is a classic example of Joyce's belief that an epiphany can dramatically alter the human spirit in a matter of just a few seconds.

**Analysis of major characters**

**1.Stephen Dedalus**

Modeled after Joyce himself, Stephen is a sensitive, thoughtful boy who reappears in Joyce's later masterpiece, *Ulysses.* In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* though Stephen's large family runs into deepening financial difficulties, his parents manage to send him to prestigious schools and eventually to a university. As he grows up, Stephen grapples with his nationality, religion, family, and morality, and finally decides to reject all socially imposed bonds and instead live freely as an artist.

Stephen undergoes several crucial transformations over the course of the novel. The first, which occurs during his first years as Clongowes, is from a sheltered little boy to a bright student who understands social interactions and can begin to make sense of the world around him. The second, which occurs when Stephen sleeps with the Dublin prostitute, is from innocence to debauchery. The third, which occurs when Stephen hears Father Arnall's speech on death and hell, is from an unrepentant sinner to a devout Catholic. Finally, Stephen's greatest transformation is from near fanatical religiousness to a new devotion to art and beauty. This transition takes place in Chapter 4, when he is offered entry to the Jesuit order but refuses it in order to attend university. Stephen's refusal and his subsequent epiphany on the beach mark his transition from belief in God to belief in aesthetic beauty. This transformation continues through his college years. By the end of his time in college, Stephen has become a fully formed artist, and his diary entries reflect the independent individual he has become.

**2.Simon Dedalus**

Simon Dedalus spends a great deal of his time reliving past experiences, lost in his own sentimental nostalgia. Joyce often uses Simon to symbolize the bonds and burdens that Stephen's family and nationality place upon him as he grows up. Simon is a nostalgic, tragic figure: he has a deep pride in tradition, but he is unable to keep his own affairs in order. To Stephen, his father Simon represents the parts of family, nation, and tradition that hold him back, and against which he feels he must rebel. The closest look we get at Simon is on the visit to Cork with Stephen, during which Simon gets drunk and sentimentalizes about his past. Joyce paints a picture of a man who has ruined himself and, instead of facing his problems, drowns them in alcohol and nostalgia.

**Themes**

**1.The development of individual consciousness**

Perhaps the most famous aspect of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is Joyce's innovative use of stream of consciousness, a style in which the author directly transcribes the thoughts and sensations that go through a character's mind, rather than simply describing those sensations from the external standpoint of an observer. Joyce's use of stream of consciousness makes *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* a story of the development of Stephen's mind. In the first chapter, the very young Stephen is only capable of describing his world in simple words and phrases. The sensations that he experiences are all jumbled together with a child's lack of attention to cause and effect. Later, when Stephen is a teenager obsessed with religion, he is able to think in a clearer, more adult manner. Paragraphs are more logically ordered than in the opening sections of the novel, and thoughts progress logically. Stephen's mind is more mature and he is now more coherently aware of his surroundings. Nonetheless, he still trusts blindly in the church, and his passionate emotions of guilt and religious ecstasy are so strong that they get in the way of rational thought. It is only in the final chapter, when Stephen is in the university, that he seems truly rational. By the end of the novel, Joyce renders a portrait of a mind that has achieved emotional, intellectual, and artistic adulthood.

The development of Stephen's consciousness in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is particularly interesting because, insofar as Stephen is a portrait of Joyce himself, Stephen's development gives us insight into the development of a literary genius. Stephen's experiences hint at the influences that transformed Joyce himself into the great writer he is considered today: Stephen's obsession with language; his strained relations with religion, family, and culture; and his dedication to forging an aesthetic of his own mirror the ways in which Joyce related to the various tensions in his life during his formative years. In the last chapter of the novel, we also learn that genius, though in many ways a calling, also requires great work and considerable sacrifice. Watching Stephen's daily struggle to puzzle out his aesthetic philosophy, we get a sense of the great task that awaits him.

**2.The pitfalls of religious extremism**

Brought up in a devout Catholic family, Stephen initially ascribes to an absolute belief in the morals of the church. As a teenager, this belief leads him to two opposite extremes, both of which are harmful. At first, he falls into the extreme of sin, repeatedly sleeping with prostitutes and deliberately turning his back on religion. Though Stephen sins willfully, he is always aware that he acts in violation of the church's rules. Then, when Father Arnall's speech prompts him to return to Catholicism, he bounces to the other extreme, becoming a perfect, near fanatical model of religious devotion and obedience. Eventually, however, Stephen realizes that both of these lifestyles—the completely sinful and the completely devout—are extremes that have been false and harmful. He does not want to lead a completely debauched life, but also rejects austere Catholicism because he feels that it does not permit him the full experience of being human. Stephen ultimately reaches a decision to embrace life and celebrate humanity after seeing a young girl wading at a beach. To him, the girl is a symbol of pure goodness and of life lived to the fullest.

**3.The role of the artist**

*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* explores what it means to become an artist. Stephen's decision at the end of the novel—to leave his family and friends behind and go into exile in order to become an artist—suggests that Joyce sees the artist as a necessarily isolated figure. In his decision, Stephen turns his back on his community, refusing to accept the constraints of political involvement, religious devotion, and family commitment that the community places on its members.

However, though the artist is an isolated figure, Stephen's ultimate goal is to give a voice to the very community that he is leaving. In the last few lines of the novel, Stephen expresses his desire to "forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race." He recognizes that his community will always be a part of him, as it has created and shaped his identity. When he creatively expresses his own ideas, he will also convey the voice of his entire community. Even as Stephen turns his back on the traditional forms of participation and membership in a community, he envisions his writing as a service to the community.

**4.The need for Irish autonomy**

Despite his desire to steer clear of politics, Stephen constantly ponders Ireland's place in the world. He concludes that the Irish have always been a subservient people, allowing outsiders to control them. In his conversation with the dean of studies at the university, he realizes that even the language of the Irish people really belongs to the English. Stephen's perception of Ireland's subservience has two effects on his development as an artist. First, it makes him determined to escape the bonds that his Irish ancestors have accepted. As we see in his conversation with Davin, Stephen feels an anxious need to emerge from his Irish heritage as his own person, free from the shackles that have traditionally confined his country: "Do you fancy I am going to pay in my own life and person debts they made?" Second, Stephen's perception makes him determined to use his art to reclaim autonomy for Ireland. Using the borrowed language of English, he plans to write in a style that will be both autonomous from England and true to the Irish people.

**Motifs**

**1.Music**

Music, especially singing, appears repeatedly throughout *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.* Stephen's appreciation of music is closely tied to his love for the sounds of language. As a very young child, he turns Dante's threats into a song, " [A]pologise, pull out his eyes, pull out his eyes, apologise." Singing is more than just language, however—it is language transformed by vibrant humanity. Indeed, music appeals to the part of Stephen that wants to live life to the fullest. We see this aspect of music near the end of the novel, when Stephen suddenly feels at peace upon hearing a woman singing. Her voice prompts him to recall his resolution to leave Ireland and become a writer, reinforcing his determination to celebrate life through writing.

**2.Flight**

Stephen Dedalus's very name embodies the idea of flight. Stephen's namesake, Daedalus, is a figure from Greek mythology, a renowned craftsman who designs the famed Labyrinth of Crete for King Minos. Minos keeps Daedalus and his son Icarus imprisoned on Crete, but Daedalus makes plans to escape by using feathers, twine, and wax to fashion a set of wings for himself and his son. Daedalus escapes successfully, but Icarus flies too high. The sun's heat melts the wax holding Icarus's wings together, and he plummets to his death in the sea.

In the context of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* we can see Stephen as representative of both Daedalus and Icarus, as Stephen's father also has the last name of Dedalus. With this mythological reference, Joyce implies that Stephen must always balance his desire to flee Ireland with the danger of overestimating his own abilities—the intellectual equivalent of Icarus's flight too close to the sun. To diminish the dangers of attempting too much too soon, Stephen bides his time at the university, developing his aesthetic theory fully before attempting to leave Ireland and write seriously. The birds that appear to Stephen in the third section of Chapter 5 signal that it is finally time for Stephen, now fully formed as an artist, to take flight himself.

**3.Prayers, secular songs and Latin phrases**

We can often tell Stephen's state of mind by looking at the fragments of prayers, songs, and Latin phrases that Joyce inserts into the text. When Stephen is a schoolboy, Joyce includes childish, sincere prayers that mirror the manner in which a child might devoutly believe in the church, even without understanding the meaning of its religious doctrine. When Stephen prays in church despite the fact that he has committed a mortal sin, Joyce transcribes a long passage of the Latin prayer, but it is clear that Stephen merely speaks the words without believing them. Then, when Stephen is at the university, Latin is used as a joke—his friends translate colloquial phrases like "peace over the whole bloody globe" into Latin because they find the academic sound of the translation amusing. This jocular use of Latin mocks both the young men's education and the stern, serious manner in which Latin is used in the church. These linguistic jokes demonstrate that Stephen is no longer serious about religion. Finally, Joyce includes a few lines from the Irish folk song "Rosie O'Grady" near the end of the novel. These simple lines reflect the peaceful feeling that the song brings to Stephen and Cranly, as well as the traditional Irish culture that Stephen plans to leave behind. Throughout the novel, such prayers, songs, and phrases form the background of Stephen's life.

**Symbols**

**1.Green and maroon**

Stephen associates the colors green and maroon with his governess, Dante, and with two leaders of the Irish resistance, Charles Parnell and Michael Davitt. In a dream after Parnell's death, Stephen sees Dante dressed in green and maroon as the Irish people mourn their fallen leader. This vision indicates that Stephen associates the two colors with the way Irish politics are played out among the members of his own family.

**2.Emma**

Emma appears only in glimpses throughout most of Stephen's young life, and he never gets to know her as a person. Instead, she becomes a symbol of pure love, untainted by sexuality or reality. Stephen worships Emma as the ideal of feminine purity. When he goes through his devoutly religious phase, he imagines his reward for his piety as a union with Emma in heaven. It is only later, when he is at the university, that we finally see a real conversation between Stephen and Emma. Stephen's diary entry regarding this conversation portrays Emma as a real, friendly, and somewhat ordinary girl, but certainly not the goddess Stephen earlier makes her out to be. This more balanced view of Emma mirrors Stephen's abandonment of the extremes of complete sin and complete devotion in favor of a middle path, the devotion to the appreciation of beauty.

**MRS. DALLOWAY – VIRGINIA WOOLF**

**Context**

Virginia Woolf, the English novelist, critic, and essayist, was born on January 25, 1882, to Leslie Stephen, a literary critic, and Julia Duckworth Stephen. Woolf grew up in an upper-middle-class, socially active, literary family in Victorian London. She had three full siblings, two half-brothers, and two half-sisters. She was educated at home, becoming a voracious reader of the books in her father’s extensive library. Tragedy first afflicted the family when Woolf’s mother died in 1895, then hit again two years later, when her half-sister, Stella, the caregiver in the Stephen family, died. Woolf experienced her first bout of mental illness after her mother’s death, and she suffered from mania and severe depression for the rest of her life.

The Bloomsbury group, as Woolf and her friends came to be called, disregarded the constricting taboos of the Victorian era, and such topics as religion, sex, and art fueled the talk at their weekly salons. They even discussed homosexuality, a subject that shocked many of the group’s contemporaries. For Woolf, the group served as the undergraduate education that society had denied her.

 Before World War I, Woolf viewed the realistic Victorian novel, with its neat and linear plots, as an inadequate form of expression. Her opinion intensified after the war, and in the 1920s she began searching for the form that would reflect the violent contrasts and disjointed impressions of the world around her.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, published in 1925, Woolf discovered a new literary form capable of expressing the new realities of postwar England. The novel depicts the subjective experiences and memories of its central characters over a single day in post–World War I London. Divided into parts, rather than chapters, the novel's structure highlights the finely interwoven texture of the characters' thoughts. This book, which focuses on commonplace tasks, such as shopping, throwing a party, and eating dinner, showed that no act was too small or too ordinary for a writer’s attention. Ultimately, *Mrs. Dalloway* transformed the novel as an art form.

Woolf develops the book’s protagonist, Clarissa Dalloway, and myriad other characters by chronicling their interior thoughts with little pause or explanation, a style referred to as stream of consciousness. Several central characters and more than one hundred minor characters appear in the text, and their thoughts spin out like spider webs. Sometimes the threads of thought cross—and people succeed in communicating. More often, however, the threads do not cross, leaving the characters isolated and alone.

Characters in *Mrs. Dalloway*occasionally perceive life’s pattern through a sudden shock, or what Woolf called a “moment of being.

While writing *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf reread the Greek classics along with two new modernist writers, Marcel Proust and James Joyce. Woolf shared these writers' interest in time and psychology, and she incorporated these issues into her novel. She wanted to show characters in flux, rather than static, characters who think and emote as they move through space, who react to their surroundings in ways that mirrored actual human experience. Rapid political and social change marked the period between the two world wars: the British Empire, for which so many people had sacrificed their lives to protect and preserve, was in decline. Countries like India were beginning to question Britain’s colonial rule. At home, the Labour Party, with its plans for economic reform, was beginning to challenge the Conservative Party, with its emphasis on imperial business interests. Women, who had flooded the workforce to replace the men who had gone to war, were demanding equal rights.

Although *Mrs. Dalloway*portrays the shifting political atmosphere through the characters Peter Walsh, Richard Dalloway, and Hugh Whitbread, it focuses more deeply on the charged social mood through the characters Septimus Warren Smith and Clarissa Dalloway. Woolf delves into the consciousness of Clarissa, a woman who exists largely in the domestic sphere, to ensure that readers take her character seriously, rather than simply dismiss her as a vain and uneducated upper-class wife. In spite of her heroic and imperfect effort in life, Clarissa, like every human being and even the old social order itself, must face death.

Woolf’s struggles with mental illness gave her an opportunity to witness firsthand how insensitive medical professionals could be, and she critiques their tactlessness in *Mrs. Dalloway*. One of Woolf’s doctors suggested that plenty of rest and rich food would lead to a full recovery, a cure prescribed in the novel, and another removed several of her teeth. In the early twentieth century, mental health problems were too often considered imaginary, an embarrassment, or the product of moral weakness. During one bout of illness, Woolf heard birds sing like Greek choruses and King Edward use foul language among some azaleas.

**Analysis of major characters**

**1.Clarissa Dalloway**

Clarissa Dalloway, the heroine of the novel, struggles constantly to balance her internal life with the external world. Her world consists of glittering surfaces, such as fine fashion, parties, and high society, but as she moves through that world she probes beneath those surfaces in search of deeper meaning. Yearning for privacy, Clarissa has a tendency toward introspection that gives her a profound capacity for emotion, which many other characters lack. However, she is always concerned with appearances and keeps herself tightly composed, seldom sharing her feelings with anyone. Constantly overlaying the past and the present, Clarissa strives to reconcile herself to life despite her potent memories.

**2.Septimus Warren Smith**

Septimus, a veteran of World War I, suffers from shell shock and is lost within his own mind. He feels guilty even as he despises himself for being made numb by the war. His doctor has ordered Lucrezia, Septimus’s wife, to make Septimus notice things outside himself, but Septimus has removed himself from the physical world. Instead, he lives in an internal world, wherein he sees and hears things that aren’t really there and he talks to his dead friend Evans. He is sometimes overcome with the beauty in the world, but he also fears that the people in it have no capacity for honesty or kindness. Woolf intended for Clarissa to speak the sane truth and Septimus the insane truth.

On the surface, Septimus seems quite dissimilar to Clarissa, but he embodies many characteristics that Clarissa shares and thinks in much the same way she does. He could almost be her double in the novel. Septimus and Clarissa both have beak-noses, love Shakespeare, and fear oppression. More important, as Clarissa’s double, Septimus offers a contrast between the conscious struggle of a working-class veteran and the blind opulence of the upper class. His troubles call into question the legitimacy of the English society he fought to preserve during the war. Because his thoughts often run parallel to Clarissa’s and echo hers in many ways, the thin line between what is considered sanity and insanity gets thinner and thinner. Septimus chooses to escape his problems by killing himself, a dramatic and tragic gesture that ultimately helps Clarissa to accept her own choices, as well as the society in which she lives.

**Themes**

**1.Communication vs privacy**

Throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa, Septimus, Peter, and othersstruggle to find outlets for communication as well as adequate privacy, and the balance between the two is difficult for all to attain. Clarissa in particular struggles to open the pathway for communication and throws parties in an attempt to draw people together.  At the same time, she feels shrouded within her own reflective soul and thinks the ultimate human mystery is how she can exist in one room while the old woman in the house across from hers exists in another. Even as Clarissa celebrates the old woman’s independence, she knows it comes with an inevitable loneliness. Peter tries to explain the contradictory human impulses toward privacy and communication by comparing the soul to a fish that swims along in murky water, then rises quickly to the surface to frolic on the waves. The war has changed people’s ideas of what English society should be, and understanding is difficult between those who support traditional English society and those who hope for continued change. Meaningful connections in this disjointed postwar world are not easy to make, no matter what efforts the characters put forth. Ultimately, Clarissa sees Septimus’s death as a desperate, but legitimate, act of communication.

**2.Disillusionment with the British Empire**

In 1923, when *Mrs. Dalloway* takes place, the old establishment and its oppressive values are nearing their end. English citizens, including Clarissa, Peter, and Septimus, feel the failure of the empire as strongly as they feel their own personal failures. Those citizens who still champion English tradition, such as Aunt Helena and Lady Bruton, are old. Aunt Helena, with her glass eye (perhaps a symbol of her inability or unwillingness to see the empire's disintegration), is turning into an artifact. Anticipating the end of the Conservative Party’s reign, Richard plans to write the history of the great British military family, the Brutons, who are already part of the past. The old empire faces an imminent demise, and the loss of the traditional and familiar social order leaves the English at loose ends.

**3.The fear of death**

Thoughts of death lurk constantly beneath the surface of everyday life in *Mrs. Dalloway*, especially for Clarissa, Septimus, and Peter, and this awareness makes even mundane events and interactions meaningful, sometimes even threatening. At the very start of her day, when she goes out to buy flowers for her party, Clarissa remembers a moment in her youth when she suspected a terrible event would occur. Big Ben tolls out the hour, and Clarissa repeats a line from Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*over and over as the day goes on: “Fear no more the heat o’ the sun / Nor the furious winter’s rages.” The line is from a funeral song that celebrates death as a comfort after a difficult life. Middle-aged Clarissa has experienced the deaths of her father, mother, and sister and has lived through the calamity of war, and she has grown to believe that living even one day is dangerous. Death is very naturally in her thoughts, and the line from *Cymbeline*, along with Septimus’s suicidal embrace of death, ultimately helps her to be at peace with her own mortality. Peter Walsh, so insecure in his identity, grows frantic at the idea of death and follows an anonymous young woman through London to forget about it. Septimus faces death most directly. Though he fears it, he finally chooses it over what seems to him a direr alternative—living another day.

**4.The threat of oppression**

Oppression is a constant threat for Clarissa and Septimus in *Mrs. Dalloway*, and Septimus dies in order to escape what he perceives to be an oppressive social pressure to conform. It comes in many guises, including religion, science, or social convention.

**Motifs**

**1.Time**

Time imparts order to the fluid thoughts, memories, and encounters that make up *Mrs. Dalloway*. Big Ben, a symbol of England and its might, sounds out the hour relentlessly, ensuring that the passage of time, and the awareness of eventual death, is always palpable. Clarissa, in particular, senses the passage of time, and the appearance of Sally and Peter, friends from the past, emphasizes how much time has gone by since Clarissa was young. Once the hour chimes, however, the sound disappears—its “leaden circles dissolved in the air.” This expression recurs many times throughout the novel, indicating how ephemeral time is, despite the pomp of Big Ben and despite people’s wary obsession with it. “It is time,” Rezia says to Septimus as they sit in the park waiting for the doctor's appointment on Harley Street. The ancient woman at the Regent’s Park Tube station suggests that the human condition knows no boundaries of time, since she continues to sing the same song for what seems like eternity. She understands that life is circular, not merely linear, which is the only sort of time that Big Ben tracks. Time is so important to the themes, structure, and characters of this novel that Woolf almost named her book *The Hours*.

**2.Shakespeare**

The many appearances of Shakespeare specifically and poetry in general suggest hopefulness, the possibility of finding comfort in art, and the survival of the soul in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Clarissa quotes Shakespeare’s plays many times throughout the day. When she shops for flowers at the beginning of the novel, she reads a few lines from a Shakespeare play, *Cymbeline*, in a book displayed in a shop window. The lines come from a funeral hymn in the play that suggests death should be embraced as a release from the constraints of life. Traditional English society promotes a suppression of visible emotion, and since Shakespeare and poetry promote a discussion of feeling and emotion, they belong to sensitive people like Clarissa, who are in many ways antiestablishment.

**3.Trees and flowers**

Tree and flower images abound in *Mrs. Dalloway*. The color, variety, and beauty of flowers suggest feeling and emotion, and those characters who are comfortable with flowers, such as Clarissa, have distinctly different personalities than those characters who are not, such as Richard and Lady Bruton. Trees, with their extensive root systems, suggest the vast reach of the human soul, and Clarissa and Septimus, who both struggle to protect their souls, revere them. Clarissa believes souls survive in trees after death, and Septimus, who has turned his back on patriarchal society, feels that cutting down a tree is the equivalent of committing murder.

**4.Waves and water**

Waves and water regularly wash over events and thoughts in *Mrs. Dalloway* and nearly always suggest the possibility of extinction or death.  The narrative structure of the novel itself also suggests fluidity. One character’s thoughts appear, intensify, then fade into another’s, much like waves that collect then fall.

Traditional English society itself is a kind of tide, pulling under those people not strong enough to stand on their own.

**Symbols**

**1.The Prime Minister**

The prime minister in *Mrs. Dalloway* embodies England’s old values and hierarchical social system, which are in decline.  The prime minister is a figure from the old establishment, which Clarissa and Septimus are struggling against. *Mrs. Dalloway*takes place after World War I, a time when the English looked desperately for meaning in the old symbols but found the symbols hollow.

**2.Peter Walsh’s pocketknife and other weapons**

Peter Walsh plays constantly with his pocketknife, and the opening, closing, and fiddling with the knife suggest his flightiness and inability to make decisions. He cannot decide what he feels and doesn’t know whether he abhors English tradition and wants to fight it, or whether he accepts English civilization just as it is. The pocketknife reveals Peter’s defensiveness. He is armed with the knife, in a sense, when he pays an unexpected visit to Clarissa, while she herself is armed with her sewing scissors. Their weapons make them equal competitors. Knives and weapons are also phallic symbols, hinting at sexuality and power. Peter cannot define his own identity, and his constant fidgeting with the knife suggests how uncomfortable he is with his masculinity. Characters fall into two groups: those who are armed and those who are not. Ellie Henderson, for example, is “weaponless,” because she is poor and has not been trained for any career. Her ambiguous relationship with her friend Edith also puts her at a disadvantage in society, leaving her even less able to defend herself. Septimus, psychologically crippled by the literal weapons of war, commits suicide by impaling himself on a metal fence, showing the danger lurking behind man-made boundaries.

**3.The old woman in the window**

The old woman in the window across from Clarissa’s house represents the privacy of the soul and the loneliness that goes with it, both of which will increase as Clarissa grows older. Clarissa sees the future in the old woman: She herself will grow old and become more and more alone, since that is the nature of life. As Clarissa grows older, she reflects more but communicates less. Instead, she keeps her feelings locked inside the private rooms of her own soul, just as the old woman rattles alone around the rooms of her house. Nevertheless, the old woman also represents serenity and the purity of the soul. Clarissa respects the woman’s private reflections and thinks beauty lies in this act of preserving one’s interior life and independence. Before Septimus jumps out the window, he sees an old man descending the staircase outside, and this old man is a parallel figure to the old woman. Though Clarissa and Septimus ultimately choose to preserve their private lives in opposite ways, their view of loneliness, privacy, and communication resonates within these similar images.

**4.The old woman singing an ancient song**

Opposite the Regent’s Park Tube station, an old woman sings an ancient song that celebrates life, endurance, and continuity. She is oblivious to everyone around her as she sings, beyond caring what the world thinks. The narrator explains that no matter what happens in the world, the old woman will still be there, even in “ten million years,” and that the song has soaked “through the knotted roots of infinite ages.” Roots, intertwined and hidden beneath the earth, suggest the deepest parts of people’s souls, and this woman’s song touches everyone who hears it in some way. Peter hears the song first and compares the old woman to a rusty pump. He doesn’t catch her triumphant message and feels only pity for her, giving her a coin before stepping into a taxi. Rezia, however, finds strength in the old woman’s words, and the song makes her feel as though all will be okay in her life. Women in the novel, who have to view patriarchal English society from the outside, are generally more attuned to nature and the messages of voices outside the mainstream. Rezia, therefore, is able to see the old woman for the life force she is, instead of simply a nuisance or a tragic figure to be dealt with, ignored, or pitied.

**POSTMODERNISM**

**THE CONTEMPORARY AGE**

**BRITAIN 1950 – THE PRESENT**

Representative writers:

**English writers:**

* William Golding – Lord of the flies
* J. Fowles

**American writers:**

* K. Vonnegut
* Th. Pynchon

**Characteristics:** The second half of the 20th century was largely a period of peaceful prosperity. Despite fractious political and industrial disputes and a diminished role as a world power, the United Kingdom faced the challenges of post-industrialism and globalization with the same spirit of pragmatism that had seen it through earlier periods of historic change.

**Other features are:**

* England had a diminished role as a world power; it had become a high-powered consumer society, increased salaries and more free time; it has a better quality of life; and there was a rise in the level of education.
* A more tolerant attitude to social, religious and ethnic diversity
* The emergence of a distinctive youth culture; young people started to reject the strict moral and social codes by which older generations lived
* A general economic development

**Literature:**

* Postmodernism implies a movement away from and perhaps a reaction against modernism
* Breaks away from the idea that man can achieve understanding through a reliance on reason and science
* Playfulness with language
* Experimentation in the form of novel: less reliance on traditional narrative form, less reliance on traditional character development, experimentation with point of view.
* Experimentation with the way time is conveyed in the novel
* Mixture of ‘’high art’’ and ‘’popular culture’’
* Interest in metafiction, that is, fiction about the nature of fiction.

**THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT’S WOMAN – JOHN FOWLES**

This novel is based on the nineteenth-century romantic or gothic novel, a literary genre which can trace its origins back to the eighteenth century. Although Fowles perfectly reproduces typical characters, situations, and even dialogue, the reader should always be aware of the irony inherent in Fowles' perception; for his perspective, however cleverly disguised, is that of the twentieth century. We see this both in the authorial intrusions, which comment on the mores of people in Victorian England, and in his choice of opening quotations, which are drawn from the writings of people whose observations belie the assumptions that most Victorians held about their world.

Fowles is concerned in this novel with the effects of society on the individual's awareness of himself or herself and how that awareness dominates and distorts his or her entire life, including relationships with other people. All the main characters in this novel are molded by what they believe to be true about themselves and others. In this case, their lives are governed by what the Victorian Age thought was true about the nature of men and women and their relationships to each other. The French Lieutenant's Woman of the title, for example, is the dark, mysterious woman of the typical Victorian romantic novel.

Sometimes the villainess, sometimes the heroine, such a woman was a symbol of what was forbidden. It is this aura of strangeness about Sarah Woodruff that first attracts Charles Smithson's attention. The story that develops around this pair echoes other romantic novels of a similar type, wherein a man falls in love with a strange and sometimes evil woman.

**Structure, style and technique**

In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, John Fowles does not merely recreate a Victorian novel; neither does he parody one. He does a little of both, but also much more. The subject of this novel is essentially the same as that of his other works: the relationship between life and art, the artist and his creation, and the isolation resulting from an individual's struggle for selfhood. He works within the tradition of the Victorian novel and consciously uses its conventions to serve his own design, all the while carefully informing the reader exactly what he is doing. His style purposely combines a flowing nineteenth-century prose style with an anachronistic twentieth-century perspective.

Fowles is as concerned with the details of the setting as were his Victorian counterparts. But he is also conscious that he is setting a scene and does not hesitate to intrude into the narrative himself in order to show the reader how he manipulates reality through his art. Like Dickens, Fowles uses dialogue to reveal the personalities of his characters and often he will satirize them as well.

Fowles does not recreate his Victorian world uncritically. He focuses on those aspects of the Victorian era that would seem most alien to a modern reader. In particular, he is concerned with Victorian attitudes towards women, economics, science, and philosophy. In this romance, Fowles examines the problems of two socially and economically oppressed groups in nineteenth-century England: the poverty of the working and servant classes, and the economic and social entrapment of women. While the plot traces a love story, or what seems to be a love story, the reader questions what sort of love existed in a society where many marriages were based as much on economics as on love. This story is thus not really a romance at all, for Fowles' objective is not to unite his two protagonists, Sarah and Charles, but to show what each human being must face in life in order to be able to grow.

Charles, it seems, is the actual protagonist of this novel, for he must travel from ignorance to understanding, by following the woman whom he thinks he is helping, but who in fact is his mentor. He must discard each layer of the false Charles: Charles the naturalist, Charles the gentleman, Charles the rake, and perhaps even Charles the lover, in order to find Charles the human being. The knowledge he arrives at is bitter, for he has lost all his illusions, as Sarah discarded hers sometime before. But the result itself is not bitter. Although Charles and Sarah are not reunited, for life's answers are never as simple and perfect as those of art, they both achieve a maturity that enables them to control their lives as long as they remember to look for answers nowhere but in themselves.

Fowles has taken two traditional romantic characters, a young hero and a mysterious woman, and has transformed them into human beings.

The novel is therefore actually a psychological study of an individual rather than a romance. It is a novel of individual growth and the awareness of one's basic isolation which accompanies that growth.

**Themes**

**Class Differences**

The stringent demarcation between classes - and sexes - in Victorian England is one of this novel’s central themes and is scrutinized and deconstructed constantly. Charles, who is one of the main protagonists, is cast as a gentleman and is deemed by society (and often by himself) to be superior to his servants, his bride-to-be, Ernestina, and Sarah. He is ranked higher due to the chance of birth and just misses out on reaching nobility when his uncle marries and produces an heir.  
Each of the characters is shown to be aware of the rigid class distinctions and the narrative uses this theme to undermine the naturalization of these barriers. Charles, for example, is characteristically less intelligent than his supposed inferiors Sam and Sarah. He blanches at the thought of working in commerce for his future father-in-law as this is regarded as being below him by consensus in this class-bound society.  
Both the class system and patriarchy confine Sarah. Although her education moves her up the social ladder away from her father who was a farmer, this serves to leave her in the limbo world of being fit for the role of only governess or companion. The society she is born into effectively marginalizes her twice: for being a woman and for being born into the working classes.

**Convention**

*The French Lieutenant’s Woman* uses an overtly twentieth-century perspective to critique this representation of Victorian England where duty and conformity take precedence over kindness and honesty.  
The belief that one should adhere to convention is put into question by the hypocrisy of many of the main characters. Apart from Sarah, who is depicted as attempting to live by her own codes of behavior rather than society’s, others, such as Charles, Mrs Poulteney and Ernestina, are more concerned about how they appear to the outside world than in acting on their desires. The sense of duty, which in some measure is shown to be admirable, has become twisted as duty becomes more valued than the Christian ethos that informs it.

**Loss of faith in authority**

As though to undermine the strong thematic concern that exposes the adherence to conformity in this described society, there is a parallel theme that questions authority. This is brought about in a range of small ways, from Sam disobeying his employer Charles, to the depiction of Charles’s growing interest in Darwinism. The preference for evolutionary theories over creationism implies a questioning of the authority of the Bible. Sarah’s decision to be an outcast, rather than another governess who knows her place, also exemplifies this challenge to dominant thinking as does the insertion of the author in what appeared to be a realist text.

**PERSPECTIVES AND SENSIBILITIES**

Although the novel is firmly set in the mid-Victorian period, it also contains 20th century sensibilities and perspectives. We can see the characters both as Victorians in their attitudes and behaviour, and also as people who occasionally glimpse a different perspective/time which gives them hope. This applies especially to Sarah, who "sees through" people with a very un Victorian directness, and to Charles who dimly perceives the shape of things to come as he speaks to Freeman and when he is in America. In FLW the characters are more important than the plot - a twentieth century literary device which enables us to understand events much more because we see the characters interior motives and thoughts unfolded as the novel progresses. Plot would have been the Victorian priority; the characters secondary to the narrative. Fowles blends plot and characterisation with a neat combination of Victorian and modern literary style.

The plot is rather cleverly stereotyped in Victorian fashion - romance, intrigue, misunderstanding, deceit, forbidden love, carnal desire, betrayal and a classic "triangle" between two women attracted to the same man. There are also villains, in the shapes of Mrs Poulteney and Mrs Fairley; rogues like the scheming widow Mrs Tomkins and a brace of lower class observers Sam and Mary, to comment and make mischief.

Sarah Woodruff - a poor, innocent (yes, she is) harshly treated woman, spurned by those who are better off socially, if not morally and Charles, the gentleman compromised by his chivalry are the "main" characters, but we must not forget Tina (Ernestina - should she have been Ernest?) who is wealthy and pampered. Does she really love Charles - or just the idea of his position - his country house - her own status as the wife of a gentleman, not the daughter of a tradesman? Should we pity her or despise her? Is she a victim as the others are victims?

Conventionally the novel seldom proceeds as we would expect it to. Charles is at first the pursuer and Sarah the pursued, but at the lowest ebb of his fortunes he is entrapped by the pursued - Sarah, and once compromised - deserted. The conventional ending is abandoned and Fowles takes us on through a dislocated time structure to two different, more twentieth century, outcomes. The seduction and consequent events are described in vivid, very un Victorian detail and we are given the choice of two alternative conclusions to the action (neither are "endings") - one Victorian, the other more "modern".

One of the most impressive aspects of the novel is Fowles ability to shift the characters and the reader back and forth between centuries. The present impinges on the past and vice versa throughout the story. This creates in us the "angst" of experiencing with Charles and Sarah the agonies of their decisions and choices, for we are never allowed to become detached from the events we see unfolding. Fowles himself at times appears and forces us, with him to participate in the action, inviting us to comment - to observe - to judge and to reflect on what happens.

**NARRATIVE STRUCTURE**

Again, Fowles cleverly uses a number of different "voices" throughout the novel. There are several narrative presences and the identity of the story-teller is always ambiguous. He appears (it is tempting to think of him as a male, isn't it?) as a raconteur, an observer, and a "god" figure (or maybe a devil?). Sometimes he is the author, dropping into a familiar style and inviting us to share his creative illusory process, using the "I" pronoun.

The novel begins "in media res" (in the middle of things); and events are unfolded in retrospect as we go along. This can be confusing, but is also a technique which serves to increase the suspense and tension. Fowles keeps his reader guessing, as he himself is guessing, or so he tells us. Time is played with - events are shown as though in sequence, when in fact they are happening at the same time, in parallel; sometimes events which have already happened are not revealed until later on. Most strikingly, though, we are deliberately told by Fowles that he has "cheated" by creating three different endings and he even appears in an enigmatic disguise as an anonymous bearded character to turn back his watch and give us the last, existential ending.

**THE****EPIGRAPHS**

Each chapter has at least one epigraph, taken mainly, though not exclusively, from Victorian literature (both fiction and non-fiction). The purpose of an epigraph is to set the tone for the chapter which follows.

Many of them are from the works of Alfred, Lord Tennyson and there are also examples from Thomas Hardy, Matthew Arnold, Charles Darwin, Charles Lyell, E. Royston Pike (1967) and the poet, Clough. He also alludes to Dickens, Eliot (George), Thackeray and Jane Austen.

**STYLE**

The novel is written in a familiar style as though the narrator is conversing with the reader. It contains a mixture of straightforward prose narrative and dialogue and the dialogue does capture the tone of the Victorian period.

The imagery is vivid and taken from nature, persistently including animals and birds - preying and preyed upon. Mrs Poulteney is described as a "bulldog" , a "plump vulture" with an "eagle eye", and Mrs Fairley as a "weasel". Charles, visiting mrs P. is described as a "plump mouse dropping between the claws of a hungry cat".

Throughout the novel we have allusions to judgement, punishment, suffering and retribution.

On a more sensuous note, flower and plant imagery is included to emphasise the gentler settings associated with Sarah, especially on the common, where the two lovers further their doomed acquaintance. In fact Ware Commons is a kind of Garden of Eden, embodying the twin connotations of innocence and sin.

Parallel to the themes of nature we find colour strongly used, especially with reference to Sarah. She buys a brilliant green shawl, for the seduction scene, which contrasts with her red (Pre-Raphaelite) hair. When Charles meets her in the Rosetti house she is wearing red and blue and is flaunting bravely the colours of the "new" woman. This contrasts most sharply with the black which is her common costume throughout her time of ostracism in Lyme.

**SEXUAL****REPRESSION**

The novel is described as a definitive study of the sexual repression of the Victorian age. There is a strong sexual/sensual element in the story and the characters react as they do largely because of the sexual mores of the time. It is interesting to speculate as to how much Fowles exaggerates the reactions and attitudes of his main characters. I suspect that he is in fact quite accurate, as we know that he researched the period quite exhaustively.

Women of the middle and upper classes were sexually ignorant before marriage - some indeed remained so afterwards, except for the processes of childbirth, which can hardly be ignored! It was certainly not seemly for a female to invite sexual activity, or intercourse either before, or, one assumes, after marriage. There must have been exceptions, of course. It is unlikely that ALL Victorian women hated intercourse, but very probable than many of them found it at best distasteful and at worst terrifying. In the novel, we learn from Grogan that at least one couple he knew thought that the navel was the point of entry for sex!! Ernestina, who is typical of the time, will not even allow herself to look at her own naked body, or permit Charles to touch her except for the most chaste of kisses on the cheek, forehead or hand. Paradoxically, she imagines herself very much in love, preferring recitations of poetry and passionate entries (idealised) in her journal to real intimacy with her fiancee.

Ordinarily, a respectable female would not be allowed any contact before the engagement was announced with a man, without the presence of a female chaperone. Aunt Tranter is always near at hand even after Tina and Charles are engaged. There would not be any real education about what to expect after marriage, either. Women would most likely be counselled to "endure the inevitable" and regard it as their "duty" to submit to the husband's carnal desires. In a society where a wife became, literally, a chattel of the husband, her property becoming his automatically upon marriage, we cannot expect any real assertive behaviour on the part of the wife. Women were subordinate to their husbands - the marriage service still contained the words "to obey". Sex was a means of fulfilling the instructions at the beginning of the marriage service to procreate (have children). Enjoyment of sex for its own sake was not a requirement of marriage - indeed it was rather an indication of a loose moral character. Look what happened to Sarah, who was presumed to have chased after a man! Some women of course could indulge themselves in sexual sport, but they could not aspire to be classed as ladies if they were too obvious about it. The higher up the social scale, the more leeway a woman had to break the rules, as long as she did not cross over the unwritten rule of being indiscreet or unladylike. TOTAL hypocrisy, but true. Neither Tina nor Sarah have the luxury, though; Tina because of her upbringing in trade and her own naivety and Sarah because she is caught between classes.

The lower orders were much more fortunate. Mary the servant girl is basic, aware and sexually active with Sam. The prostitute Sarah has no inhibitions and few illusions about the realities of life. It is only the more "refined" species of society who have to observe the taboos and keep to the rules. Who has the most fun?

Gentlemen were in the fortunate (?) position of being able to indulge their instincts with women of a certain sort. Prostitution was rife at the time the novel is set. Clubs like the Terpsichore certainly existed, where gentlemen (were they?) could be entertained with sexual shows and intercourse, if they wished. Mistresses were common, although discretion was the watchword. (Women, too, especially those of the aristocracy could and did have lovers, again discreetly. The hypocrisy of the age is legendary.) Men were expected to be experienced, but they must never slip from their position of "gentleman". The most humiliating experience Charles undergoes is having to sign the breach of promise papers which describe him as no longer having the right to be considered a gentleman. It is probable that some men, though, were as ignorant as women about sexual relationships. If the wife was frigid, and many of them, alas, were; then a husband was not likely to find much pleasure in the marital bed - off to the club, then!! Charles has had women (ironically of course he "has" Sarah - he does not "make love" to her as we would understand it) but he is not what we would consider an experienced lover. His relationships with both the women in the novel are crippled - one by inhibition, the other by guilt. We must feel compassion for him - the more so as he considers himself to be rather advanced for the age, a "new man" of the Darwinian period.

**LORD OF FLIES – WILLIAM GOLDING**

**Context**

William Golding was born on September 19, 1911, in Cornwall, England. After graduating from Oxford, he worked briefly as a theater actor and director, wrote poetry, and then became a schoolteacher. In 1940, a year after England entered World War II, Golding joined the Royal Navy, where he served in command of a rocket-launcher and participated in the invasion of Normandy. Golding’s experience in World War II had a profound effect on his view of humanity and the evils of which it was capable. After the war, Golding resumed teaching and started to write novels. His first and greatest success came with*Lord of the Flies* (1954).

*Lord of the Flies* tells the story of a group of English schoolboys marooned on a tropical island after their plane is shot down during a war. Though the novel is fictional, its exploration of the idea of human evil is at least partly based on Golding’s experience with the real-life violence and brutality of World War II. Free from the rules and structures of civilization and society, the boys on the island in*Lord of the Flies* descend into savagery. As the boys splinter into factions, some behave peacefully and work together to maintain order and achieve common goals, while others rebel and seek only anarchy and violence. In his portrayal of the small world of the island, Golding paints a broader portrait of the fundamental human struggle between the civilizing instinct—the impulse to obey rules, behave morally, and act lawfully—and the savage instinct—the impulse to seek brute power over others, act selfishly, scorn moral rules, and indulge in violence.

Golding employs a relatively straightforward writing style in *Lord of the Flies,*one that avoids highly poetic language, lengthy description, and philosophical interludes. Much of the novel is allegorical, meaning that the characters and objects in the novel are infused with symbolic significance that conveys the novel’s central themes and ideas.

During the 1950s and 1960s, many readings of the novel claimed that *Lord of the Flies* dramatizes the history of civilization. Some believed that the novel explores fundamental religious issues, such as original sin and the nature of good and evil. Others approached *Lord of the Flies* through the theories of the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, who taught that the human mind was the site of a constant battle among different impulses—the id (instinctual needs and desires), the ego (the conscious, rational mind), and the superego (the sense of conscience and morality). Still others maintained that Golding wrote the novel as a criticism of the political and social institutions of the West. Ultimately, there is some validity to each of these different readings and interpretations of *Lord of the Flies*.

**Analysis of major characters**

**1.Ralph**

Ralph is the athletic, charismatic protagonist of *Lord of the Flies.* Elected the leader of the boys at the beginning of the novel, Ralph is the primary representative of order, civilization, and productive leadership in the novel. While most of the other boys initially are concerned with playing, having fun, and avoiding work, Ralph sets about building huts and thinking of ways to maximize their chances of being rescued. For this reason, Ralph’s power and influence over the other boys are secure at the beginning of the novel. However, as the group gradually succumbs to savage instincts over the course of the novel, Ralph’s position declines precipitously while Jack’s rises. Eventually, most of the boys except Piggy leave Ralph’s group for Jack’s, and Ralph is left alone to be hunted by Jack’s tribe. Ralph’s commitment to civilization and morality is strong, and his main wish is to be rescued and returned to the society of adults. In a sense, this strength gives Ralph a moral victory at the end of the novel, when he casts the Lord of the Flies to the ground and takes up the stake it is impaled on to defend himself against Jack’s hunters.

In the earlier parts of the novel, Ralph is unable to understand why the other boys would give in to base instincts of bloodlust and barbarism. The sight of the hunters chanting and dancing is baffling and distasteful to him. As the novel progresses, however, Ralph, like Simon, comes to understand that savagery exists within all the boys. Ralph remains determined not to let this savagery -overwhelm him, and only briefly does he consider joining Jack’s tribe in order to save himself. When Ralph hunts a boar for the first time, however, he experiences the exhilaration and thrill of bloodlust and violence. When he attends Jack’s feast, he is swept away by the frenzy, dances on the edge of the group, and participates in the killing of Simon. This firsthand knowledge of the evil that exists within him, as within all human beings, is tragic for Ralph, and it plunges him into listless despair for a time. But this knowledge also enables him to cast down the Lord of the Flies at the end of the novel. Ralph’s story ends semi-tragically: although he is rescued and returned to civilization, when he sees the naval officer, he weeps with the burden of his new knowledge about the human capacity for evil.

**2.Jack**

The strong-willed, egomaniacal Jack is the novel’s primary representative of the instinct of savagery, violence, and the desire for power—in short, the antithesis of Ralph. From the beginning of the novel, Jack desires power above all other things. He is furious when he loses the election to Ralph and continually pushes the boundaries of his subordinate role in the group. Early on, Jack retains the sense of moral propriety and behavior that society instilled in him—in fact, in school, he was the leader of the choirboys. The first time he encounters a pig, he is unable to kill it. But Jack soon becomes obsessed with hunting and devotes himself to the task, painting his face like a barbarian and giving himself over to bloodlust. The more savage Jack becomes, the more he is able to control the rest of the group. Indeed, apart from Ralph, Simon, and Piggy, the group largely follows Jack in casting off moral restraint and embracing violence and savagery. Jack’s love of authority and violence are intimately connected, as both enable him to feel powerful and exalted. By the end of the novel, Jack has learned to use the boys’ fear of the beast to control their behavior—a reminder of how religion and superstition can be manipulated as instruments of power.

**3.Simon**

Whereas Ralph and Jack stand at opposite ends of the spectrum between civilization and savagery, Simon stands on an entirely different plane from all the other boys. Simon embodies a kind of innate, spiritual human goodness that is deeply connected with nature and, in its own way, as primal as Jack’s evil. The other boys abandon moral behavior as soon as civilization is no longer there to impose it upon them. They are not *innately* moral; rather, the adult world—the threat of punishment for misdeeds—has conditioned them to act morally. To an extent, even the seemingly civilized Ralph and Piggy are products of social conditioning, as we see when they participate in the hunt-dance. In Golding’s view, the human impulse toward civilization is not as deeply rooted as the human impulse toward savagery. Unlike all the other boys on the island, Simon acts morally not out of guilt or shame but because he believes in the inherent value of morality. He behaves kindly toward the younger children, and he is the first to realize the problem posed by the beast and the Lord of the Flies—that is, that the monster on the island is not a real, physical beast but rather a savagery that lurks within each human being. The sow’s head on the stake symbolizes this idea, as we see in Simon’s vision of the head speaking to him. Ultimately, this idea of the inherent evil within each human being stands as the moral conclusion and central problem of the novel. Against this idea of evil, Simon represents a contrary idea of essential human goodness. However, his brutal murder at the hands of the other boys indicates the scarcity of that good amid an overwhelming abundance of evil.

**Themes**

**1.Civilization vs savagery**

The central concern of *Lord of the Flies* is the conflict between two competing impulses that exist within all human beings: the instinct to live by rules, act peacefully, follow moral commands, and value the good of the group against the instinct to gratify one’s immediate desires, act violently to obtain supremacy over others, and enforce one’s will. This conflict might be expressed in a number of ways: civilization vs. savagery, order vs. chaos, reason vs. impulse, law vs. anarchy, or the broader heading of good vs. evil. Throughout the novel, Golding associates the instinct of civilization with good and the instinct of savagery with evil.

The conflict between the two instincts is the driving force of the novel, explored through the dissolution of the young English boys’ civilized, moral, disciplined behavior as they accustom themselves to a wild, brutal, barbaric life in the jungle.*Lord of the Flies* is an allegorical novel, which means that Golding conveys many of his main ideas and themes through symbolic characters and objects. He represents the conflict between civilization and savagery in the conflict between the novel’s two main characters: Ralph, the protagonist, who represents order and leadership; and Jack, the antagonist, who represents savagery and the desire for power.

As the novel progresses, Golding shows how different people feel the influences of the instincts of civilization and savagery to different degrees. Piggy, for instance, has no savage feelings, while Roger seems barely capable of comprehending the rules of civilization. Generally, however, Golding implies that the instinct of savagery is far more primal and fundamental to the human psyche than the instinct of civilization. Golding sees moral behavior, in many cases, as something that civilization forces upon the individual rather than a natural expression of human individuality. When left to their own devices, Golding implies, people naturally revert to cruelty, savagery, and barbarism. This idea of innate human evil is central to *Lord of the Flies,* and finds expression in several important symbols, most notably the beast and the sow’s head on the stake. Among all the characters, only Simon seems to possess anything like a natural, innate goodness.

**2.Loss of Innocence**

As the boys on the island progress from well-behaved, orderly children longing for rescue to cruel, bloodthirsty hunters who have no desire to return to civilization, they naturally lose the sense of innocence that they possessed at the beginning of the novel. The painted savages in Chapter 12 who have hunted, tortured, and killed animals and human beings are a far cry from the guileless children swimming in the lagoon in Chapter 3. But Golding does not portray this loss of innocence as something that is done to the children; rather, it results naturally from their increasing openness to the innate evil and savagery that has always existed within them. Golding implies that civilization can mitigate but never wipe out the innate evil that exists within all human beings. The forest glade in which Simon sits in Chapter 3 symbolizes this loss of innocence. At first, it is a place of natural beauty and peace, but when Simon returns later in the novel, he discovers the bloody sow’s head impaled upon a stake in the middle of the clearing. The bloody offering to the beast has disrupted the paradise that existed before—a powerful symbol of innate human evil disrupting childhood innocence.

**Motifs**

**1.Biblical Parallels**

Many critics have characterized *Lord of the Flies* as a retelling of episodes from the Bible. While that description may be an oversimplification, the novel does echo certain Christian images and themes. Golding does not make any explicit or direct connections to Christian symbolism in *Lord of the Flies*; instead, these biblical parallels function as a kind of subtle motif in the novel, adding thematic resonance to the main ideas of the story. The island itself, particularly Simon’s glade in the forest, recalls the Garden of Eden in its status as an originally pristine place that is corrupted by the introduction of evil. Similarly, we may see the Lord of the Flies as a representation of the devil, for it works to promote evil among humankind. Furthermore, many critics have drawn strong parallels between Simon and Jesus. Among the boys, Simon is the one who arrives at the moral truth of the novel, and the other boys kill him sacrificially as a consequence of having discovered this truth. Simon’s conversation with the Lord of the Flies also parallels the confrontation between Jesus and the devil during Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness, as told in the Christian Gospels.

However, it is important to remember that the parallels between Simon and Christ are not complete, and that there are limits to reading *Lord of the Flies* purely as a Christian allegory. Save for Simon’s two uncanny predictions of the future, he lacks the supernatural connection to God that Jesus has in Christian tradition. Although Simon is wise in many ways, his death does not bring salvation to the island; rather, his death plunges the island deeper into savagery and moral guilt. Moreover, Simon dies before he is able to tell the boys the truth he has discovered. Jesus, in contrast, was killed while spreading his moral philosophy. In this way, Simon—and *Lord of the Flies* as a whole—echoes Christian ideas and themes without developing explicit, precise parallels with them. The novel’s biblical parallels enhance its moral themes but are not necessarily the primary key to interpreting the story.

**Symbols**

*1.***The Conch Shell**

Ralph and Piggy discover the conch shell on the beach at the start of the novel and use it to summon the boys together after the crash separates them. Used in this capacity, the conch shell becomes a powerful symbol of civilization and order in the novel. The shell effectively governs the boys’ meetings, for the boy who holds the shell holds the right to speak. In this regard, the shell is more than a symbol—it is an actual vessel of political legitimacy and democratic power. As the island civilization erodes and the boys descend into savagery, the conch shell loses its power and influence among them. Ralph clutches the shell desperately when he talks about his role in murdering Simon. Later, the other boys ignore Ralph and throw stones at him when he attempts to blow the conch in Jack’s camp. The boulder that Roger rolls onto Piggy also crushes the conch shell, signifying the demise of the civilized instinct among almost all the boys on the island.

