



**UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT**

**SCHOOL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

**STUDY MATERIALS**

**M. A. (Final)  
ENGLISH**

***Additional Lessons***

**PAPER IX – EUROPEAN FICTION**

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## UNIT I

## 1. ZORBA THE GREEK

## 1. Objectives

At the end of this *Unit*, you should be able to:

- (i) become familiar with modern Greek fictional literature:
- (ii) have an idea of Nikos Kazantzakis: and
- (iii) appreciate his novel *Zorba the Greek*.

Let us begin with a brief survey of modern Greek fiction.

## 1.1 Modern Greek literature (fiction)- a brief introduction

The literature of modern Greece consists almost entirely of poetry. There is no major prose writer. To an educated Greek, poetry is a natural response to experience. However few novelists adorn modern Greek literature; one of them is Nikos Kazantzakis. Let us study something about him.

## 1.2 Nikos Kazantzakis: Life and Achievements

*Nikos Kazantzakis* (1883-1957) was a Greek novelist, poet, dramatist and traveller. He was born at Herakleion in Crete. He was educated there and in Naxos. Later he studied at Athens (1902-06) and Paris (1907-09). He grew up amidst the bloody uprisings of the Cretans against Ottoman rule and for a time, his family moved to the island of Naxos where he attended a French school run by Catholic friars. He later studied law at Athens. His first writings included numerous philosophical and literary essays, and translations of foreign works, mostly French and German. He wrote plays travel books, poems and several novels. A restless man with an insatiable curiosity and avidity for experience, he travelled widely and incessantly in Europe, Asia and the Far East. His travel books, characterised by a romantic and intuitive grasp of people and landscapes, are notable. The philosophers BERGSON and NIETZSCHE were early influences, and religious problems always held a fascination for him. His intellectual explorations were equally wide: besides Bergson and Nietzsche they include Darwin, Dante (whose *Divine*

*Comedy* he translated very sensitively into Greek), Cervantes, Homer, Karl Marx, Lenin, Christianity, Buddhism etc.

Though he has claims to be treated primarily as a poet, it is in his prose that Kazantzakis might live, for a while yet. His work is undoubtedly 'magnificent', but he meant it to be so; his grandiosity vitiates it. It is not his confusion between Bergsonian vitalism and Nietzschean despair that causes suspicion, for that is a familiar enough conflict in our century; but it is his restless pretensions to a greatness that his writings never earn. His monumental epic 'The Odyssey' (tr. 1959) consisting of 33,333 lines takes up the story, though transferring it to modern times, where Homer left off. Unfortunately, Kazantzakis misjudged his age, and tried to achieve a sort of greatness that it could not accommodate. But he was a noble minded man, who moved excitedly from influence to influence absorbing the nature of virtually every major teaching the world has known.

Kazantzakis's major novels, written after the II world War, and later in life, attained international fame. They are marked by a flamboyance in the treatment of heroes and situations and a great but uncontrolled energy. They have been widely translated and successful too. He is of course famous for the crude, near Kitsch (pretentious, vulgar) but vital and evocative novels of his later life: *Zorba The Greek* (1946, tr. 1952) which was turned into a popular film *Christ Recrucified* (1954), *The Life and Manners of Alexis Zorbas*, *The Last Temptation* and so on. *Anafora Ston Greco* was a posthumous autobiographical novel.

Kazantzakis spent the last decade of his life in Antibes. He died in Germany on the way back from a journey to China of leukemia, a month after he lost the Nobel Prize to Albert Camus by one vote. He was a fierce fighter all his life for the demotic (colloquial, vulgar) and his undoubtedly profound vulgarity is to some extent compensated by his vigour. Kazantzakis is a writer who must be taken or left. He could not offer anything substantial to explain his tragic optimism and was in reality a second rate thinker. He has no depth; the central ideology of all his work, that matter must be trans-



formed continuously into spirit is meaningless in the face of the sheer physical gusto of his novels. (*Martin Seymour Smith*)

Let us pass on to a critical summary of the novel.

### 1.3. Critical Summary of *Zorba The Greek*

*Zorba the Greek* is set in *Crete*, a Greek island on the Mediterranean, in the present times. The main characters who people the novel are as follows:

- (i) ZORBA : a Greek miner, a man of great physical vigour and lusty appetites.
- (ii) THE NARRATOR: : Called *Boss* Zorba's employer and friend.
- (iii) MADAME HORTENSE : an ageing courtesan.
- (iv) STAVRIDAKI : the narrator's close friend.

The story of *Zorba the Greek* is that of life against death. The central figure is Zorba, a miner of about sixty who refuses to let age and approaching death keep him from the celebration of being alive. Zorba is employed by a man who is an intellectual in spite of himself, a man bound to the contemplation of books and landscapes, and cut off from the traditional snares of wine, women and song. *Zorba The Greek* is about the conversion of this man; it is the story of the passion for life raised by the old man in the spirit of the younger. These are the circumstances of the narrative: The Narrator whose entire life has been bound up with the rather sterile worship of ideas, decides to go into business on the island of Crete. To this purpose, he rents a strip of land, assembles equipment, and forms a mining company. To supervise the miners, he brings with him Zorba, a man of immense physical presence and corresponding physical appetites. The Narrator is reserved, intellectual, introspective. Zorba is barbarous (uncivilized) and noisy, a lover of wine and a chaser of women. Their encounters and misadventures on the island of Crete form the substance of the book.

Upon their arrival on Crete, the two men find an ageing woman cast ashore by whatever fates determine the careers of broken down courtesans. She is a woman who has known a great ideal of plea-

sure, even something of love. In her youth she had been the mistress of admirals and princes and a good many other rich men besides. She is about to invest her old age in the repentant contemplation of her past when Zorba arrives to bring her back to life. He proves that even though they are at the end of their colourful lifespans, there is a great deal of life left in both of them. Zorba and Madame Hortense set up a *menage a deux* (an artificial household) and the narrator to whose age such attachments are more natural, becomes the amused witness of their late passion.

As for the narrator himself, he is deeply stirred, but not by love. The idea of love has the power to move him, as does the sight of birds, the memory of lines of Dante, the thoughts of his platonic attachment to a departed friend. But he shrinks from real physical attachment; it is only with an effort that he brings himself to understand why Zorba delights in eating and drinking too much. He sings the praises of Dante on the island of Crete, surely a case of doing the right thing at the wrong time. For, the island of Crete is a fertile island in the symbolic relation of Kazantzakis. The island is a place where vines grow in abundance. Wines flow easily, it is likened to blood, and drinking wine is compared to a feast of cannibals, (savages). The island is a place of olives and grain, growing lushly (very well) out of the earth under hot Libyan winds. And it is pre-eminently a place of passion whose rulers are the young woman of the countryside. All of these, the Narrator tries desperately to avoid until he undergoes a ceremonial baptism in all of them.

He is first awakened to life by the musings of Madame Hortense who revels in her immoral but fascinating stories about the motives that make men both sinful and magnificent. Her rhapsodies (enthusiastic accounts) over her past lovers seem at first merely amusing - she goes on forever over their curly, silky, dark perfumed beards - until the Narrator becomes aware of the power of life behind her experiences. He realises that what has kept her life alive, indeed what has redeemed the nature of her life is her capacity to take the deepest pleasure from the memory of love. And

he sees this same capacity operating in Zorba who refuses to let his age stand between him and life. It is the great failing of Zorba, and perhaps his strength, as he admits, that the older he grows the less he is able to control his desires.

Gradually, the story of Zorba's life comes out. He has been married and he has been free. He has been at times a father and a lover, a man of property and a beggar. Yet he is perhaps, by definition, a man who is completely free. When he likes something, he stays with it; when he grows tired, he moves on to some other experience. He does so not out of a decadent sense of pleasure but because he is convinced that this is the way of all living things. Zorba, in short is an animal and he is astute (clever) enough to recognise this fact and not to wish he were something else. He lives without ordinary morals, because that is his nature. Gradually, the narrator comes to realize that his simple and primitive existence holds the key to a real truth for whenever he attempts to argue with Zorba the issue is reduced to realities and he loses. Hunger, Zorba shows him, can only be appeased (satisfied) by eating, even if the food belongs to someone else. Women, Zorba explains, can only be understood by their use and their desires, even if they are married to somebody else. The cardinal sin, in fact is to disappoint a woman who is ready for love, for this denies the whole purpose of her creation.

This theology may be too primitive for the mainland but it is appropriate to Crete. The Gods have abandoned Crete, and their representatives, the monks in the monastery nearby, encourage no faith in their beliefs. When the Narrator approaches them to confront the earthiness of Zorba with disinterested wisdom, he finds that they too have their fierce appetites, their depravities, and their moral ugliness. Zorba, he begins to see, is more true to the forces that really rule this savage island. They are the forces of fertility, and Zorba is one of the last of Greek demigods of nature. He is a passionate dancer, and player on the stringed *santuri*, and when he finds language inexpressive, which is often he simply leaps to his

feet and dances until he reaches a state of frenzy and exhaustion. In all of his excesses, he is like some natural force. Kazantzakis is evidently comparing him to the magnificent Nature-gods of Greek mythology. The fact that he is old and approaching death is significant, for the author intimates that he is last of such gods.

In this long and lyrical book, there is not a great deal of action to accompany the reflections of the Narrator what there is, however makes up in intensity what it lacks in volume. The Narrator finally succumbs to the nature-worship of Zorba, and however reluctantly, he arrives at the bed of the woman for whom he is destined. Crete, however, is not the kind of place to let matters end in so rational a way. In a terrible scene ushered in by a celebration and dancing, she is cornered by an angry mob of jealous women. They incite their men to attack her. In the presence of Zorba and his friend, she is pinioned in a re-enactment of some ancient sacrifice and beheaded. With a special touch of irony, her head is thrown on to the steps of the Church!

It is the advent of death that brings another kind of enlightenment to the Narrator. He realises that he is in the midst of a kind of life that is nowhere described in books, not even in Dante. He has accepted the orgiastic celebration of life and now this ritual medium brings him to understand the omnipresence of death. It is this which completes his vision of death. Yet *Zorba The Greek* does not end here; for it is in the nature of Zorba scarcely to end at all. He leaves the island, and as the Narrator later hears, travels through the countries of the Balkans leaving behind him a swath or collection of empty bottles and rejoicing women. Finally in his seventies, he marries a magnificent young Serbian woman, fathers her child and dies even while protesting his sickness.

Throughout *Zorba The Greek*, Kazantzakis concentrates on the language of abundance. He describes the things of the earth - wine, oil, and bodies of beautiful women - with a passion and an accuracy that is all too often lacking in the denatured realism of the present. He deals with ideas, but only as they become concrete and



specific in action. His accomplishment is to have made *Zorba The Greek* a fitting structure for the symbolic weight it carries.

#### 1.4 Zorba the Greek: An Overall Estimate

*Zorba The Greek* is a different type of novel. It is an illustration of *Art for Art's sake*. The moral code of the titular character is rather unconventional. He does anything and everything that is conducive to his personal joy. He is little concerned about others. His attitude to food wine and women is the same- they are all meant to be consumed. Zorba symbolises the Epicurean philosophy: "*Eat drink and be merry today, for tomorrow we die*". The philosophy seems to work well with him, for to the end, he drinks life to the lees (last drops). His motto is *Carpe Diem* that is, "seize the day". That is the secret of his vitality and lust for life.

Zorba is portrayed in better light by being contrasted with the narrator on the one hand and the monks on the other. The former dares not taste life; he does not know the meaning of love or sex or a fast life till he is initiated by Zorba. The monks lead a life of moral depravity, hardly encouraging to the narrator who approaches them for counsel and consolation. What the novelist tries to show is that it is not easy for man to control his appetite-physical or sexual. He implies that it is better to be an open animal-like character as Zorba, than be a hypocrite like the monks who are veritably immoral fellows in priestly robe.

The novel is a poetic mosaic. Written in rich poetic prose it is an effusion of sentiments and the rich play imagination. The language is highly metaphoric. Symbols and motifs add to the richness of the language. The characters are types, Zorba reminds one of Browning's dramatic monologue *Fra Lippo Lippic*. In conclusion in its own way, the novel is an affirmation of life.

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## UNIT ONE

### OBJECTIVE TYPE QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

#### 1.0 Objectives

At the end of this *Unit*, you should be able to:  
 attempt *Objective Type Questions*, successfully

#### 1.1 Introduction

Before you go through this *Unit*, please read all the other *Units*, and become familiar with the authors, the novels the plots and characters pertaining to each and so on. Then you will be able to answer the *Objective Type Questions* easily.

#### 1.2. Don Quixote : Cervantes

1. Full name of Cervantes is ---- (Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra)
2. The country to which Cervantes belonged ---- (Spain)
3. The village to which Don Quixote belonged ---- [La Mancha]
4. What was one of the strangest fancies that entered the head of Don Quixote? [To become a knight -errant]
5. The imaginary lady whom Don Quixote was in love with ---- [Dulcinea or Toboso]
6. Name of Quixote's horse ---- [Rocinante]
7. Don Quixote's squire ---- [Sancho Panza]
8. What did Quixote imagine to be monstrous giants and started attacking? --- [30 or 40 windmills]
9. Who is Freston? --- [An enchanter-sage]
10. Who has sworn oath of vengeance concerning Mambrino's helmet? --- [Marquis of Mantua]
11. Name of Sancho Panza's ass --- [Dapple]
12. Original name of Don Quixote --- [Alonso Quixano]
13. The types of books Don Quixote read in plenty - [Romances of Chivalry]

14. Name of the priest in Quixote's village ---- [*Pedro Perez*]
15. Name of the barber in Quixote's village ---- [*Nicholas*]
16. What did Sancho Panza hope to become ---- [*Governor of an isle*]
17. The place where Quixote encountered the windmills ---- [*Montiel*]
18. What did Quixote mistake for Mambrino's golden helmet? [*The poor barber's bowl*]
19. What did the puppeteer (in *Don Quixote*) have? [*A divining ape*]
20. How long did Sancho govern his isle? [*A week*]
21. The knight who challenged Don Quixote to a combat at Barcelona? [*The knight of The White Moon*]
22. The bachelor knight who defeated Don Quixote ---- [*Samson Carrasco*]
23. Don Quixote is a ---- novel [*Picaresque*]
24. Who burnt Don Quixote's books/library? [*His housekeeper*]
25. ----- is the rustic companion of Don Quixote who is described as "long-legged" [*Sancho Panza*]

### 1.3. Madame Bovary : Gustave Flaubert

1. The country to which Flaubert belonged ---- [*France*]
2. Charles Bovary was called to attend to M. Raoult's ---- [*Broken leg*]
3. Where did Emma have her early education? [*In a French convent*]
4. Charles Bovary's first wife ---- [*Heloise*]
5. Charles Bovary had married Heloise for her - [*fortune*]
6. Emma's child was born in ---- [*Yonville*]
7. The law clerk who was initially attracted to Emma - [*Leon Dupuis*]
8. The town chemist at Yonville ---- [*Monsieur Homais*]
9. A stranger who soon became Emma's passion ---- [*Rodolphe Boulanger*]

10. What poison did Emma consume? [*Arsenic*]
11. The legacy left by Charles Bovary for his orphaned daughter ---- [*Twelve francs*]
12. What did Charles Bovary reply when the teacher asked him his name? ---- [*Charbovary*]
13. Charles Bovary studied ---- [*Medicine*]
14. Farmer Raoult (Emmas' father) lived in ---- [*Les Bertaux*]
15. The dry goods merchant who lent large sums of money to Emma - [*Lheureux*]
16. Where was Charles Bovary living, and practicing as a doctor before they left for Yonville? ---- [*Tostes*]
17. Name of Emma's daughter ---- [*Berthe*]
18. The boy whose clubfoot Charles Bovary tried to set right unsuccessfully ---- [*Hippolyte*]
19. Who amputated Hippolyte's leg? ---- [*Monsieur Canivet, M.D.*]
20. Hippolyte developed - after the operation on his clubfoot --- - [*Gangrene*]
21. The errand boy at Monsieur Homais' pharmacy ---- [*Justin*]
22. The place in Homais's pharmacy where the deadly poison Arsenic was kept ---- [*Chaphanaum*]
23. The paper in which Monsieur Homais gave Emma's obituary ---- [*Rouen Beacon*]
24. The title/honour that Monsieur Homais won following Charles Bovary's death ---- [*Legion of Honour*]
25. Subtitle of the novel *Madame Bovary* ---- [*Provincial Morals*]
26. The two lovers of Emma Bovary ---- [*Leon Dupuis and Rodolphe*]
27. Title for *Madame Bovary* suggested by the Prosecution ---- [*History of the Adulteries of A Provincial wife*]
28. The 3 defendants in the Trial of *Madame Bovary* ---- [*Flaubert, the author of the book; Pichat, who accepted it, Pillet, who printed it*]