**2.Piggy’s Glasses**

Piggy is the most intelligent, rational boy in the group, and his glasses represent the power of science and intellectual endeavor in society. This symbolic significance is clear from the start of the novel, when the boys use the lenses from Piggy’s glasses to focus the sunlight and start a fire. When Jack’s hunters raid Ralph’s camp and steal the glasses, the savages effectively take the power to make fire, leaving Ralph’s group helpless.

**3.The Signal Fire**

The signal fire burns on the mountain, and later on the beach, to attract the notice of passing ships that might be able to rescue the boys. As a result, the signal fire becomes a barometer of the boys’ connection to civilization. In the early parts of the novel, the fact that the boys maintain the fire is a sign that they want to be rescued and return to society. When the fire burns low or goes out, we realize that the boys have lost sight of their desire to be rescued and have accepted their savage lives on the island. The signal fire thus functions as a kind of measurement of the strength of the civilized instinct remaining on the island. Ironically, at the end of the novel, a fire finally summons a ship to the island, but not the signal fire. Instead, it is the fire of savagery—the forest fire Jack’s gang starts as part of his quest to hunt and kill Ralph.

**4.The Beast**

The imaginary beast that frightens all the boys stands for the primal instinct of savagery that exists within all human beings. The boys are afraid of the beast, but only Simon reaches the realization that they fear the beast because it exists within each of them. As the boys grow more savage, their belief in the beast grows stronger. By the end of the novel, the boys are leaving it sacrifices and treating it as a totemic god. The boys’ behavior is what brings the beast into existence, so the more savagely the boys act, the more real the beast seems to become.

**5.The Lord of the Flies**

The Lord of the Flies is the bloody, severed sow’s head that Jack impales on a stake in the forest glade as an offering to the beast. This complicated symbol becomes the most important image in the novel when Simon confronts the sow’s head in the glade and it seems to speak to him, telling him that evil lies within every human heart and promising to have some “fun” with him. (This “fun” foreshadows Simon’s death in the following chapter.) In this way, the Lord of the Flies becomes both a physical manifestation of the beast, a symbol of the power of evil, and a kind of Satan figure who evokes the beast within each human being. Looking at the novel in the context of biblical parallels, the Lord of the Flies recalls the devil, just as Simon recalls Jesus. In fact, the name “Lord of the Flies” is a literal translation of the name of the biblical name Beelzebub, a powerful demon in hell sometimes thought to be the devil himself.

**6.Ralph, Piggy, Jack, Simon, and Roger**

*Lord of the Flies* is an allegorical novel, and many of its characters signify important ideas or themes. Ralph represents order, leadership, and civilization. Piggy represents the scientific and intellectual aspects of civilization. Jack represents unbridled savagery and the desire for power. Simon represents natural human goodness. Roger represents brutality and bloodlust at their most extreme. To the extent that the boys’ society resembles a political state, the littluns might be seen as the common people, while the older boys represent the ruling classes and political leaders. The relationships that develop between the older boys and the younger ones emphasize the older boys’ connection to either the civilized or the savage instinct: civilized boys like Ralph and Simon use their power to protect the younger boys and advance the good of the group; savage boys like Jack and Roger use their power to gratify their own desires, treating the littler boys as objects for their own amusement.

**NORTH AMERICAN HISTORY 1823 – 1900**

While the economy did thrive in the 19th century, it proved much more difficult to bring about national political unity**. Rivalry** between **the north and the south** emerged as a burning issue which eventually led to a **war** that threatened to split the United States in two. The two areas were different in various ways. Firstly, the climates were very different and consequently people’s lifestyles differed. Secondly, the north was more industrialized and, thanks to greater access to public schools, had a higher level of education. Thirdly, and most importantly, slavery was practiced in the south but had been abolished in the north. The issue of slavery was to provide the spark that ignited **the Civil War**. War was declared **in April 1861**. A fierce and bloody conflict dragged on for four years until **the South surrender**. The hero of the hour was the leader of the northern states, **Abraham Lincoln**, who was assassinated just as the war ended.

**RECONSTRUCTION**

The 14th and 15th Amendments to the constitution outlawed discrimination of any kind and gave the vote to all races. Slavery was replaced by a form of segregation which made it clear that blacks were second-class citizens.

**NORTH AMERICAN LITERATURE**

The mid-nineteenth century was a period of astonishing literary creativity in American literature. In the short space of six years, **four monumental works** were published:

* **Nathaniel Hawthorne – The scarlet letter**
* **Herman Melville – Moby Dick**
* Henry David Thoreau – Walden
* Walt Whitman – Leaves of grass

This period witnessed the highest literary expression of the Puritan tradition and the emergence of a new cultural and philosophical movement, **TRANSCENDENTALIMS** – **influenced by English Romanticism and German and Eastern philosophies, the transcendentalism exalted feeling and intuition over reason; they rebelled against the materialism of contemporary society and rejected the established church. Unlike the Puritans they believed that man was fundamentally good and should be allowed to develop free from rules and restrictions.**

**PROSE**

The Puritan heritage is clearly evident in the work of **Nathaniel Hawthorne**, who wrote about the conflict between good and evil set in the dark, Puritan, New England past. In his masterpiece, **The Scarlet Letter**, he explores one of his constant themes: the relationship between the individual and the society.

**Herman Melville** dedicated his work, **Moby Dick**, to Hawthorne. The metaphysical and symbolic style, the juxtaposition of tones and the innovative narrative technique make it a rich and complex work which encompasses many themes, including the battle between man and nature, the conflict between good and evil and man’s quest to live in a largely hostile world. The emergence of transcendentalist movement in New England in the middle years of the century marked a significant break from the Puritan tradition.

East coast dominance of the American literary scene was broken by **MARK TWAIN**, who shows his deep distrust of respectable society and his sympathy for social outcasts and the common man. His use of language is strikingly original. The stories of **Tom Sawyer** and **Huck Finn** are told from the point of view of the young protagonists and contain slang, regional dialect and illogical sentence constructions that make the dialogue come to life. He created **a distinctly American style**.

**THE SCARLET LETTER - NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE**

**Context**

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1804. Transcendentalism was a religious and philosophical movement of the early nineteenth century that was dedicated to the belief that divinity manifests itself everywhere, particularly in the natural world. It also advocated a personalized, direct relationship with the divine in place of formalized, structured religion. This second transcendental idea is privileged in *The Scarlet Letter.*

Herman Melville, among others, hailed Hawthorne as **the “American Shakespeare**.”

The majority of Hawthorne’s work takes America’s Puritan past as its subject, but *The Scarlet Letter* uses the material to greatest effect. The Puritans were a group of religious reformers who arrived in Massachusetts in the 1630s under the leadership of John Winthrop (whose death is recounted in the novel). The religious sect was known for its intolerance of dissenting ideas and lifestyles. In *The Scarlet Letter,* Hawthorne uses the repressive, authoritarian Puritan society as an analogue for humankind in general. The Puritan setting also enables him to portray the human soul under extreme pressures. Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth, while unquestionably part of the Puritan society in which they live, also reflect universal experiences. Hawthorne speaks specifically to American issues, but he circumvents the aesthetic and thematic limitations that might accompany such a focus. His universality and his dramatic flair have ensured his place in the literary canon.

**Analysis of major characters**

**1.Hester Prynne**

Although *The Scarlet Letter* is about Hester Prynne, the book is not so much a consideration of her innate character as it is an examination of the forces that shape her and the transformations those forces effect. We know very little about Hester prior to her affair with Dimmesdale and her resultant public shaming. We read that she married Chillingworth although she did not love him, but we never fully understand why. The early chapters of the book suggest that, prior to her marriage, Hester was a strong-willed and impetuous young woman—she remembers her parents as loving guides who frequently had to restrain her incautious behavior. The fact that she has an affair also suggests that she once had a passionate nature.

But it is what happens after Hester’s affair that makes her into the woman with whom the reader is familiar. Shamed and alienated from the rest of the community, Hester becomes contemplative. She speculates on human nature, social organization, and larger moral questions. Hester’s tribulations also lead her to be stoic and a freethinker. Although the narrator pretends to disapprove of Hester’s independent philosophizing, his tone indicates that he secretly admires her independence and her ideas.

Hester also becomes a kind of compassionate maternal figure as a result of her experiences. Hester moderates her tendency to be rash, for she knows that such behavior could cause her to lose her daughter, Pearl. Hester is also maternal with respect to society: she cares for the poor and brings them food and clothing. By the novel’s end, Hester has become a protofeminist mother figure to the women of the community. The shame attached to her scarlet letter is long gone. Women recognize that her punishment stemmed in part from the town fathers’ sexism, and they come to Hester seeking shelter from the sexist forces under which they themselves suffer. Throughout *The Scarlet Letter* Hester is portrayed as an intelligent, capable, but not necessarily extraordinary woman. It is the extraordinary circumstances shaping her that make her such an important figure.

**2.Roger Chillingworth**

As his name suggests, Roger Chillingworth is a man deficient in human warmth. His twisted, stooped, deformed shoulders mirror his distorted soul. From what the reader is told of his early years with Hester, he was a difficult husband. He ignored his wife for much of the time, yet expected her to nourish his soul with affection when he did condescend to spend time with her. Chillingworth’s decision to assume the identity of a “leech,” or doctor, is fitting. Unable to engage in equitable relationships with those around him, he feeds on the vitality of others as a way of energizing his own projects. Chillingworth’s death is a result of the nature of his character. After Dimmesdale dies, Chillingworth no longer has a victim. Similarly, Dimmesdale’s revelation that he is Pearl’s father removes Hester from the old man’s clutches. Having lost the objects of his revenge, the leech has no choice but to die.

Ultimately, Chillingworth represents true evil. He is associated with secular and sometimes illicit forms of knowledge, as his chemical experiments and medical practices occasionally verge on witchcraft and murder. He is interested in revenge, not justice, and he seeks the deliberate destruction of others rather than a redress of wrongs. His desire to hurt others stands in contrast to Hester and Dimmesdale’s sin, which had love, not hate, as its intent. Any harm that may have come from the young lovers’ deed was unanticipated and inadvertent, whereas Chillingworth reaps deliberate harm.

**3.Arthur Dimmesdale**

Arthur Dimmesdale, like Hester Prynne, is an individual whose identity owes more to external circumstances than to his innate nature. The reader is told that Dimmesdale was a scholar of some renown at Oxford University. His past suggests that he is probably somewhat aloof, the kind of man who would not have much natural sympathy for ordinary men and women. However, Dimmesdale has an unusually active conscience. The fact that Hester takes all of the blame for their shared sin goads his conscience, and his resultant mental anguish and physical weakness open up his mind and allow him to empathize with others. Consequently, he becomes an eloquent and emotionally powerful speaker and a compassionate leader, and his congregation is able to receive meaningful spiritual guidance from him.

Ironically, the townspeople do not believe Dimmesdale’s protestations of sinfulness. Given his background and his penchant for rhetorical speech, Dimmesdale’s congregation generally interprets his sermons allegorically rather than as expressions of any personal guilt. This drives Dimmesdale to further internalize his guilt and self-punishment and leads to still more deterioration in his physical and spiritual condition. The town’s idolization of him reaches new heights after his Election Day sermon, which is his last. In his death, Dimmesdale becomes even more of an icon than he was in life. Many believe his confession was a symbolic act, while others believe Dimmesdale’s fate was an example of divine judgment.

**4.Pearl**

Hester’s daughter, Pearl, functions primarily as a symbol. She is quite young during most of the events of this novel—when Dimmesdale dies she is only seven years old—and her real importance lies in her ability to provoke the adult characters in the book. She asks them pointed questions and draws their attention, and the reader’s, to the denied or overlooked truths of the adult world. In general, children in *The Scarlet Letter* are portrayed as more perceptive and more honest than adults, and Pearl is the most perceptive of them all.

Pearl makes us constantly aware of her mother’s scarlet letter and of the society that produced it. From an early age, she fixates on the emblem. Pearl’s innocent, or perhaps intuitive, comments about the letter raise crucial questions about its meaning. Similarly, she inquires about the relationships between those around her—most important, the relationship between Hester and Dimmesdale—and offers perceptive critiques of them. Pearl provides the text’s harshest, and most penetrating, judgment of Dimmesdale’s failure to admit to his adultery. Once her father’s identity is revealed, Pearl is no longer needed in this symbolic capacity; at Dimmesdale’s death she becomes fully “human,” leaving behind her otherworldliness and her preternatural vision.

**Themes**

**1.Sin, knowledge and the human condition**

Sin and knowledge are linked in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The Bible begins with the story of Adam and Eve, who were expelled from the Garden of Eden for eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. As a result of their knowledge, Adam and Eve are made aware of their humanness, that which separates them from the divine and from other creatures. Once expelled from the Garden of Eden, they are forced to toil and to procreate—two “labors” that seem to define the human condition. The experience of Hester and Dimmesdale recalls the story of Adam and Eve because, in both cases, sin results in expulsion and suffering. But it also results in knowledge—specifically, in knowledge of what it means to be human. For Hester, the scarlet letter functions as “her passport into regions where other women dared not tread,” leading her to “speculate” about her society and herself more “boldly” than anyone else in New England. As for Dimmesdale, the “burden” of his sin gives him “sympathies so intimate with the sinful brotherhood of mankind, so that his heart vibrate[s] in unison with theirs.” His eloquent and powerful sermons derive from this sense of empathy. Hester and Dimmesdale contemplate their own sinfulness on a daily basis and try to reconcile it with their lived experiences. The Puritan elders, on the other hand, insist on seeing earthly experience as merely an obstacle on the path to heaven. Thus, they view sin as a threat to the community that should be punished and suppressed. Their answer to Hester’s sin is to ostracize her. Yet, Puritan society is stagnant, while Hester and Dimmesdale’s experience shows that a state of sinfulness can lead to personal growth, sympathy, and understanding of others. Paradoxically, these qualities are shown to be incompatible with a state of purity.

**2.The nature of evil**

The characters in the novel frequently debate the identity of the “Black Man,” the embodiment of evil. Over the course of the novel, the “Black Man” is associated with Dimmesdale, Chillingworth, and Mistress Hibbins, and little Pearl is thought by some to be the Devil’s child. The characters also try to root out the causes of evil: did Chillingworth’s selfishness in marrying Hester force her to the “evil” she committed in Dimmesdale’s arms? Is Hester and Dimmesdale’s deed responsible for Chillingworth’s transformation into a malevolent being? This confusion over the nature and causes of evil reveals the problems with the Puritan conception of sin. The book argues that true evil arises from the close relationship between hate and love. As the narrator points out in the novel’s concluding chapter, both emotions depend upon “a high degree of intimacy and heart-knowledge; each renders one individual dependent . . . upon another.” Evil is not found in Hester and Dimmesdale’s lovemaking, nor even in the cruel ignorance of the Puritan fathers. Evil, in its most poisonous form, is found in the carefully plotted and precisely aimed revenge of Chillingworth, whose love has been perverted. Perhaps Pearl is not entirely wrong when she thinks Dimmesdale is the “Black Man,” because her father, too, has perverted his love. Dimmesdale, who should love Pearl, will not even publicly acknowledge her. His cruel denial of love to his own child may be seen as further perpetrating evil.

**3.Identity and society**

After Hester is publicly shamed and forced by the people of Boston to wear a badge of humiliation, her unwillingness to leave the town may seem puzzling. She is not physically imprisoned, and leaving the Massachusetts Bay Colony would allow her to remove the scarlet letter and resume a normal life. Surprisingly, Hester reacts with dismay when Chillingworth tells her that the town fathers are considering letting her remove the letter. Hester’s behavior is premised on her desire to determine her own identity rather than to allow others to determine it for her. To her, running away or removing the letter would be an acknowledgment of society’s power over her: she would be admitting that the letter is a mark of shame and something from which she desires to escape. Instead, Hester stays, refiguring the scarlet letter as a symbol of her own experiences and character. Her past sin is a part of who she is; to pretend that it never happened would mean denying a part of herself. Thus, Hester very determinedly integrates her sin into her life.

Dimmesdale also struggles against a socially determined identity. As the community’s minister, he is more symbol than human being. Except for Chillingworth, those around the minister willfully ignore his obvious anguish, misinterpreting it as holiness. Unfortunately, Dimmesdale never fully recognizes the truth of what Hester has learned: that individuality and strength are gained by quiet self-assertion and by a reconfiguration, not a rejection, of one’s assigned identity.

**Motifs**

**1.Civilization versus the wilderness**

In *The Scarlet Letter,* the town and the surrounding forest represent opposing behavioral systems. The town represents civilization, a rule-bound space where everything one does is on display and where transgressions are quickly punished. The forest, on the other hand, is a space of natural rather than human authority. In the forest, society’s rules do not apply, and alternate identities can be assumed. While this allows for misbehavior— Mistress Hibbins’s midnight rides, for example—it also permits greater honesty and an escape from the repression of Boston. When Hester and Dimmesdale meet in the woods, for a few moments, they become happy young lovers once again. Hester’s cottage, which, significantly, is located on the outskirts of town and at the edge of the forest, embodies both orders. It is her place of exile, which ties it to the authoritarian town, but because it lies apart from the settlement, it is a place where she can create for herself a life of relative peace.

**2.Night versus day**

By emphasizing the alternation between sunlight and darkness, the novel organizes the plot’s events into two categories: those which are socially acceptable, and those which must take place covertly. Daylight exposes an individual’s activities and makes him or her vulnerable to punishment. Night, on the other hand, conceals and enables activities that would not be possible or tolerated during the day—for instance, Dimmesdale’s encounter with Hester and Pearl on the scaffold. These notions of visibility versus concealment are linked to two of the book’s larger themes—the themes of inner versus socially assigned identity and of outer appearances versus internal states. Night is the time when inner natures can manifest themselves. During the day, interiority is once again hidden from public view, and secrets remain secrets.

**3.Evocative names**

The names in this novel often seem to beg to be interpreted allegorically. Chillingworth is cold and inhuman and thus brings a “chill” to Hester’s and Dimmesdale’s lives. “Prynne” rhymes with “sin,” while “Dimmesdale” suggests “dimness”—weakness, indeterminacy, lack of insight, and lack of will, all of which characterize the young minister. The name “Pearl” evokes a biblical allegorical device—the “pearl of great price” that is salvation. This system of naming lends a profundity to the story, linking it to other allegorical works of literature such as *The Pilgrim’s Progress*and to portions of the Bible. It also aligns the novel with popular forms of narrative such as fairy tales.

**Symbols**

**1.The scarlet letter**

The scarlet letter is meant to be a symbol of shame, but instead it becomes a powerful symbol of identity to Hester. The letter’s meaning shifts as time passes. Originally intended to mark Hester as an adulterer, the “A” eventually comes to stand for “Able.” Finally, it becomes indeterminate: the Native Americans who come to watch the Election Day pageant think it marks her as a person of importance and status. Like Pearl, the letter functions as a physical reminder of Hester’s affair with Dimmesdale. But, compared with a human child, the letter seems insignificant, and thus helps to point out the ultimate meaninglessness of the community’s system of judgment and punishment. The child has been sent from God, or at least from nature, but the letter is merely a human contrivance. Additionally, the instability of the letter’s apparent meaning calls into question society’s ability to use symbols for ideological reinforcement. More often than not, a symbol becomes a focal point for critical analysis and debate.

**2.The Meteor**

As Dimmesdale stands on the scaffold with Hester and Pearl in Chapter 12, a meteor traces out an “A” in the night sky. To Dimmesdale, the meteor implies that he should wear a mark of shame just as Hester does. The meteor is interpreted differently by the rest of the community, which thinks that it stands for “Angel” and marks Governor Winthrop’s entry into heaven. But “Angel” is an awkward reading of the symbol. The Puritans commonly looked to symbols to confirm divine sentiments. In this narrative, however, symbols are taken to mean what the beholder wants them to mean. The incident with the meteor obviously highlights and exemplifies two different uses of symbols: Puritan and literary.

**3.Pearl**

Although Pearl is a complex character, her primary function within the novel is as a symbol. Pearl is a sort of living version of her mother’s scarlet letter. She is the physical consequence of sexual sin and the indicator of a transgression. Yet, even as a reminder of Hester’s “sin,” Pearl is more than a mere punishment to her mother: she is also a blessing. She represents not only “sin” but also the vital spirit and passion that engendered that sin. Thus, Pearl’s existence gives her mother reason to live, bolstering her spirits when she is tempted to give up. It is only after Dimmesdale is revealed to be Pearl’s father that Pearl can become fully “human.” Until then, she functions in a symbolic capacity as the reminder of an unsolved mystery.

\*\*\*\*\*The scarlet letter is regarded as America’s first psychological novel. Set in the 17th century, the novel displays a strikingly modern psychological insight into the forces that drive human behaviour. Hawthorne’s interest lies primarily in the exploration of the human soul and in the processes that take place in a character’s mind. The development of the plot is secondary; what happens in society at large and the events surrounding his main characters are of little consequence. The novel’s main passions – sin and guilt, punishment and redemption, fear and shame, pride and selfishness, hatred and destructive revenge – are described in allegorical style and through rich suggestive symbolism.

**MOBY DICK – HERMAN MELVILLE**

**CONTEXT**

Herman Melville was born in New York City in 1819, the third of eight children born to Maria Gansevoort Melville and Allan Melville, a prosperous importer of foreign goods. When the family business failed at the end of the 1820s, the Melvilles relocated to Albany in an attempt to revive their fortunes. A string of further bad luck and overwork, however, drove his father to an early grave, and the young Melville was forced to start working in a bank at the age of thirteen.

Melville’s masterpiece, ***Moby-Dick* or *The Whale****,* is a tremendously ambitious novel that functions at once as a documentary of life at sea and a vast philosophical allegory of life in general. No sacred subject is spared in this bleak and scathing critique of the known world, as Melville satirizes by turns religious traditions, moral values, and the literary and political figures of the day.

**Melville was influenced** in the writing of *Moby-Dick* by the work of **Nathaniel Hawthorne.** Though the works of Shakespeare and Milton and stories in the Bible (especially the Old Testament) influenced *Moby-Dick,* Melville didn’t look exclusively to celebrated cultural models. He drew on sources from popular culture as well; whaling narratives, for example, were popular in the nineteenth century.

**Moby-Dick** was both a seminal work elaborating on classic American themes, such as religion, fate, and economic expansion, and a radically experimental anachronism that anticipated Modernism in its outsized scope and pastiche of forms. It stands alongside James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* as a novel that appears bizarre to the point of being unreadable but proves to be infinitely open to interpretation and discovery.

**Analysis of major characters**

**1.Ishmael**

Despite his centrality to the story, Ishmael doesn’t reveal much about himself to the reader. We know that he has gone to sea out of some deep spiritual malaise and that shipping aboard a whaler is his version of committing suicide—he believes that men aboard a whaling ship are lost to the world. It is apparent from Ishmael’s frequent digressions on a wide range of subjects—from art, geology, and anatomy to legal codes and literature—that he is intelligent and well educated, yet he claims that a whaling ship has been “[his] Yale College and [his] Harvard.” He seems to be a self-taught Renaissance man, good at everything but committed to nothing. Given the mythic, romantic aspects of *Moby-Dick,* it is perhaps fitting that its narrator should be an enigma: not everything in a story so dependent on fate and the seemingly supernatural needs to make perfect sense.

Additionally, Ishmael represents the fundamental contradiction between the story of *Moby-Dick* and its setting. Melville has created a profound and philosophically complicated tale and set it in a world of largely uneducated working-class men; Ishmael, thus, seems less a real character than an instrument of the author. No one else aboard the *Pequod* possesses the proper combination of intellect and experience to tell this story. Indeed, at times even Ishmael fails Melville’s purposes, and he disappears from the story for long stretches, replaced by dramatic dialogues and soliloquies from Ahab and other characters.

**2.Ahab**

Ahab, the *Pequod*’s obsessed captain, represents both an ancient and a quintessentially modern type of hero. Like the heroes of Greek or Shakespearean tragedy, Ahab suffers from a single fatal flaw, one he shares with such legendary characters as Oedipus and Faust. His tremendous overconfidence, or hubris, leads him to defy common sense and believe that, like a god, he can enact his will and remain immune to the forces of nature. He considers Moby Dick the embodiment of evil in the world, and he pursues the White Whale monomaniacally because he believes it his inescapable fate to destroy this evil. According to the critic M. H. Abrams, such a tragic hero “moves us to pity because, since he is not an evil man, his misfortune is greater than he deserves; but he moves us also to fear, because we recognize similar possibilities of error in our own lesser and fallible selves.”

Unlike the heroes of older tragic works, however, Ahab suffers from a fatal flaw that is not necessarily inborn but instead stems from damage, in his case both psychological and physical, inflicted by life in a harsh world. He is as much a victim as he is an aggressor, and the symbolic opposition that he constructs between himself and Moby Dick propels him toward what he considers a destined end.

**3.Moby Dick**

In a sense, Moby Dick is not a character, as the reader has no access to the White Whale’s thoughts, feelings, or intentions. Instead, Moby Dick is an impersonal force, one that many critics have interpreted as an allegorical representation of God, an inscrutable and all-powerful being that humankind can neither understand nor defy. Moby Dick thwarts free will and cannot be defeated, only accommodated or avoided. Ishmael tries a plethora of approaches to describe whales in general, but none proves adequate. Indeed, as Ishmael points out, the majority of a whale is hidden from view at all times. In this way, a whale mirrors its environment. Like the whale, only the surface of the ocean is available for human observation and interpretation, while its depths conceal unknown and unknowable truths. Furthermore, even when Ishmael does get his hands on a “whole” whale, he is unable to determine which part—the skeleton, the head, the skin—offers the best understanding of the whole living, breathing creature; he cannot localize the essence of the whale. This conundrum can be read as a metaphor for the human relationship with the Christian God (or any other god, for that matter): God is unknowable and cannot be pinned down.

**Themes**

**1.The limits of knowledge**

As Ishmael tries, in the opening pages of *Moby-Dick,* to offer a simple collection of literary excerpts mentioning whales, he discovers that, throughout history, the whale has taken on an incredible multiplicity of meanings. Over the course of the novel, he makes use of nearly every discipline known to man in his attempts to understand the essential nature of the whale. Each of these systems of knowledge, however, including art, taxonomy, and phrenology, fails to give an adequate account. The multiplicity of approaches that Ishmael takes, coupled with his compulsive need to assert his authority as a narrator and the frequent references to the limits of observation (men cannot see the depths of the ocean, for example), suggest that human knowledge is always limited and insufficient. When it comes to Moby Dick himself, this limitation takes on allegorical significance. The ways of Moby Dick, like those of the Christian God, are unknowable to man, and thus trying to interpret them, as Ahab does, is inevitably futile and often fatal.

**2.The Deceptiveness of Fate**

In addition to highlighting many portentous or foreshadowing events, Ishmael’s narrative contains many references to fate, creating the impression that the*Pequod*’s doom is inevitable. Many of the sailors believe in prophecies, and some even claim the ability to foretell the future. A number of things suggest, however, that characters are actually deluding themselves when they think that they see the work of fate and that fate either doesn’t exist or is one of the many forces about which human beings can have no distinct knowledge. Ahab, for example, clearly exploits the sailors’ belief in fate to manipulate them into thinking that the quest for Moby Dick is their common destiny. Moreover, the prophesies of Fedallah and others seem to be undercut in Chapter 99, when various individuals interpret the doubloon in different ways, demonstrating that humans project what they want to see when they try to interpret signs and portents.

**3.The Exploitative Nature of Whaling**

At first glance, the *Pequod* seems like an island of equality and fellowship in the midst of a racist, hierarchically structured world. The ship’s crew includes men from all corners of the globe and all races who seem to get along harmoniously. Ishmael is initially uneasy upon meeting Queequeg, but he quickly realizes that it is better to have a “sober cannibal than a drunken Christian” for a shipmate. Additionally, the conditions of work aboard the *Pequod* promote a certain kind of egalitarianism, since men are promoted and paid according to their skill. However, the work of whaling parallels the other exploitative activities—buffalo hunting, gold mining, unfair trade with indigenous peoples—that characterize American and European territorial expansion. Each of the *Pequod*’s mates, who are white, is entirely dependent on a nonwhite harpooner, and nonwhites perform most of the dirty or dangerous jobs aboard the ship. Flask actually stands on Daggoo, his African harpooner, in order to beat the other mates to a prize whale. Ahab is depicted as walking over the black youth Pip, who listens to Ahab’s pacing from below deck, and is thus reminded that his value as a slave is less than the value of a whale.

**Motifs**

**1.Whiteness**

Whiteness, to Ishmael, is horrible because it represents the unnatural and threatening: albinos, creatures that live in extreme and inhospitable environments, waves breaking against rocks. These examples reverse the traditional association of whiteness with purity. Whiteness conveys both a lack of meaning and an unreadable excess of meaning that confounds individuals. Moby Dick is the pinnacle of whiteness, and Melville’s characters cannot objectively understand the White Whale. Ahab, for instance, believes that Moby Dick represents evil, while Ishmael fails in his attempts to determine scientifically the whale’s fundamental nature.

**2.Surfaces and Depths**

Ishmael frequently bemoans the impossibility of examining anything in its entirety, noting that only the surfaces of objects and environments are available to the human observer. On a live whale, for example, only the outer layer presents itself; on a dead whale, it is impossible to determine what constitutes the whale’s skin, or which part—skeleton, blubber, head—offers the best understanding of the entire animal. Moreover, as the whale swims, it hides much of its body underwater, away from the human gaze, and no one knows where it goes or what it does. The sea itself is the greatest frustration in this regard: its depths are mysterious and inaccessible to Ishmael. This motif represents the larger problem of the limitations of human knowledge. Humankind is not all-seeing; we can only observe, and thus only acquire knowledge about, that fraction of entities—both individuals and environments—to which we have access: surfaces.

**Symbols**

**1.The Pequod**

Named after a Native American tribe in Massachusetts that did not long survive the arrival of white men and thus memorializing an extinction, the *Pequod* is a symbol of doom. It is painted a gloomy black and covered in whale teeth and bones, literally bristling with the mementos of violent death. It is, in fact, marked for death. Adorned like a primitive coffin, the *Pequod* becomes one.

**2.Moby Dick**

Moby Dick possesses various symbolic meanings for various individuals. To the *Pequod*’’s crew, the legendary White Whale is a concept onto which they can displace their anxieties about their dangerous and often very frightening jobs. Because they have no delusions about Moby Dick acting malevolently toward men or literally embodying evil, tales about the whale allow them to confront their fear, manage it, and continue to function. Ahab, on the other hand, believes that Moby Dick is a manifestation of all that is wrong with the world, and he feels that it is his destiny to eradicate this symbolic evil.

Moby Dick also bears out interpretations not tied down to specific characters. In its inscrutable silence and mysterious habits, for example, the White Whale can be read as an allegorical representation of an unknowable God. As a profitable commodity, it fits into the scheme of white economic expansion and exploitation in the nineteenth century. As a part of the natural world, it represents the destruction of the environment by such hubristic expansion.

**3.Queequeg’s Coffin**

Queequeg’s coffin alternately symbolizes life and death. Queequeg has it built when he is seriously ill, but when he recovers, it becomes a chest to hold his belongings and an emblem of his will to live. He perpetuates the knowledge tattooed on his body by carving it onto the coffin’s lid. The coffin further comes to symbolize life, in a morbid way, when it replaces the *Pequod*’s life buoy. When the*Pequod* sinks, the coffin becomes Ishmael’s buoy, saving not only his life but the life of the narrative that he will pass on.

\*\*\*\*\*\* Moby Dick – the obsessive, epic pursuit of the great white whale by Captain Ahab. The central theme of the novel is the obsession of Captain Ahab, master of the whaler Pequod, with a great white whale that had torn off one of his legs. Ahab’s life and journey are dedicated to hunting and killing the whale, a vendetta that drives himself, his ship and crew to destruction. Moby Dick is a complex, multi – faceted novel. The narrative is at times naturalistic, at times fantastic and it is interrupted by metaphysical debates, soliloquies and long digressions on whales and the art of whaling. It is written in an extraordinary variety of styles which range from sailor’s slang to biblical parable to Shakespearean verse. Several themes can be found in the narrative: madness and monomania, the conflict between man and nature, the impossibility of escaping fate. Numerous symbolic associations have been made with the figure of the whale itself. It has variously been interpreted as the personification of evil in the world, the mirror image of Captain Ahab’s soul and the representation of the hidden and powerful forces of nature.

**THE TELL-TALE HEART – EDGAR ALLAN POE**

**Context**

Edgar Allan Poe was born on January 19, 1809, and died on October 7, 1849. He was a magazine editor, a poet, a short story writer, a critic, and a lecturer. He introduced the British horror story, or the Gothic genre, to American literature, along with the detective story, science fiction, and literary criticism. Poe became a key figure in the nineteenth-century flourishing of American letters and literature. Famed twentieth--century literary critic F.O. Matthiessen named this period **the American Renaissance**. He argued that nineteenth-century American writers Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Walt Whitman crafted a distinctly American literature that attempts to escape from the long shadow of the British literary tradition. Matthiessen paid little attention to Edgar Allan Poe. Although he long had a reputation in Europe as one of America’s most original writers, only in the latter half of the -twentieth century has Poe been viewed as a crucial contributor to the American Renaissance.

His name has since become synonymous with macabre tales like “The Tell-Tale Heart,” but Poe assumed a variety of literary personas during his career. *The Messenger*—as well as *Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine* and *Graham’s*—established Poe as one of America’s first popular literary critics.

Poe also introduced of a new form of short fiction—the detective story—in tales featuring the Parisian crime solver C. Auguste Dupin. The detective story follows naturally from Poe’s interest in puzzles, word games, and secret codes, which he loved to present and decode in the pages of the *Messenger*to dazzle his readers. The word “detective” did not exist in English at the time that Poe was writing, but the genre has become a fundamental mode of twentieth-century literature and film. Dupin and his techniques of psychological inquiry have informed countless sleuths, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes and Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe.

Gothic literature, a genre that rose with Romanticism in Britain in the late eighteenth century, explores the dark side of human experience—death, alienation, nightmares, ghosts, and haunted landscapes. Poe brought the Gothic to America. American Gothic literature dramatizes a culture plagued by poverty and slavery through characters afflicted with various forms of insanity and melancholy. In the spectrum of American literature, the Gothic remains in the shadow of the dominant genre of the American Renaissance—the Romance. Popularized by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Romantic literature, like Gothic literature, relies on haunting and mysterious narratives that blur the boundary between the real and the fantastic. In Romances like the novels of Hawthorne, conflicts occur among characters within the context of society and are resolved in accordance with society’s rules. Poe’s Gothic tales are brief flashes of chaos that flare up within lonely narrators living at the fringes of society.

**Analysis of major characters**

**1.The narrator**

Our narrator is such a wreck, it's hard not to feel sorry for him. He's nervous ("very dreadfully nervous"), paranoid, and physically and mentally ill. He doesn't know the difference between the "real" and the "unreal," and seems to be completely alone and friendless in the world. We suspect that he rarely sleeps. He's also a murderer.  
Maybe this explains why he doesn't share his name, or any other identifying characteristics. He wants us to know what he did, but not where to find him. We actually have precious little to go on in discussing his character. We have to do lots of investigation and reading between the lines to come up with possibilities.  
Before we explore some of those possibilities, we should clear up a fine point. Poe doesn't explicitly tell us if the narrator is male or female. The only reason we feel comfortable calling the narrator "he" is these lines: "You fancy me mad. Mad *men* know nothing" (3) (our italics). This isn't one hundred percent proof that the narrator is male, so it's important to consider the possibility that the narrator is female. But, for now, we are clinging to those lines to get out of having to use the awkward "he/she."

**2.The old man**

The old man is even more of a mystery than the narrator, partly because we only see him through the narrator's skewed perspective. We know he has money (the narrator shows the old man's "treasures" to the police). We also know he has a blue eye that the narrator is afraid of, and which fits the description of a [corneal ulcer](http://www.eyes-and-vision.com/corneal-ulcer.html). We know he's old, and that he's a fairly sound sleeper. According to the narrator, the old man suspects nothing because the narrator was nice to him the week before he killed him. We can't prove the old man *wasn't* suspicious, but because he leaves his bedroom door unlocked we can assume it. We know the man isn't naturally trusting – he's afraid of robbers. But, it seems he does trust the narrator enough to give him the run of the house while he sleeps. Nothing the narrator tells us about the old man fits our idea of "madness" or "insanity," but the old man does fit neatly into the narrator's definition of madness: 1) "destroyed" or "dulled" senses; 2) "Madmen know nothing" (2).  
His senses are definitely dulled – he only hears the narrator on the eighth night. He doesn't seem to have the slightest idea what's going on around him and is incapable of defending himself. Perhaps the narrator is slyly hinting that he thinks the old man is "mad." This makes us wonder if the old man was very senile, dependant on the narrator's care. Alienated - We know that at least one neighbor is suspicious of the goings on in the house of the old man and the narrator. Otherwise, he or she would not have been so quick to call the cops after hearing a little scream, and wouldn't have been able to convince the powers that be to send not one or two, but three policemen. We don't know if this suspicion is directed toward the old man or toward the narrator or both. But, it's possible that the narrator wasn't the only one afraid of the old man's eye. The old man could be an alienated figure both in and out of the home, and thus the narrator's murder of him could be symbolic of prejudices and abuses that stem from physical "difference."

**Themes**

**1. Love and Hate**

Poe explores the similarity of love and hate in many stories, especially “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “William Wilson.” Poe portrays the psychological complexity of these two supposedly opposite emotions, emphasizing the ways they enigmatically blend into each other. Poe’s psychological insight anticipates the theories of Sigmund Freud, the Austrian founder of psychoanalysis and one of the twentieth century’s most influential thinkers. Poe, like Freud, interpreted love and hate as universal emotions, thereby severed from the specific conditions of time and space.

The Gothic terror is the result of the narrator’s simultaneous love for himself and hatred of his rival. The double shows that love and hate are inseparable and suggests that they may simply be two forms of the most intense form of human emotion. The narrator loves himself, but when feelings of self-hatred arise in him, he projects that hatred onto an imaginary copy of himself. In “The Tell-Tale Heart,” the narrator confesses a love for an old man whom he then violently murders and dismembers. The narrator reveals his madness by attempting to separate the person of the old man, whom he loves, from the old man’s supposedly evil eye, which triggers the narrator’s hatred. This delusional separation enables the narrator to remain unaware of the paradox of claiming to have loved his victim.

**2.Self vs. Alter Ego**

In many of Poe’s Gothic tales, characters wage internal conflicts by creating imaginary alter egos or assuming alternate and opposite personalities.

**3.The Power of the Dead over the Living**

Poe often gives memory the power to keep the dead alive. Poe distorts this otherwise commonplace literary theme by bringing the dead literally back to life, employing memory as the trigger that reawakens the dead, who are usually women.

**Motifs**

*1.***The Masquerade**

At masquerades Poe’s characters abandon social conventions and leave themselves vulnerable to crime. In “The Cask of Amontillado,” for -example, Montresor uses the carnival’s masquerade to fool Fortunato into his own demise. The masquerade carries the traditional meanings of joy and social liberation. Reality is suspended, and people can temporarily assume another identity. Montresor exploits these sentiments to do Fortunato real harm. In “William Wilson,” the masquerade is where the narrator receives his double’s final insult. The masquerade is enchanting because guests wear a variety of exotic and grotesque costumes, but the narrator and his double don the same Spanish outfit. The double Wilson haunts the narrator by denying him the thrill of unique transformation. In a crowd full of guests in costumes, the narrator feels comfortably anonymous enough to attempt to murder his double. Lastly, in “The Masque of the Red Death,” the ultimate victory of the plague over the selfish retreat of Prince Prospero and his guests occurs during the palace’s lavish masquerade ball. The mysterious guest’s gruesome costume, which shows the bloody effects of the Red Death, mocks the larger horror of Prospero’s party in the midst of his suffering peasants. The pretense of costume allows the guest to enter the ball, and bring the guests their death in person.

**2.Animals**

In Poe’s murder stories, homicide requires animalistic element. Animals kill, they die, and animal imagery provokes and informs crimes committed between men. Animals signal the absence of human reason and morality, but sometimes humans prove less rational than their beastly counterparts. The joke behind “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” is that the Ourang-Outang did it. The savage irrationality of the crime baffles the police, who cannot conceive of a motiveless crime or fathom the brute force involved. Dupin uses his superior analytical abilities to determine that the crime couldn’t have been committed by a human. In “The Black Cat,” the murder of Pluto results from the narrator’s loss of reason and plunge into “perverseness,” reason’s inhuman antithesis. The story’s second cat behaves cunningly, leading the narrator into a more serious crime in the murder of his wife, and then betraying him to the police. The role reversal—irrational humans vs. rational animals—indicates that Poe considers murder a fundamentally animalistic, and therefore inhuman, act. In “The Tell-Tale Heart,” the murderer dehumanize his victims by likening him to animal. The narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” claims to hate and murder the old man’s “vulture eye,” which he describes as “pale blue with a film over it.” He attempts to justify his actions by implicitly comparing himself to a helpless creature threatened by a hideous scavenger. In the “Cask of Amontillado,” Montresor does the reverse, readying himself to commit the crime by equating himself with an animal. In killing Fortunato, he cites his family arms, a serpent with its fangs in the heel of a foot stepping on it, and motto, which is translated “no one harms me with impunity.” Fortunato, whose insult has spurred Montresor to revenge, becomes the man whose foot harms the snake Montresor and is punished with a lethal bite.

**Symbols**

*1.***The Whirlpool**

In “MS. Found in a Bottle,” the whirlpool symbolizes insanity. When the whirlpool transports the narrator from the peaceful South Seas to the surreal waters of the South Pole, it also symbolically transports him out of the space of scientific rationality to that of the imaginative fancy of the German moralists. The whirlpool destroys the boat and removes the narrator from a realistic realm, the second whirlpool kills him.

**2.Eyes**

In “The Tell-Tale Heart,” the narrator fixates on the idea that an old man is looking at him with the Evil Eye and transmitting a curse on him. At the same time that the narrator obsesses over the eye, he wants to separate the old man from the Evil Eye in order to spare the old man from his violent reaction to the eye. The narrator reveals his inability to recognize that the “eye” is the “I,” or identity, of the old man. The eyes symbolize the essence of human identity, which cannot be separated from the body. The eye cannot be killed without causing the man to die. Similarly, in “Ligeia,” the narrator is unable to see behind Ligeia’s dark and mysterious eyes. Because the eyes symbolize her Gothic identity, they conceal Ligeia’s mysterious knowledge, a knowledge that both guides and haunts the narrator.

**Analysis**

Poe uses his words economically in the “Tell-Tale Heart”—it is one of his shortest stories—to provide a study of paranoia and mental deterioration. Poe strips the story of excess detail as a way to heighten the murderer’s obsession with specific and unadorned entities: the old man’s eye, the heartbeat, and his own claim to sanity. Poe’s economic style and pointed language thus contribute to the narrative content, and perhaps this association of form and content truly exemplifies paranoia. Even Poe himself, like the beating heart, is complicit in the plot to catch the narrator in his evil game.

As a study in paranoia, this story illuminates the psychological contradictions that contribute to a murderous profile. For example, the narrator admits, in the first sentence, to being dreadfully nervous, yet he is unable to comprehend why he should be thought mad. He articulates his self-defense against madness in terms of heightened sensory capacity. Unlike the similarly nervous and hypersensitive Roderick Usher in “The Fall of the House of Usher,” who admits that he feels mentally unwell, the narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” views his hypersensitivity as proof of his sanity, not a symptom of madness. This special knowledge enables the narrator to tell this tale in a precise and complete manner, and he uses the stylistic tools of narration for the purposes of his own sanity plea. However, what makes this narrator mad—and most unlike Poe—is that he fails to comprehend the coupling of narrative form and content. He masters precise form, but he unwittingly lays out a tale of murder that betrays the madness he wants to deny.

Another contradiction central to the story involves the tension between the narrator’s capacities for love and hate. Poe explores here a psychological mystery—that people sometimes harm those whom they love or need in their lives. Poe examines this paradox half a century before Sigmund Freud made it a leading concept in his theories of the mind. Poe’s narrator loves the old man. He is not greedy for the old man’s wealth, nor vengeful because of any slight. The narrator thus eliminates motives that might normally inspire such a violent murder. As he proclaims his own sanity, the narrator fixates on the old man’s vulture-eye. He reduces the old man to the pale blue of his eye in obsessive fashion. He wants to separate the man from his “Evil Eye” so he can spare the man the burden of guilt that he attributes to the eye itself. The narrator fails to see that the eye is the “I” of the old man, an inherent part of his identity that cannot be isolated as the narrator perversely imagines.

The murder of the old man illustrates the extent to which the narrator separates the old man’s identity from his physical eye. The narrator sees the eye as completely separate from the man, and as a result, he is capable of murdering him while maintaining that he loves him. The narrator’s desire to eradicate the man’s eye motivates his murder, but the narrator does not acknowledge that this act will end the man’s life. By dismembering his victim, the narrator further deprives the old man of his humanity. The narrator confirms his conception of the old man’s eye as separate from the man by ending the man altogether and turning him into so many parts. That strategy turns against him when his mind imagines other parts of the old man’s body working against him.

The narrator’s newly heightened sensitivity to sound ultimately overcomes him, as he proves unwilling or unable to distinguish between real and imagined sounds. Because of his warped sense of reality, he obsesses over the low beats of the man’s heart yet shows little concern about the man’s shrieks, which are loud enough both to attract a neighbor’s attention and to draw the police to the scene of the crime. The police do not perform a traditional, judgmental role in this story. Ironically, they aren’t terrifying agents of authority or brutality. Poe’s interest is less in external forms of power than in the power that pathologies of the mind can hold over an individual. The narrator’s paranoia and guilt make it inevitable that he will give himself away. The police arrive on the scene to give him the opportunity to betray himself. The more the narrator proclaims his own cool manner, the more he cannot escape the beating of his own heart, which he mistakes for the beating of the old man’s heart. As he confesses to the crime in the final sentence, he addresses the policemen as “[v]illains,” indicating his inability to distinguish between their real identity and his own villainy.

**THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER**

**Analysis**

“The Fall of the House of Usher” possesses the quintessential -features of the Gothic tale: a haunted house, dreary landscape, mysterious sickness, and doubled personality. For all its easily identifiable Gothic elements, however, part of the terror of this story is its vagueness. We cannot say for sure where in the world or exactly when the story takes place. Instead of standard narrative markers of place and time, Poe uses traditional Gothic elements such as inclement weather and a barren landscape. We are alone with the narrator in this haunted space, and neither we nor the -narrator know why. Although he is Roderick’s most intimate boyhood friend, the narrator apparently does not know much about him—like the basic fact that Roderick has a twin sister. Poe asks us to question the reasons both for Roderick’s decision to contact the narrator in this time of need and the bizarre tenacity of narrator’s response. While Poe provides the recognizable building blocks of the Gothic tale, he contrasts this standard form with a plot that is inexplicable, sudden, and full of unexpected disruptions. The story begins without complete explanation of the narrator’s motives for arriving at the house of Usher, and this ambiguity sets the tone for a plot that continually blurs the real and the fantastic.

Poe creates a sensation of claustrophobia in this story. The narrator is mysteriously trapped by the lure of Roderick’s attraction, and he cannot escape until the house of Usher collapses completely. Characters cannot move and act freely in the house because of its structure, so it assumes a monstrous character of its own—the Gothic mastermind that controls the fate of its inhabitants. Poe, creates confusion between the living things and inanimate objects by doubling the physical house of Usher with the genetic family line of the Usher family, which he refers to as the house of Usher. Poe employs the word “house” metaphorically, but he also describes a real house. Not only does the narrator get trapped inside the mansion, but we learn also that this confinement describes the biological fate of the Usher family. The family has no enduring branches, so all genetic transmission has occurred incestuously within the domain of the house. The peasantry confuses the mansion with the family because the physical structure has effectively dictated the genetic patterns of the family.

The claustrophobia of the mansion affects the relations among characters. For example, the narrator realizes late in the game that Roderick and Madeline are twins, and this realization occurs as the two men prepare to entomb Madeline. The cramped and confined setting of the burial tomb metaphorically spreads to the features of the characters. Because the twins are so similar, they cannot develop as free individuals. Madeline is buried before she has actually died because her similarity to Roderick is like a coffin that holds her identity. Madeline also suffers from problems typical for women in -nineteenth--century literature. She invests all of her identity in her body, whereas Roderick possesses the powers of intellect. In spite of this disadvantage, Madeline possesses the power in the story, almost superhuman at times, as when she breaks out of her tomb. She thus counteracts Roderick’s weak, nervous, and immobile disposition. Some scholars have argued that Madeline does not even exist, reducing her to a shared figment Roderick’s and the narrator’s imaginations. But Madeline proves central to the symmetrical and claustrophobic logic of the tale. Madeline stifles Roderick by preventing him from seeing himself as essentially different from her. She completes this attack when she kills him at the end of the story.

Doubling spreads throughout the story. The tale highlights the Gothic feature of the doppelganger, or character double, and portrays doubling in inanimate structures and literary forms. The narrator, for example, first witnesses the mansion as a reflection in the tarn, or shallow pool, that abuts the front of the house. The mirror image in the tarn doubles the house, but upside down—an inversely symmetrical relationship that also characterizes the relationship between Roderick and Madeline.

The story features numerous allusions to other works of literature, including the poems “The Haunted Palace” and “Mad Trist” by Sir Launcelot Canning. Poe composed them himself and then fictitiously attributed them to other sources. Both poems parallel and thus predict the plot line of “The Fall of the House of Usher.” “Mad Trist,” which is about the forceful entrance of Ethelred into the dwelling of a hermit, mirrors the simultaneous escape of Madeline from her tomb. “Mad Trist” spookily crosses literary borders, as though Roderick’s obsession with these poems ushers their narratives into his own domain and brings them to life.

The crossing of borders pertains vitally to the Gothic horror of the tale. We know from Poe’s experience in the magazine industry that he was obsessed with codes and word games, and this story amplifies his obsessive interest in naming. “Usher” refers not only to the mansion and the family, but also to the act of crossing a -threshold that brings the narrator into the perverse world of Roderick and Madeline. Roderick’s letter ushers the narrator into a world he does not know, and the presence of this outsider might be the factor that destroys the house. The narrator is the lone exception to the Ushers’ fear of outsiders, a fear that accentuates the claustrophobic nature of the tale. By undermining this fear of the outside, the narrator unwittingly brings down the whole structure. A similar, though strangely playful crossing of a boundary transpires both in “Mad Trist” and during the climactic burial escape, when Madeline breaks out from death to meet her mad brother in a “tryst,” or meeting, of death. Poe thus buries, in the fictitious gravity of a medieval romance, the puns that garnered him popularity in America’s magazines.

**ANALYSIS OF MAJOR CHARACTERS**

**Roderick Usher**

As one of the two surviving members of the Usher family in “The Fall of the House of Usher,” Roderick is one of Poe’s character doubles, or doppelgangers. Roderick is intellectual and bookish, and his twin sister, Madeline, is ill and bedridden. Roderick’s inability to distinguish fantasy from reality resembles his sister’s physical weakness. Poe uses these characters to explore the philosophical mystery of the relationship between mind and body. With these twins, Poe imagines what would happen if the connection between mind and body were severed and assigned to separate people. The twin imagery and the incestuous history of the Usher line establish that Roderick is actually inseparable from his sister. Although mind and body are separated, they remain dependent on each other for survival. This interdependence causes a chain reaction when one of the elements suffers a breakdown. Madeline’s physical death coincides with the collapse of both Roderick’s sanity and the Ushers’ mansion.

**Themes**

**The central theme** of "The Fall of the House of Usher" is terror that arises from the complexity and multiplicity of forces that shape human destiny. Dreadful, horrifying events result not from a single, uncomplicated circumstance but from a collision and intermingling of manifold, complex circumstances.