#### 1.4 Nana : Emile Zola

1. The country to which Emile Zola belonged ---- (France)
2. Nana is one of Emile Zola's ---- series of novels. [*Rougan Macquart*]
3. The reign of ---- forms the background of Nana. [*Napoleon III*]
4. The play in which Nana makes her debut ---- [*The Blonde Venus*]
5. The crooked but very rich banker who is one of Nana's lovers ---- [*Steiner*]
6. Name of the theatre where Nana makes her debut ---- [*Variety Theatre*]
7. The Blonde Venus is a vulgar travesty of ---- [*The Olympian Gods*]
8. ---- exclaimed on seeing Nana, "She is Stunning", ["*George*"]
9. Nana's son ---- [*Louis*]
10. Nana's son Louis suffers from ---- [*Scrofula*]
11. The country place that Steiner buys for Nana ---- [*La Mignotte*]
12. Home of Madam Hugon, George and Philippe ---- [*Les Fondettes*]
13. The scurrilous (cheap) article written about Nana by Fauchery ---- [*The Golden Fly*]
14. The actor with whom Nana lived for some time ---- [*Fontan*]
15. Count Muffat's wife ---- [*Countess Sabine*]
16. Daughter of Count Muffat and Sabine ---- [*Estelle*]
17. The most persistent of Nana's lovers ---- [*Count Muffat*]
18. The Count who burnt himself to death in his stable following heavy loss through betting ---- [*Count de Vaneuveres*]
19. Count Muffat's father-in-law ---- [*Marquis de Chouard*]
20. Philippe Hugon was imprisoned for ---- [*stealing army funds*]
21. The French battlecry with which the novel Nana ends ----

- ["*The Franco - Prussian war of 1870 has begun*"]
22. The journalist referred to as Nana's sweetheart ---- [*Daguenet*]
23. The theatrical reviewer of a Paris paper, who is attracted to Countess Sabine ---- [*Monsieur Fauchery*]
24. Nana's maid ---- [*Zoe*]
25. Nana's aunt who looks after her son Louis ---- [*Madame Lerat*]
26. Daguenet noticed the same mark on the left cheeks of ---- and ---- [*Countess Sabine, Nana*]
27. Philippe Hugon was a----in the army ---- [*lieutenant*]
28. About whom did Daguenet remark to Fauchery, "A pretty broom stick to shove into a fellow's arms"-? ---- [*Estelle*]
29. Daguenet married Estelle for her ---- [*Dowry*]
30. The proprietor of 'The Blonde Venus' troop ---- [*Bordenave*]
31. Nana's pet name for George Hugon ---- [*Zizi*]
32. The paper in which the article The golden Fly appeared -- [*Figaro*]
33. The slut (cheap, immoral woman) with whom Nana associated from time to time - [*Satin*]
34. The role Nana insisted on playing in the play "Little Duchess" ---- [*The grand Duchess Helene*]
35. Where did Nana die? [*At the Grand Hotel*]

#### 1.5 Anna Karenina : Leo Tolstoy

1. Complete name of Tolstoy ---- [*Count Leo Nikoleyewich Tolstoy*]
2. The country to which Tolstoy belonged ---- [*Russia*]
3. Son of Anna and Karenin ---- [*Seryosha (Sergi)*]
4. Anna's lover ---- [*Vronsky*]
5. Daughter of Anna and Vronsky---- [*Anny*]
6. Anna's brother ---- [*Stepan Oblonsky*]

7. Kitty is Dolly's ---- [Younger sister]
8. Anna Karenina's house was in ---- [St. Petersburg]
9. The central theme of Anna Karenina ---- [Adultery]
10. The happy couple in Anna Karenina ---- [Kitty-Levin]
11. The unhappy couple in Anna Karenina ---- [Anna-Alexi]
12. Son of Kitty---Levin ---- Dmitri (Mitya)
13. Anna died by ---- [jumping in front of a running train]
14. Vronsky's mother's place was ---- [Nijni]
15. Konstantine Levin belonged to an old----family [Muscovite]
16. The character in Anna Karenina who may be regarded as Tolstoy's mouthpiece ---- [Konstantine Levin]
17. Anna first met Count Vronsky in ---- [Moscow]
18. Though Kitty and Levin loved each other it was their----which kept them apart. [Pride]
19. Fearing public scandal, Karenin refused to give his wife a -- -- [divorce]
20. Anna went with Vronsky and their baby to ---- [Italy]
21. After Anna's death, Vronsky joined the ---- [army]
22. Full name of Karenin ---- [Alexei Alexandrovich Karenin]
22. Alexei is a ---- [bureaucrat in the Czarist government]
23. Stepan Oblonsky is commonly called ---- [Stiva]
24. After the accident at the race-course, Vronsky's mare had to be ---- [shot]
25. Vronsky's mother wanted him to marry ---- [Princess Sarokine]
26. The two men whose lives Anna ruined ---- [Alexei Karenin, Vronsky]

### 1.6 Brother Karamazov : Dostoevsky

1. The country to which Dostoevsky belonged ---- [Russia]
2. The names of the Karamazov brothers ---- [Ivan, Dmitri, (Mitya) Alyosha (Alexei) (and Smerdyakov, their step brother)]
3. The young woman loved by Fyodor and Dmitri ----

- [Grushenka]
4. Milieu (background) of the novel 'Brothers Karamazov ---- [Skotoprigonyevski]
5. The saintly old priest in 'Brothers Karamazov' ---- [Father Zossima]
6. The loyal servant in the Fyodor household ---- [Grigory]
7. The young girl who attracts both Dmitri and Ivan ---- [Katerina Ivanovna]
8. The murderer/parricide of Fyodor ---- [Smerdyakov]
9. Place to which Dmitri is exiled for 20 years' hard labour ---- [Siberia]
10. Alyosha in Brothers Karamazov is also called ---- [Alexei]
11. The instrument used by Dmitri to hurt Grigory ---- [Pestle]
12. Amount stolen by Smerdyakov ---- [3000 roubles]
13. The allegory in Brothers Karamazov ----[The Grand Inquisitor]
14. The germinal idea /central idea of Brothers Karamazov ---- [parricide]
15. Character called "wailer" by Fyodor ---- [Sofia Ivanovna]
16. Dmitri's mother in the novel Brothers Karamazov ---- [Mitya]
17. The character in Brothers Karamazov referred to as 'Stinky' - ---- [Smerdyakov]
18. Grigory's wife in Brothers Karamazov ---- [Marfa]
19. The character in "Brothers Karamazov" referred to as 'man-eater' ---- [Grushenka]
20. The lady from whom Dmitri misappropriated 3000 roubles - ---- [Katerina]
21. First wife of Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov ---- [Adelaida Ivanovna Miusov]
22. Smerdyakov is the illegitimate son of Fyodor Karamazov by



- [Lizaveta]
23. Katerina in Brothers Karamazov calls Grushenka a ---- [ti-  
gress]
  24. The character in Brothers Karamazov who symbolises Holy  
Russia of Orthodox Christianity ---- Alexei (Alyosha)
  25. Mother of Alexei (Alyosha) and second wife of Fyodor ----  
[Sofia Ivanovna]
  26. Type of plot of 'Brothers Karamazov' ---- [Impressionistic re-  
alism]

### 1.7 The Trial : Franz Kafka

1. ---- is the lawyer in The Trial [Huld]
2. Joseph K. worked in a ---- [bank]
3. The executor of Kafka's will ---- [Brod]
4. The protagonist of 'The Trial' ---- [Joseph K.]
5. Kafka belonged to ---- [Prague, the part of the Austro - Hun-  
garian Empire]
6. Kafka wrote in ---- language ---- [German]
7. Joseph K's landlady ---- [Frau Grubach]
8. Nurse and house keeper of Huld the lawyer ---- [Leni]
9. The court pointer who offers to help Joseph K ---- [Titro  
velli]
10. Fraulein Burstner is a niece of ---- [Frau Grubach]
11. Fraulein Burstner works as a ---- [typist]
12. 3 possibilities of Joseph K's trial ---- [A definite acquittal, a  
provisional acquittal, an indefinite postponement]
13. The last chapter of 'The Trial' is set on the eve of ---- [Jo-  
seph K's 31st birthday]
14. How does Joseph K die? [He is stabbed in the heart/executed  
by two men.]
15. Joseph K dies like a ---- [dog]
16. In 'The Trial', the Inspector uses ---- room. [Fraulein  
Burstner's]

17. The type of plot of 'The Trial' ---- [fantasy]
18. Joseph K was arrested on ---- [his 30th birthday]
19. Joseph K apologized to Fraulein Burstner for ---- [using her  
room]
20. Joseph K was a ---- in a bank. [junior manager]
21. Joseph K hired an advocate, upon his ----'s advice. [uncle's]
22. The address of the place of interrogation of Joseph K's trial -  
---- [A large ware house]

### 1.8 Siddhartha : Herman Hesse

1. The country to which Hermann Hesse belonged ---- [Ger-  
many]
2. The wandering ascetics are called ---- [Samanas]
3. The character in Siddhartha referred to as "The Illustrious  
One" ---- [Gotama or The Buddha]
4. ---- robbed Siddhartha of his friend Govinda ---- [The Bud-  
dha]
5. After parting from Siddhartha, Govinda decided to become -  
---- [a Buddhist monk]
6. The woman /courtesan who taught Siddhartha the art of love-  
making ---- [Kamala]
7. ---- is called a game for children in Siddhartha. [Samsara]
8. "Om" means ---- ["The Perfect One" or Perfection]
9. Name of the ferryman who takes Siddhartha across the river -  
---- [Vasudeva]
10. Kamala dies of ---- [a snake-bite]
11. The merchant for whom Siddhartha worked ----  
[Kamaswami]
12. Siddhartha learnt most from ---- and ---- [The river and  
Vasudeva]
13. The person who taught Siddhartha the art of making money -  
----

- [Kamaswami]
14. The town where Gotama was well known ---- [Savathi]
  15. The garden where the Illustrious One so journeyed or stayed --  
--  
[Anathapindika in Jetavana]
  16. The father of Kamala's son ---- [Siddhartha]
  17. 3 things Siddhartha told Kamala that he could do ---- [I can think, I can wait, I can fast]
  18. When Siddhartha first approached Kamala, he was a ---- [Samana]
  19. Kamala described ---- as "the best lover that I have had" [Siddhartha]
  20. The central metaphor in Siddhartha ---- [River]
  21. Siddhartha regarded Gotama as a great man in ---- and ---- [his deeds and life]
  22. The successor of Vasudeva as ferryman ---- [Siddhartha]
  23. Siddhartha remembered lines from the ---- Upanishad [Chandogya]
  24. Because of Vasudeva and the river, ---- comes to Siddhartha at last [Self-realization]
  25. Siddhartha learnt that wisdom was not ---- [communicable]

### 1.9 The Magic Mountain : Thomas Mann

1. The country to which Thomas Mann belonged ---- [Germany]
2. Name of the sanatorium in *The Magic Mountain* ---- [International Sanatorium Berghofhigh.]
3. In *The Magic Mountain*, the name of the Jew who is a converted Jesuit ---- [Naphtha]
4. International Sanatorium Berghofhigh is in ---- [Davos, Switzerland]
5. Hans Castorp is suffering from the disease ---- [Tuberculosis, (T.B.)]
6. The Russian lady who rejects Hans Castorp's love ----

- [Clavdia Cauchat.]
7. In *The Magic Mountain*, ---- is a hedonistic planter from Java, and is a Dutchman. [Mynheer Peeperkorn]
  8. Naphtha dies by ---- [shooting himself in the duel with Mynheer Peeperkorn]
  9. Hans Castorp's best friend at Davos ---- [Settembrini]
  10. Period of time Hans Castorp intended to stay at Davos ---- [3 weeks]
  11. Period of time Hans Castorp actually stayed at Davos ---- [3 fairy tale years]
  12. The German composer who influenced Mann's novel *The Magic Mountain* ---- [Wagner]
  13. Hans Castorp's cousin at Davos ---- [Joachim Ziemessen]
  14. The club of the T.B. patients at Davos ---- [The Half Lung Club]
  15. Name given by Settembrini for the patients at Davos ---- [Horizontallers]
  16. The magic number which crops up repeatedly in *The Magic Mountain* ---- [Seven]
  17. The world below the magic mountain is called ---- [Flatland]
  18. The first chapter of *The Magic Mountain* is called ---- [Arrival]
  19. The magic mountain symbolises ---- [the sick world of Europe]
  20. By profession, Joachim Ziemessen is a ---- [soldier]
  21. The psychoanalyst at Davos sanatorium is ---- [Dr. Krowkowski]
  22. By profession, Hans Castorp is ---- [an engineer]
  23. In the chapter entitled 'Snow', Hans Castorp dreams of ---- [humanity]
  24. The chapter in which Hans Castorp prepares to declare his passion for Clavdia Cauchat ---- [Walpurgis Night]



### 1.10 Zorba The Greek : Nikos Kazantzakis

1. The country to which Kazantzakis belongs ---- [Greece]
2. Locale (setting) of *Zorba The Greek* [Crete, an island in the Mediteranean]
3. ---- is the narrator of *Zorba The Greek*----['Boss' Zorba's employer and friend]
4. The ageing courtesan in *Zorba The Greek* ---- [Madame Hortense]
5. Musical instrument played by Zorba ---- [santuri]
6. In his seventies, Zorba marries ---- [A young Serbian lady]
7. ---- is the close friend of the narrator of *Zorba The Greek*.  
[Stavridaki]
8. By profession Zorba is a ---- [miner]
9. The narrator of *Zorba The Greek* forms a ---- on the island of Crete.  
[mining company]
10. Age of Zorba when the novel opens ---- [About sixty years]
11. A poet whose praises the Narrator of *Zorba The Greek* keeps singing on the island of Crete ---- [Dante]
12. ---- grow in abundance on the island of Crete [Vines]
13. The central theme of *Zorba The Greek* ---- [Celebration of the victory of life over old age and death]
14. Kazantzakis portrays Zorba as one of the last ---- of Nature [demigods].
15. The woman for whom the Narrator of *Zorba The Greek* is destined is at last ---- [beheaded]
16. In *Zorba The Greek*, the beheaded woman's head is ----  
[thrown onto the steps of the church]
17. The ritual murder of the woman makes the Narrator of *Zorba The Greek* understand ---- [the omnipresence of death]
18. After leaving Crete, Zorba travels through the countries of the ----  
[Balkans]
19. How does Zorba die ? [He dies while protesting his sickness; dies suddenly and naturally]

20. The language of *Zorba The Greek* may be described as the language of ---- [Abundance ; plenty; richness]

### 1.11 Growth of The Soil : Knut Hamson

1. The deformity of Inger ---- [A hare-lip]
2. Inger's rich uncle ---- [Uncle Sivert]
3. Name of Inger's cow ---- [Goldenhorns]
4. Goldenhorns originally belonged to ---- [Oline's son]
5. The medicine given by Isak to Inger when she was pregnant -  
---- [Naphtha]
6. Name suggested by Inger for Goldenhorns's calf ---- [Silverhorns]
7. A distant female relation of Inger who occasionally came across the hills to visit Isak and Inger ---- [Oline]
8. The first man to become a settler on the no-mans's land and till the soil ---- [Isak]
9. Isak's characteristic exclamation ---- [Eyah, Herregud]
10. The eldest son of Isak and Inger ---- [Eleseus]
11. What did the Lapp Os-Anders show Inger a little before she delivered her daughter? [A hare]
12. Inger blindly believed that she had been born with a hare-lip because ----[her mother had seen a hare before the delivery]
13. The sheriff's officer in charge of a small district in Norway is called ---- [Lensmand]
14. The Lensmand who is a strange friend of Isak and Inger ---- [Giessler]
15. Lensmand Giessler's assistant ---- [Brede Olsen]
16. The name of Iska's land ---- [Sellanraa]
17. The name Sellanraa for Iska's land was suggested by ---- [Lensmand Giessler]
18. In Norway, Amtmand means ---- [Governor of a country]
19. Giessler's successor as Lensmand ---- [Heyerdahl]
20. Inger was sent to prison because ---- [She killed her new-born

daughter/of infanticide]

21. The mysterious and powerful friend of Isak and Inger is ----  
[*Lensmand Giessler*]
22. Nils is ---- a son of [Oline]
23. Inger was sentenced to prison for ---- years. [Eight]
24. Due to Giessler's intervention, Inger's prison term was reduced to ---- years. [Five]
25. Name of Inger's daughter born in prison ---- [Leopoldine]
26. Name of Brede Olden's land ---- [Breidablik]
27. The governor's gift to Inger, upon her release from the prison ----  
[A prayer book]
28. The place from where Inger had acquired all her knowledge and artistic skills ---- [Trondhjem]
29. Two characters in Growth of The Soil who are charged with infanticide ---- [Inger, Barbro]
30. The metal whose ore was found in plenty in Isak's land ---- [Copper]
31. Eleseus left for ---- and never came back [America]
32. The servant girl in the Sellanraa household ---- [Jensine]
33. The young workman with whom Inger was passionately in love ---- [Gustaf, the Swede]

### 1.12 The Stranger : Albert Camus

1. The country to which Albert Camus belonged ---- [Algeria]
2. The philosophy associated with Camus ---- [Existentialism, Absurd, Atheism]
3. Camus wrote his novels in the ---- language [French]
4. The central character and narrator of *The Stranger* ---- [Meursault]
5. By profession, Meursault is ---- [an ordinary, low-paid clerk]
6. Meursault's mistress is ---- [Maria Cardona]
7. The owner of the restaurant where Meursault usually has his

food from ---- [Celeste]

8. The pimp in *The Stranger*, who paves the way for Meursault's destruction ---- [Raymond]
9. The inmate of the home for the aged who fell in love with Meursault's mother ---- [Perez.]
10. Salamano own a ---- having skin disease [dog]
11. In *The Outsider* ---- kills the Arab. [Meursault]
12. Meursault's mother died in ---- [the Home for Aged Persons at Marengo]
13. Meursault astonishes the porter at the Home for Aged Persons by saying that ---- [he does not want to see his mother's body]
14. The motiveless crime that Meursault commits ---- [He kills the Arab]
15. The character in *The Outsider* addressed as Anti Christ ---- [Meursault]
16. The punishment given to Meursault for killing the Arab ---- [He was to be decapitated (beheaded) in some public place]
17. Maria was not allowed to see Meursault in prison because --  
[She was not his wife]
18. 2 English titles of Albert Camus's novel *L'Etranger* ---- [The Outsider, The Stranger]

### 1.13 Doctor Zhivago : Boris Pasternak

1. The country to which Boris Pasternak belonged ---- [Russia]
2. The older Zhivago died by ---- [leaping from a moving train]
3. The unscrupulous lawyer in *Doctor Zhivago* ---- [Viktor Komarovsky]
4. Seducer or betrayer of Lara ---- [Komarovsky]
5. The career chosen by Yuri Zhivago ---- [Medicine]
6. Yuri Zhivago's first wife ---- [Tonia]
7. Yuri Zhivago's strongest passion ---- [Lara]
8. The young girl Yuri Zhivago marries later in life ---- [Ma-



- rina]
9. Comrade Pasha Antipov dies by ---- [committing suicide]
  10. The character in Doctor Zhivago known as 'Strelnikov' or 'The Shooter' ---- [Pasha Antipov]
  11. Yuri Zhivago's half-brother ---- [Yevgraf]
  12. Number of poems appended to *Doctor Zhivago* ---- [24]
  13. The closing poem of Doctor Zhivago ---- [Garden of Gethsemane]
  14. The cause of Doctor Zhivago's death ---- [Heart attack]
  15. Tonia's father Gromeko is a professor of ---- [Agronomy]
  16. Helen's pet name for her husband Mikulitsin ---- [Civvy]
  17. Two favourite writers of Doctor Zhivago ---- [Chekhov, Pushkin]
  18. Which member of Forest Brotherhood was nicknamed "hetman's ear" (Captain's spy)? [Sivobluy.]
  19. In *Doctor Zhivago*, 'bezprizornaya' means ---- [a waif, or a child of unknown parents]
  20. The 'laundry -girl' in Doctor Zhivago whom Yevgraf looks after ---- [Tanya]
  21. Daughter of Yuri and Lara ---- [Tanya]
  22. Tanya's barbarous nickname ---- [Tanya out of the turn]
  23. The young school boy who betrayed Strelnikov ---- [Terenty]
  24. The revolutionary in Doctor Zhivago who axed his wife and three children to prevent their future suffering in the event of his death ---- [Pamphil Palykh]
  25. The young man on the drum whom Palykh killed for a joke - ---- [A young White Commissar]
  26. Nickname of Strelnikov (Pasha) ---- [Rastrelnikov (The Executioner)]
  27. The strange deaf and mute traveller Yuri Zhivago met on the train ---- [Pogorevshikh]
  28. The present given by Pogorevshikh to Yuri Zhivago while parting after their train journey ---- [A fat duck]

29. The chief liaison officer of Comrade Liberius who arrested Doctor Zhivago and conscripted him ---- [Kammenodvorsky]
30. The enemy white soldier whom Doctor Zhivago and his assistant Angelar nursed back to health ---- [Seryosha]
31. ---- spied on Terenty and the young boys who had conspired against Liberius's life, and caused them to be shot [Sivobluy]

#### 1.14 The Joke : Milan Kundera

1. The country to which Milan Kundera belonged ---- [Prague, Czechoslovakia]
2. The method of narration employed in *The Joke* ---- [A series of monologues]
3. The female barber who attended on Ludvik Jahn/to whom Kostka took Ludvik ---- [Lucie Sebetka]
4. The daughter of Helene and Pavel Zemanek ---- [Zdena]
5. Pavel Zemanek's most treasured possession ---- [A locket with the picture of Krémelin on it]
6. The 19 year old sound technician who was dangerously in love with the ageing Helene ---- [Jindra]
7. Ludvik's home town ---- [Moravia]
8. "Let sadness never be linked with my name" ---- Whose name? [Fucik]
9. The fatal joke (sentence) Ludvik wrote to Marketa ---- ["Optimism is the opium of the people"]
10. On what grounds was Ludvik expelled from the Party? [Intellectualism and cynicism]
11. The soldier at the Ostrava unit whom Ludvik liked best ---- [Honza]
12. The person Ludvik considered his worst enemy and wanted to take revenge upon ---- [Zemanek]
13. Ludvik hated Zemanek bitterly because [after giving false hopes, Zemanek denounced Ludvik and got him expelled from the Party]

14. ----is the author of *Peace Manifesto* [Bedrich]
15. The Soviet film referred to by Marketa to Ludvik ----[*Court of Honour*]
16. Lucie Sebetka's home-town ---- [Bohemia]
17. The type of films Lucie likes to watch ---- [war-films]
18. Whose book of poems did Ludvik read? [Frantisek Halas]
19. The soldier at the Ostrava unit who did a lot of murals ---- [Cenek]
20. Ludvik's best friend at the Ostrava unit ---- [Honza]
21. Zemanek's young sweetheart ---- [Miss Broz]
22. A female character in *The Joke* who loves hitchhiking (asking for free rides) ---- [Miss. Broz]
23. Jaroslav's favourite instrument ---- [Harmonium]
24. Jaroslav used to call ---- the Pied Piper. [Ludvik]
25. ---- is the most popular drink in Moravia. [Rye]
26. Helene's favourite adjective ---- [Marvellous]
27. Kostka used to consider ---- his chief adversary or rival. ---- [Ludvik]
28. The female character in *The Joke* nicknamed as 'The little grave robber' ---- [Lucie Sebetka]
29. Lucie stole----from the cemetery [flowers]
30. After leaving the farm Kostka became a ---- [construction worker]
31. Ludvik was returning to his hometown after ---- years [Fifteen]
32. Age of Ludvik when the novel opens - [37 years]
33. The word very often repeated in Jaroslav's monologue ---- [Fatigue]
34. Helene dies due to ---- [Desparation at being rejected by Ludvik]
35. The tablets swallowed by Helene were actually ---- [laxatives]
36. Jaroslav's passion ---- [Moravian folk songs]

37. Son of Jaroslav and Vlasta ---- [Vladmir]
38. Jindra kept his laxative tablets in a bottle labelled ----[Algena]
39. The woman who passionately desired Ludvik ---- [Helena]

### 1.15 The Tin Drum : Gunter Grass

1. The country to which Gunter Grass belongs ---- [Germany]
2. Narrator of *The Tin Drum* ---- [Oskar Matzerath]
3. Oskar's mother's lover ---- [Jan Bronski]
4. Oskar's third birthday-gift ---- [A tin drum]
5. On this third birthday Oskar decides ----[to stop growing by a sheer act of will.
6. Oskar shatters ---- with his voice [glass]
7. In the novel *The Tin Drum*, the most celebrated (famous) somnambulist in all Italy ---- [Roswitha Raguna]
8. Oskar Matzerath is accused of killing ---- [Sister Dorothea]
9. The person whose testimony leads to Oskar Matzerath's arrest ----- [Vittlar]
10. When the novel opens, Oskar Matzerath is an inmate of ---- [a mental hospital]
11. The keeper of Oskar at the mental hospital ---- [Bruno Munsterberg]
12. Ann Bronski hides the fugitive Koljaiczek ---- [under her wide skirts]
13. Oskar asks Bruno to get him ---- [A ream of virgin paper / five hundred sheets of writing paper]
14. The treasure that Oskar guards ---- [His photograph album]
15. ---- was the child with the glass-shattering voice [Oskar Matzerath]
16. Oskar pulverised Miss Spollenhauer's spectacle-lenses because ---- [she struck his 'darling', drum with her cane]
17. The theatre whose lobby windows Oskar shattered with his singing ---- [Stadt - Theater]
18. The gnome / midget whom Oskar met at the circus and who became his mentor ---- [Bebra]



19. ---- was popularly known as "the Green Kitten" [Niobe]
20. "He's lying in Saspé" ---- About whom did Oskar Matzerath make this remark? [Jan Bronski]
21. A card game repeatedly mentioned in *The Tin Drum* ---- [Skat]
22. The character in *The Tin Drum* described as "The Sandwich Eater" or whom Oskar associated with the Black Witch---- [Lucy Rennwand]
23. The name of the jazz band found with Klepp the flutist, Scholle the guitarist and Oskar the percussion man ---- [The Rhine River Three]
23. - apparently killed Sister Dorothea. [Sister Beata]
24. Oskar Matzerath believed that he was ---- 's father [Kurt]

The above list of questions is certainly not exhaustive. You may prepare similar questions and answers on your own by becoming familiar with the texts.

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## UNIT I

### EUROPEAN FICTION - AN OVERALL SURVEY

#### 1.0 Objectives

This *Unit* is intended to give you an overall survey of the trend of European fiction in present times. Supplementary material on some of the prescribed novels, as well as questions with sufficient hints also have been included. Important critical terms in fiction have been explained.

#### 1.1 Introduction

The novel, a recent entrant in the realm of literature, is a work of prose fiction of considerable length, and is made up of certain elements : PLOT, CHARACTER, DIALOGUE, SETTING, SYMBOLS etc. You may refer to any standard text book and understand more about these terms. The prescribed novels were written in the 19th or 20th centuries. Let us take a brief look at the tendencies in the European Novel of this period with special reference to the prescribed novels.

#### 1.2 Modern Trends in European Fiction

Romanticism which had prevailed in the 18th century gradually paved the way to *Realism* and *Naturalism*. The novels of *Balzac* set out to give an exact picture of contemporary manners. The romantic elements in *Flaubert's* novels were punctured with realistic irony. On one level, his *Madame Bovary* may be taken as a kind of parable of the punishment that fate metes out to the romantic dreamer, and it is the more telling because Flaubert recognised a strong romantic vein in himself. Realism has been a continuing impulse in the 20th century novel. Flaubert succeeded in fusing the romantic and the realistic. He, like Balzac and Stendhal, portrayed the physical environment of life as the determining factor in character, and from his work derives the modern novel as a conscious art form.

The *naturalistic novell* is a development out of realism, and

it is again, in France, that its first leading practitioners are to be found, with Emile Zola leading. It is difficult to separate the two categories, but *naturalism* seems characterised not only by a pessimistic determinism, but also by a more throughgoing attention to the physical and biological aspects of human existence. Man is more a product of natural force, as well, as genetic and social influences. Other novelists include Hardy, Conrad, Knut Hamsun, James Joyce, etc. The naturalistic novelists had to struggle against prejudice and often censorship mainly on the charge of obscenity before their literary candour could prevail. The 20th century takes the naturalistic approach for granted, but is more concerned with the technique of presentation.

The German novelists Thomas Mann and Hermann Hesse, moving from the realist tradition sought the lightness and clarity of a more elliptical style and were proclaimed *Impressionists*. This sort of literature of revolt (against extreme realism) existed before the Nazi regime. *Expressionism* was a German movement, in which the artist's aim was to express or convey the essence of a particular theme, to the exclusion of such secondary considerations as fidelity to real life. Expressionistic techniques were adopted by Gunter Grass in his novel *The Tin Drum*. But the Austrian Franz Kafka, the greatest of the Expressionist novelists sought to convey what may crudely be termed man's alienation from his world in terms that admit of no political interpretation. Joseph K, the hero of Kafka's novel *The Trial* (1925) is accused of a nameless crime, he seeks to arm himself with the apparatus of a defense, and he is finally executed- stabbed with the utmost courtesy by two men in a lonely place. The hallucinatory atmosphere of that novel as also of Kafka's novel *The Castle* (1926), is appropriate to nightmare, and indeed Kafka's work has been taken by many as an imaginative forecast of the nightmare through which Europe was compelled to live during the Hitler regime. But its significance is more subtle and universal; one of the elements is original sin and another filial guilt. Indeed Kafka's influence has been considerable.

The 20th century European novel is distinguished by variety and experiment. The Russian revolution and the two major world wars triggered off a horde of revolutionary novels. Soviet novelists are circumscribed in their activities by the repressive political outlook of the regime. Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is the great triumphant example of the panoramic study of a whole society living in a period of cataclysmic change. In the 20th century another Russian Boris Pasternak in his *Doctor Zhivago* (1957) expressed -though on a less than Tolstoyan scale- the personal immediacies of life during the Russian Revolution. *The Joke* (1967) by the Czech novelist Milan Kundera likewise deals with the effect of Stalin's social realism on the individual intellectual. All these novels are documents of oppression wrought out of bitter experience.

Throughout the 20th century, European Fiction has continued to diversify, reflecting the sporadic changes in society. These changes are evident not only in the choice of themes but also in the mode of narration the use of myths and symbol the probing into the human psyche, the debate over the existence of God etc. Major novels stressing human loneliness and nightmare, and using to the full the bleak techniques of the short novel were written by Albert Camus besides Kafka. The sickness of the Germany that produced Hitler undergoes fictional diagnosis in Gunter Grass's *The Tin Drum*, and is a reflection of the nature of the period, the Zeitgeist. To sum up, European fiction is a developing and diversifying genre (literary form).

In the next section some extra material on certain prescribed novels is given. You may use them along with what is given in other Units as supplementary points, while preparing your essays.

### 1.5 The Magic Mountain : Thomas Mann

*The Magic Mountain* is a philosophical chronicle concerned with perspectives of history and philosophy in our time. In it the modern age has become the International Sanatorium Berghof high in the Swiss Alps, and to the institution gravitate various and con-



flitting currents of thought and activity in the person of a group of invalids exiled by disease to a pinnacle of the "magic mountain". The magic it exercises in their lives is to cut them off from calendar time. Time flows through their days and years with quiet nothingness and perceptions of reality stretch into eternity. Modern ideologies and beliefs are represented by characters like the Italian humanist, the absolutist Jewish, Jesuit, a German Doctor, a Polish scientist and the hedonistic Mynheer Peeperkorn. The magic mountain is the sick world of Europe and its people are various aspects of the modern consciousness. The book tells us how the personal horizon of the hero Hans Castorp is widened and how he undergoes physical, moral, intellectual and spiritual development entirely as a result of his human encounters and personal reactions during the seven years in the rarefied atmosphere of the Swiss Alps.

The *narrative pattern* is formed by a clever interweaving of multiple strands of thought and experience. Castorp may stand as a sort of "Mr Everyman", and the book's wider implication becomes apparent as his story unfolds. Many people have pointed out that the book may be read on several levels - as a *distinctive novel* in its own right; as a *dialectic* (full of argument) work or as an *allegory* in which the isolated mountain resort may be taken as a microcosm of Europe and the incisively drawn characters carry the reader on.

Thomas Mann is regarded as a *master of irony* and *The Magic Mountain* as has been shown, provides him with plenty of scope for the indulgence of this gift. Yet he himself was a prey to ironic influences when committing this masterpiece to paper. He has confessed that in his first conception he envisaged little more than a light humorous book touching on a few themes including the fascination of death. But somehow, the creation ran away with the creator and it grew and developed into an epic study of a civilisation in decay. Mann found himself depicting with earnest Teutonic thoroughness a comprehensive picture of the contemporary world scene. Mann's irony brings into question the very possibility of art.

*The Magic Mountain* is a great novel of the epoch in nothing

so much as in its preoccupation with Time. Mann was a contemporary of Einstein. Both Einstein's Relativity and *The Magic Mountain* are connected with a concept of time rendered problematical by the absence of a valid standard of measurement, the absence of an Absolute.

Though a powerful stylist with a great gift of expression Mann's work in general and this masterpiece in particular has bred a whole group of would be interpreters, all of whom have striven according to their lights to unravel the complex strands of the story. Certain critics have traced evidence of Schopenhauer's influence in specific passages. Mann in his tendency towards mysticism allows himself free range in *The Magic Mountain*. He was known to have been superstitious where numbers are concerned. In the final estimate, the wide sweep of this great book sets before the ordinary reader an impressive feast of reading. First it tells an unusual absorbing story, with some memorable characters and stimulating dialogue. The magic in fact lies just as much in the author's powerful pen as in the mountain of the tale.

### 1.6 The Brothers Karamazov: Dostoevsky

Of the four greatest Russian literary giants Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, it is the last named one- *Dostoevsky* who is the greatest affirmer of life. Gogol laughs to hide his tears. Turgenev sadly contemplates the beauty of transitory existence, and Tolstoy is preoccupied with the question what point there is in eating, drinking and loving, when all living things sooner or later fall to dust. But Dostoevsky, despite his own harrowing experiences, never doubted that life is its own justification, and that to love, to feel compassion, to have memories, even to suffer are better in all circumstances than non-existence. A passionate interest in life, and in the heights and depths of human experience fill his novels and make them major works of art crammed with fascinating characters, teeming with ideas on religion, nationality and politics full of violent action, while behind all lurks a tragic sense that men are the

victims of their own passions driven by force which they cannot control; towards a fate they cannot foresee.