**1.Mortality**

The plot of Poe's tale essentially involves a woman who dies, is buried, and rises from the grave. But did she ever die? Near the horrific finale of the tale, Usher screams: "We have put her living in the tomb!" Premature burial was something of an obsession for Poe, who featured it in many of his stories. In "[The Fall of the House of Usher](http://www.gradesaver.com/the-fall-of-the-house-of-usher)," however, it is not clear to what extent the supernatural can be said to account for the strangeness of the events in the tale. [Madeline](http://www.gradesaver.com/the-fall-of-the-house-of-usher/study-guide/character-list#madeline) may actually have died and risen like a vampire--much as Usher seems to possess vampiric qualities, arising "from a sofa on which he had been lying at full length" when the Narrator first sees him, avoiding all daylight and most food, and roaming through his crypt-like abode. But a more realistic version of events suggests that she may have been mistaken for dead--and luckily managed to escape her tomb. Either way, the line between life and death is a fine one in Poe's fiction, and Usher's study of the "sentience of all vegetable things" fits aptly with Poe's own preoccupations.

**2.Madness**

Poe writes that Usher "entered, at some length, into what he conceived to be the nature of his malady." What exactly is his "malady" we never learn. Even Usher seems uncertain, contradictory in his description: "It was, he said, a constitutional and a family evil, and one for which he despaired to find a remedy--a mere nervous affection, he immediately added, which would undoubtedly soon pass off." [The Narrator](http://www.gradesaver.com/the-fall-of-the-house-of-usher/study-guide/character-list#the-narrator) notes an "incoherence" and "inconsistency" in his old friend, but he offers little by way of scientific explanation of the condition. As a result, the line between sanity and insanity becomes blurred, which paves the way for the Narrator's own descent into madness.

**3.Fear**

If we were to try to define [Roderick Usher](http://www.gradesaver.com/the-fall-of-the-house-of-usher/study-guide/character-list#roderick-usher)'s illness precisely, we might diagnose him with acute anxiety. What seems to terrify Usher is fear itself. "To an anomalous species of terror," Poe writes, "I found him a bounden slave." Usher tries to explain to the Narrator that he dreads "the events of the future, not in themselves but in their results." He dreads the intangible and the unknowable; he fears precisely what cannot be rationally feared. Fear for no apparent reason except ambiguity itself is an important motif in Poe's tale, which after all begins with the Narrator's description of his own irrational dread: "I know not how it was--but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit." Later, Usher identifies fear itself as the thing that will kill him, suggesting that his own anxiety is what conjures up the blood-stained Madeline--or that she is simply a manifestation of his own deepest neuroses.

**4.Incest**

What binds Usher to Madeline, and what renders him terrified of her? If he conjures up her specter, arisen from the grave to bring him to his own, why does he do so? There is a clear incestuous undertone to the relationship between the brother and sister. Without spouses they live together in the great family home, each of them wasting away within the building's dark rooms. The Narrator describes the strange qualities of the Usher family--that it never has put forth "any enduring branch," that "the entire family lay in the direct line of descent." The implication is that incest is the norm for the Ushers, and that Roderick's and Madeline's strange illnesses may stem from their inbred genes.

**5.Friendship**

The Narrator arrives at the House of Usher in order to visit a friend. While the relationship between him and Roderick is never fully explained, the reader does learn that they were boyhood friends. That Usher writes to the Narrator, urging him to give him company in his time of distress, suggests the close rapport between the two men. But Poe's story is a chronicle of both distancing and identification. In other words, the Narrator seems to remove himself spiritually from Usher, terrified of his house, his illness, his appearance, but as the narrative progresses he cannot help but be drawn into Usher's twisted world. Alas, family (if not incest) trumps friendship at the end, when Usher and Madeline are reunited and the Narrator is cast off on his own into the raging storm.

**6.Burial**

There are three images of would-be "tombs" or "crypts" in "[The Fall](http://www.gradesaver.com/the-fall) of the House of Usher." The house itself is shut off from the daylight, its cavernous rooms turned into spacious vaults, in which characters who never seem entirely alive--Madeline and Usher--waste away. Second, Usher's painting is of "an immensely long and rectangular vault or tunnel," foreshadowing the third image of a tomb, the real one of Madeline's temporary burial. What Poe has constructed therefore is a kind of *mise-en-abime* (story-within-a-story)--tombs being represented within tombs. The implication, especially once the entire House of Usher sinks into a new grave below the tarn, is that the world itself is a kind of crypt.

**7.The Arts**

Despite (or because) of his madness, Usher is skilled at music and apparently is quite a painter. The Narrator compares Roderick's "phantasmagoric conceptions" to those of a real artist, Fuseli, and the Narrator seems both entranced and terrified by them. "If ever mortal painted an idea," he proposes, "that mortal was Roderick Usher." Insofar as art might be deemed a stab at immortality, the death-obsessed Usher, so certain of his own demise, strives to cling to time itself by producing works which can last beyond him. And insofar as art is a fleeting good in itself, Usher might at least claim a bit of beauty in the midst of his anxieties. Ironically, though, the one painting of his that the Narrator describes portrays a tomb, and everything is finally destroyed by the House's collapse. It would seem that his art fails Roderick Usher.

**Symbolism**

**The Fungus-Ridden Mansion**: Decline of the Usher family.      
**The Collapsing Mansion**: Fall of the Usher family.     
**The “Vacant eye-like” Windows of the Mansion**: (1) Hollow, cadaverous eyes of Roderick Usher; (2) Madeline Usher’s cataleptic gaze; (3) the vacuity of life in the Usher mansion.      
**The Tarn, a Small Lake Encircling the Mansion and Reflecting Its Image**: (1) Madeline as the twin of Roderick, reflecting his image and personality; (2) the  image of reality which Roderick and the narrator perceive; though the water of the tarn reflects details exactly, the image is upside down, leaving open the possibility that Roderick and the narrator see a false reality; (3) the desire of the Ushers to isolate themselves from the outside world.     
**The Bridge Over the Tarn**: The narrator as Roderick Usher’s only link to the outside world.        
**The name *Usher***: An usher is a doorkeeper. In this sense, Roderick Usher opens the door to a frightening world for the narrator.     
**The Storm**: The turbulent emotions experienced by the characters.

**Other themes**

**Love/ Death**

 In Poe’s stories, as in his famous poem, “The Raven,” love and death are often intertwined, with the beloved being a beautiful woman dying young, only to be obsessively sought after but found “nevermore.” Poe was traumatized by the sudden death of his own young wife, Virginia, and the sudden shocking death of a young woman became a constant motif in his work.

 Whatever affection seems to exist between Roderick and “his tenderly beloved sister” (p. 42) is not healthy but doomed. They are both hypersensitive, and because they are twins, they have “A striking similitude” and “sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature” (p. 46). It is as though they are one soul in two bodies. Roderick is stricken by Madeleine’s impending death yet inexplicably speeds it up. He predicts both their tragic deaths and then makes them happen, perhaps understanding death is imminent and unavoidable, a family curse. The family is known to have mental illness as a legacy. The other possibility is that what is between the brother and sister is sinful and painful, and that neither can bear the consequences.

 Poe makes death and decay frightening because he reveals them to be the hidden destiny of everyone and everything. The narrator gets this insight immediately on approaching the house and feeling a “depression of soul” which he compares to the opium eater coming out of his pleasant illusions to find “the bitter lapse into every-day life—the hideous dropping off of the veil” (p. 38). Death is the truth we all fear at the end of life, and love is not enough to stop it from happening. The narrator’s friendship and devotion to Roderick can do nothing to avert the tragedy. He too is drawn into complicity with death by going along with the plan to bury Madeleine.

**The Sentience of All Things**

 Having material or normally inanimate objects come alive is one of the stock motifs of gothic or horror stories. Shrieking trees, moaning or talking paintings, furniture, houses, animals, and natural locations are thus to be expected in a story like Poe’s. Poe takes this archetype further, however, and makes Roderick Usher propound a theory of the correlation of matter and spirit. Poe suggests there is a spiritual world beyond the material one, and that one influences the other. He does not mean this in a particularly positive or religious sense, but evokes the spiritual in terms of the demonic. The narrator describes the House of Usher and the black tarn that swallows it as having “no affinity with the air of heaven” but instead having a “pestilent and mystic vapor” (p. 39).

 Of particular interest is Usher’s reading of Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), the Swedish mystic, whose doctrine of correspondences helps to explain Usher’s theory about the House of Usher being sentient. Swedenborg taught there are correspondences or equivalent laws and relationships in the spiritual and physical worlds—one reflects the other. The human soul is a microcosm that precisely mirrors the macrocosm. Thus, it is not fantastic to think that the material House of Usher, the mansion, is alive and reflecting the mental or spiritual life of the Usher family.

 Roderick Usher, however, blames the house itself for producing the evil influence. Is the house evil in itself, the agent of evil, infected with evil spirits as the ballad suggests, or has it just accumulated the evil influence and fate of the family over the centuries? Poe does not say, but the story implies a unified or quantum world where spiritual forces interact with the material world in a sort of field effect. This is proven when a stranger, the narrator, enters that field and is affected with some of the same symptoms as the Usher family (depression, fear, loss of normal moral perception, distorted judgment). This theory of the unity of matter and spirit is further developed in Poe’s essay, “Eureka.”

**Hypochondria and Madness**

 Many of Poe’s stories detail the distorted thinking of a person going mad, such as in “The Black Cat,” and “The Tell-Tale Heart.” Poe, the victim of hypersensitivity, like many of his characters, is interested in mental processes, both rational and irrational. He is credited with inventing the detective story in which a brilliant mind rationally solves riddles. In another vein, his horror stories show the mind coming unbalanced.

 The Usher family has a “peculiar sensibility of temperament” that has a positive result in their artistic and philanthropic endeavors (p. 39), but which also shows itself as hypochondria, a very popular topic in nineteenth century fiction, which today might be labeled depression. Roderick is described by the narrator as incoherent and inconsistent. He engages in “a series of feeble and futile struggles to overcome an habitual trepidancy—an excessive nervous agitation” (p. 41). Perhaps he is bi-polar, as the narrator suggests: “His action was alternately vivacious and sullen” (p. 41). The narrator continually likens the atmosphere of the house and Roderick’s behavior to drunkenness or to an opium hallucination. Roderick says he has a constant terror and dread, not of anything in particular, but calls it an “agitation of the soul” (p. 41). He has “unnatural sensations,” “a morbid acuteness of the senses,” and “superstitious impressions” (p. 41). The narrator finds out about Roderick’s fears “through broken and equivocal hints” (p. 41) rather than any coherent communication. Indeed, at the end, Usher is reduced to a “gibbering murmur” as he rocks in his chair (p. 49) and makes his confession.

 The story details Usher’s descent into madness, and his complete awareness of what is happening to him. He sings and makes music from “the highest artificial excitement” (p. 43). The narrator knows that Roderick has a “full consciousness” of his “tottering” and “lofty reason” when he hears him sing “The Haunted Palace” (p. 43) about a once “Radiant palace” that loses “wit and wisdom” as it becomes taken over by “a discordant melody” (pp. 43, 44).

The reader realizes Roderick’s madness before the narrator does, when Roderick decides to bury his sister in the basement. The narrator seems convinced by Roderick’s reasons for doing such a terrible and irrational act, but then, he has been in the house for many weeks and is obviously affected. In the last scene, he is almost in as much fear as Roderick is. He is aware that his friend is mad by now.

**EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY AND MODERNISM**

**1901 – 1950**

**NORTH AMERICAN HISTORY**

**1900 – 1950**

As the 20th century dawned, the United States was poised to change the relationship with the rest of the world. Up until then it had been content to stay out of international disputes, but as its economic power grew, it saw how the colonial influence over other countries had benefited European powers and consequently began to end its historic isolationism.

The United States did not embark on a blatant (ostentativ) policy of colonization. In **1898,** the inhuman treatment of Cuban rebels at the hands of the Spanish colonists had strongly affected public opinion in America and led to **a short war with Spain** which saw the United States victorious. The United States, therefore, had become, almost overnight, a colonial power.

Following the Second World War, the United States officially took on its role as leader of the western world.

**THE ECONOMY**

While foreign policy changed, the economy continued to expand. Average incomes rose steadily, there was a fivefold (incincit) increase in exports, and the world looked on admiringly at the economic miracle of the age.

**The 1920s,** known as the **Roaring Twenties**, were years of excess end enjoyment as people put the First World War firmly behind them. The prosperity of those years, however, was to come to a sudden end in 1929 when the Stock Exchange in Wall Street collapsed. Public confidence in financial institutions vanished, and America slipped into the **Great Depression** during which millions lost their jobs while some farmers were reduced to starvation.

**SOCIETY**

Despite the great hardship of the 1930s American society continued to evolve and develop.

One of the major features of the Roaring Twenties was the freer role allowed to women. In the jazz era young women, often preferring a masculine to a feminine style of dress, danced and drank the night away in illegal drinking clubs.

These clubs were illegal because between 1920 and 1933 the sale and consumption of alcohol was prohibited, but the only lasting effect of the measure was the increased power and influence of organized crime gangs who trafficked in alcohol.

Money that could not be spent on alcohol was spent on other goods as a consumer society was born. The consumer boom only really started after 1945, but before that, the radio, telephone and fridge had become features of most American homes.

Along with the improved status of women, the changing attitude towards nonwhite Americans was a significant social development. Although racism was still widespread in 1950, the participation of two million blacks in the defence forces during the Second World War marked their conditional acceptance into mainstream American life.

Race relation would remain a major issue right up the present day, but the first tentative steps were being made towards the creation of a multicultural nation.

In 1950 this nation, thanks to its economic power and military might, had become a superpower that was ready to face and challenge the world’s other superpower, the Soviet Union.

**NORTH AMERICAN LITERATURE**

The 19th century had seen the beginnings of a Native American literature with the publication of such classics as **‘The adventures of Huckleberry Finn’** and **‘Moby Dick’** and the emergence of a national poet in the shape of Walt Whitman. In the first half of the 20th century, American writing was to move from being a peripheral adjunct to the world of English letters to being a dynamic and fully accepted branch of world literature. Writers like **Hemingway** and **Faulkner** were translated into every major language and helped put an end to America’s literary isolation at the same time as the United States was coming out of political isolation.

**FICTION**

Perhaps the greatest contribution that American writers made to the world literature was in the field of fiction. In the early years of the century, the realism of European novelists like Emile Zola was much admired, as it allowed novelists to describe graphically the dynamic, competitive and often violent nature of American life. One of the most strikingly realistic writers was **Jack London**.

When America emerged rich and strong from the First World War, and as the world watched and envied the excesses of the Roaring Twenties, a group of writers began to question the unswerving (fidel) belief in limitless progress and fabulous wealth that the United States was seen to represent. In so doing they brought to their writing a directness and clarity that have become one of the hallmarks (marca, standard) of American writing in English.

The first, in chronological order, of this group was **F. Scott Fitzgerald**, whose work is inexorably linked with the 1920s. Fitzgerald was a product of and an active participant in the carefree madness of his age but in his book he reveals the darker side of the glamour. In **‘The Great Gatsby’** the veneer of youth, beauty, wealth and success fails to cover up the moral black hole at the centre of American society.

The world of **William Faulkner** is very different from that of Fitzgerald, but a similar sense of decadence pervades his work. His decaying world is that of the Deep South, in which old established white families fall into disrepute (a se compromite) and where traditional values are slowly eroded. By using the **stream of consciousness** technique, he builds up a comprehensive picture of the intense pride and passion of the people who make up the racial cauldron of the South.

Like **Faulkner** and **Steinbeck**, **Ernest Hemingway** dealt in his work with the more primitive and elemental sides of human life. In a deceptively simple direct style he presents an almost nihilistic vision of reality in which man is constantly fighting against the forces of death. The struggle against hostile nature is the main theme in **‘Death in the afternoon’** and **‘The old man and the sea’**, while the destructive folly (absurditate) of war acts as a backdrop to personal tragedy in **‘A farewell to arms’.**

**THE ADVENTURES OF KUCKLEBERRY FINN – MARK TWAIN**

**Context**

Mark Twain was born Samuel Langhorne Clemens in the town of Florida, Missouri, in 1835. When he was four years old, his family moved to Hannibal, a town on the Mississippi River much like the towns depicted in his two most famous novels, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884).

The pen name Mark Twain, derived from the riverboat leadsmen’s signal—“By the mark, twain”—that the water was deep enough for safe passage. Life on the river also gave Twain material for several of his books, including the raft scenes of *Huckleberry Finn* and the material for his autobiographical *Life on the Mississippi* (1883).

Clemens continued to work on the river until 1861, when the Civil War exploded across America and shut down the Mississippi for travel and shipping. Although Clemens joined a Confederate cavalry division, he was no ardent Confederate, and when his division deserted en masse, he did too. He then made his way west with his brother Orion, working first as a silver miner in Nevada and then stumbling into his true calling, journalism.

Throughout the late 1860s and 1870s, Twain’s articles, stories, memoirs, and novels, characterized by an irrepressible wit and a deft ear for language and dialect, garnered him immense celebrity. As the nation prospered economically in the post–Civil War period—an era that came to be known as the Gilded Age, an epithet that Twain coined—so too did Twain.

Twain began work on *Huckleberry Finn,* a sequel to *Tom Sawyer,* in an effort to capitalize on the popularity of the earlier novel.  This new novel took on a more serious character, however, as Twain focused increasingly on the institution of slavery and the South.  In the early 1880s, however, the hopefulness of the post–Civil War years began to fade. Reconstruction, the political program designed to reintegrate the defeated South into the Union as a slavery-free region, began to fail. The harsh measures the victorious North imposed only embittered the South. Concerned about maintaining power, many Southern politicians began an effort to control and oppress the black men and women whom the war had freed. Ultimately*, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*has proved significant not only as a novel that explores the racial and moral world of its time but also, through the controversies that continue to surround it, as an artifact of those same moral and racial tensions as they have evolved to the present day.

**Analysis of major characters**

**1.Huck Finn**

From the beginning of the novel, Twain makes it clear that Huck is a boy who comes from the lowest levels of white society. His father is a drunk and a ruffian who disappears for months on end. Huck himself is dirty and frequently homeless. Although the Widow Douglas attempts to “reform” Huck, he resists her attempts and maintains his independent ways. The community has failed to protect him from his father, and though the Widow finally gives Huck some of the schooling and religious training that he had missed, he has not been indoctrinated with social values in the same way a middle-class boy like Tom Sawyer has been. Huck’s distance from mainstream society makes him skeptical of the world around him and the ideas it passes on to him.

Huck’s instinctual distrust and his experiences as he travels down the river force him to question the things society has taught him. According to the law, Jim is Miss Watson’s property, but according to Huck’s sense of logic and fairness, it seems “right” to help Jim. Huck’s natural intelligence and his willingness to think through a situation on its own merits lead him to some conclusions that are correct in their context but that would shock white society. For example, Huck discovers, when he and Jim meet a group of slave-hunters, that telling a lie is sometimes the right course of action.

Because Huck is a child, the world seems new to him. Everything he encounters is an occasion for thought. Because of his background, however, he does more than just apply the rules that he has been taught—he creates his own rules. Yet Huck is not some kind of independent moral genius. He must still struggle with some of the preconceptions about blacks that society has ingrained in him, and at the end of the novel, he shows himself all too willing to follow Tom Sawyer’s lead. But even these failures are part of what makes Huck appealing and sympathetic. He is only a boy, after all, and therefore fallible. Imperfect as he is, Huck represents what anyone is capable of becoming: a thinking, feeling human being rather than a mere cog in the machine of society.

**2.Jim**

Jim, Huck’s companion as he travels down the river, is a man of remarkable intelligence and compassion. At first glance, Jim seems to be superstitious to the point of idiocy, but a careful reading of the time that Huck and Jim spend on Jackson’s Island reveals that Jim’s superstitions conceal a deep knowledge of the natural world and represent an alternate form of “truth” or intelligence. Moreover, Jim has one of the few healthy, functioning families in the novel. Although he has been separated from his wife and children, he misses them terribly, and it is only the thought of a permanent separation from them that motivates his criminal act of running away from Miss Watson. On the river, Jim becomes a surrogate father, as well as a friend, to Huck, taking care of him without being intrusive or smothering. He cooks for the boy and shelters him from some of the worst horrors that they encounter, including the sight of Pap’s corpse, and, for a time, the news of his father’s passing.

Some readers have criticized Jim as being too passive, but it is important to remember that he remains at the mercy of every other character in this novel, including even the poor, thirteen-year-old Huck, as the letter that Huck nearly sends to Miss Watson demonstrates. Like Huck, Jim is realistic about his situation and must find ways of accomplishing his goals without incurring the wrath of those who could turn him in. In this position, he is seldom able to act boldly or speak his mind. Nonetheless, despite these restrictions and constant fear, Jim consistently acts as a noble human being and a loyal friend. In fact, Jim could be described as the only real adult in the novel, and the only one who provides a positive, respectable example for Huck to follow.

**3.Tom Sawyer**

Tom is the same age as Huck and his best friend. Whereas Huck’s birth and upbringing have left him in poverty and on the margins of society, Tom has been raised in relative comfort. As a result, his beliefs are an unfortunate combination of what he has learned from the adults around him and the fanciful notions he has gleaned from reading romance and adventure novels. Tom believes in sticking strictly to “rules,” most of which have more to do with style than with morality or anyone’s welfare. Tom is thus the perfect foil for Huck: his rigid adherence to rules and precepts contrasts with Huck’s tendency to question authority and think for himself.

Although Tom’s escapades are often funny, they also show just how disturbingly and unthinkingly cruel society can be. Tom knows all along that Miss Watson has died and that Jim is now a free man, yet he is willing to allow Jim to remain a captive while he entertains himself with fantastic escape plans. Tom’s plotting tortures not only Jim, but Aunt Sally and Uncle Silas as well. In the end, although he is just a boy like Huck and is appealing in his zest for adventure and his unconscious wittiness, Tom embodies what a young, well-to-do white man is raised to become in the society of his time: self-centered with dominion over all.

**Themes**

**1.Racism and Slavery**

Although Twain wrote *Huckleberry Finn* two decades after the Emancipation Proclamation and the end of the Civil War, America—and especially the South—was still struggling with racism and the aftereffects of slavery.

Although Twain wrote the novel after slavery was abolished, he set it several decades earlier, when slavery was still a fact of life. But even by Twain’s time, things had not necessarily gotten much better for blacks in the South. In this light, we might read Twain’s depiction of slavery as an allegorical representation of the condition of blacks in the United States even *after* the abolition of slavery. Just as slavery places the noble and moral Jim under the control of white society, no matter how degraded that white society may be, so too did the insidious racism that arose near the end of Reconstruction oppress black men for illogical and hypocritical reasons. In *Huckleberry Finn,*Twain, by exposing the hypocrisy of slavery, demonstrates how racism distorts the oppressors as much as it does those who are oppressed. The result is a world of moral confusion, in which seemingly “good” white people such as Miss Watson and Sally Phelps express no concern about the injustice of slavery or the cruelty of separating Jim from his family.

**2.Intellectual and Moral Education**

By focusing on Huck’s education, *Huckleberry Finn* fits into the tradition of the bildungsroman: a novel depicting an individual’s maturation and development. As a poor, uneducated boy, for all intents and purposes an orphan, Huck distrusts the morals and precepts of the society that treats him as an outcast and fails to protect him from abuse. This apprehension about society, and his growing relationship with Jim, lead Huck to question many of the teachings that he has received, especially regarding race and slavery. More than once, we see Huck choose to “go to hell” rather than go along with the rules and follow what he has been taught. Huck bases these decisions on his experiences, his own sense of logic, and what his developing conscience tells him. On the raft, away from civilization, Huck is especially free from society’s rules, able to make his own decisions without restriction. Through deep introspection, he comes to his own conclusions, unaffected by the accepted—and often hypocritical—rules and values of Southern culture. By the novel’s end, Huck has learned to “read” the world around him, to distinguish good, bad, right, wrong, menace, friend, and so on. His moral development is sharply contrasted to the character of Tom Sawyer, who is influenced by a bizarre mix of adventure novels and Sunday-school teachings, which he combines to justify his outrageous and potentially harmful escapades.

**3.The Hypocrisy of “Civilized” Society**

When Huck plans to head west at the end of the novel in order to escape further “sivilizing,” he is trying to avoid more than regular baths and mandatory school attendance. Throughout the novel, Twain depicts the society that surrounds Huck as little more than a collection of degraded rules and precepts that defy logic. This faulty logic appears early in the novel, when the new judge in town allows Pap to keep custody of Huck. The judge privileges Pap’s “rights” to his son as his natural father over Huck’s welfare. At the same time, this decision comments on a system that puts a white man’s rights to his “property”—his slaves—over the welfare and freedom of a black man. In implicitly comparing the plight of slaves to the plight of Huck at the hands of Pap, Twain implies that it is impossible for a society that owns slaves to be just, no matter how “civilized” that society believes and proclaims itself to be. Again and again, Huck encounters individuals who seem good—Sally Phelps, for example—but who Twain takes care to show are prejudiced slave-owners. This shaky sense of justice that Huck repeatedly encounters lies at the heart of society’s problems: terrible acts go unpunished, yet frivolous crimes, such as drunkenly shouting insults, lead to executions. Sherburn’s speech to the mob that has come to lynch him accurately summarizes the view of society Twain gives in *Huckleberry Finn*: rather than maintain collective welfare, society instead is marked by cowardice, a lack of logic, and profound selfishness.

**Motifs**

**1.Childhood**

Huck’s youth is an important factor in his moral education over the course of the novel, for we sense that only a child is open-minded enough to undergo the kind of development that Huck does. Since Huck and Tom are young, their age lends a sense of play to their actions, which excuses them in certain ways and also deepens the novel’s commentary on slavery and society. Ironically, Huck often knows better than the adults around him, even though he has lacked the guidance that a proper family and community should have offered him. Twain also frequently draws links between Huck’s youth and Jim’s status as a black man: both are vulnerable, yet Huck, because he is white, has power over Jim. And on a different level, the silliness, pure joy, and naïveté of childhood give *Huckleberry Finn* a sense of fun and humor. Though its themes are quite weighty, the novel itself feels light in tone and is an enjoyable read because of this rambunctious childhood excitement that enlivens the story.