*The Brother Karamazov* is considered by some critics to be Dostoevsky's masterpiece. It is certainly the most involved, full of interludes. The anguish caused by the *dual nature of man* recurs in great chords throughout this powerful novel. The Psychologist-novelist chose as the theme for this the story of a father and his three sons, the effect of sensuality and inherited sensuality or a family and on all with whom the family came into contact. The earthy barbarism of Tsarist Russia can be seen beneath the veneer of western culture which covers Dostoevsky's society. In another sense the theme of the novel is *faith versus atheism*, a spiritual as contrasted with a materialistic view of life, a contrast which is worked out in the characters, very subtly portrayed, of the three brothers. Alyosha represents the pure flame of spiritual awareness, while Dimitri is the most involved character in the book and vies for central place with Alyosha. Brimming with the Karamazov's lust for life, but neglected by his father in childhood, *Dimitri* grows up with a burning conviction that the world owes him happiness, and he is determined to win it in the shape of Grushenka, despite all obstacles, degradations, and even crimes. He does possess a yearning for what he dimly thinks of as a virtuous life, but virtue and decency must be put on ice until he has gained his heart's desire. Meanwhile he believes they are unattainable, for he sees himself as the victim of circumstances, a nice fellow at heart who has never had a chance. So for Dimitri, life is not a continuous process from which men must learn in good days and bad, but a lottery in which all must be staked on the winning ticket. His conviction at the end of the book of a murder he never committed stands as Dostoevsky's solemn warning to those who hold such immature and dangerous views.

If Dimitri is the reckless, perpetual adolescent Ivan is the haughty austere, and would be self-sufficient young intellectual also with dim strivings towards the good life, but whose brain gets in

the way of his heart. He has spiritual faith of a kind but his intellect refuses to concur and he is another example of a *split personality* which is a danger to itself and others. He is in short a rather colourless character. In contrast to his brothers, with *Alyosha*, the youngest brother, religion is the perpetual climate of his mind. He figures as a physically robust young man of wide tolerance and love of humanity, spiritually unshakeable and intelligent. He is convinced of the immortality of the soul and swears to live for the future. He plays no active part in the main plot beyond helping his brothers to know their better selves, but it is through him and Father Zossima that some of Dostoevsky's profound beliefs are brought to the reader.

Dostoevsky is not a propagandist, and much less a dogmatist. He is a genuine philosopher, for he really inquired, questioned, and sought the truth painstakingly. In his view, we cannot have heaven without hell. Through Father Zossima, he taught that we had to learn to accept our condition as creatures. This called for love at the heart of human existence. The psychological and the metaphysical make up the concrete reality of Dostoevsky's human world. Thus the meaning of human destiny which Dostoevsky reveals is this: a life not built on love is not human, and a world without God is a world in which a triumphant cannibal frees the mass from the burden of their freedom in exchange for happiness.

### 1.7 Anna Karenia: Leo Tolstoy

*Anna Karenina* one of Tolstoy's masterpieces is distinguished by its realism. The novel contains two plots: the tragedy of Madame Karenina in love with a man who is not her husband, and the story of Konstantine Levin, a sensitive man whose personal philosophy is Tolstoy's reason for writing about him. The story of Anna is an absorbing one and true, the person of Levin reflects Tolstoy's own ideas about the Russian society in which he lived. Thus the book is a closely knit plot of a woman bound in the fetters of the Russian social system, and a philosophy of life which attempts to untangle the maze of incongruities present in this society. The novel



has to be taken not merely as a work of art but as a piece of life. Tolstoy had always been a writer with a message. To quote him: "A writer's aim is not to settle a question once and for all but to compel the reader to see life in all its forms, which are endless. This aptly sums up his attitude to Anna's character. Like Zola he does not condemn anyone or anything he leaves it to the reader to decide for himself after analysing the situation and the characters. The foundations of *Anna Karenina* are grounded on the opposition of the ethos of family life and the pathos of unlawful love. Here we have a novel of modern life without hopes for a better future or longings after a better past. The reader is confronted with two dramas, the one public, the other private. Socially, *Anna Karenina* is a tragedy of manners" or as Dostoevsky would say, a drawing room tragedy" But morally it is a tragedy of the bedroom the worst of all tragedies. In the author's view, Tolstoy projected Anna's drama absurdity of the Christian injunction to love the sinner and to hate his sin. He wanted the reader to be merciful not merciless as was society, which punished Anna not for sinning but for confessing her passion before the world. Anna was to be pitied, but not absolved, nor was her guilt to be forgiven. [Renato Poggioli]

In all literature, there is no writer equal to Tolstoy in depicting the human body. He is accurate, simple and as short as possible selecting only the few small unnoticed facial or personal features and producing them not all at once but gradually and one by one distributing them over the whole course of the story weaving them into the living web of the action. Plenty of instances can be quoted from *Anna Karenina*. This gift of insight into the body at times leads Tolstoy into excess. The language of gesture, if less varied than words, is more direct, expressive and suggestive. With inimitable art he uses the convertible connection between the external, and the internal. [Dmitri Merezhkovsky]

Autobiographical elements permeate the works of Tolstoy. Even though Vronsky and Anna are not related to his own life and to his problems of life, the figures of Levin and Kitty are flesh of

his flesh and spirit of his spirit. It is also known that he depicted his own marriage and in part its early history in this couple. By means of the Levin-plot Tolstoy built his own life into the *Anna Karenina* novel and here again an autobiographical impulse works towards the open form, which was seen as the artistic precipitate of the urge to portray natural life in its true colours. In *Anna Karenina* the structural principle of open form, that is natural to Tolstoy operates in a modified way. The naturalism of Tolstoy's style and diction is nothing more than another expression of his striving for veracity. There seems to be no artistic impulse at work in this style. Every picturesque, musical or otherwise aesthetically designed effect is avoided. The aim of the narrative is to approach the being of things as adequately and accurately as possible. [Kate Hamburger]

There is perhaps no other modern author in whose works the "totality of objects" is so rich, so complete as in Tolstoy. Emile Zola too possessed this trait. We cannot fail to see how different Tolstoy's pictures are from those painted by modern realists and how similar to those we find in the old epics. Such a manner of presenting the totality of objects is a pre-condition for depicting truly typical characters. For instance in *Anna Karenina* the genius with which Tolstoy creates such pictures as Levin's moving of a field letting them grow out of the problematic nature of Levin's relationship with his peasants and his sentimental attitude to physical labour is truly admirable.

In *Anna Karenina* Tolstoy created superb types of the upper classes under nascent Russian capitalism. In *Oblonski* he painted a wonderfully rich and subtly modelled picture of the Liberal tendencies at work within that social group; here, we find the type of the modern aristocrat in the person of Vronsky who gives up his military career and develops into a capitalist landowner. To round off the picture there is a third character the type of the already completely bureaucratised reactionary obscurantist (one who opposes increase of knowledge) hypocritical and empty administrative official in the person of Karenin. Capitalist division of labour increas-

ingly permeates all human relationships, it becomes the way of life. Tolstoy depicts with an increasingly bitter irony how in this world of divided labour, human beings are transformed into parts of an inhuman machine. Tolstoy hates it precisely because division of labour is a most suitable instrument for the oppression and exploitation of the working masses. But as the great and universal genius that he is, Tolstoy presents this whole process as it affects all classes of the population [George Lukacs]

The moral reality of *Anna Karenina* lies in the appearances that indicate as they conceal, sexual involvements, which the narrative is constantly analysing. Sex is the cause and effect of brightness or darkness, harmony or discord and Levin's soul searching is shown as depending on his real search for a harmonious fruitful marriage with Kitty. Sex is a point at which body meets spirit. Deeply needing reality, Anna finds Karenin most intolerable because he is a sham. Anna's tragic flaw is a kind of impatience with the subjecting appearances of the moment, as well as an obscure desire for a life only precariously whole. All her actions bear the truth of this fact. Levin is a spiritual barometer, like Anna. [Albert Cook]

### 1.8 The Trial: Kafka

Franz Kafka's nightmare world of the imagination has always haunted readers, but few grasp the full meaning of his eerie symbolic writings. He is primarily a writer of novels and stories though he is known as a religious thinker or a critic of religion. The whole experience recorded in his works like *The Trial* whether spiritual, mental, emotional or physical is absolutely continuous and there are no distinctions between the religious social and individual levels. "The whole art of Kafka consists in forcing the reader to re-read" says Albert Camus in his essay on the writer. Kafka's reputation as a writer has been controversial; it has been largely due to the fantastic strangeness of his imagination. The mixture of realism and allegory which to Kafka's peculiar invention is perhaps the most

economical and effective means that could have been found for expressing his vision of life his world is a sort of underground world in which life becomes denser; it is an image of what the actual world might be, if it were subjected to some process of condensation by means of which the invisible agencies that environ man, hopes and fears, devils and angels are forced to contract and solidify, peopling a scene which earlier man thought he had to himself. This probably explains the peculiarly charged and overcrowded atmosphere that fills *The Castle* and *The Trial*.

*The Trial* is the story of a war of attrition (gradual wearing down) conducted by a secret court against a man's demand for justice. Josef K searches continually for some clue to the guilt of which the secret court accuses him. He is executed, still in ignorance. There is a sense of guilt everywhere, though it is never clear to what the guilt refers; there is a sense of futility, sometimes even of vindictiveness throughout. And it is this which enhances the horror of Kafka more than the aesthetic trill which is in Edgar Allan Poe. The root of Kafka's dilemma is that not to see the world as good is to realise his guilt acutely, while to pretend to see it as good is to be guilty of hubris. And he could not escape this dilemma. By nature, upbringing and environment Kafka was distrustful, isolated, prone to see the worst. Hence the neurotic element in his work is not trivial. There was no certainty in his world.

In Kafka, we have before us the modern mind seemingly self-sufficient, intelligent, sceptical, ironically splendidly trained for the great game of pretending that the world it comprehends in sterilized sobriety is the only and ultimate reality there is - yet a mind living in sin. Thus he knows two things at once, and both with equal assurance: that there is no God, and that there *must* be God. It is the perspective of the curse: the intellect dreaming its dream of absolute freedom, and the soul knowing its terrible bondage.

Kafka is a metaphysical poet in symbolist narrative. *The Trial* and *The Castle* are composed very largely of dialogues, especially dialectic-dialogues. The characteristic excitement of these novels



lies in the wit and intellectual suspense of the dialogue. Kafka's world is neither the world of the average sensual man, not yet fantasy. In *The Trial*, the whole sequence is so improbable as to suggest some kind of pervasive allegory, but at no point does one encounter downright impossibility. It is his narrative method to write from within the mind of the hero. The introspective hero, through whose eyes we have glimpses of other persons, is man *alone*, man hunted and haunted, man eager to do right but perpetually baffled and confused as to what it is to do right, the man in search of salvation.

*The Trial* is one of the most effective and most discussed works to come out of Central Europe between wars. To most readers, it is a highly engaging comedy, filled with buffoonery and fantasy. More serious students of literature see in it, however, a vast symbolism and a first rate psychological study of a system whose leaders are convinced of their own righteousness. To some the court is a symbol of the Church as an imperfect bridge between the individual and God. To others, the symbolism represents rather the search of a sensitive Jew for a homeland that is always denied him. At any rate, *The Trial* is a powerful and provocative book.

### 1.9 The Outsider : Albert Camus

Several themes are interwoven into the structure of *The Outsider*. On the *metaphysical level*, Mersault's story is an example of that opposition between man and the external universe that Camus terms the 'absurd'. Mersault is a man who wants to be happy who wants to continue living, who would have liked when he was a student, to plan a useful life for himself. He comes up against a universe, however, that will not allow these desires to be fulfilled. He releases at the end of his story, which is a series of monotonous repetitions, that death is the common fate of all men and that death renders any attempt to plan for the future *meaningless*.

Another theme of *L'Etranger* is the lack of meaning in the social roles that most people play and believe to be significant. The

main targets of this *satire* are those middle-class citizens who are normally considered the pillars of society, who are supposed to lead upright lives, who believe in the virtues of the established government and the established church. The novel is also a satire on some social institutions like the press, the legal system, and particularly the state's use of capital punishment. Mersault's criticism of the Christian religion is largely directed towards the extent to which belief in God keeps men from devoting their energies to this life, which, from his perspective, is the only certainty we have. All these themes are treated in a paradoxical and often humorous manner. *The Strabser* is thus not a novel with a simple message, but rather an expression of sensibility that Camus can look at with sympathy and chronic detachment. It reflects the crisis of European culture, it also reflects what has often been termed the "Crisis of the novel". The reader knows only as much as that character Camus uses the first - person narration in this novel.

*L'Etranger* is carefully and formally organised. The two parts of the novel are of equal length. A central motif is death. The two-part structure of the novel is reinforced by the tone which suddenly rises towards the end of each part. The calmness of the opening of each part of the novel contrasts with the emotion in the murder scene and in Mersault's outburst against the chaplain. Part I covers eighteen days, while in contrast Part II covers a period of eleven months. The treatment of time in the two part structure shows the difference between how a free man responds to immediate events, and how a prisoner sees life as primarily a repetition in which time no longer has any meaning. The narrator Mersault has lost the key to his own secret : he has become a stranger to his own life ; to himself and to others. He has a homeland : *sensation*

Camus belongs to a generation which history forced to live in a climate of violent death. Raised on Marx and Nietzsche, it witnessed both the caricature of Nietzsche's ideas in the Hitlerian state and the falsification of Marxism in the Stalinist dictatorship. *L'Etranger* makes that curious impression on the reader. It is a



book without hope, or rather against hope, it ends on a promise. The Mersault who seems to us from the very beginning inhumanly stripped of illusions, who tries only to put the world in the wrong by bringing its hatred and disapproval down on himself, extracts from defeat a grim acceptance of life. It is not an explanatory book, nor does it prove anything, for the absurd man does not explain; he describes.

*L'Etranger* has often been considered one of the best novels written in French during the 20th century. The critical judgment is based on how appropriate the form and style of the novel are to the content : how skilfully Camus has constructed the plot to show his themes, how well the way in which Mersault tells his story, expresses his personal vision of life. As an unheroic exemplar (typical example) of the sensibility of an era, Mersault has an enduring place among the characters of world fiction.

### 1.10 Siddhartha : Herman Hesse

*Siddhartha* is a novel containing many autobiographical hints. It describes a young man's revolt against the orthodox religious views of his father, who is a missionary, and his growing interest in Indian mysticism. Incidentally Hesse married, but left his wife and three children in 1911, to make a protracted (long) tour of India. To a large extent, he was a rolling stone like Siddhartha, and above all, he was the prophet of individualism. Hesse gives a key to the understanding of *Siddhartha* in his diary : "I have once tried to put down my beliefs in a book. This book is *Siddhartha*. I have experienced religion in two forms, as a child and grandson of pious and righteous Protestants, and as a reader of Indian manifestations of which I give preference to the Upanishads, the Bhagvat Gita and the teachings of Buddha. "One sees the typical German 'Faustian' conflict a feeling of "two souls in a breast" which originates from his dissatisfaction with life. The moods of melancholy and loneliness, despair and helplessness form the background of his work which has a strong autobiographical trend.

**River** : The central metaphor of the novel is the river. After leaving the entangling world of Sansara, Siddhartha comes to the river which he had crossed earlier to enter the town of Kamala. He now realises that his self is transitory. He decides to stay by the river, stay with the ferryman Vasudeva who had taken him in his boat across the river. He feels that the river had some message for him. He feels a new love for flowing water. In the image of water, he sees both transitoriness and eternity at the same time. "He saw that the water continually flowed and flowed and yet it was always there; it was always the same and yet every moment it was new." Siddhartha learned from the river, "how to listen, to listen with a still heart, with a waiting, open soul, without passion, without desire, without judgement, without opinions". The river was to him "not just water but the voice of life, the voice of Being, of perpetual Becoming". At their first meeting the ferryman had told Siddhartha that he had learned from the river that "everything comes back". "The idea of the river as an eternal and a transitory thing at the same time is not entirely new. It is Greek : But Hesse borrows it from Vedanta's idea of *Pravahika nityata* [Shridhar B. Shrotri].

Hesse expresses his experiences and convictions through *Siddhartha*. Hesse's "Search for India" was born out of his "Flight from Europe". Likewise when he learned to listen to the river, Siddhartha's 'Self merged into unity; and then onwards he ceased to fight his own destiny. In their final meeting, the two split souls Govinda and Siddhartha once more unite. There is no more conflict in his mind. He tells Gotama that "wisdom is not communicable" and that "*Time is not real*". In this work of Hesse like his other works, there runs the trend of German humanism. For Hesse, love was the most important thing in the world. After his son's flight, Siddhartha feels a sort of a brotherhood with ordinary people with their life's urges and desires. Hesse's thoughts are curiously akin to Goethe's. He regards Gotama as a great man "in his deeds and life". This is Hesse's *Siddhartha*. Hesse preaches whatever doctrines he has through this Indian work.

The importance of Hesse's *Siddhartha* lies in the fact that the author succeeds in creating the necessary Indian atmosphere. For that his deep study of the *Upanishads* and *Bhagvat Gita* came to his help. He follows the style of the dialogues in the *Upanishads*. He uses the third person for the first person, double negatives (not unscanty pilgrims), inversions (Spoke Govinda), well-known Indian similis and metaphors. His style is lyrical and makes a lasting impact on the reader.

*Siddhartha* is a rich and colourful novel about the search for self knowledge. Through this work, Hermann Hesse tried to remind man of inherent dangers in his personality, but at the same time he tried to bring home to him the real meaning of Self-experience for his spiritual life. For his he employs the metaphor of the river, whose unique sound signals the true beginning of Siddhartha's life, or the life of any sincere seeker - the beginning of suffering, rejection, peace and finally wisdom. Hesse sees the reflection of his search of this Self-experience in the life of Gotama Buddha. His masterpiece *Siddhartha* may be considered a dedication to that search.

#### **Important questions on Siddhartha**

##### **1. Bring out the moral allegory of Siddhartha**

[Hints : Siddhartha, an everyman - in search of true self - wisdom incommunicable - has to be attained through one's own experience - much suffering involved.]

##### **2. "Siddhartha got salvation through existential suffering" -**

**Discuss**

[Refer (1)]

##### **3. "Siddhartha is the story of a man who sought and found himself" - Elucidate.**

[Refer (1)]

#### **Important Critical terms**

It is advisable to have, at your disposal, a standard glossary of critical terms such as by *M.H. Abrams*. Various Critical terms

pertaining to European Fiction have been explained in the several *Units*. Check your knowledge for the following in particular :-

a) **Movements** : Realism, Naturalism, expressionism, Impressionism Decadence, Arts for Art's sake, Surrealism, Dada, Futurism, Absurd

b) **Modes of Narration** : Epic, epistolary, Documentary, Picaresque, Autobiographical, Stream-of-Consciousness, Monologue.

c) **Types of Fiction** : Psychological, Sociological, Revolutionary, Fantasy, Propagandist, Domestic, Historical, Novel with a purpose

d) **Miscellaneous** : Round and flat Characters, Leitmotif, Metaphor

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## GUNTER GRASS : AN INTRODUCTION

### I.O. Objectives

At the end of this *Unit*, you should be able to:

- (i) form a general idea of German fictional literature of modern times : and
- (ii) understand about the life personality of *Gunter Grass*.

### 1.1 Introduction

Before you embark on the study of any author, it is advisable to know something about his age, since however conventional or individualistic he may be, he nevertheless belongs to his age, and is a product of his society. So let us begin this *Unit* with a brief note on German fictional literature of the modern times, which has produced such gems as *Thomas Mann*, *Hermann Hesse*, *Franz Kafka* and *Gunter Grass*.

### 1.2. German Fictional Literature of Modern Times

German literature holds less than its deserved status in world literature, in part because the lyrical qualities of its poetry and the nuances of its prose are ill-served by translation. Even the most sublime of figures in German literary history such as *Goethe* and *Schiller* are doomed to remain known to the world largely by reputation. In the 20th century perhaps four German poets and writers have won a permanent niche in world literature - *Franz Kafka*, *Thomas Mann*, *Rainer Maria Rilke* and *Bertolt Brecht*, all of whose works date from the early decades. Of German novelists since the war, only two have been published in translation abroad - *Heinrich Boll* and *Gunter Grass*; among the playwrights, apart from *Brecht* and *Carl Zuckmayer*, whose major plays extend from the 1920s to the mid 1950s, the works of *Siegfried Lenz* and *Peter Weiss* have been well received abroad.

In *Thomas Mann*, we find the *Zeitgeist* (Time Spirit), in all

its violence, concentrated within the stolid limits of a phenomenally intelligent conservative. He has been posited as a realistic bourgeois writer who clearly saw that time for his class had run out. Man was a bleak pessimist trapped in the Germanism he so vigorously resisted. *Expressionism*, the literary movement of approximately 1910-25 - was the first, and the most violent and explicit, manifestation of modernism. The German reaction to the disintegration of the old culture and to the impending catastrophe of the war, to the growing notion that man was alone in a hostile universe, was the most anguished and contorted (twisted) of all; frequently it took violent or gruesome forms. Apart from its intensity the most notable feature of German expressionism is the hostility of the younger towards the elder generation, often manifesting itself as hatred of the father or father figure. Like *Thomas Mann*, the Czech *Franz Kafka* also was an expressionist. Kafka was not interested in character, he is a writer of fables which evoke the bewildered, humiliated or defensive states of mind of a single protagonist. Another notable German *Hermann Hesse* (1877-1962) was a critic, poet, short-story writer and above all, novelist. As a writer, he has been more heeded in the East than in the West, with his overriding desire to reconcile such opposites as death and life with the war, Hesse turned pacifist. In *Siddhartha* (1922 tr 1957) the increasingly antinomian (Ref Section 1.4) Hesse drew on his Indian experiences. The hero son of a Brahmin is first an ascetic, then a sensual materialist, but does not learn anything until he becomes the assistant of a ferryman-mage (a magician) who plies between the two worlds of spirit and flesh.

The movements known as *Dada* and *Surrealism*, related to expressionism prevailed in German literature in the twenties. Nothing illustrates the nature of the German genius more clearly than the *German novel*. Before the first World War, German literature experienced comparative calm. The main influences were *Naturalism* and its opposite "art for art's sake". The *Impressionistic Novel* derived from the naturalists with however, a greater empha-



sis on character. Outstanding among the impressionistic novelists are *Hermann Hesse*, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1946 and *Thomas Mann*. Towards the end of the first World War weariness and despair, accentuated in Germany by the revolution (1918) led to several *war novels* being written by younger writers. *Johannes BECHER* in his works violently opposed war, and the chaotic state life was expressed generally in literature by EXPRESSIONISM, a movement borrowed from painting in a spirit of almost ecstatic mysticism. The Expressionistic writers were often socialists, and their work also revealed a changed attitude towards women, the relationship between men and women being intellectual rather than emotional. In 1922 Expressionism subsided. Immediate post-war novels were chiefly concerned with the attempt to explain the rise and fall of Nazi Germany. The late 1950s and early 1960s produced few great writers, with the exception of perhaps *Gunter Grass*, who won recognition and acclaim only much later.

Let us study something about the life and achievements of *Gunter Grass* now.

### 1.3 Life and achievements of Gunter Grass

*Wilhelm Gunter Grass* (1927-) who was born of German - Polish parents in the Free City of *Danzig* (now Gdansk) has achieved the greatest success of all post-war German writers. Trained as a sculptor and draughtsman, he began writing about 1956, had articles and poems published in *avant-garde* magazines and stage-pieces produced at experimental theatres in Hamburg and elsewhere but made little impact. He fought in the army towards the end of the war and was captured by the Americans. Thus Grass began like so many German writers as an artist, a sculptor. He had become known both for his art and for his radio plays by the mid-fifties; his plays were grotesque and in the manner of *Samuel Beckett*. His poems (with his own illustrations which were "at once amusing, horrifying and strangely life-enhancing....expose the false indemnities of modern man, the fragmentation of his world, his puzzle-

ment, his littleness and his curious paradoxical courage in recognising absurdity and facing it" [*Times Literary Supplement*]. Reminiscent of *Beckett's, Poems in English*, their elements of the 'Absurd' recur in the novel that has made Grass internationally famous: *DIE BLECHTROMMEL* (1959 tr. *THE TIN DRUM*, 1961). He was awarded the *Gruppe 47* award for this, even before publication. Since then Grass has written more novels, a full scale stage play, poetry and several essays and speeches. *Dog Years* and *Cat and Mouse* are two of his novels. Committed to the establishment of socialism in West Germany, Grass campaigned for the Social Democrats in 1965 and 1969 (when they were just successful); and in 1972, when they did well.

Grass is a linguistically exuberant, ingenious and highly inventive writer, whose work is a unique combination of vitality and grotesquerie. He is a genuinely *neo-baroque* novelist. He is old enough to have taken part in Nazi activities and the war (he was a member of the Hitler youth when Germany seized Danzig) without being responsible. This makes him eager to probe the immediate past an activity that puzzles those who are too young to have experienced Nazidom, but annoys those who once accepted it. Grass insists that the artist however committed he may be in life, should be a clown in art; there is much pained irony in this pronouncement. But Grass, an intelligent and sensible as well as a clever and amusing man, has made good sense of the division between his art (which is sceptical about human happiness) and his life (unequivocal political activity for a party of which he is critical); he calls himself a revisionist, that is one who departs from a Marxist doctrine. Despite everything, Grass remains extraordinarily relaxed, a remarkable feat for a really gifted German writer. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, 1999.

Grass is a charming, most often playful or satirical minor poet. His Absurd plays did not work well on the stage. A brilliant, tightly-controlled novella, *Cat and Mouse* (1961) demonstrated Grass's ability to direct his satire with complete accuracy at the world of Nazi

heroics. *Dog Years* is another vast novel with a wider political range than *The Tin Drum*, in which the world of political reality is ironically unmarked and seen from the perspective of a dog's fate. As usual in Grass's works, the mixture is of scurrility, humour, tragedy, satire and marvellously inventive imagery. Deeply committed politically, Grass left the immediacy of the pre - 1945 era in 1969, and presented a more contemporary German intellectualising of the past and present.

*The Tin Drum* is a historically meticulous examination of the period 1925-55, narrated by an impossible midget (dwarf) *Oscar Matzerath* who willed himself to stop growing at the age of three, a device which enables the author to hover between fantasy and realism and achieve a detachment to make the scenes and characters of German life before and during the Nazi regime stand out with extraordinary clarity and humour. One of the most outstanding post-war German novels, it has been translated into many languages. In this novel fantasy of the specifically German sort is brilliantly counter-pointed with historical detail. The scenes which helped to make it a success are only incidental to its epic "autobiographical" sweep, from German - Polish origins in Danzing through the Nazi period and the war to the, night-clubs of the West. Its power lies in its 'style', the fantastic vision of its hero; a dwarf in an asylum, whose drum the toy of his retarded childhood beats through the illusions and forgetfulness of the adult world, to expose its follies and fears with a sensationally detached sophistication, purporting (intending) to be naive. We can understand that Oskar's childhood need for tin drums, his glass-shattering screams, if denied them is not merely fanciful. Similar techniques and themes, with grotesque satire of Nazi-violence, the war and its end, and post war Germany are employed in *Dog years* and *Cat and Mouse*.

You should have an idea of certain critical terms, if you are to appreciator *The Tim Drum* fully. Let us make a brief note of them.

#### 1.4 Some Critical Terms

1. **Expressionism:** A German movement in literature and other

arts (especially the visual arts) which was at its height between 1910 and 1925, that is, the period just before, during, and after the First World War. Its chief precursors (beginners) were artists and writers who had in various ways departed from realistic depictions of life and the world by expressing in their art visionary or powerfully emotional states of mind. Prominent among the literary movement are the Russian novelist *Dostoevsky*, the German philosopher *Friedrich Nietzsche*, *Franz Kafka* and *Gunter Grass*. Its central feature is a revolt against the artistic and literary tradition of *realism*, both in subject matter and style. The expressionistic writer undertakes to express a personal vision - usually a troubled or tensely emotional vision - of human life and society; he does it through exaggeration and distortion of the objective features of the outer world, and by embodying violent extremes of mood and feeling. The expressionists were radical in their politics. The movement was finally suppressed in Germany by the Nazis in the early 1930s. We recognise its effects direct or indirect, on the theatre of the *absurd*.

2. **Surrealism :** An artistic movement launched in France in the 1920s. The expressed aim was a revolt against all restraints on free creativity; the restraints included logical reason, standard morality, social and artistic conventions and norms, and any other control over the artistic process by fore thought and intention. To ensure the unhampered (free) operation of the "deep mind" which they regarded as the only source of valid knowledge as well as art, surrealists turned to *automatic writing* (writing delivered over entirely to the promptings of the unconscious mind) and to exploiting the material of dreams, of states of mind between sleep and waking and of natural or artificially induced hallucinations. Surrealistic writing is characterised by broken syntax, non-logical and non-chronological order, free association dream like and nightmarish sequences and the juxtaposition of bizarre (strange) shocking and seemingly unrelated images.

3. **The Literature of the Absurd:** The term is applied to a



number of works in drama and prose-fiction which have in common the sense that the human condition is essentially and ineradicably absurd, and that this condition can be adequately represented only in works of literature that are themselves absurd. The current movement emerged in France after the horrors of the II World War, as a rebellion against essential beliefs and values, both of traditional culture and traditional literature. Absurd literature is characterised by naive, inept characters in a fantastic or nightmarish modern world, and events which are often simultaneously comic, horrifying, and absurd. Examples in prose-fiction are the novels of *Kafka* (*The Trial*), *Sartre*, *Camus* and *Gunter Grass* (*The Tin Drum*)

**4. Baroque:** The term refers to a style of art and architecture prevailing in Europe during the 17th and first half of the 18th centuries that was characterised by elaborate and grotesque forms and ornamentation.

**5. Antinomian:** A person who (like Herman Hesse) maintains that Christians are freed from the moral law by virtue of grace as set forth in the Gospel.

**6. Dadaism/Dada:** The term refers to the style and technique of a group of artists, writers etc, of the early 20th century who exploited accidental and incongruous effects in their work and programmatically challenged established canons of art, thought, morality etc.

Let us summarise the novel *The Tin Drum* in the succeeding Units.

## UNIT TWO

### THE TIN DRUM: A SUMMARY OF PART ONE

#### 2.0 Objectives

At the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- (i) have a general idea of the plot of Gunter Grass's novel *The Tin Drum* : and

- (ii) form your initial impressions about the characters and the mode of narration.

#### 2.1 Introduction

The best way to enjoy a novel, of course, is to read it in the original. Even in the most authentic translation something of the original flavour and flair is bound to be lost. A chapter-wise summary of this sort is twice removed from the original. It will certainly help you to know the plot of the novel, form ideas about the characters, mode of narration and so on. But if you can lay your hands on a good translation, do it. Only then will you be able to understand and enjoy Grass's masterpiece. Anyway, something is better than nothing. So let us begin to summarise the first part of the novel comprising the whole of *Book One* and seven chapters of *Book Two*.

#### 2.2 BOOK ONE

##### 2.2.1 The Wide Skirt

*Oskar Matzerath*, the narrator of the novel is an inmate of a mental hospital. He seems to enjoy his quiet, lonely existence there. Upon his request, his keeper *Bruno Munsterberg* gets him five hundred sheets of writing paper ("a ream of virgin paper" as Oskar calls it). Oskar begins to write the story of his grandmother *Anna Bronski* who was once sitting in her skirts at the edge of potato field, late one October afternoon in the year 1899 in the heart (centre) of *Kashubia*. Oskar's grandmother wore four wide skirts one over the other! She saw three men darting between the telegraph poles. After some time she hid one of them ('Short and Wide') inside her skirts! His name was *Kiljaiczek*, and the other two men, who were rural constables were chasing him. They searched everywhere around the woman, disturbing her heaps of potatoes and were disappointed not to find any sign of the fugitive. Oskar's grandmother sat there rooted to her spot and sighing at intervals. It was evening when the two constables decided to look for *Koljaiczek* in



Bissau. Oskar's grandmother saw them vanishing; only then did she rise, "slowly and painfully as though she had struck root and now, drawing earth and fibres along with her, were tearing herself out of the ground"! She gave some hot potatoes to him, then with her basket, potatoes etc, she started off in the direction of Bissau Quarry. Joseph Koljaiczek, unable to tear himself away from her skirts, followed Oskar's grandmother there.

**Critical Comments:** The novel opens in a dramatic manner. The central character, an inmate of a lunatic asylum recounts the meeting of his grandmother Anna Bronski with the fugitive Joseph Koljaiczek. Her wearing four wide skirts one over the other, her hiding the short and stocky Koljaiczek under her skirts, with subtle sexual innuendos (sly remarks) are rather fantastic, bizarre and ludicrous.

### 2.2.2 Under the Raft

That afternoon Anna Bronski conceived Oskar's mother Agnes! The same night his grandmother changed her name to Anna Koljaiczek and followed Joseph, who found work as a raftsmen in the provincial capital on the river Mottlau. Joseph remained in hiding for three weeks, assuming the name and role of a raftsmen *Joseph Wranka*, a harmless fellow and a good husband. He was not a tyrant. His daughter seemed to take after him hiding herself under the bed, or in the clothes cupboard. The essential thing for little Agnes was to remain hidden, it gave her a sense of security.

The trouble began in 1913, when as in every summer, Koljaiczek was to help man the big raft from Kiev to Vistula. Twelve raftsmen in all, they boarded the tugboat *Radaune*. The new manager of the sawmill introduced himself as *Duckerhoff*. Both Koljaiczek and Duckerhoff were afraid and full of doubts suspicions and hesitation - like two enemy brothers Duckerhoff doubted whether Wranka was Koljaiczek, the fire-bug who had worked in the mill at Schwetz, the one that burned down. Oskar's grandmother Anna was able to produce papers and documents to dis-

prove any allegation of arson. Fire captain Hecht, a parson similarly supported Joseph. Evidence was gathered in a number of saw mills, matters became quite bad and at last when Koljaiczek saw the blue uniforms, he jumped into the water. Oskar's grandfather's body was never found; he had met with his death under the raft. However there were a number of cock and bull stories as to how he had been miraculously rescued. Oskar did not believe them.

### Critical Comments

This chapter begins with the starting bizarre manner of Anna Bronski conceiving Oskar's mother Agnes, while the short and stocky Koljaiczek was hiding under her wide skirts! It ends with the death of the grandfather.

### 2.2.3 Moth and Light Bulb

The rumour about Oskar's grandfather was that he was a man who had left everything behind him, crossed the great water and become rich. Oskar felt that was enough about his grandfather regardless of whether he was called Goljaczek (Polish), Koljaiczek (Kashubian) or Joe Calchic (American). Bruno remarked that it was a beautiful death. Oskar's friend Klepp made an ill-humoured refusal to decide between life and death. But his other friend Vittlar's answer was sardonic and offensive; he advised him to go to America after his acquittal and trace his grandfather.

Oskar continued to touch very briefly on the life up to the hour of his birth, of the little group of mourners his grandfather had left behind him in Europe. When Koljaiczek disappeared under the raft, Oskar's grandmother, her daughter Agnes, her brother Vincent Bronski and his seventeen year-old son *Jan Bronski* were filled with anguish. Joseph's brother Gregor Koljaiczek said he hardly knew anything about him. At last he married Oskar's grandmother who was determined to stick by the Koljaiczeks. Gregor drank heavily. Oskar's mother Agnes, then a plump little girl of fifteen helped in her mother's store. Only when Gregor died of influenza in 1917 did the profits of the shop increase a little. But not much; for, what

was there to sell in 1917?