**2.Lies and Cons**

*Huckleberry Finn* is full of malicious lies and scams, many of them coming from the duke and the dauphin. It is clear that these con men’s lies are bad, for they hurt a number of innocent people. Yet Huck himself tells a number of lies and even cons a few people, most notably the slave-hunters, to whom he makes up a story about a smallpox outbreak in order to protect Jim. As Huck realizes, it seems that telling a lie can actually be a good thing, depending on its purpose. This insight is part of Huck’s learning process, as he finds that some of the rules he has been taught contradict what seems to be “right.” At other points, the lines between a con, legitimate entertainment, and approved social structures like religion are fine indeed. In this light, lies and cons provide an effective way for Twain to highlight the moral ambiguity that runs through the novel.

**3.Superstitions and Folk Beliefs**

From the time Huck meets him on Jackson’s Island until the end of the novel, Jim spouts a wide range of superstitions and folktales. Whereas Jim initially appears foolish to believe so unwaveringly in these kinds of signs and omens, it turns out, curiously, that many of his beliefs do indeed have some basis in reality or presage events to come. Much as we do, Huck at first dismisses most of Jim’s superstitions as silly, but ultimately he comes to appreciate Jim’s deep knowledge of the world. In this sense, Jim’s superstition serves as an alternative to accepted social teachings and assumptions and provides a reminder that mainstream conventions are not always right.

**4.Parodies of Popular Romance Novels**

*Huckleberry Finn* is full of people who base their lives on romantic literary models and stereotypes of various kinds. Tom Sawyer, the most obvious example, bases his life and actions on adventure novels. The deceased Emmeline Grangerford painted weepy maidens and wrote poems about dead children in the romantic style. The Shepherdson and Grangerford families kill one another out of a bizarre, overexcited conception of family honor. These characters’ proclivities toward the romantic allow Twain a few opportunities to indulge in some fun, and indeed, the episodes that deal with this subject are among the funniest in the novel. However, there is a more substantive message beneath: that popular literature is highly stylized and therefore rarely reflects the reality of a society. Twain shows how a strict adherence to these romantic ideals is ultimately dangerous: Tom is shot, Emmeline dies, and the Shepherdsons and Grangerfords end up in a deadly clash.

**Symbols**

1.**The Mississippi River**

For Huck and Jim, the Mississippi River is the ultimate symbol of freedom. Alone on their raft, they do not have to answer to anyone. The river carries them toward freedom: for Jim, toward the free states; for Huck, away from his abusive father and the restrictive “sivilizing” of St. Petersburg. Much like the river itself, Huck and Jim are in flux, willing to change their attitudes about each other with little prompting. Despite their freedom, however, they soon find that they are not completely free from the evils and influences of the towns on the river’s banks. Even early on, the real world intrudes on the paradise of the raft: the river floods, bringing Huck and Jim into contact with criminals, wrecks, and stolen goods. Then, a thick fog causes them to miss the mouth of the Ohio River, which was to be their route to freedom.

As the novel progresses, then, the river becomes something other than the inherently benevolent place Huck originally thought it was. As Huck and Jim move further south, the duke and the dauphin invade the raft, and Huck and Jim must spend more time ashore. Though the river continues to offer a refuge from trouble, it often merely effects the exchange of one bad situation for another. Each escape exists in the larger context of a continual drift southward, toward the Deep South and entrenched slavery. In this transition from idyllic retreat to source of peril, the river mirrors the complicated state of the South. As Huck and Jim’s journey progresses, the river, which once seemed a paradise and a source of freedom, becomes merely a short-term means of escape that nonetheless pushes Huck and Jim ever further toward danger and destruction.

**THE GREAT GATSBY – FRANCIS SCOTT FITZGERALD**

**Context**

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald was born on September 24, 1896. Academic troubles and apathy plagued him throughout his time at college, and he never graduated, instead enlisting in the army in 1917, as World War I neared its end.

Many of these events from Fitzgerald’s early life appear in his most famous novel, *The Great Gatsby,* published in 1925. Like Fitzgerald, Nick Carraway is a thoughtful young man from Minnesota, educated at an Ivy League school (in Nick’s case, Yale), who moves to New York after the war. Also similar to Fitzgerald is Jay Gatsby, a sensitive young man who idolizes wealth and luxury and who falls in love with a beautiful young woman while stationed at a military camp in the South.

Having become a celebrity, Fitzgerald fell into a wild, reckless life-style of parties and decadence, while desperately trying to please Zelda by writing to earn money. Similarly, Gatsby amasses a great deal of wealth at a relatively young age, and devotes himself to acquiring possessions and throwing parties that he believes will enable him to win Daisy’s love. As the giddiness of the Roaring Twenties dissolved into the bleakness of the Great Depression, however, Zelda suffered a nervous breakdown and Fitzgerald battled alcoholism, which hampered his writing.

Fitzgerald was the most famous chronicler of 1920s America, an era that he dubbed “the Jazz Age.” Written in 1925, *The Great Gatsby* is one of the greatest literary documents of this period, in which the American economy soared, bringing unprecedented levels of prosperity to the nation. Prohibition, the ban on the sale and consumption of alcohol mandated by the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution (1919), made millionaires out of bootleggers, and an underground culture of revelry sprang up.

Like Nick in *The Great Gatsby,* Fitzgerald found this new lifestyle seductive and exciting, and, like Gatsby, he had always idolized the very rich. Now he found himself in an era in which unrestrained materialism set the tone of society, particularly in the large cities of the East. Even so, like Nick, Fitzgerald saw through the glitter of the Jazz Age to the moral emptiness and hypocrisy beneath, and part of him longed for this absent moral center. In many ways, *The Great Gatsby* represents Fitzgerald’s attempt to confront his conflicting feelings about the Jazz Age. Like Gatsby, Fitzgerald was driven by his love for a woman who symbolized everything he wanted, even as she led him toward everything he despised.

**Analysis of major characters**

**1.Jay Gatsby**

The title character of *The Great Gatsby* is a young man, around thirty years old, who rose from an impoverished childhood in rural North Dakota to become fabulously wealthy. However, he achieved this lofty goal by participating in organized crime, including distributing illegal alcohol and trading in stolen securities. From his early youth, Gatsby despised poverty and longed for wealth and sophistication—he dropped out of St. Olaf’s College after only two weeks because he could not bear the janitorial job with which he was paying his tuition. Though Gatsby has always wanted to be rich, his main motivation in acquiring his fortune was his love for Daisy Buchanan, whom he met as a young military officer in Louisville before leaving to fight in World War I in 1917. Gatsby immediately fell in love with Daisy’s aura of luxury, grace, and charm, and lied to her about his own background in order to convince her that he was good enough for her. Daisy promised to wait for him when he left for the war, but married Tom Buchanan in 1919, while Gatsby was studying at Oxford after the war in an attempt to gain an education. From that moment on, Gatsby dedicated himself to winning Daisy back, and his acquisition of millions of dollars, his purchase of a gaudy mansion on West Egg, and his lavish weekly parties are all merely means to that end.

Fitzgerald uses this technique of delayed character revelation to emphasize the theatrical quality of Gatsby’s approach to life, which is an important part of his personality. Gatsby has literally created his own character, even changing his name from James Gatz to Jay Gatsby to represent his reinvention of himself. As his relentless quest for Daisy demonstrates, Gatsby has an extraordinary ability to transform his hopes and dreams into reality; at the beginning of the novel, he appears to the reader just as he desires to appear to the world. This talent for self-invention is what gives Gatsby his quality of “greatness”: indeed, the title “*The Great Gatsby*” is reminiscent of billings for such vaudeville magicians as “The Great Houdini” and “The Great Blackstone,” suggesting that the persona of Jay Gatsby is a masterful illusion.

As the novel progresses and Fitzgerald deconstructs Gatsby’s self-presentation, Gatsby reveals himself to be an innocent, hopeful young man who stakes everything on his dreams, not realizing that his dreams are unworthy of him. Gatsby invests Daisy with an idealistic perfection that she cannot possibly attain in reality and pursues her with a passionate zeal that blinds him to her limitations. His dream of her disintegrates, revealing the corruption that wealth causes and the unworthiness of the goal, much in the way Fitzgerald sees the American dream crumbling in the 1920s, as America’s powerful optimism, vitality, and individualism become subordinated to the amoral pursuit of wealth.

**2.Nick Carraway**

If Gatsby represents one part of Fitzgerald’s personality, the flashy celebrity who pursued and glorified wealth in order to impress the woman he loved, then Nick represents another part: the quiet, reflective Midwesterner adrift in the lurid East. A young man (he turns thirty during the course of the novel) from Minnesota, Nick travels to New York in 1922 to learn the bond business. He lives in the West Egg district of Long Island, next door to Gatsby. Nick is also Daisy’s cousin, which enables him to observe and assist the resurgent love affair between Daisy and Gatsby. As a result of his relationship to these two characters, Nick is the perfect choice to narrate the novel, which functions as a personal memoir of his experiences with Gatsby in the summer of 1922.

Nick is also well suited to narrating *The Great Gatsby* because of his temperament. As he tells the reader in Chapter 1, he is tolerant, open-minded, quiet, and a good listener, and, as a result, others tend to talk to him and tell him their secrets. Gatsby, in particular, comes to trust him and treat him as a confidant. Nick generally assumes a secondary role throughout the novel, preferring to describe and comment on events rather than dominate the action. Often, however, he functions as Fitzgerald’s voice, as in his extended meditation on time and the American dream at the end of Chapter 9.

Insofar as Nick plays a role inside the narrative, he evidences a strongly mixed reaction to life on the East Coast, one that creates a powerful internal conflict that he does not resolve until the end of the book. On the one hand, Nick is attracted to the fast-paced, fun-driven lifestyle of New York. On the other hand, he finds that lifestyle grotesque and damaging. This inner conflict is symbolized throughout the book by Nick’s romantic affair with Jordan Baker. He is attracted to her vivacity and her sophistication just as he is repelled by her dishonesty and her lack of consideration for other people.

 After witnessing the unraveling of Gatsby’s dream and presiding over the appalling spectacle of Gatsby’s funeral, Nick realizes that the fast life of revelry on the East Coast is a cover for the terrifying moral emptiness that the valley of ashes symbolizes. Having gained the maturity that this insight demonstrates, he returns to Minnesota in search of a quieter life structured by more traditional moral values.

**3.Daisy Buchanan**

Partially based on Fitzgerald’s wife, Zelda, Daisy is a beautiful young woman from Louisville, Kentucky. She is Nick’s cousin and the object of Gatsby’s love. As a young debutante in Louisville, Daisy was extremely popular among the military officers stationed near her home, including Jay Gatsby. Gatsby lied about his background to Daisy, claiming to be from a wealthy family in order to convince her that he was worthy of her. Eventually, Gatsby won Daisy’s heart, and they made love before Gatsby left to fight in the war. Daisy promised to wait for Gatsby, but in 1919 she chose instead to marry Tom Buchanan, a young man from a solid, aristocratic family who could promise her a wealthy lifestyle and who had the support of her parents.

After 1919, Gatsby dedicated himself to winning Daisy back, making her the single goal of all of his dreams and the main motivation behind his acquisition of immense wealth through criminal activity. To Gatsby, Daisy represents the paragon of perfection—she has the aura of charm, wealth, sophistication, grace, and aristocracy that he longed for as a child in North Dakota and that first attracted him to her. In reality, however, Daisy falls far short of Gatsby’s ideals. She is beautiful and charming, but also fickle, shallow, bored, and sardonic. Nick characterizes her as a careless person who smashes things up and then retreats behind her money. Daisy proves her real nature when she chooses Tom over Gatsby in Chapter 7, then allows Gatsby to take the blame for killing Myrtle Wilson even though she herself was driving the car. Finally, rather than attend Gatsby’s funeral, Daisy and Tom move away, leaving no forwarding address.

Like Zelda Fitzgerald, Daisy is in love with money, ease, and material luxury. She is capable of affection (she seems genuinely fond of Nick and occasionally seems to love Gatsby sincerely), but not of sustained loyalty or care. She is indifferent even to her own infant daughter, never discussing her and treating her as an afterthought when she is introduced in Chapter 7. In Fitzgerald’s conception of America in the 1920s, Daisy represents the amoral values of the aristocratic East Egg set.

**Themes**

**1.The decline of the American dream in the 1920s**

On the surface, *The Great Gatsby* is a story of the thwarted love between a man and a woman. The main theme of the novel, however, encompasses a much larger, less romantic scope. Though all of its action takes place over a mere few months during the summer of 1922 and is set in a circumscribed geographical area in the vicinity of Long Island, New York, *The Great Gatsby* is a highly symbolic meditation on 1920s America as a whole, in particular the disintegration of the American dream in an era of unprecedented prosperity and material excess.

Fitzgerald portrays the 1920s as an era of decayed social and moral values, evidenced in its overarching cynicism, greed, and empty pursuit of pleasure. The reckless jubilance that led to decadent parties and wild jazz music—epitomized in*The Great Gatsby* by the opulent parties that Gatsby throws every Saturday night—resulted ultimately in the corruption of the American dream, as the unrestrained desire for money and pleasure surpassed more noble goals. When World War I ended in 1918, the generation of young Americans who had fought the war became intensely disillusioned, as the brutal carnage that they had just faced made the Victorian social morality of early-twentieth-century America seem like stuffy, empty hypocrisy. The dizzying rise of the stock market in the aftermath of the war led to a sudden, sustained increase in the national wealth and a newfound materialism, as people began to spend and consume at unprecedented levels. A person from any social background could, potentially, make a fortune, but the American aristocracy—families with old wealth—scorned the newly rich industrialists and speculators. Additionally, the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919, which banned the sale of alcohol, created a thriving underworld designed to satisfy the massive demand for bootleg liquor among rich and poor alike.

Fitzgerald positions the characters of *The Great Gatsby* as emblems of these social trends. Nick and Gatsby, both of whom fought in World War I, exhibit the newfound cosmopolitanism and cynicism that resulted from the war. The various social climbers and ambitious speculators who attend Gatsby’s parties evidence the greedy scramble for wealth. The clash between “old money” and “new money” manifests itself in the novel’s symbolic geography: East Egg represents the established aristocracy, West Egg the self-made rich. Meyer Wolfshiem and Gatsby’s fortune symbolize the rise of organized crime and bootlegging.

As Fitzgerald saw it (and as Nick explains in Chapter 9), the American dream was originally about discovery, individualism, and the pursuit of happiness. In the 1920s depicted in the novel, however, easy money and relaxed social values have corrupted this dream, especially on the East Coast. The main plotline of the novel reflects this assessment, as Gatsby’s dream of loving Daisy is ruined by the difference in their respective social statuses, his resorting to crime to make enough money to impress her, and the rampant materialism that characterizes her lifestyle. Additionally, places and objects in *The Great Gatsby* have meaning only because characters instill them with meaning: the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg best exemplify this idea. In Nick’s mind, the ability to create meaningful symbols constitutes a central component of the American dream, as early Americans invested their new nation with their own ideals and values.

Nick compares the green bulk of America rising from the ocean to the green light at the end of Daisy’s dock. Just as Americans have given America meaning through their dreams for their own lives, Gatsby instills Daisy with a kind of idealized perfection that she neither deserves nor possesses. Gatsby’s dream is ruined by the unworthiness of its object, just as the American dream in the 1920s is ruined by the unworthiness of its object—money and pleasure. Like 1920s Americans in general, fruitlessly seeking a bygone era in which their dreams had value, Gatsby longs to re-create a vanished past—his time in Louisville with Daisy—but is incapable of doing so. When his dream crumbles, all that is left for Gatsby to do is die; all Nick can do is move back to Minnesota, where American values have not decayed.

**2.The hollowness of the upper class**

One of the major topics explored in *The Great Gatsby* is the sociology of wealth, specifically, how the newly minted millionaires of the 1920s differ from and relate to the old aristocracy of the country’s richest families. In the novel, West Egg and its denizens represent the newly rich, while East Egg and its denizens, especially Daisy and Tom, represent the old aristocracy. Fitzgerald portrays the newly rich as being vulgar, gaudy, ostentatious, and lacking in social graces and taste. Gatsby, for example, lives in a monstrously ornate mansion, wears a pink suit, drives a Rolls-Royce, and does not pick up on subtle social signals, such as the insincerity of the Sloanes’ invitation to lunch. In contrast, the old aristocracy possesses grace, taste, subtlety, and elegance, epitomized by the Buchanans’ tasteful home and the flowing white dresses of Daisy and Jordan Baker.

What the old aristocracy possesses in taste, however, it seems to lack in heart, as the East Eggers prove themselves careless, inconsiderate bullies who are so used to money’s ability to ease their minds that they never worry about hurting others. The Buchanans exemplify this stereotype when, at the end of the novel, they simply move to a new house far away rather than condescend to attend Gatsby’s funeral. Gatsby, on the other hand, whose recent wealth derives from criminal activity, has a sincere and loyal heart, remaining outside Daisy’s window until four in the morning in Chapter 7 simply to make sure that Tom does not hurt her. Ironically, Gatsby’s good qualities (loyalty and love) lead to his death, as he takes the blame for killing Myrtle rather than letting Daisy be punished, and the Buchanans’ bad qualities (fickleness and selfishness) allow them to remove themselves from the tragedy not only physically but psychologically.

**Motifs**

**1.Geography**

Throughout the novel, places and settings epitomize the various aspects of the 1920s American society that Fitzgerald depicts. East Egg represents the old aristocracy, West Egg the newly rich, the valley of ashes the moral and social decay of America, and New York City the uninhibited, amoral quest for money and pleasure. Additionally, the East is connected to the moral decay and social cynicism of New York, while the West (including Midwestern and northern areas such as Minnesota) is connected to more traditional social values and ideals.

**2.Weather**

As in much of Shakespeare’s work, the weather in *The Great Gatsby* unfailingly matches the emotional and narrative tone of the story. Gatsby and Daisy’s reunion begins amid a pouring rain, proving awkward and melancholy; their love reawakens just as the sun begins to come out. Gatsby’s climactic confrontation with Tom occurs on the hottest day of the summer, under the scorching sun (like the fatal encounter between Mercutio and Tybalt in Romeo and Juliet). Wilson kills Gatsby on the first day of autumn, as Gatsby floats in his pool despite a palpable chill in the air—a symbolic attempt to stop time and restore his relationship with Daisy to the way it was five years before, in 1917.

**Symbols**

**1.The green light**

Situated at the end of Daisy’s East Egg dock and barely visible from Gatsby’s West Egg lawn, the green light represents Gatsby’s hopes and dreams for the future. Gatsby associates it with Daisy, and in Chapter 1 he reaches toward it in the darkness as a guiding light to lead him to his goal. Because Gatsby’s quest for Daisy is broadly associated with the American dream, the green light also symbolizes that more generalized ideal. In Chapter 9, Nick compares the green light to how America, rising out of the ocean, must have looked to early settlers of the new nation.

**2.The valley of ashes**

First introduced in Chapter 2, the valley of ashes between West Egg and New York City consists of a long stretch of desolate land created by the dumping of industrial ashes. It represents the moral and social decay that results from the uninhibited pursuit of wealth, as the rich indulge themselves with regard for nothing but their own pleasure. The valley of ashes also symbolizes the plight of the poor, like George Wilson, who live among the dirty ashes and lose their vitality as a result.

**3.The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg**

The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are a pair of fading, bespectacled eyes painted on an old advertising billboard over the valley of ashes. They may represent God staring down upon and judging American society as a moral wasteland, though the novel never makes this point explicitly. Instead, throughout the novel, Fitzgerald suggests that symbols only have meaning because characters instill them with meaning. The connection between the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg and God exists only in George Wilson’s grief-stricken mind. This lack of concrete significance contributes to the unsettling nature of the image. Thus, the eyes also come to represent the essential meaninglessness of the world and the arbitrariness of the mental process by which people invest objects with meaning. Nick explores these ideas in Chapter 8, when he imagines Gatsby’s final thoughts as a depressed consideration of the emptiness of symbols and dreams.

The 1920s was the jazz era in the big cities of the USA. It was an era of high living and all-night parties to the rhythm of the sax and trumpet. It was an era of gangsters, of prohibition and of ostentatious new-found wealth. Scott Fitzgerald was part of that world, and with his glamorous wife, Zelda, he became a pin-up personality of the time. The main character in his best-known novel, The Great Gatsby, is a man who, like his creator, climbs the ladder of social success. The foundations on which this success is built are fragile, and consequently his fall into obscurity is almost as rapid as his rise to meteoric success.

**Narrators**

In The Great Gatsby the first person-narrator is a minor character, Nick; the reader does not have direct access to the thoughts and feelings of the main character of the story – what he learns he must piece together from the information that is provided. This narrative technique can be used to create an air of mistery and tension, and to engage the reader’s attention by slowly allowing him to put together the pieces of the puzzle.

**Style**

Fitzgerald’s greatest talent as a writer was his ability to create atmosphere and characters. His rich, elegant prose style is dense in metaphors, similes and symbols, and often has the evocative beauty of poetry.

**ABSALOM, ABSALOM – WILLIAM FAULKNER**

**Context**

William Faulkner was born in New Albany, Mississippi, in September 1897; he died in Mississippi in 1962. Faulkner achieved a reputation as one of the greatest American novelists of the 20th century largely based on his series of novels about a fictional region of Mississippi called Yoknapatawpha County, centered on the fictional town of Jefferson. The greatest of these novels—among them *The Sound and the Fury,* *Light in August,* and *Absalom, Absalom!*—rank among the finest novels of world literature.

Faulkner was especially interested in moral themes relating to the ruins of the Deep South in the post-Civil War era. His prose style—which combines long, uninterrupted sentences with long strings of adjectives, frequent changes in narration, many recursive asides, and a frequent reliance on a sort of objective stream-of- consciousness technique, whereby the inner experience of a character in a scene is contrasted with the scene's outward appearance—ranks among his greatest achievements. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1949.

*Absalom, Absalom!* is perhaps Faulkner's most focused attempt to expose the moral crises which led to the destruction of the South. The story of a man hell-bent on establishing a dynasty and a story of love and hatred between races and families, it is also an exploration of how people relate to the past. Faulker tells a single story from a number of perspectives, capturing the conflict, racism, violence, and sacrifice in each character's life, and also demonstrating how the human mind reconstructs the past in the present imagination.

**Themes**

**Race**

This comes to be the central theme of the "house" of Sutpen and the "house" of the South. According to the final and most complete Sutpen legend, [Henry Sutpen](http://www.gradesaver.com/absalom-absalom/study-guide/character-list#henry-sutpen) killed [Charles Bon](http://www.gradesaver.com/absalom-absalom/study-guide/character-list#charles-bon) and brought down his father's dynasty to prevent him from marrying Judith--not because Charles was their half-brother, but because Charles had a bit of black blood. This revelation makes it clear how the values of the South have affected not only Henry Sutpen, but also the narrator of the story, [Quentin Compson](http://www.gradesaver.com/absalom-absalom/study-guide/character-list#quentin-compson). Faulkner leaves room for some ambiguity as to whether or not Charles Bon actually had black blood, thereby making it clear that the even the suggestion of black blood is enough to put someone in the South beyond the pale in a horribly destructive way. Race is a central theme in many Faulkner works, including his famed A Light in August. Faulkner recognizes that race is the central problem for the South in the post-Civil War period, and that without a healthy discussion of this topic, the South will never move forward.

**Memory**

This theme is weaved into the very structure of the book. Each character tells the Sutpen legend from his or her own memory; each character exercises selective memory. Both Miss Rosa and [Mr. Compson](http://www.gradesaver.com/absalom-absalom/study-guide/character-list#mr-compson) omit important details from their stories and the implication is that Quentin does as well. Memory plays an important role in the plotline of the book as well: [Thomas Sutpen](http://www.gradesaver.com/absalom-absalom/study-guide/character-list#thomas-sutpen)'s memories of Charles Bon stir him to follow the young man back to New Orleans and make crucial discoveries, Miss Rosa has lived her whole life obsessed by memories, and Quentin is attempting to escape his own memories by fleeing to the North, and Harvard.

**History**

The history of the South, and especially of the Civil War, forms a compelling backdrop to the book. It is intriguing, however, that Faulkner does not make a huge effort to ground the novel in the hard-and-fast dates, locations, and events that many great historical novels do. Instead, Faulkner's goal is to present an emotional history of the South that matches the strength and power of the factual history.

**"The South"**

Quentin is asked, over and over again by Northerners at Harvard, about the South. "What's it like there." When his roommate Shreve asks him to talk about the South, Quentin responds by telling him the story of the Sutpen legend as he knows it. And in telling this story, Quentin exhibits all the ambivalence, love, and hatred towards the region that most Southerners have. It is also important that Quentin tells the story of Sutpen, unknowingly, as a metaphor for the South and its post-Civil War history and memory.

**Narration**

The structure of this book is a series of different, intertwining narratives. Each narrator brings his or her own set of preoccupations, misinformed knowledge, and interests to the narrative. As a result, there are three different stories to piece together. Crucial to this theme is the role of the reader him or herself--Faulkner expects you to participate in restructuring the Sutpen legend and, through this action, understand how biased each narrative, each memory, each history, is to each individual.

**"Design"**

Sutpen's "design" rules his life and causes his downfall. The futility of directing one's life towards an idea or a "design" without emotional concern for other human beings is well-illustrated through the figure of Sutpen, who is unable to engage the people that surround him as people, rather than as objects. Sutpen's failure to achieve his design strictly based on his will is proof that the only designs that succeed in life are those that account for people as humans rather than as objects.

**Haunted House**

The original title for this book was Dark House, symbolizing both the work's Gothic roots and its depiction of the "dark house" of the South. Sutpen's haunted house on Sutpen's Hundred is a metaphor for the South and all of the sins that it is responsible for, including slavery and the repudiation of the black "sons" of the South. Just as Sutpen's haunted house fell because it failed to reconcile the black sons with the white, the South, too, fell for the same reason.

**Style**

Many readers find that Faulkner's style is the most difficult aspect of this particular novel to overcome. In fact, Faulkner's style throughout many of his novels has been a restraining hindrance for many readers.

What Faulkner attempts to do is to adjust his style to his subject matter. Therefore, to see how his style functions in this particular novel, we must review briefly his approach to his subject.