Oskar's mother fell in love with her cousin Jan, a sickly young man of twenty who worked in a post office and had a large stamp collection. In 1918, Agnes, who was working as an auxiliary nurse met *Alfred Matzerath*, a wounded cook and soon he captivated Sister Agnes. Jan Bronski opted to be transferred to the Polish post office. The gesture seemed spontaneous and was generally interpreted as a reaction to Oskar's mother's infidelity. It was only after Jan married his *Hedwig*, a Kashubian girl that relations between him and Agnes improved. In 1923, Alfred Matzerath married Agnes, and the two looked after the store quite well, complementing each other wonderfully.

Oskar was born in the bedroom. He himself says, "I was one of those clairaudient infants whose mental development is completed at birth and after that merely need a certain amount of filling in". Oskar listened carefully to the first words that slipped from his parents beneath the light bulbs. Matzerath commented that the boy would take over the store when he grew up. His mother said, "*When little Oskar is three, he will have a toy drum*". Oskar made up his mind to reject his father's projects but to give his mother's plan favourable consideration, when his third birthday arrived. He quickly realised that his parents were not equipped to understand or respect his decisions. Lonely and misunderstood, he knew that he had to go on living till the end. It was only the prospect of the drum that prevented him from expressing more forcefully his desire to return to the womb.

### Critical comments

This chapter tells us about Oskar's birth, his being a clairaudient infant, his inherent sense of loneliness and insecurity and his desire to return to the womb. One is reminded of the characters of Samuel Beckett who suffer from similar problems. The promise of the tin-drum as Oskar's third birthday gift also is expressed here.

### 2.2.4 The Photograph Album

Oskar guarded his photograph album like a treasure. He described it as his "family cemetery". He went through it commenting on the snaps, which he and Klepp had taken long back. Oskar then had been gloomy and depressed for no solid reason. He observes that true gloom is by nature groundless. Their gloom attained a pitch of intensity that would yield to nothing. If there was any way of making friends with their gloom, it was through the photos, because they found an image of themselves in them; the photos gave them a kind of freedom in their dealings with themselves. Occasionally they gave a photo away. Oskar never gave any pictures to the waitress. In the photographs taken shortly before the First World War, and even during the war years, those who posed continued to smile. After the war the faces changed. The men looked rather de-mobilised; melancholy was becoming to the women of the twenties, who made no attempt to conceal an under tone of studied sorrow. Oskar paid special attention to one particular photo in which his mother was sitting, and Jan and Matzerath standing behind her, and smiling too - the three protagonists of Oskar's early years forming a triangle, those three who brought me into the world thought they wanted for (lacked) nothing".

Oskar observed that he was a handsome child. His first photograph was taken on Pentecost, 1925. He was eight months old, two months younger than Stephan Bronski. There were several photos of his taken when he was aged between one and three years including the full-length portrait they had taken of him in honour of this third birthday. His tin drum was hanging in front of his tummy, brand-new with its serrated red and white fields. It was in that picture that Oskar first arrived at an unalterable decision, and determined that he would never under any circumstances be a politician, much less a grocer, that he would remain as he was - and so he did, for many years Oskar not only stayed the same size, but clung to the same attire. He remained the three year-old, the gnome, the Tom-Thumb, the pigmy, the Liliputian, the midget, whom no



one could persuade to grow. To quote Oskar: "I remained the precocious three-year-old towered over by grown-ups but superior to all grown-ups, who refused to measure his shadow with theirs, who was complete both inside and outside, while they, to the very brink of the grave, were condemned to worry their heads about development." However something did grow, ultimately taking on Messianic proportions but no grown-up in his day had eyes and ears for Oskar, the eternal three-year-old drummer.

### Critical Comments

It is in this chapter that we come to know of Oskar's decision taken on his third birthday, that he would stop growing. It is his way of rebelling, protesting against society and man-made conventions and institutions.

#### 2.2.5 Smash a Little Windowpane

From the very beginning it was plain to Oskar that grown ups would not understand him. On his third birthday, while everyone was busy, Oskar went down the trap door leading to the cellar and tried to climb up with a tray of raspberry syrup bottles, he landed head first on the cement floor of the cellar. His fall created a big sensation. His mother was upset, blamed Matzerath for keeping the trap-door open, and called him a murderer. Unintentionally, Oskar transformed the harmless, good-natured Matzerath into a guilty Matzerath. Oskar's fall brought him four weeks in the hospital. After this incident he created the general impression that he just would not grow any more after that fall down the cellar stairs. And Oskar began to drum. The ability to drum the necessary distance between grown-ups and Oskar developed shortly after his fall, almost simultaneously with the ability to sing-scream so piercingly that no one dared to take away the drum that was destroying his eardrums. *Oskar had the gift of shattering glass with his singing, his screams and singing made window-panes crumble.* Soon his talents became well-known. To his irritation, every window-pane broken in the entire neighbourhood by rowdies big or little was

blamed on Oskar and his voice.

A month after his third birthday, Oskar's parents tried to take his old drum away, because they feared that he would cut himself on the sharp edges when Matzerath tried to pull it Oskar screamed so strongly that the glass covering of the clock was shattered. Hence forth Oskar made this a practice. Jan Bronski bought him a new drum and took away his old wreck. Surprisingly Oskar did not protest. He relinquished the relic and devoted himself with both hands to the new instrument. He observed that not all the grown-ups around him proved as understanding as Jan Bronski.

Once, shortly after his fifth birthday, Oskar's mother took him to Dr. Hollatz, who tried to take his drum away. For the first time Oskar tried his voice on a whole set of carefully sealed glasses, destroying the greater part of his collection of snakes, toads and embryos! The success was unique and overwhelming for all present. Then lending his scream greater relief and throwing economy to the winds Oskar shattered one test tube after another. The tubes popped like firecrackers. Dr. Hollatz turned the loss of his collection to his advantage by publishing an article about Oskar M, the child with the glass-shattering voice in a medical journal. His already keen scepticism led Oskar to judge the doctor's opusculum (composition) as a long-winded skilfully formulated display of irrelevancies.

Today as he lies in his mental hospital unable to damage even his toothbrush glass with his singing, Oskar likes to think back on the archaic period of his voice. In those early days he shattered glass only when necessary, but later on in the heyday and decadence of his art, exercised it even when not impelled by outward circumstances. *He employed glass as a medium of self expression and grew older in the process.*

### Critical comments

This chapter connects two of Oskar's particular gifts or characteristics - his habit of drumming and his ability to shatter glass

by singing - both equally irritating and troublesome to the others. Well, it is his way of expressing his protest against the world which cannot understand him.

### 2.2.6 The Schedule

In this chapter, Oskar speaks about the schedules Klepp kept drawing up and then goes on to recount his first day at school-the Pestalozzi School. There were several boys of Oskar's age in the I-A class. Their mothers pressed against the walls. After some time *Miss Spollenhauer* came in. Upon her suggestion the class started signing, or rather howling. Oskar started drumming emphatically. The teacher gave him a nod of encouragement. For a moment, he felt that Miss Spollenhauer had become a not unpleasant old maid, but had become human, that is, childlike, curious complex and immoral. Soon trouble began when she tried to coax him to put his drum in the locker and have it back when school was over. Oskar gave her a warning scratch on the lens of her right eye-glass, probably with his voice. The teacher looked reproachfully at mother and son and called the boy wicked. Following that she handed out the schedule (timetable) and started reading out. Oskar started drumming, much to the irritation of the teacher. She tried to seize the drum when the boy let out his glass-demolishing scream. She then tried to whip him.. When Oskar would not hold out his hand to be whipped she struck his drum, his "darling"! It was too much for Oskar who composed a double cry which literally pulverised both lenses of Miss Spollenhauer spectacles, and caused slight bleeding at the eyebrows. As an offended mother escorted the son out of the classroom, a photographer placed Oskar against a blackboard on which was written : *My First School Day*, and took a snap!

#### Critical Comments

Oskar's protest against routine and timetables, very characteristic of him, is described here with a mixture of realism and fantasy.

### 2.2.7 Rasputin and the Alphabet

At the Pestalozzi School, Oskar had not drummed in mere revolutionary protest; he lacked the most elementary school learning. It was just unfortunate that Miss Spollenhauer's methods of inculcating knowledge did not appeal to Oskar. His parents did not care much about his education. Several times a day he tramped up and down the steps of the four-story apartment house. He sometimes accompanied Mr. Meyn the trumpet player on his drum. The green grocer Greff hardly understood him. To a very small extent, Oskar envied other school children, but that was only a temporary feeling. Then *Gretchen Scheffler* who lived behind the bakery took his education in hand. This lady had little enough to offer him; for she hardly read. From her small collection of books, Oskar picked out first Rasputin and then Goethe. Gretchen complained to Oskar's mother that the boy learnt nothing. But actually Oskar tore off pages after pages from the two books combined them differently and read them! He ate a lot of cakes in those years and grew just fat and lumpy. He was compelled to try on little frocks and bonnets Gretchen made.

#### Critical Comments

This is a rather funny but thought provoking chapter which recounts how Oskar learnt his alphabets. Once again, Oskar's protest against conventional methods of education, coupled with incompetent teachers is brought out.

### 2.2.8. The Stock turn. Long - Distance Song Effects

The lady doctor who attended on Oskar observed that he suffered from isolation in his childhood, that he did not play enough with other children. One day some of the children forced Oskar to drink some disgusting, nauseating soup and he screamed and sang banking on long-distance glass-shattering effects. Each time he needed a new drum, which was very often, his mother took him into the city to shop. Often she would leave Oskar in Markus's shop to go and opened three quarters of an hour with Jan in a hotel.



On one such occasion Oskar strolled, crossed the Kohlenmarkt and stood facing the Stockturm a very tall East German brick Gothic tower. He climbed the lower and screamed even though his drum was not even remotely threatened. He was very happy to note that window panes in the end window of the lobby of Stadt theatre was shattered. Markus mentioned his to Oskar's mother. Today, in his hospital bed, Oskar looks for the land of the Poles that is lost to the 'Poles'

### Critical Comments

This chapter describes the expansion or extension of Oskar's glass shattering skills to long distance effects. It also hints at his mother's clandestine relations with his Uncle Jan.

### 2.2.9 The Rostrum

Oskar's mother took him and his cousins to see the Christmas play at the Stadt-Theater. The play was Tom Thumb. Oskar and his mother were touched particularly by the end of the play. It was not until the summer of '33 that he visited the theatre again to watch the Zoppot Opera-in-the Woods. In '34 he went there for the third time to watch a circus. There he met *Bebra* who was about four inches taller than Oskar. They got introduced Oskar was then nine and a half. Babra who claimed royal lineage said he was about fifty three years old. Bebra was impressed by Oskar's glass-shattering ability and wanted to hire him on the spot. Even today Oskar is occasionally sorry that he declined. Bebra kissed him on the forehead. He said that little people like them could always find a place on the most crowded rostrum. The political events of the ensuing (following) years bore him out. Oskar was usually able to find a place among the leaders of the women's associations. By the summer of '34, Oskar began to be disillusioned with the party.

### Critical Comments

This chapter open with Oskar's visits to the theatre on different occasions, his meeting with Bebra, his initial fascination with

rostrums and his gradual disillusionment with the party. The novel takes on a political tinge. As an undercurrent, the love triangle involving Agnes, Matzerath and Jan Bronski is perceived by the precocious child.

### 2.2.10 Shopwindows

For several years till '38 Oskar and his drum spent much time huddling under rostrums observing demonstrations, breaking up rallies, driving orators to distraction and so on. Looking back Oskar feels that though he cannot be called a *Resistance Fighter*, he had drummed *for* the people. His work was destructive, what he did not defeat with his drum, he killed with his voice, gradually he developed another strange temptation - to turn ordinary, well meaning persons into thieves. He would produce a neat hole in a show case, shop-window, jewellery or watch case, so that a victim standing close by would invariably be tempted to put his or her hand through it and steal that object. Through his mother suspected his hand or rather his voice in the sudden increase in the crime, she said or reported nothing. Once Oskar tempted Jan to steal a ruby necklace which he presented to Oskar's mother. Agnes, who suspected the source, wore it only when Matzerath was absent. Soon, after the war, Oskar exchanged it on the black market for twelve cartons of Lucky strikes and a leather briefcase. Oskar was aware that all that he was doing was evil.

### Critical Comments

This is a very dramatic chapter which recounts how Oskar turns ordinary people into thieves. The strange thing is that he knows what he is doing is wrong, yet he persists.

### 2.2.11 No Wonder

Today as he lay in his mental hospital, Oskar often regretted the power he had in those days to project his voice to cut holes in shop-windows and show thieves the way. How he suffered from the loss of that power during the year before his commitment to the

hospital! He usually abhorred (hated) violence. Oskar records sarcastically that his mother who led "an adulterous woman's life" by meeting Jan Bronski regularly on Thursdays became religious in her son's case and put a stop to his singing outside of shopwindows. She started taking him every Saturday to Church, for Confession. Oskar could not help noticing an embarrassing resemblance between Christ the Saviour and his godfather, uncle and presumptive father Jan Bronski.

Since his mother felt the need to confess before Easter should reach its climax she took Oskar by the hand on the afternoon of Passion Monday to the Church. It was late when they arrived. As his mother confessed, Oskar wandered. He hung the drum on Jesus and thrust the drumsticks into Jesus's hands. Oskar hoped that by a small miracle Jesus would start drumming but nothing happened. Oskar realised that it was a mistake to try to teach Jesus anything. He took the sticks but left the drum. He then put back the sticks. He actually drummed to show the "little pseudo-Jesus" how to do it. Hearing the din Father Wiehnke, the Vicar, Oskar's mother, all came there. The priest snatched the drum; Oskar kicked him, much to his mother's shame. Oskar screamed, but he failed to execute his glass-shattering miracle. He sank down and wept bitterly because Jesus had failed. Only his mother understood his tears, though she could not help feeling glad that there had been no broken glass. His mother then picked up Oskar in her arms and they left. Oskar regretted that Jesus with the Sacred Heart was false. He would go down into the grave on Good Friday, while Oskar would keep on drumming and drumming, but never again experience any desire for a miracle.

### Critical Comments

In this chapter Oskar tries to see a resemblance between himself and Christ as men of miracle. We note how for the first time his glass-shattering voice fails him. Is Oskar trying to show that religion or God cannot tolerate destructive tendencies?

### 2.2.12 Good Friday Fare

Oskar's feelings during the period between Passion Monday and Good Friday were *paradoxical*. He was glad his drum was his own, though he was irritated that Jesus had not drummed. Though he had failed in his glass-shattering in the Church, he was glad that the vestige of Catholic faith was preserved. The triumph of his voice over profane targets made him painfully aware of his failures in the sacred sector. The cleavage was lasting; Oscar had never been able to heal it. Now he was at home neither in the sacred nor the profane, but dwelt on the fringes, in a mental hospital.

On Good Friday, after breakfast, Oskar his parents and Jan Bronski started for Brosen. There Agnes witnessed a revolting scene of eels being extracted from the head of a dead horse submerged in water. She perversely forced a diet of the eels upon herself. Upon their return the elders began to argue about the Good Friday dinner. As usual Agnes reminded Matzerath of Oskar's famous fall, and Bronski tried to pacify them. Oskar hid himself in the clothes cupboard and tried to dream of Sister Inge. He was disturbed by their screaming, arguing and his mother's whimpering. It was only after Easter that Oskar's Passion began.

### Critical Comments

This is one of the several outlandish experiences that fill the later part of Oskar's recorded existence.

### 2.2.13 Tapered at the Foot End

Oskar's mother's Passion too was going to begin. Her sufferings began soon. Quite of her own accord, possessed by some mysterious demon, she began, exactly two weeks after Easter, to devour fish in terrible quantities again. Everyone including Matzerath and Grandma Koljaiczek were exasperated. She was taken to hospital. She was found to be pregnant; her face was devastated by pain and nausea. She could not forget the horse. On the fourth day she died Oskar could not weep. He felt it was his mother's way of



breaking up the triangle that would leave Matzerath, whom perhaps she hated, with the guilt and enable Jan Bronski to feel that she did it for. Agnes and Jan could be easily identified with Romeo and Juliet.

Oskar suppressed a passionate desire to climb up on his mother's coffin, sit there and drum. With his very knuckles, he would have wished to drum and go down into the grave with his mother and the foetus, if it had only been possible and allowed. Markus who came for the condolence was shown the gate. At last Oskar slept under his grandmother's skirts.

### Critical Comments

This is a rather touching chapter, recounting the strange manner of Oskar's mother's death following her unnatural consumption of fish. Oskar's desire to return to his mother is reminiscent of the Beckettian dilemma of the return to the womb.

### 2.2.14 Herbert Truczinski's Back

Soon after his mother's funeral, Oskar started missing her terribly. He was almost fourteen; he loved solitude and his drum went with him, though he used it sparingly. One day, in '37 or '38, he met Bebra who introduced him to the midget *Roswitha Raguna*, the most celebrated somnambulist in all Italy. The Neapolitan (Italian) somnambulist was an old lady of eighty or ninety. She admonished Oskar to forgive his fathers, to accustom himself to his own existence so that his heart might find peace, but it was all in vain. In spite of everything Oskar felt badly let down by his mother. In his acute loneliness, he had only his drum to turn to. Oskar experienced guilt when his grandmother remarked that her daughter Agnes had died because she could not stand the drumming any more.