We have already seen that Faulkner does not begin his story at the beginning. Likewise, he does not use a straightforward method of relating the story. In other words, he will tell the reader a little about a certain event, and then he will drop it and later return to the event and tell the reader more and then drop it and then later return once more and tell more. During this technique of circumlocution (that is, a technique whereby the author approaches his material in circular movements rather than heading directly to the heart of the story), the reader gradually becomes aware of events, facts, motivations, and emotions.

This type of technique would fall very flat if Faulkner used a simple expository prose. Part of the thrill and excitement of the novel is that the style is therefore adapted to the subject matter and the emotions. As the subject matter is told in circular movements, so is the style involved and circular. Every sentence is almost as involved as is the entire novel; every sentence reflects the complexity of the subject matter. And every sentence reminds the reader that this story is not one that can be told with simplicity.

The complexity of the narration is another way Faulkner uses to indicate and to suggest the complexity that man (particularly Quentin) must face in arriving at the truth. Truth is not easy to discover. The Sutpen story conceals many important revelations and truths which need to be revealed. The style, then, emphasizes the difficulty which man must encounter when he seeks after the real truth.

Possibly the story is too great or too violent to be told in a straight, simple narration. If we were suddenly confronted in simple factual prose with the facts of incest, possible homosexuality, fratricide, lust, etc., we would think the story too incredible and too fantastic to believe. But with the difficulty of untangling Faulkner's complex style, suddenly the very complexity of his style makes the bizarre plot more believable.

And finally, the style reflects the way which the story actually occurred. That is to say, Sutpen appeared in Jefferson for one day; nothing was known about him for a long time. Then gradually a little information was discovered by General Compson. Then later, years later, more information was uncovered. Then the death of Bon was announced to the town, but again it was years before anyone knew all of the facts surrounding this death. Faulkner's style suggests also the way that story actually occurred, that is, from fragment to fragment.

If, then, the difficult sentences retard the reader at first, they are supposed to. It would be dangerous to go too rapidly into the story. If the sentences surround you and envelop you and entangle you in the story, this is Faulkner's method of making you become a part of the story. And before long, the reader becomes accustomed to the style and becomes, as does Shreve, one of the narrators or one of the participants. We become or we identify with the strong, pulsating rhythms of his style until we become totally emerged in Faulkner's strange but vivid world so that when we follow Henry and Bon onto the battlefield, it is not just Shreve and Quentin following them, but it is also we the readers who are also following them. Faulkner's style has served its purpose: First, it held the reader back and confused him, and then gradually it brought the reader into the story so personally that he became one of the actors or participants.

*Absalom, Absalom!* is considered to be one of Faulkner's most difficult novels because of its complex narrative structure. In a sense, the story becomes part of an oral tradition among the residents of Jefferson and, as Shreve becomes involved, people living beyond Jefferson. Many of Faulkner's characteristic structural innovations are employed in *Absalom, Absalom!,*such as long sentences, flashbacks, and multiple points of view describing the same events. Because the narrative structure is so unusual, the reader is kept off balance from the opening pages to the end of the novel and must learn how to read it as the book unfolds.

**THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA, THE SHORT HAPPY LIFE OF FRANCIS MACOMBER – ERNEST HEMINGWAY**

**1.The old man and the sea**

**Context**

Ernest Miller Hemingway was born on July 21, 1899, the second of six children, and spent his early years in Oak Park, a suburb of Chicago.  Hemingway began to hone his now-famous literary style during his years as a reporter. His editors instructed him to write short, factual sentences without too many negatives to deliver the facts in his articles. He later incorporated this writing style into his own fiction writing. Hemingway soon grew restless and left the *Star* to serve in the Red Cross, where he worked as an ambulance driver in Europe during World War I. While recovering from a knee injury in a hospital in Milan, he fell in love with a nurse named Agnes von Kurosky. Although their relationship didn’t last, he based his novel *A Farewell To Arms*(1929) on their romance.

**The iceberg theory and Hemingway’s style**

Many first-time readers read “Hills Like White Elephants” as nothing more than a casual conversation between two people waiting for a train and therefore miss the unstated dramatic tension lurking between each line. As a result, many people don’t realize that the two are actually talking about having an abortion and going their separate ways, let alone why the story was so revolutionary for its time. In accordance with his so-called Iceberg Theory, Hemingway stripped everything but the bare essentials from his stories and novels, leaving readers to sift through the remaining dialogue and bits of narrative on their own. Just as the visible tip of an iceberg hides a far greater mass of ice underneath the ocean surface, so does Hemingway’s dialogue belie the unstated tension between his characters. In fact, Hemingway firmly believed that perfect stories conveyed far more through subtext than through the actual words written on the page. The more a writer strips away, the more powerful the “iceberg,” or story, becomes.

Hemingway stripped so much from his stories that many of his contemporary critics complained that his fiction was little more than snippets of dialogue strung together. Others have called his writing overly masculine—there are no beautiful phrases or breathtaking passages, just the sheer basics. In “Hills Like White Elephants,” for example, both the American man and the girl speak in short sentences and rarely utter more than a few words at a time. Hemingway also avoids using dialogue tags, such as “he said” or “she said,” and skips any internal monologues. These elements leave the characters’ thoughts and feelings completely up to the reader’s own interpretations. Hemingway’s fans, however, have lauded his style for its simplicity, believing that fewer misleading words paint a truer picture of what lies beneath.

**Analysis of major characters**

**Santiago**

Santiago suffers terribly throughout *The Old Man and the Sea.* In the opening pages of the book, he has gone eighty-four days without catching a fish and has become the laughingstock of his small village. He then endures a long and gruelling struggle with the marlin only to see his trophy catch destroyed by sharks. Yet, the destruction enables the old man to undergo a remarkable transformation, and he wrests triumph and renewed life from his seeming defeat. After all, Santiago is an old man whose physical existence is almost over, but the reader is assured that Santiago will persist through Manolin, who, like a disciple, awaits the old man’s teachings and will make use of those lessons long after his teacher has died. Thus, Santiago manages, perhaps, the most miraculous feat of all: he finds a way to prolong his life after death.

Santiago’s commitment to sailing out farther than any fisherman has before, to where the big fish promise to be, testifies to the depth of his pride. Yet, it also shows his determination to change his luck. Later, after the sharks have destroyed his prize marlin, Santiago chastises himself for his hubris (exaggerated pride), claiming that it has ruined both the marlin and himself. True as this might be, it is only half the picture, for Santiago’s pride also enables him to achieve his most true and complete self. Furthermore, it helps him earn the deeper respect of the village fishermen and secures him the prized companionship of the boy—he knows that he will never have to endure such an epic struggle again.

Santiago’s pride is what enables him to endure, and it is perhaps endurance that matters most in Hemingway’s conception of the world—a world in which death and destruction, as part of the natural order of things, are unavoidable. Hemingway seems to believe that there are only two options: defeat or endurance until destruction; Santiago clearly chooses the latter. His stoic determination is mythic, nearly Christ-like in proportion. For three days, he holds fast to the line that links him to the fish, even though it cuts deeply into his palms, causes a crippling cramp in his left hand, and ruins his back. This physical pain allows Santiago to forge a connection with the marlin that goes beyond the literal link of the line: his bodily aches attest to the fact that he is well matched, that the fish is a worthy opponent, and that he himself, because he is able to fight so hard, is a worthy fisherman. This connectedness to the world around him eventually elevates Santiago beyond what would otherwise be his defeat. Like Christ, to whom Santiago is unashamedly compared at the end of the novella, the old man’s physical suffering leads to a more significant spiritual triumph.

**Manolin**

Manolin is present only in the beginning and at the end of *The Old Man and the Sea,* but his presence is important because Manolin’s devotion to Santiago highlights Santiago’s value as a person and as a fisherman. Manolin demonstrates his love for Santiago openly. He makes sure that the old man has food, blankets, and can rest without being bothered. Despite Hemingway’s insistence that his characters were a real old man and a real boy, Manolin’s purity and singleness of purpose elevate him to the level of a symbolic character. Manolin’s actions are not tainted by the confusion, ambivalence, or wilfulness that typify adolescence. Instead, he is a companion who feels nothing but love and devotion.

Hemingway does hint at the boy’s resentment for his father, whose wishes Manolin obeys by abandoning the old man after forty days without catching a fish. This fact helps to establish the boy as a real human being—a person with conflicted loyalties who faces difficult decisions. By the end of the book, however, the boy abandons his duty to his father, swearing that he will sail with the old man regardless of the consequences. He stands, in the novella’s final pages, as a symbol of uncompromised love and fidelity. As the old man’s apprentice, he also represents the life that will follow from death. His dedication to learning from the old man ensures that Santiago will live on.

**Themes**

**The Honor in Struggle, Defeat & Death**

From the very first paragraph, Santiago is characterized as someone struggling against defeat. He has gone eighty-four days without catching a fish—he will soon pass his own record of eighty-seven days. Almost as a reminder of Santiago’s struggle, the sail of his skiff resembles “the flag of permanent defeat.” But the old man refuses defeat at every turn: he resolves to sail out beyond the other fishermen to where the biggest fish promise to be. He lands the marlin, tying his record of eighty-seven days after a brutal three-day fight, and he continues to ward off sharks from stealing his prey, even though he knows the battle is useless.

Because Santiago is pitted against the creatures of the sea, some readers choose to view the tale as a chronicle of man’s battle *against* the natural world, but the novella is, more accurately, the story of man’s place *within* nature. Both Santiago and the marlin display qualities of pride, honor, and bravery, and both are subject to the same eternal law: they must kill or be killed. As Santiago reflects when he watches the weary warbler fly toward shore, where it will inevitably meet the hawk, the world is filled with predators, and no living thing can escape the inevitable struggle that will lead to its death. Santiago lives according to his own observation: “man is not made for defeat . . . [a] man can be destroyed but not defeated.” In Hemingway’s portrait of the world, death is inevitable, but the best men (and animals) will nonetheless refuse to give in to its power. Accordingly, man and fish will struggle to the death, just as hungry sharks will lay waste to an old man’s trophy catch.

The novel suggests that it is possible to transcend this natural law. In fact, the very inevitability of destruction creates the terms that allow a worthy man or beast to transcend it. It is precisely through the effort to battle the inevitable that a man can prove himself. Indeed, a man can prove this determination over and over through the worthiness of the opponents he chooses to face. Santiago finds the marlin worthy of a fight, just as he once found “the great negro of Cienfuegos” worthy. His admiration for these opponents brings love and respect into an equation with death, as their destruction becomes a point of honor and bravery that confirms Santiago’s heroic qualities. One might characterize the equation as the working out of the statement “Because I love you, I have to kill you.” Alternately, one might draw a parallel to the poet John Keats and his insistence that beauty can only be comprehended in the moment before death, as beauty bows to destruction. Santiago, though destroyed at the end of the novella, is never defeated. Instead, he emerges as a hero. Santiago’s struggle does not enable him to change man’s place in the world. Rather, it enables him to meet his most dignified destiny.

**Pride as the Source of Greatness & Determination**

Many parallels exist between Santiago and the classic heroes of the ancient world. In addition to exhibiting terrific strength, bravery, and moral certainty, those heroes usually possess a tragic flaw—a quality that, though admirable, leads to their eventual downfall. If pride is Santiago’s fatal flaw, he is keenly aware of it. After sharks have destroyed the marlin, the old man apologizes again and again to his worthy opponent. He has ruined them both, he concedes, by sailing beyond the usual boundaries of fishermen. Indeed, his last word on the subject comes when he asks himself the reason for his undoing and decides, “Nothing . . . I went out too far.”

While it is certainly true that Santiago’s eighty-four-day run of bad luck is an affront to his pride as a masterful fisherman, and that his attempt to bear out his skills by sailing far into the gulf waters leads to disaster, Hemingway does not condemn his protagonist for being full of pride. On the contrary, Santiago stands as proof that pride motivates men to greatness. Because the old man acknowledges that he killed the mighty marlin largely out of pride, and because his capture of the marlin leads in turn to his heroic transcendence of defeat, pride becomes the source of Santiago’s greatest strength. Without a ferocious sense of pride, that battle would never have been fought, or more likely, it would have been abandoned before the end.

Santiago’s pride also motivates his desire to transcend the destructive forces of nature. Throughout the novel, no matter how baleful his circumstances become, the old man exhibits an unflagging determination to catch the marlin and bring it to shore. When the first shark arrives, Santiago’s resolve is mentioned twice in the space of just a few paragraphs. First we are told that the old man “was full of resolution but he had little hope.” Then, sentences later, the narrator says, “He hit [the shark] without hope but with resolution.” The old man meets every challenge with the same unwavering determination: he is willing to die in order to bring in the marlin, and he is willing to die in order to battle the feeding sharks. It is this conscious decision to act, to fight, to never give up that enables Santiago to avoid defeat. Although he returns to Havana without the trophy of his long battle, he returns with the knowledge that he has acquitted himself proudly and manfully. Hemingway seems to suggest that victory is not a prerequisite for honor. Instead, glory depends upon one having the pride to see a struggle through to its end, regardless of the outcome. Even if the old man had returned with the marlin intact, his moment of glory, like the marlin’s meat, would have been short-lived. The glory and honor Santiago accrues comes not from his battle itself but from his pride and determination to fight.

**Motifs**

**Crucifixion Imagery**

In order to suggest the profundity of the old man’s sacrifice and the glory that derives from it, Hemingway purposefully likens Santiago to Christ, who, according to Christian theology, gave his life for the greater glory of humankind. Crucifixion imagery is the most noticeable way in which Hemingway creates the symbolic parallel between Santiago and Christ. When Santiago’s palms are first cut by his fishing line, the reader cannot help but think of Christ suffering his stigmata. Later, when the sharks arrive, Hemingway portrays the old man as a crucified martyr, saying that he makes a noise similar to that of a man having nails driven through his hands. Furthermore, the image of the old man struggling up the hill with his mast across his shoulders recalls Christ’s march toward Calvary. Even the position in which Santiago collapses on his bed—face down with his arms out straight and the palms of his hands up—brings to mind the image of Christ suffering on the cross. Hemingway employs these images in the final pages of the novella in order to link Santiago to Christ, who exemplified transcendence by turning loss into gain, defeat into triumph, and even death into renewed life.

**Life from Death**

Death is the unavoidable force in the novella, the one fact that no living creature can escape. But death, Hemingway suggests, is never an end in itself: in death there is always the possibility of the most vigorous life. The reader notes that as Santiago slays the marlin, not only is the old man reinvigorated by the battle, but the fish also comes alive “with his death in him.” Life, the possibility of renewal, necessarily follows on the heels of death.

Whereas the marlin’s death hints at a type of physical reanimation, death leads to life in less literal ways at other points in the novella. The book’s crucifixion imagery emphasizes the cyclical connection between life and death, as does Santiago’s battle with the marlin. His success at bringing the marlin in earns him the awed respect of the fishermen who once mocked him, and secures him the companionship of Manolin, the apprentice who will carry on Santiago’s teachings long after the old man has died.

**The Lions on the Beach**

Santiago dreams his pleasant dream of the lions at play on the beaches of Africa three times. The first time is the night before he departs on his three-day fishing expedition, the second occurs when he sleeps on the boat for a few hours in the middle of his struggle with the marlin, and the third takes place at the very end of the book. In fact, the sober promise of the triumph and regeneration with which the novella closes is supported by the final image of the lions. Because Santiago associates the lions with his youth, the dream suggests the circular nature of life. Additionally, because Santiago imagines the lions, fierce predators, playing, his dream suggests a harmony between the opposing forces—life and death, love and hate, destruction and regeneration—of nature.

**Symbols**

**The Marlin**

Magnificent and glorious, the marlin symbolizes the ideal opponent. In a world in which “everything kills everything else in some way,” Santiago feels genuinely lucky to find himself matched against a creature that brings out the best in him: his strength, courage, love, and respect.

**The Shovel-Nosed Sharks**

The shovel-nosed sharks are little more than moving appetites that thoughtlessly and gracelessly attack the marlin. As opponents of the old man, they stand in bold contrast to the marlin, which is worthy of Santiago’s effort and strength. They symbolize and embody the destructive laws of the universe and attest to the fact that those laws can be transcended only when equals fight to the death. Because they are base predators, Santiago wins no glory from battling them.

It is written on the principle of the iceberg – seven- eighths of it is underwater for every part that shows. Explores the inner consciousness of a single man as he fights against natural forces.

Some of the **motifs** present in the book are :

* Human courage
* The search for dignity amidst the harshness of the world
* The stoic hero who lives by his own code of values
* The ability to function with grace under pressure
* The images of the athlete, animals and Christ

**The themes**:

* Nature as symbolized in one form by the fish, is not a malignant force but one that is to be respected for its power
* Santiago’s noble battle can also be seen as an account of humans’ search for meaning in a harsh world
* Interconnectedness of all things in nature
* The many biblical allusions underscore the novella’s themes of suffering, redemption, hope, faith, love and endurance; Santiago is at once a sinner who has ‘gone too far out’ and Christ- like figure who bears the burden of trying to achieve the impossible and is victorious even in defeat. Like Christ he is a fisherman, he lives on charity; he lacerates his hands during his struggle; he carries his mast across his shoulders like a cross and falls down five times; he sleeps in cruciform position at the end of his ordeal. The boy Manolin keeps his faith in the old man, and is an embodiment of uncorrupted youth and hope, the figure to whom the fisherman finally passes the marlin’s spear, a symbol of heroic vitality.

**2.THE SHORT HAPPY LIFE OF FRANCIS MACOMBER**

Ernest Hemingway’s “Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” is a double statement about manhood. The story’s plot revolves around a rich thirty-five year old American’s sudden transformation from a boy to a man during an African safari. Underneath the surface, however, is a scathing criticism of the American upper class of the 1920’s and 30’s. Hemingway’s distinct style and universal theme make this story a classic.

The narrator of “The Short Happy Life”, Robert Wilson, is a gruff, tough British hunter-turned-tour guide. He is a realistic and static character whose insight, thoughtful nature and neutrality to those around him greatly aid his telling of the story. His current charges are Francis Macomber, the “very tall, very well built” realistic main character and Margot, his “extremely handsome and well-kept”, static, realistic wife (122). The two despise each other but are inseparable; Margot is too old and dependent on Francis’s wealth and Francis lacks the confidence necessary to get another woman.

Francis and Margot’s marriage completely disintegrates after Francis runs away from a lion instead of killing it on the safari; that night, Margot leaves Francis’s side to lie with Robert Wilson. Francis is enraged by Margot’s infidelity and the next day shoots three buffalo, killing one. After the encounter, he is a changed man; “Macomber felt a wild unreasonable happiness that he had never known before” and no longer fears anything (149). Wilson is surprised but pleased by the change; Margot, however, feels sickened and dreaded by her loss of power. When Macomber and Wilson hunt down and try to kill a wounded buffalo, she “accidentally” kills her husband with a pistol while shooting at the buffalo. Francis matured as a person and Margot could not handle it.

According to Hemingway, the problems between Francis and his wife never would have occurred if not for the weakness of American society. Wilson regards Francis as one of the “great American boy-men”, “damned strange people” who look and act like boys well into their fifties (150). He is even more wary about the wife, he considers American women “the hardest, the cruelest, the most predatory and the most attractive and their men have softened or gone to pieces nervously as they have hardened” (126). He finds Francis’s wife and other American women very attractive and has sexual intercourse with them frequently, but has still “seen enough of their damn terrorism” (128). Hemingway, clearly, has had enough with the wealthy of America.

Though the setting of “The Short Happy Life” is essential to the events that take place therein, man’s coming of age is one of the most popular themes of world literature. Hemingway agrees with many thinkers that a man is created through challenge and suffering; his main character’s sudden transformation through the killing of wild beasts is a different interpretation of the nature challenge and suffering. Hemingway is also unique in the different reactions of his supporting characters; Robert Wilson, a man, is pleased and intrigued by Francis’s change while Francis’s wife, Margot, is mortified. Misogyny happens to be another common theme in Hemingway stories.

Hemingway’s style is one of the most distinctive in the English-speaking world. It is brief and heavy on dialogue and descriptions of places. His vocabulary and sentence structure are both very simple. Though its originality can make it somewhat difficult to read, Hemingway’s style is lively and refreshing.

“The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” is hardly inspiring, but it is a very realistic and captivating portrayal of human nature. This is a story for people who want to learn about people; it may shatter some illusions of our greatness. Due to its depressing content, the story is hard to like, but it is definitely worthwhile and a work of art.

“The Short, Happy Life of Francis Macomber” by Ernest Hemingway is a story about both coming of age and the flaws of the upper class of his society. In this story, the author seems to make a wish for an increased pursuit of manhood in his society and decreased reliance on wealth and power. A man’s power lies within his soul, not his wallet, and Francis Macomber learns these lessons the hard way.

 "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" can be viewed thematically as the last phase of the initiation of the code hero, a phase whose echoes are heard in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" and, in one form or another, in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *The Old Man and the Sea*.  The at-first cowardly Francis Macomber and his symbolically castrating wife are being   
guided on a big-game hunt by a professional hunter and code initiate, Robert Wilson.  Macomber repeatedly shows his cowardice and is verbally chastised by his wife, who sarcastically responds to his assertiveness late in the story with the line, "You've gotten awfully brave, awfully suddenly." Ironically, Macomber has, in fact, become brave, as he demonstrates by standing his ground and firing at a charging buffalo, "shooting a touch high each time and hitting the heavy horns, splintering and chipping them like hitting a slate roof...."   Margot grabs a gun, ostensibly to get the buffalo, and shoots Macomber through the skull.   
    The literal reader will find a number of questions about this story, at the level of plot, nagging.  Why does Macomber, if he is a coward, go on a big-game hunt in the first place?  Why does he, when in the company of Wilson, allow his wife to badger him?  Of what is he actually afraid and how does he overcome his fear?  Finally, does his wife shoot him intentionally?  None of the questions is answered explicitly in the story, and yet the reader familiar with Hemingway's aesthetic theories can make good guesses at the answers.  Moreover, he knows that the unstated answers tell what the story is really about.  Macomber, although a coward, goes on a big-game hunt because of his craving to break free of the oppressive forces, represented by his wife, which bind him.  Perhaps the fear is, on one level, of castration; perhaps on another, it is a fear of being forever bound to woman, a condition which keeps his identity as a male and as an individual in eclipse.  On the deepest level, as the text of the story indicates, it is a fear of death, which because of the heroic Wilson's presence and with his guidance, Macomber overcomes.  the title of the story suggest that every moment Macomber lived in fear was not actually life at all; only in overcoming the fear of death did he escape the suffocating attachment ot Margot and actually have a life, although the life was only of a few seconds' duration.  Whether Margot shot Macomber intentionally or not makes little difference, because when the code hero embraces death, that, for him, is the end of the story.   
    With Francis Macomber the code hero finally reaches the point of full initiation toward which he has been moving since the early Nick Adams stories.  In his first form, as in "Indian Camp," the hero becomes dimly aware of the central dilemma of life:  to face his own mortality.  Once he accepts this call to adventure, he begins his pursuit of experiences which will reveal to him, at least symbolically, the truth that in life, death is always present.  It becomes the hero's task to accept it stoically.  Seeing death, calling it by various names like *nada* or nothingness, empathizing with those who are close to it like the old man in the cafe--it remains only for the code hero to grasp the thing itself.  When he does, as Francis Macomber does, embrace death without fear, the cycle is complete; the initiation is accomplished.   
    From the beginning, the dominant concern of Hemingway's short stories is with initiation; the mythic pattern of the heroic quest, whose end point is death.  His triumph, however, is the knowledge that it can be faced gracefully and with courage.  That is the boon that the Hemingway hero finally, often through his sacrificial death, gives to those with whom he is associated and to the Hemingway reader.  In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Hemingway concludes with these words:  "A writer should write what he has to say and not speak it."  Through the short story, the genre by which Hemingway learned to practice his craft, he wrote what he had to say--perhaps until he had too few things left on the surface that he did not know about and which did not go without saying.  After that, what remained for him was to embrace the thing itself in his suicide.  "But not before, in William White's words, "he had written a shelf of some of the finest prose by an American in this century."

**Themes**

**Nature**

Nature, in the form of beautiful landscapes and wholesome surroundings, is a constant presence in Hemingway’s short fiction. It is often the only thing in the text, animate or inanimate, that is described in a positive or laudatory fashion. Hemingway was a great believer in the power of nature, both in terms of its beauty and its challenges, to improve one’s quality of life. He was a lifelong outdoorsman, an avid hunter, fisherman, camper and boater, and he believed that overcoming natural obstacles using only one’s intelligence and skills made one a better person. In addition, Hemingway’s characters look to majestic landscapes and other manifestations of natural beauty for hope, inspiration, and even guidance during difficult or challenging times.

In many Hemingway stories, the ability to conquer nature by hunting and killing animals is the test of masculinity. For example, in “The Short Happy Life of [Francis Macomber](http://www.gradesaver.com/complete-short-stories-of-ernest-hemingway/study-guide/character-list#francis-macomber),” the title character comes into his own by shooting buffalo.

**Death**

Also a near-constant presence in Hemingway’s stories is the theme of death, either in the form of death itself, the knowledge of the inevitability of death, or the futility of fleeing death. Clearly evocative of death are the stories in which Hemingway describes actual deaths: the war experiences of “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” and “In Another Country;” the suicides of “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” and “Fathers and Sons;” and the accidents of “The Capital of the World” and “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber.”

Hand-in-glove with the theme of death is another Hemingway favorite: fatalistic heroism or heroic fatalism. This attitude entails facing one’s certain death with dignity. In addition, Hemingway can be seen to embrace nihilism, the belief that life is meaningless and that resistance to death is futile, in some of his stories. In short, Hemingway, critics have speculated, feared death but was fascinated by it; it crops up in one form or another in nearly every one of his stories.

**Masculinity**

Hemingway, it is often noted, was enamored of a particular notion of masculinity. Hemingway’s heroes are often outdoorsmen or hunters who are stoic, taciturn, and averse to showing emotion. Real men, according to Hemingway, are physically courageous and confident, and keep doubts and insecurities to themselves. In addition, there is always an emphasis on the necessity of proving one’s manhood rather than taking it for granted. According to the author’s biographers and critics, Hemingway was brought up with this notion of masculinity; it certainly pervades all of his works of short fiction.