Oskar would occasionally go to Madame Truczinski's house. Her son Herbert was his friend. Herbert worked in a Sweden Bar an international spot; the job was not without its perils, for Herbert would come home in an ambulance once or twice a month. Oskar was fascinated by the scars on his massive back; they were caused

by the knives of the drunk customers. Herbert would explain the history of each scar as Oskar pointed to it.

### Critical comments

One feels sorry for poor Oskar, for he really misses his dead mother. His fascination with Herbert's scars is a diversion.

### 2.2.15 Niobe

In '38, the Customs duties were raised and the borders between Poland and the free City were temporarily closed. Herbert was unemployed. During that period Oskar and Herbert together committed two medium sized burglaries. They gave up the burglar's trade not so much due to the misplaced feelings of guilt as the increasing difficulty of disposing the goods. Mother Truczinski insisted that Herbert should look for a decent job. Herbert managed to get the job of a maritime museum assistant. The pride of the museum collection was a ship's wooden figurehead called *Niobe* - a luxuriant wooden woman green and naked, with sunken amber eyes gazing out over resolute, forward-looking breasts. This female figure head was believed to be a bringer of disaster. Niobe, popularly known as "the Green Kitten" was responsible in the short space of fourteen years for the death of three directors, the violent ends of students graduates etc - all apparently cases of tragic suicides. Biobe was seriously suspected of having dispatched men and boys from life to death.

Herbert took Oskar along on a child's admission ticket and they went inside. At first Herbert declared that he was not at all affected by Niobe. He worked there for weeks. Then one day he took up his post alone, for Oskar was not allowed inside by the cashier. Oskar accompanied him to the museum and sat on a place across the street. That afternoon, Oskar managed to slip in with the emergency squad into the museum. In a frenzy of lust, Herbert, who was bare to the waist and whose trousers were open, had torn a double-edged ship's ax (axe) from its safety chain; in the course of his frantic assault, he was impaled (fixed) to her - forever. Thus

Herbert Truczunski died of a wound in the chest inflicted by a wooden woman!

### **Critical Comments**

The killing power of lust is dramatically and fascinatingly brought out in this chapter, not without a tinge of sardonic humour. The attempted love affair between Herbert and Niobe is the ludicrous equation between flesh and wood, and is naturally foredoomed to disaster.

### **2.2.16 Faith, Hope, Love**

There was once a musician named Meyn; a toy merchant named Markus and a drummer named Oskar. Meyn killed his four cats with a fire poker. Markus took all the toys with him out of this world. They took away Oskar's toy-merchant.

### **Critical Comments**

This chapter contains a lot of repetitions. Oskar is dejected and wonders if there is any meaning in the Biblical words: *Faith*, *hope*, and *love*.

With this, we come to the end of Book One. Let us move on to *Book Two*.

## **2.3 Book Two**

### **2.3.1 Scrap Metal**

Oskar piles up all his battered tin drums in the potato cellar, with a note on each drum's career. He has a passion for order which Herbert's sister Maria cannot understand. The fear of a shortage or prohibition of drums following his generous mother's death must have been at the root of his collector's passion. He had little realised that the relatively serene and playful days of his childhood had ended with Markus's death. Now Oskar was very careful with his drums; he drummed seldom and only in cases of absolute necessity. Even since his mother's death, Oskar's father thought of nothing but Hitler and his Party occupations. Oskar hated to think about the collec-

tion Sundays. Once he took Matzerath's tin can in which he collected for Winter Aid. After his unsuccessful attempt to use it as a drum he realised that nothing could amply substitute a tin drum. Oskar realised how things had changed after his mother's death while Jan worked for the Polish Post Office. Matzerath stood for the German Reich and the relations between them were not the same as before, in the present political situation.

Once in August '39, Oskar waited for Jan outside the Polish settlement. They were going to the Polish Post Office to see Jani-tor Kobyella who would repair Oskar's drum. Oskar noticed as they drove that his presumptive father was sweating profusely. As an official Jan was expected to help defend the Polish Post Office. Some of his colleagues distrusted him, some felt that Postal Secretary Bronski was going to shirk his duties. Jan had difficulty in clearing himself. A little later someone came and gave Jan instructions. Oskar lay down in one of the mail baskets and fell asleep.

### **Critical Comments**

This is an introductory chapter to Book Two. Oskar's fear complex regarding his drums and his approaching Jan Bronski for getting his drum repaired, as well as the increasing political tension are all broadly hinted.

### **2.3.2. The Polish Post Office**

The machine gun fire increased; there followed the first anti-tank shell burst against The Polish Post Office, Oskar, still obsessed with the desire to have his drum repaired, thought of Kobyella and looked for Jan. Oskar compared the damage with the window panes that had collapsed in quiet deep breathing times of peace under the influence of his diamond voice. After a long search Oskar found Jan and Kobyella in the nursery of the flat of Chief Postal Secretary Naczalnik. They carried Kobyella out, he had lost much blood. Oskar took a drum belonging to Naczalnik's son.

### **Critical Comments**

This chapter gives an account of the shell burst at Polish Post



Office and Oskar's experience at tracing his uncle and Kobyella.

### 2.3.3 The Card House

They went to the emergency hospital where the wounds of Jan and Kobyella were treated. They played cards and tried to lighten the atmosphere. Suddenly SS Home Guards came and led them to the courtyard where thirty others like them had been captured and were being photographed for the news reel. Oskar was separated from the thirty defenders by the wall. They picked him up and handed him into an official car belonging to the SS Home Guards. Oskar could see Jan, smiling stupidly and blissfully into the air; perhaps he waved with his upraised hand to Oskar, his departing son.

#### Critical Comments

This is a continuation of the sequel of the previous chapter.

### 2.3.4 He lies In Saspe

As soon as the Home Guards had ordered them to come out, Oskar concerned for his comfort and safety made up to two Home Guards who struck him as good-natured uncle-like souls, put on an imitation of pathetic sniveling and pointed to Jan, his father with accusing gestures which transformed the poor man into a villain who had dragged off an innocent child to the Polish Post Office to use him, with typically Polish inhumanity, as a buffer for enemy bullets. As a result Jan was battered though Oskar was left with both the drums. Even today Oskar is filled with shame at this disgusting behaviour of his especially since, on that afternoon he had felt absolutely certain that Jan Bronski was his real father. The date September 1, 1939 marked the inception of his second burden of guilt; It was Oskar the drummer who had dispatched first his mother, then Jan Bronski, his uncle and father to their graves.

Oskar the sly ignoramus, an innocent victim of Polish barbarism, was taken to the City hospital with brain fever Matzerath was notified. Oskar came to know that after imprisonment, Jan and

the other thirty men were thrown into the porous sand behind the wall of the run-down abandoned old cemetery in *Saspe*. Hedwig Poronski was officially informed that Jan had been sentenced to death by the seminarist Leo Schugger, Oskar visited the *Saspe* cemetery. A few days later, throwing caution to the winds, Oskar whispered into his grandmother's ear, "He's lying in *Saspe*".

#### Critical Comments

This is a powerful, thought provoking chapter. It describes Oskar's treachery born out a desire for self preservation, personal security, and perhaps cowardice too. Isn't it a universal predicament?

### 2.3.5 Maria

Oskar drummed furiously to destroy the last witness of his shameful conduct with the Home Guards, namely Neczaln timer's drum. The tin grew thin and fragile. He felt confident that for Christmas he should receive a new and guiltless drum. But he was disappointed, for he got no drum. Matzerath employed Maria Truczinski to work in his store. Maria was Oskar's first love. She undressed him washed him helped him into his pyjamas, prayed with him and put him to bed at night - all very pleasantly. But Maria was not all self-conscious about undressing in Oskar's presence. One day Matzerath sent Oskar and Maria to the beach, keeping the child's health in mind. Oskar made a ludicrous attempt at making love to Maria.

#### Critical Comments

Oskar is not able to forget his guilt over Jan Bronski's murder and his feelings are naturally transferred to his drum. His ludicrous attempt to make love to Maria illustrates that though physically he is a midget, Oskar's sexual instincts are normally developed.

### 2.3.6 Fizz Power

In this chapter, we have a continuation of the previous one.

Oskar is attracted towards Maria. Since Matzerath goes out to play *Skat* with his Party friends twice a week it is arranged that Oskar will share Maria's bed. He waits expectantly, but nothing happens.

### 2.3.7 Special communiques

Maria came to visit Oskar at the hospital. There was a special communique regarding Stalin's death. Maria spoke about her son *Kurt*, who was twelve years old. Oskar travelled down memory lane. He was certain that Kurt was his son; he had impregnated the sleeping Maria in the bed of her brother Herbert. He had found Matzerath lying on top of her. The people in the neighborhood though otherwise; they thought that Matzerath had knocked up (impregnated) Maria and so he was marrying her though she was only seventeen years old and he was going on forty five. Moreover she was a real mother and not a mere stepmother to Oskar. The whole idea was revolting to Oskar. On Gretchen Scheffler's advice, Matzerath married Oskar's sweetheart. Oskar remembers distinctly how he had seduced Maria; he lay motionless on Maria who was crying with pain while Oskar cried from hate and love, which turned to a leaden helplessness but could not die.

### Critical Comments

We get a glimpse into Oskar the man who wished to be acknowledged as a proud father though no one would believe him if he were to say that he was Kurt's father. His search for true love and his disappointment in sex produced by the preposterous seduction of Maria are described here.

Read the study material carefully a number of times and become familiar with the story so far. Also note down your observations of Oskar's character, his bizarre experiences and the role played by his tin drum. We shall study the latter part of the novel in the next *Unit*.

## UNIT THREE

### THE TIN DRUM: A SUMMARY OF PART TWO

#### 3.0. Objectives

At the end of this *Unit*, you should be able to:

- (i) have a complete idea of the story of *The Tin Drum*; and
- (ii) understand the symbolic and expressionistic aspects of the drum.

#### 3.1 Introduction

The novel *The Tin Drum* is made up of three books, In *Unit 2* we summarised the whole of Book One and seven chapters of Book Two. In this *Unit* we shall summarise the rest of the novel that is eleven chapters of Book Two and the whole of Book Three.

#### 3.2. Book Two (Contd.)

##### 3.2.1. How Oskar took his helplessness to Mrs. Greff

Oskar begins the chapter by speaking of the green grocer *Greff* whom he never liked. *Greff's* wife *Lina* was a sloven. *Greff* liked young boys a lot. But Oskar was not his type. *Greff* was one witness to the marriage of Matzerath and Maria who was then in her third month. The stouter his sweetheart became the more Oskar's hate mounted. The idea that the fruit by him engendered should one day bear the name of Matzerath deprived him of all pleasure in his anticipated son and heir. He made two unsuccessful attempts at abortions. Maria handled the situation tactfully. As a means of diversion she bought him a new drum and shifted him to Madame Truczinski's where he grew calmer or more resigned. Oskar's son Kurt was born on June 12.

Jan Bronski's widow had married a Baltic German the local Peasant Leader *Ehlers*. Seventeen years old *Stephan* had volunteered for fighting. The old folks including Oskar's grandmother had been turned into Germans. They were Poles no longer and spoke Kashubian only in their-dreams. They were now called Ger-



man Nationals, Group 3. Oskar would soon be of military age, but was reduced to waiting behind his drum, until there should be an opening for a three year old drummer in the Army or Navy, or even in the Air Corps.

Kurt was baptised in August. All the relatives had come Oskar refused to join them in the church. Later during lunch, when *Vanilla* pudding was served it was more than Oskar could bear. There was nothing so joyous and so sad as the vanilla scent which spread round about, enveloping him more and more in Maria, to be point that he could not bear to look at her, root and source of all vanilla, who sat beside Matzerath, holding his hand in hers. Oskar slipped off his baby chair, clung to the skirts of Lina Greff and lay at her feet, breathing in the efflurium (unpleasant-outflow) peculiar to Lina which instantly killed the Vanilla. Oskar clung to the new perfume until all recollections connected with Vanilla seemed to be dulled. Slowly, he was seized with a redeeming nausea. Oskar became fully aware of his helplessness. He decided that from then on and daily he should carry his helplessness to Lina Greff.

### Critical Comments

This chapter describes the agony of Oskar deprived of what he believes to be *legitimate* fatherhood. In a sense he is getting back from Kurt what he gave to Matzerath whom he never acknowledged to be his real father. The olfactory (smell) effect towards the end of the chapter is highly effective. You will recollect in the chapter *Maria* it is the smell of vanilla that Oskar associates with his sweetheart.

### 3.2.2 165 lbs

Oskar continued to frequent Lina Greff's place: He would slip in with her under her feather-bed. The woman was bed-ridden. Greff had sadly changed. The open-hearted, convivial (cheerful) friend of the young had been transformed into a lonely, eccentric rather unkempt old man. One day he had received indirectly the news that his favourite *Horst Donath*, then lieutenant in the army,

had fallen to the Donets. From that day Greff began to age. His shop looked pitiful; instead of vegetables, he filled it with all sorts of silly noisy machines. One day there was a huge commotion. Mrs. Greff was screaming wildly. She would not allow anyone to enter the house before the ambulance men arrived. It was soon revealed that Greff had hanged himself against 165 lbs (pounds) of potatoes.

### Critical Comments

This is yet another ludicrous chapter, tinged with sorrow. Greff's manner of death is comic in spite of its tragic end.

### 3.2.3 Bebra's Theatre at the front

Oskar was looking forward to his son's second birthday in June '43; for from there it would be only a brief year before he too would start drumming. But it so happened that on that day he was not present to take part in the celebrations. He met Bebra and Signora Roswitha Raguna and joined their theatre group. In a performance Oskar shattered a beer bottle; he rated it only as a child's play, hardly anything in the international class. However long applause came - long and thunderous, mingled with the sounds of a major air-raid on the capital. It made the men forget the front and they laughed heartily. Good old indestructible Bebra spoke up, played the clown in the darkness, wrung volleys of laughter from the mob buried overhead. Timelessly courageous and timelessly fearful, Roswitha offered herself to Oskar.

### Critical Comments

The war scenario is intense and air-raids have become the order of the day. Oskar, who has declined Bebra's earlier offers, has at last joined him and this entails moving out, leaving his son.

### 3.2.4 Inspection of Concrete, or Barbaric, Mystical, Bored

For three weeks, Oskar, Bebra and Raguna played every night in the venerable casemates of *Metz* a city of garrisons and once a Roman outpost. Oskar enjoyed Roswitha's company. They spent

the whole winter in Paris. Though he had not forgotten his dear ones at home Kurt, Maria, Matzerath, Grandma etc, he missed none of them.

It was June '44. Bebra's troupe had been giving several performances. One night, after the programme, Oskar and Roswitha slipped quietly away and went to bed. It had been a trying day. They dropped off quickly and slept until 5 A.M when the invasion woke them up. Canadians landed in their sector. Roswitha was hit by a shell from a naval gun and she died. Bebra later on regretted: "We dwarfs and fools had no business dancing on concrete made for giants. If only we had stayed under the rostrums where no one suspected our presence." In Berlin Oskar parted from Bebra. He made a present of the five remaining drums to Oskar and sent Kitty and Felix at Danzing with official travel orders to keep him company. So it was that armed with six drums and his "book" Oskar returned on June 11, 1944, the day before his son's third birthday, to his native city which was still intact.

### **Critical Comments**

This chapter finishes Oskar's experience as an artist in Bebra's theatre group during the invasion, the death of Roswitha and his return to his native place.

### **3.2.5 The Imitation of Christ**

Oskar's homecoming was like that of the Prodigal Son; for Matzerath opened the door and welcomed him like a true, not as presumptive father. From that day on Oskar called himself Oskar Matzeth as well. Maria's reception of Oskar was less emotional but not unfriendly. There was quite a lot of bother. A man came from the Ministry of Public Health; but upon Matzerath's insistence Oskar was not sent to an institution.

It was Kurt's birthday the next day. Oskar picked out a gleaming brand-new instrument resolved to offer his son the same opportunity as his mother had offered him on his third birthday. He was consumed by one desire: to see a drummer son beside a drummer

father, two diminutive drummers looking on at the doings of the grown up world; to establish a dynasty of drummers, Oskar imagined how father and son, the two, would have drummed away. Brushing away his fantasies, Oskar presented Kurt with a drum, In no time the boy battered it and made it ready for the scrap heap.

Shortly Oskar received the shocking news of the death of his step-brother Stephan Bronski on the Arctic front. Then followed the bad news of the death of Maria's brother Sergeant Truczinski in the Center Sector. His death made Maria religious. Not being satisfied with Protestant faith, she turned to Catholic religion. Oskar felt sorry for her. He noticed that nothing had changed in the church of the Sacred Heart. Jesus was just about the size of his son Kurt: Oskar laughed at Jesus for not being able to drum. As he was leaving, he felt that a pleasant but imperious voice touched his shoulder: "Dost thou love me Oskar?" The irritating voice came thrice, upon which Oskar replied looking him full in the voice: "You bastard, I hate you and all your hocus-pocus. In spite of Oskar's hostility, the voice said that Oskar was rock, and on that rock he would build his Church. Oskar was full of indignation.

On reaching home, Oskar went to the attic and sang a number of bulbs to pieces. Upon one bulb his voice inscribed JESUS, then pulverised both bulb and inscription. Oskar still had his voice.

### **Critical Comments**

This chapter opens with the homecoming of Oskar like the Prodigal Son, his son Kurt's third birthday and ends with his hatred and disbelief in religion; this last aspect is important, for, in the political scenario of the world war, religion cannot actually render much concrete help and Oskar is quick to perceive the inefficacy of Church, religion etc in such an inhuman situation.