In “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber,” the title character goes from emasculation to full manhood just by shooting buffalo. In “A Day’s Wait,” Schatz proves his masculinity by stoically holding his emotions in check even as he believes he is dying while his father proves his by going shooting in spite of having a sick son at home. In “Up in Michigan” Jim Gilmore displays his masculinity by going on an extended deer hunt with his buddies and in “The Capital of the World,” Paco and [Enrique](http://www.gradesaver.com/complete-short-stories-of-ernest-hemingway/study-guide/character-list#enrique) play out a make-believe bullfight in order to prove they are manly enough for the real thing. “In Another Country” describes Nick Adams’s inferiority complex with respect to three Italian soldiers who received medals for bravery; he explains that received his simply for being an American. “The Killers” describes Nick’s heroic physical courage in defying hit men to warn their target, and “Fathers and Sons” describes Nick’s coming of age in terms of hunting and killing black squirrels.

**Animals as Symbols**

Animals in the Hemingway canon, whether they are game, pets, or wild, sometimes serve as symbols for their human hunters, caretakers or observers. In “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” the frozen leopard on the top of the mountain represents immortality, which is the quality Harry strives for even as he is dying. The hyena in that story, conversely, represents Harry’s impending death. In “Old Man at the Bridge,” Hemingway switches the word “pigeons,” a reference to the old man’s eight pet birds, for the word “doves,” a symbol of peace in the midst of the Spanish Civil War. In “Hills Like White Elephants,” the “white elephant” of the title is Jig’s unborn baby, a cumbersome, largely useless thing that is on the brink of driving the relationship apart. In “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber,” the wounded lion that Francis shoots and then runs away from represents the obstacle to his proving his masculinity; though not cowardly itself, it represents Macomber’s cowardice.

**THE CONTEMPORARY AGE**

**NORTH AMERICAN HISTORY**

**1950 – THE PRESENT**

As it left the Second World War behind, the Unites States set its sights on forgetting the misery and depression that had taken root for over a decade following the economic collapse of 1929. While Europe was slowly reconstructed in the late 1940s and ‘50s with the help of American investments, the United States began to take on its role as leader of the Western world. In foreign affairs it emerged as the main opponent of Soviet and Chinese –inspired communism and at home it became a laboratory for new social and lifestyle trends that would be copied all over the western world and beyond.

In the 1950s the United States saw a marked increase in the birth rate and the children born during this baby grew into a generation that profoundly changed the nature of American society.

The first winds of change were felt during the 1960s as young people started to rebel against the values and traditions of previous generations. Both the term ‘teenager’ and ‘generation gap’ were coined in these years to describe the rebellion of youth which made its voice heard in many fields.

Women won the right to control birth through the use of artificial contraception and in 1973 abortion was legalised for the first time. The feminist movement continued to promote women’s welfare and made great strides in obtaining equal opportunities for women in all walks of life,

Of similar if not even greater impact on American life was the Civil Rights Movement which demanded equal rights for black Americans and subsequently all non-whites.

The two major political parties, the Republicans and the Democrats, regularly alternated periods in power without greatly upsetting or changing general social and economic trends. Meanwhile, the United States consolidated its position as the most powerful economy in the world and continues to dominate world trade.

As the United States enters the new millennium, it holds a pre-eminent position in the world. The small cluster of north-eastern colonies, that gave birth to a new state in the 18th century, has grown and expanded to become the most powerful country on earth both militarily and economically. It has become a multiethnic nation in which people of all races and religions live and to which the rest of the world looks as a major partner in plotting the future of humanity.

**NORTH AMERICAN LITERATURE**

On a general cultural level America has had and continues to have enormous influence on Britain. America has also led the way in certain artistic fields. Of undoubted significance was the emergence of Pop Art in the 1960s as championed by Andy Warhol, who used the styles and themes of popular culture to create a new form of visual expression.

**FICTION**

In the world of English letters America also continued to be a major protagonist. This was particularly true in the field of fiction, as writers from different ethnic and social backgrounds produced novel that reflected the complex and varied structure of American society.

The late 1950s and 1960s witnessed a sociological revolution that had profound repercussions in literary circles. The philosophy of ‘make love, not war’, the acceptance of the use of recreational drugs and a hostile attitude to any form of authority were the hallmarks of the **Best Generation**.

**THE CRYING OF LOT 49 – THOMAS PYNCHON**

**Context**

Thomas Pynchon was born on Long Island, New York, in 1937. He served in the navy and graduated from Cornell, after which he worked as a technical writer for Boeing Aircraft. During this time, he turned to fiction writing and published his first novel, *V.,* in 1963, to rave reviews. He followed up this novel two years later with *The Crying of Lot 49,* a short but extremely complex novel. In a sense, *The Crying of Lot 49* was a type of dress rehearsal for his long novel that succeeded it, *Gravity's Rainbow,* which won the National Book Award and is perhaps the best-known long novel to emerge after World War II. Pynchon's fourth major novel was called *Vineland,* and two years ago, he published his historical novel *Mason and Dixon.* Through all of these books, with his use of surrealism and creation of vast, varied, and incredible conspiracy theories, Pynchon has remained one of the most original and important of American novelists.

Almost all works by Pynchon are deliberately complex. The plots are often difficult to follow both because of their intricate twists and turns and their sometimes incredibly esoteric subject matter. Pynchon's characters, furthermore, can be hard to relate to. Pynchon has a tendency to fill his novels not with real characters but rather with facades or brief cameo figures that exist in the novel only for some specific purpose, after which they disappear. Indeed, *Gravity's Rainbow* has over 400 of these types of characters. In *The Crying of Lot 49,* examples of such characters are Manny di Presso and Jesus Arrabel.

*The Crying of Lot 49* is thought by many to be Pynchon's best work. Others surely disagree, arguing that *The Crying of Lot 49* is simply Pynchon's most accessible work, its short length and streamlined (for Pynchon) plot allowing the reader to follow along with less work than his longer novels require. But no matter where *The Crying of Lot 49* stands within Pynchon's body of work, there is no doubt that in its humor, story, and deep insight into American culture and beyond, the book is an American landmark.

**Analysis**

*The Crying of Lot 49* was written in the 1960s, one of the most politically and socially turbulent decades in U.S. history. The decade saw the rise of the drug culture, the Vietnam War, the rock revolution, as well as the birth of numerous social welfare programs after the Democrats swept Congress in the 1964 elections. This was also the decade of John F. Kennedy's assassination, Martin Luther King's assassination, Civil Rights, and, to some extent, women's rights. The novel taps into this explosion of cultural occurrences, depicting a dramatically fragmented society. *The Crying of Lot 49* contains a pervasive sense of cultural chaos; indeed, the book draws on all areas of culture and society, including many of those mentioned above. In the end, the novel's protagonist, Oedipa Maas, finds herself alone and alienated from that society, having lost touch with the life she used to lead before she began her attempt to uncover the mystery of the Tristero. The drug culture plays a big part in this sense of isolation. The world around Oedipa seems to be a world perpetually on drugs, manic and full of conspiracies and illusions. And though that world is exciting and new, it is also dangerous: drugs contribute to the destruction of Oedipa's marriage, and drugs cause Hilarius to go insane. Oedipa hallucinates so often that she seems to be constantly high, and ultimately, this brings her nothing but a sense of chaotic alienation.

Many of the problems with chaos found in the novel are tied in to the idea of communication. The major symbol of order in the novel, Maxwell's Demon, cannot be operated because it requires a certain unattainable level of communication. Letters in the novel, which should be clear and direct forms of stable communication, are ultimately meaningless. The novel also contains a mail-delivery group that requires its members to mail a letter once a week even if they have nothing to say. Indeed, the letter Oedipa receives in chapter one may itself be meaningless, since it is the first step in what may be nothing more than a big joke played on Oedipa. The religious moment Oedipa experiences in chapter two seems for a moment to promise the possibility of some kind of communication being communicated, but the process breaks down. Religion, language, science, all of the purveyors of communication, and through that communication a sense of wholeness, do not correctly function in the novel.

Related to the theme of the problem of communication is the novel's representation of the way in which people impose interpretation on the meaningless. It is very telling that Oedipa wants to turn the mystery of the Tristero into a "constellation," which is not really an example of true order. Solar systems are simply mankind's way of imposing an artificial but pleasing order on the randomness of outer space. It is, furthermore, an imposition of a two-dimensional structure onto a three-dimensional reality. Oedipa's quest to construct a constellation seems to indicate that she is only looking for a superficial system. Indeed, she never succeeds in figuring out the meaning behind the Tristero, and, further, the novel ends with the very strong likelihood that the mystery may hold no mystery at all. And just as she is unable to piece together the puzzle of the Tristero, she is similarly unable to refashion her life after it begins to fall apart. Even the United States government, which tries to impose an order on the world of mail delivery, cannot prevent side groups from springing up to undermine its work.

There are two concepts underlying all this: puns and science. The novel is full of puns and language games of all sorts. For instance, the odd names of the novel's characters are a type of play on different words and their symbolic baggage. Another example is the concept of the word "lot" in the title, which actually occurs several times in the book but does not relate to anything in the story until the last few pages. Also, we see that Mucho's radio station spells "fuck" when read in reverse, forming another little language game that does not have necessarily any inherent meaning but does indicate an interest in manipulating language for intellectual enjoyment. Language is the means through which the story is communicated, and Pynchon has chosen to use a language full of jokes, puns, and satires. Science seems to stand in opposition to the chaos of language that all of Pynchon's manipulation suggests. Science is ordered and coherent and offers a body of definite knowledge that all can study. And yet, even the coherence of science is undermined in the existence of Maxwell's Demon and the figure of Dr. Hilarius. Though pure science may offer coherence, the uses to which that science is put, the interpretations imposed on that science, can scatter that coherence to the wind.

More than anything else, *The Crying of Lot 49* appears to be about cultural chaos and communication as seen through the eyes of a young woman who finds herself in a hallucinogenic world disintegrating around her.

**Themes**

**Entropy**

The process of entropy leads to the inevitable progression of a closed system to patterned, chaotic sameness. In thematic terms, entropy represents Pynchon's concern with our culture's movement toward intellectual inertia. In Maxwell's Demon, Nefastis created a machine which works directly with Pynchon's theme of entropy. The sorting inherent in the machine would actually preserve a world able to remain heterogeneous. By dividing the two types of molecules into different compartments so that heat is created and maintained, the molecules do not have a chance to share properties until an equilibrium is reached. As Grant comments, "ŒSorting,' therefore, becomes an absolutely central metaphor, and the fact that Oedipa singles this concept out for objection is an indication of her intuitive grasp of her own predicament." The closed system will move toward entropy in the same manner that the entire universal system will, both existentially and rationally. In tune with the allusions to Narcissus, the world is contained within itself and has become an egotistical system moving toward a chaotic sense of orderlessness.

**Post-modernist examination of textual versus metaphorical literary significance**

The majority of recent critics, such as Tanner, seem to believe that Pynchon's many allusions are partially red herrings. They are an attempt by Pynchon to lead the reader into drawing the easy references and falling into the traps readers so often do when they reach for allusions in order to find significance. Pynchon is possibly leading the reader into assumptions which they are all too likely to make so that they realize the error as they proceed within the postmodern novel which espouses a theme of non-categorization and structuralism. We are taken on her journey because the search for self and meaning and connection is insatiable, even when it is being parodied as is often the case with Pynchon. Is the search of meaning and analysis then a fruitless attempt to grant significance to an increasingly grey ash type of modern society or is the only escape in a system which is decreasingly transmitting communication to forge new, alternate means of informing and differentiating human beings?

**Excluded middles: the grey ash / what has been thrown away as valuable**

The entire idea of waste is concurrent with Pynchon's theme of excluded middles, in this sense, where the grey ash of life is often tossed away in order to hold onto the overly extreme binaries. A consumer society disposes and dispossesses more of life than it keeps. Often more questions are raised then answered and for every binary presented, an inversion of the duality is also usually suggested. One of the most common terms thrown around in literary criticism concerning Crying is the "excluded middle." The progression toward dichotomy is also a progression toward the questioning of what lies between the two extremes. The grey area is very significant, while also asking the reader if it is significant only because the human being cannot be satisfied without an attempt at pointing significance. Largely, though, it points to the waste, the disinherited of society, as symbolized by the amount of underground networks who have felt unrepresented by the official postal system. These are the people, the lives, the core of humanity disregarded and dispossessed. [Mucho Maas](http://www.gradesaver.com/the-crying-of-lot-49/study-guide/character-list#mucho-maas) is haunted by nightmares of these grey ash leftovers of humanity and so, in its way, is the entire novel.

**Man versus modernity/consumerism/consumption**

At the start of the novel, Oedipa is not working. She attends a Tupperware gathering, a clear symbol of mid-twentieth century American housewifery. As some critics have noted, the fact that the host of the party had likely put too much kirsch in the fondue shows that the party signifies superficial consumership in material America more than any type of sincere communal bonding as the hostess felt the need to get her attendees drunk in order to entertain them. Oedipa's search for information and cohesion within the world at large is symbolized by her entrapment by commercial society. Parallels have been constructed between the green bubble glasses that Oedipa wears when crying as she views the painting in Mexico City and the lone green eye that is a metaphor for the television screen. Furthermore, expanding the theme of disillusioning modern commercialism, Oedipa notes that in her vision, Pierce only reaches the top of her tower when he uses a credit card to shimmy his way up. In the mass consumer society in which Oedipa lives, the individual is in dire need of revelation, another term which is used often by Pynchon.

**SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE – KURT VONNEGUT**

**Context**

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. was born in Indianapolis in 1922, a descendant of prominent German-American families. His father was an architect and his mother was a noted beauty. Both spoke German fluently but declined to teach Kurt the language in light of widespread anti-German sentiment following World War I. Family money helped send Vonnegut’s two siblings to private schools. The Great Depression hit hard in the 1930s, though, and the family placed Kurt in public school while it moved to more modest accommodations. While in high school, Vonnegut edited the school’s daily newspaper. He attended college at Cornell for a little over two years, with instructions from his father and brother to study chemistry, a  subject at which he did not excel. He also wrote for the *Cornell Daily Sun.* In 1943 he enlisted in the U.S.Army. In 1944 his mother committed suicide, and Vonnegut was taken prisoner following the Battle of the Bulge, in the Ardennes Forest of Belgium.

After the war, Vonnegut married and entered a master’s degree program in anthropology at the University of Chicago. He also worked as a reporter for the Chicago City News Bureau. His master’s thesis, titled *Fluctuations Between Good and Evil in Simple Tales,* was rejected. He departed for Schenectady, New York, to take a job in public relations at a General Electric research laboratory.

Vonnegut left GE in 1951 to devote himself full-time to writing. During the 1950s, Vonnegut published short stories in national magazines. *Player Piano,* his first novel, appeared in 1952. *Sirens of Titan* was published in 1959, followed by *Mother Night* (1962), *Cat’s Cradle* (1963), *God Bless You, Mr. Rose-water* (1965), and his most highly praised work, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). Vonnegut wrote prolifically until his death in 2007.

*Slaughterhouse-Five* treats one of the most horrific massacres in European history—the World War II firebombing of Dresden, a city in eastern Germany, on February 13, 1945—with mock-serious humor and clear antiwar sentiment. More than 130,000 civilians died in Dresden, roughly the same number of deaths that resulted from the Allied bombing raids on Tokyo and from the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, both of which also occurred in 1945. Inhabitants of Dresden were incinerated or suffocated in a matter of hours as a firestorm sucked up and consumed available oxygen. The scene on the ground was one of unimaginable destruction.

The novel is based on Kurt Vonnegut’s own experience in World War II. In the novel, a prisoner of war witnesses and survives the Allied forces’ firebombing of Dresden. Vonnegut, like his protagonist Billy Pilgrim, emerged from a meat locker beneath a slaughter-house into the moonscape of burned-out Dresden. His surviving captors put him to work finding, burying, and burning bodies. His task continued until the Russians came and the war ended. Vonnegut survived by chance, confined as a prisoner of war (POW) in a well-insulated meat locker, and so missed the cataclysmic moment of attack, emerging the day after into the charred ruins of a once-beautiful cityscape. Vonnegut has said that he always intended to write about the experience but found himself incapable of doing so for more than twenty years. Although he attempted to describe in simple terms what happened and to create a linear narrative, this strategy never worked for him. Billy Pilgrim’s unhinged time—shifting, a mechanism for dealing with the unfathomable aggression and mass destruction he witnesses, is Vonnegut’s solution to the problem of telling an untellable tale.

Vonnegut wrote *Slaughterhouse-Five* as a response to war. “It is so short and jumbled and jangled,” he explains in Chapter 1, “because there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre.” The jumbled structure of the novel and the long delay between its conception and completion serve as testaments to a very personal struggle with heart-wrenching material. But the timing of the novel’s publication also deserves notice: in 1969, the United States was in the midst of the dismal Vietnam War. Vonnegut was an outspoken pacifist and critic of the conflict. *Slaughterhouse-Five* revolves around the wilful incineration of 100,000 civilians, in a city of extremely dubious military significance, during an arguably just war. Appearing when it did, then, *Slaughterhouse-Five* made a forceful statement about the campaign in Vietnam, a war in which incendiary technology was once more being employed against non-military targets in the name of a dubious cause.

**Analysis of major characters**

**Billy Pilgrim**

Billy Pilgrim is the unlikeliest of antiwar heroes. An unpopular and complacent weakling even before the war (he prefers sinking to swimming), he becomes a joke as a soldier. He trains as a chaplain’s assistant, a duty that earns him disgust from his peers. With scant preparation for armed conflict, no weapons, and even an improper uniform, he is thrust abruptly into duty at the Battle of the Bulge. The farcical spectacle created by Billy’s inappropriate clothing accentuates the absurdity of such a scrawny, mild-mannered soldier. His azure toga, a leftover scrap of stage curtain, and his fur-lined overcoat, several sizes too small, throw his incongruity into relief. They underscore a central irony: such a creature could walk through war, oblivious yet unscathed, while so many others with more appropriate attire and provisions perish. It is in this shocked and physically exhausted state that Billy first comes “unstuck in time” and begins swinging to and fro through the events of his life, past and future.

Billy lives a life full of indignity and so, perhaps, has no great fear of death. He is oddly suited, therefore, to the Tralfamadorian philosophy of accepting death. This fact may point to an interpretation of the Tralfamadorians as a figment of Billy’s disturbed mind, an elaborate coping mechanism to explain the meaningless slaughter Billy has witnessed. By uttering “So it goes” after each death, the narrator, like Billy, does not diminish the gravity of death but rather lends an equalizing dignity to all death, no matter how random or ironic, how immediate or removed. Billy’s father dies in a hunting accident just as Billy is about to go off to war. So it goes. A former hobo dies in Billy’s railway car while declaring the conditions not bad at all. So it goes. One hundred thirty thousand innocent people die in Dresden. So it goes. Valencia Pilgrim accidentally kills herself with carbon monoxide after turning bright blue. So it goes. Billy Pilgrim is killed by an assassin’s bullet at exactly the time he has predicted, in the realization of a thirty-some-year-old death threat. So it goes. Billy awaits death calmly, without fear, knowing the exact hour at which it will come. In so doing, he gains a degree of control over his own dignity that he has lacked throughout most of his life.

The novel centers on Billy Pilgrim to a degree that excludes the development of the supporting characters, who exist in the text only as they relate to Billy’s experience of events.

**Themes**

**The Destructiveness of War**

Whether we read *Slaughterhouse-Five* as a science-fiction novel or a quasi-autobiographical moral statement, we cannot ignore the destructive properties of war, since the catastrophic firebombing of the German town of Dresden during World War II situates all of the other seemingly random events. From his swimming lessons at the YMCA to his speeches at the Lions Club to his captivity in Tralfamadore, Billy Pilgrim shifts in and out of the meat locker in Dresden, where he very narrowly survives asphyxiation and incineration in a city where fire is raining from the sky.

However, the not-so-subtle destructiveness of the war is evoked in subtle ways. For instance, Billy is quite successful in his postwar exploits from a materialistic point of view: he is president of the Lions Club, works as a prosperous optometrist, lives in a thoroughly comfortable modern home, and has fathered two children. While Billy seems to have led a productive postwar life, these seeming markers of success speak only to its surface. He gets his job not because of any particular prowess but as a result of his father-in-law’s efforts. More important, at one point in the novel, Billy walks in on his son and realizes that they are unfamiliar with each other. Beneath the splendor of his success lies a man too war-torn to understand it. In fact, Billy’s name, a diminutive form of William, indicates that he is more an immature boy than a man.

Vonnegut, then, injects the science-fiction thread, including the Tralfamadorians, to indicate how greatly the war has disrupted Billy’s existence. It seems that Billy may be hallucinating about his experiences with the Tralfamadorians as a way to escape a world destroyed by war—a world that he cannot understand. Furthermore, the Tralfamadorian theory of the fourth dimension seems too convenient a device to be more than just a way for Billy to rationalize all the death with he has seen face-to-face. Billy, then, is a traumatized man who cannot come to terms with the destructiveness of war without invoking a far-fetched and impossible theory to which he can shape the world.

**The Illusion of Free Will**

In *Slaughterhouse-Five,* Vonnegut utilizes the Tralfamadorians, with their absurdly humorous toilet-plunger shape, to discuss the philosophical question of whether free will exists. These aliens live with the knowledge of the fourth dimension, which, they say, contains all moments of time occurring and reoccurring endlessly and simultaneously. Because they believe that all moments of time have already happened (since all moments repeat themselves endlessly), they possess an attitude of acceptance about their fates, figuring that they are powerless to change them. Only on Earth, according to the Tralfamadorians, is there talk of free will, since humans, they claim, mistakenly think of time as a linear progression.

Throughout his life, Billy runs up against forces that counter his free will. When Billy is a child, his father lets him sink into the deep end of a pool in order to teach him how to swim. Much to his father’s dismay, however, Billy prefers the bottom of the pool, but, against his free will to stay there, he is rescued. Later, Billy is drafted into the war against his will. Even as a soldier, Billy is a joke, lacking training, supplies, and proper clothing. He bobs along like a puppet in Luxembourg, his civilian shoes flapping on his feet, and marches through the streets of Dresden draped in the remains of the scenery from a production of *Cinderella.*

Even while Vonnegut admits the inevitability of death, with or without war, he also tells us that he has instructed his sons not to participate in massacres or in the manufacture of machinery used to carry them out. But acting as if free will exists does not mean that it actually does. As Billy learns to accept the Tralfamadorian teachings, we see how his actions indicate the futility of free will. Even if Billy were to train hard, wear the proper uniform, and be a good soldier, he might still die like the others in Dresden who are much better soldiers than he. That he survives the incident as an improperly trained joke of a soldier is a testament to the deterministic forces that render free will and human effort an illusion.

**The Importance of Sight**

True sight is an important concept that is difficult to define for *Slaughterhouse-Five.*As an optometrist in Ilium, Billy has the professional duty of correcting the vision of his patients. If we extend the idea of seeing beyond the literal scope of Billy’s profession, we can see that Vonnegut sets Billy up with several different lenses with which to correct the world’s nearsightedness. One of the ways Billy can contribute to this true sight is through his knowledge of the fourth dimension, which he gains from the aliens at Tralfamadore. He believes in the Tralfamadorians’ view of time—that all moments of time exist simultaneously and repeat themselves endlessly. He thus believes that he knows what will happen in the future (because everything has already happened and will continue to happen in the same way).

One can also argue, however, that Billy lacks sight completely. He goes to war, witnesses horrific events, and becomes mentally unstable as a result. He has a shaky grip on reality and at random moments experiences overpowering flashbacks to other parts of his life. His sense that aliens have captured him and kept him in a zoo before sending him back to Earth may be the product of an overactive imagination. Given all that Billy has been through, it is logical to believe that he has gone insane, and it makes sense to interpret these bizarre alien encounters as hallucinatory incidents triggered by mundane events that somehow create an association with past traumas. Looking at Billy this way, we can see him as someone who has lost true sight and lives in a cloud of hallucinations and self-doubt. Such a view creates the irony that one employed to correct the myopic view of others is actually himself quite blind.

**Motifs**

**“So It Goes”**

The phrase “So it goes” follows every mention of death in the novel, equalizing all of them, whether they are natural, accidental, or intentional, and whether they occur on a massive scale or on a very personal one. The phrase reflects a kind of comfort in the Tralfamadorian idea that although a person may be dead in a particular moment, he or she is alive in all the other moments of his or her life, which coexist and can be visited over and over through time travel. At the same time, though, the repetition of the phrase keeps a tally of the cumulative force of death throughout the novel, thus pointing out the tragic inevitability of death.

**The Presence of the Narrator as a Character**

Vonnegut frames his novel with chapters in which he speaks in his own voice about his experience of war. This decision indicates that the fiction has an intimate connection with Vonnegut’s life and convictions. Once that connection is established, however, Vonnegut backs off and lets the story of Billy Pilgrim take over. Throughout the book, Vonnegut briefly inserts himself as a character in the action: in the latrine at the POW camp, in the corpse mines of Dresden, on the phone when he mistakenly dials Billy’s number. These appearances anchor Billy’s life to a larger reality and highlight his struggle to fit into the human world.

**Symbols**

**The Bird Who Says “Poo-tee-weet?”**

The jabbering bird symbolizes the lack of anything intelligent to say about war. Birdsong rings out alone in the silence after a massacre, and “*Poo-tee-weet?*” seems about as appropriate a thing to say as any, since no words can really describe the horror of the Dresden firebombing. The bird sings outside of Billy’s hospital window and again in the last line of the book, asking a question for which we have no answer, just as we have no answer for how such an atrocity as the firebombing could happen.

**The Colors Blue and Ivory**

On various occasions in *Slaughterhouse-Five,* Billy’s bare feet are described as being blue and ivory, as when Billy writes a letter in his basement in the cold and when he waits for the flying saucer to kidnap him. These cold, corpselike hues suggest the fragility of the thin membrane between life and death, between worldly and otherworldly experience.