### **3.2.6 The Dusters**

Oskar was not cut out to be a follower of Christ. However Christ's "follow thou me" found its way indirectly, to his heart and he became his follower, though he did not believe in him. After



that he went to the Church several times with Maria; but he never heard either his drum or Jesus's voice again. From that period Oskar developed a sorry habit: whenever he visited a Church, he would begin to cough. Oskar knew that the whole world had forsaken him. It was due to his poor mother's influence that Matzerath refused to send him to the institution. In this matter Oskar did not trust Maria not to hand him over to the doctors. Fortunately he had his drum and his voice, the latter being a greater proof of his existence. Every time he left the Church of the Sacred Heart at a late hour, he sang something to pieces. Wishing to walk off his fury, Oskar picked a particularly circuitous way home and rented his rage on an almost empty streetcar; his rage lost some of its intensity. He had to squeeze between the planks of a fence in order to escape from his pursuers. They were a gang of youngsters with names like Ripper, Forestaller, Putty, Lionheart, Storebeker and so on. They caught Oskar, interrogated him. Oskar told them that his name was Jesus. Firestealer seized Oskar, dug his knuckles into his arm just above the elbow, and gouged, producing a hot painful sensation - that was what they called dusting. Storekeeper asked him about his trick regarding the street lights and window panes. Oskar demonstrated his glass shattering skill so impressively that Storebeker gave him his watch and invited him to join their gang-the Dusters. Oskar returned the watch. Shifting his drum to a comfortable position for the homeward march Oskar said: "Jesus will lead you. Follow Him".

### Critical Comments

This chapter opens with the desolation and frustration of Oskar who feels forsaken. Then we see him impressing the Dusters with his glass-shattering skill. Oskar vents his resentment by walking off and shouting off all his pent up emotions.

#### 3.2.7. The Christmas Play

Oskar became the leader of the gang of Dusters comprising thirty to forty members. Like Stortebeker whose unstinting respect Oskar had won, *Moorkahne*, the 16 year old leader of the

Neufahrwasser outfit recognised him as Jesus, first in command of the Dusters : In keeping with his nature, Oskar remained in the background during operations. He let Stortebeker or Moorkahne do the actual organising. After nighfall, he never stirred from Mother Truczinski's apartment. He would stand at his bedroom window, and send out his voice, farther than ever before, to demolish windows of several Party Headquarters etc - that was his secret weapon. While Oskar slept, the Dusters, in Jesus' name were looting Party treasuries, stealing food cards, rubber stamps, printed forms, or a membership list of the Hitler Youth Patrol Service, the gang's main enemy. Oskar says that their gang was accused of several conspiracies, but all that was pure legend. Stortebeker made it very clear at the trial that the Dusters were not interested in politics. They were choir boys and were getting ready for a Christmas play.

Several Sundays running Oskar attended ten o'clock Mass with Maria. The Dusters too, at his behest, had become regular churchgoers. Finally on the night of September 18, they broke into the Church of the Sacred Heart, taking whole sets of tools with them. They toppled off the statue of John the Baptist; next they covered off the boy Jesus from Virgin Mary's lap. Oskar was then lifted up and put there. Oskar sat naturally in Jesus's place, all ready to be worshipped. The boys enacted a true Mass, which went on like clock work, making the boys experience a spiritual liberation. The band of Dusters were confirmed in the faith in Oskar's and Jesus's name.

Soon the police arrived. Upon Oskar's instruction the boys remained as they were. Oskar offered no resistance, but stepped automatically into the role of a snivelling three year old who had been led astray by gangsters. All he wanted was to be comforted and protected. Father Wichenke picked Oskar up in his arms. The police led the boys away. As he was led away between two inspectors, Stortebeker turned his blood-smeared face towards Oskar and Lucy who was carrying Oskar and the basket of sandwiches. Oskar looked past him. He recognised the gangster no longer. Oskar

however was carried away to a trial that he still called the second trial of Jesus, a trial that ended with the acquittal of Oskar, hence also of Jesus.

### Critical Comments

This is the second time we find Oskar betraying his fellows. Earlier he had struck the same pose at the Polish Post office so that it had led to the execution of Jan Bronski. Is Oskar a modern Judas? Is his self preservative instinct justifiable? Is he blemishing the sacred name of Jesus Christ by assuming that holy name and behaving like Judas?

### 3.2.8. The Ant Trail

The Dusters were forced to jump into a waterless pool from the thirty-foot down every rung in the ladder. Diving down into the waterless swimming pool was the desperate punishment the Dusters got at the trial. After this incident, a court official advised Matzerath to keep Oskar off the street the child was so helpless and gullible, that he was always ready to be taken in by disreputable elements, Oskar was never able to dispel the habit of looking about in streets and public places for a skinny teenage girl, neither pretty nor ugly, but always biting men. Even in his bed in the mental hospital his nightmare is that *Lucy Rennwand* would turn up in the shape of a wicked witch and for the last time bid him to plunge.

On the eleventh day, after prolonged pondering Matzerath signed the letter regarding Oskar and sent it to the Ministry of Public Health. The city was already under artillery fire and like everyone else, they started living in the cellar. Mother Truczinski died during that period. Oskar went to Hindenburg Allee where he saw clusters of youngsters strung up in uniforms, and several times he thought he recognised Strotebeker. Now that they had hanged Strotebeker, Oskar wondered whether they had strung up Lucy Rennwand too. The vision, clear in every detail, of a dangling Lucy was still with Oskar.

When shells began to land nearby, Matzerath became as be-

wildered as a child and for the first time expressed doubts about the final victory. On the widow Greff's advice he removed his Party pin from his lapel, but could not figure what to do with it. Oskar snatched it, not allowing his brat of a son to have it for fear of endangering him. Soon the Russians arrived. One of them carried Oskar who desperately wanted to crush lice. Oskar passed on the party pin to Matzerath. When Matzerath in wild desperation tried to swallow it the enemy soldiers shot and killed him. Oskar observes wholly, "While my presumptive father was swallowing the Party and dying, I, involuntarily squashed between my fingers a louse I had just caught on the Kalmuck (Russian)".

### Critical Comments

This is yet another chapter which describes how Oskar is party to the death of someone - this time his presumptive father as he calls Matzerath. What do you think about his reason for passing on that fatal pin to his father? Is Oskar justified?

### 3.2.9 Should I or Shouldn't I?

A gentleman called *Fajngold* took over the grocery store at once and he employed Maria as salesgirl. He helped them to carry Matzerath's corpse, which had been lying in the cellar for three days, upstairs: With great difficulty Matzerath was buried. Throughout Oskar was deliberating to himself: "Should I or Shouldn't I?" He was going to be twenty one. He had never loved Matzerath. Occasionally he liked him. He took care of Oskar but more as a cook than as a father. Oskar admitted to himself that he had killed Matzerath deliberately, because he was sick of dragging a father around with him all his life; for that situation could not go on forever. Maria was still crying authentically and praying Catholically. Finally, Oskar unslung the drum from his neck saying "It must be" and threw the drum where the sand was deep enough to muffle the sound. He tossed in the sticks also. The sand piled up on his drum, the sand mounted and grew - and *Oskar too began to grow*; the first symptom was a violent nosebleed. Oskar could hear Leo Schugger



proclaiming to all the world: "He's growing, he's growing----"

### Critical Comments

This is a significant chapter. It finally resolves Oskar's feelings for Matzerath. 'Should I or Shouldn't I' is reminiscent of the dilemma in the hearts of the Shakespeare's heroes Hamlet and Macbeth: "To be or not to be". Once again Oskar feels responsible for the death of a parent; and much against his will, he starts growing.

#### 3.2.10. Disinfectant

Bruno measured Oskar and said that he was still four feet one inch tall. It was only when the stone hit him at Matzerath's funeral in Saspe cemetery that he began to grow. Oskar continued to be a sick child causing Maria much concern. Oskar had a swelling head, his neck grew shorter, his chest grew broader and higher; he heard Maria whisper. "If only he don't get a hump!" Oskar's grandmother visited them. She told them that Ehlers had been hanged by the local farm labourers. Hedwig and Marya were with her helping in the fields.

One day Fajngold proposed to Maria; she was twenty two. She rejected the proposal. Maria left for the Rhineland with Kurt and Oskar. Their train left leaving Fajngold behind. Soon he had ceased to exist altogether.

### Critical Comments

This chapter describes the changes coming over Oskar following Matzerath's funeral, and his various theories concerning them. It ends with Maria, Oskar and Kurt leaving for the Rhineland, after Maria rejects Fajngold's proposal.

#### 3.2.11. Growth In a Freight Car

Oskar suffered from severe pains and aches. His fingers were swollen and temporarily no good for drumming. He made Bruno record the next sequel of his story. Maria, Kurt and Oskar travelled in a freight-car. Bruno wrote at length about the train journey to

Stolp. Later Oskar was admitted to the Dusseldorf City Hospital, where he lay from August 1945 to May 1946. At last he was discharged so that he might embark on a new and adult life.

With this we come to the end of *Book Two*, which marks the end of the II World War, just as *Book One* marked the end of the pre-II World War period. Now, we shall move on to *Book Three* which deals with Oskar's account of his life in the post war period.

### 3.3 Book Three

#### 3.3.1. Firestones and Tombstones

After being discharged from hospital, Oskar, went to the house of Maria's sister Guste Truczinski. He found Maria and Kurt busily engaged in *black marketing*. Kurt, who was just six years old had the look of a very busy self-made man. Guste noticed Oskar's hump with curiosity. Maria did not tolerate any interference on Oskar's part in their black marketing. Oskar was shamefaced for he himself enjoyed the luxuries provided by his son illegally. Now he realises that deeds and misdeeds which only yesterday were fresh and alive and real, are reduced to history and explained as such. Two years had not passed since, at Matzerath's grave, Oskar had resolved to grow, and already he had lost interest in grown-up life. In spite of his hump, Oskar was attractive, and the hospital nurses liked him. He met an artisan who made tombstones; his name was Korneff. The stonecutter took Oskar on as his helper for a small sum. But Oskar was not strong enough for the heavy job.

#### 3.3.2. Fortuna North

For more than a year, Oskar had been a stonecutter's assistant, and had been able to enjoy a brief giving spree. They celebrated Kurt's seventh birthday in '47. When he had supported the family for months, Oskar took Maria out for a movie and then to a restaurant. She was dreadfully worried because her black marketing business was falling off and because Oskar, weakling, so she put it, that he was, had been supporting the family for several

months. He comforted her, told her that Oskar was glad to be doing what he could, that he liked nothing better than to bear a heavy responsibility; finally he proposed to her. After weeks of evasion and silence, Maria nicely declined to marry Oskar, making him feel like a fool, like Hamlet.

### 3.3.3 Madonna 49

The currency reform came too soon, it made a fool of Oskar, compelling him to reform his own currency. He was obliged to capitalise, or at least to make a living from his hump. If Maria had accepted his proposal, he should have been a business man, a family man, a respected member of society; as a husband and family man, he should have participated in the reconstruction of Germany. Since that was not to be, he remembered his hump and fell a victim to art. Before Korneff could dismiss him, he walked out. He gradually wore out his tailor-made suit and began to neglect his appearance. He frequented parks sitting on benches for hours on end. At last he met two emaciated young men and a girl in glasses who introduced themselves as painters in search of a model. Oskar was just what they were looking for. Oskar agreed to pose as a model, motivated by the lure of both art and money. They carried Oskar to the partially demolished Academy of Art.

After examining Oskar, Professor Kuchen declared: "Art is accusation, expression, passion. He told his disciples that what he wanted was expression, pitch black and desperate. Oskar, he maintained was the shattered image of man, an accusation, a challenge, timeless yet expressing the madness of our century. In conclusion, he thundered: "I don't want you to sketch this cripple, this freak of nature, I want you to slaughter him, crucify him, to nail him to your paper with charcoal". In a few weeks time the disciples produced a number of pleasant little sketches, all in the name of artistic expression; Oskar made good money and was treated with respect for six hours a day.

Professor Maruhn, a friend of Professor Kuchen asked if Oskar

would pose in the nude for sculpturing and he agreed. After several weeks his students managed to turn out a few passable sculptures, first in clay then in plaster and imitation marble. They were shown at the End of Term Exhibition. Thus Oskar made a good living on art. Later the Academy turned out a painting entitled "Madonna 49": Ulla a dress-maker posed as Madonna and Oskar sitting on her milk-white, naked thigh, a crippled child, posed for Jesus. The painting was shown at a number of exhibitions. It was purchased by a Rhenish industrialist for a large sum Ulla and Oskar were in high demand. Under duress Oskar posed with his drum and he was painted as Jesus the drummer boy sitting on the nude left thigh of the Madonna 49. It was thus that Maria saw him on a poster advertising an art show. She who was now holding a well-paid job was no longer a black marketing refuge from the East. Thus it was with a certain conviction that she was able to call him a pimp, a degenerate. She made it clear that she did not want the filthy money he made with his filthy occupation. After that Oskar decided to stop living with her. Maria, who had no objection to his moving, persuaded him to look for a room, not too far away from herself and Kurt, in any case in Dusseldorf.

### Critical Comments

This chapter describes how handicaps and deformities can prove lucrative in the name of art. Note the total absence of feeling in such endeavours. What do you think of Maria's attitude to Oskar's poster? Do you, think she is justified in criticising him as a degenerate. Or is she being unduly harsh? Note also the sardonic tone of the author.

### 3.3.4 The Hedgehog

After a long search Oskar got a room belonging to one Zeidler, who had a hedgehoggy appearance and was very severe about maintaining order. Oskar was told that the next room was occupied by a trained nurse who rarely came, except perhaps to sleep. Oskar was overwhelmed by the mystery of the nurse. His feeling for nurses



was a kind of sickness. All that he knew of her was that her name was Sister Dorothea.

### 3.3.5 In the Clothes Cupboard

Oskar had his professional occupations. He had to give up cutting inscriptions, when the summer semester at the Academy began. He and Muse Ulla received good money for sitting still for art students, especially for those from the studies of Kuchen and Maruhn, not to mention the prize students Ziege and Raskolnikov. 'The Abduction of Europe'; came after Madonna 49. Upon Oskar's suggestion, Raskolnikov next painted 'Fool Heals Nurse', picturing Oskar as guilt, and Uilla dressed as a nurse representing atonement.

One day unable to resist his temptation he tried Sister Dorothea's door knob which turned surprisingly. He made a visit of the entire apartment, found it cold and uninspiring. At last he drummed a little on the rear of the clothes cupboard and left after checking for neatness and order. He took a few strands of the woman's hair from her comb.

### 3.3.6 Klepp

What obsessed Oskar and filled him with jealousy was that Dr. Werner might be a rival for Sister Dorothea's hand! But he could find no trace or evidence in the room to confirm his doubt. One day he intercepted a letter written by Dr. Werner to Nurse Dorothea and read it; it was a passionate love letter. He then slipped the letter intact under her door. Oskar made the acquaintance of one Munzer who insisted on being called Klepp. He drummed and related his story right from the beginning. At last Klepp suggested that they should start a jazz band together. Oskar had already made up his mind to give up his modelling and stone-cutting activities and become percussion man in a jazz band. However he asked Klepp for time to think it over.

### 3.3.7 On the Fiber Rug

It was Oskar who had resurrected Klepp and forced him out

of his bed to begin life with renewed vigour. And yet today now that it is Oskar who is privileged to lie in bed, he feels that Klepp is trying to get even with him, for he is trying to throw Oskar out of his bed in the mental hospital. Once a week Oskar has to put up with his visits and listen to his tirades about jazz and his music-Communist manifestoes. Caution, his heavy, glistening flesh, and a sense of humour that lives on applause, enabled him to devise a sly system, combining the teachings of Mark with the myth of jazz. He sends petition after petition, asking Oskar to be acquitted, set free; he wants them to turn Oskar out of his hospital, just because he envies him his bed.

It worried Klepp to see Oskar so half-immersed in his thoughts. Oskar rarely went to the Academy. And so he gave himself up entirely to his friend Klepp. He did not go to see Maria and little Kurt, for their apartment offered him no peace. *Mr. Stenzel*, her loss and married lover, was always there. One day Klepp and Oskar helped Hedgehog Zeidler to spread a narrow coconut fiber rug in the hallway. It was on this fiber runner that Oskar, on the next night, met Sister Dorothea for the first time.

The night Oskar who was only half dressed since his pyjamas had not come from washing, could not sleep. At three he heard a couple of doors open. He ran to the toilet; he collided with Sister Dorothea who was seated there. Then followed a pathetic scene where Oskar desperately proposed to her. The nurse said nothing, just cried and got up. Evidently she was packing up and leaving the apartment. Oskar felt miserable after this humiliating episode. Zeidler and wife were quite angry. At last Klepp the flutist came accompanied by Scholle the long sought guitarist. They pacified Zeidler, bent down over Oskar asked no questions, picked him up; Klepp rubbed him warm. Together he and Scholle dressed him up and dried his tears. The next morning Klepp the flutist, Scholle the guitarist and Oskar the percussion man agreed to call their new-born band *The Rhine River Three* and went to breakfast.

### Critical Comments

Oskar does not seem destined to receive the love of a woman. His disappointment in not being able to secure Maria put him to a lot of mental tension jealousy and frustration. Let us see how this humiliating episode involving Sister Dorothea will turn out.

#### 3.3.8 In the Onion Cellar

The jazz and practice scared away the sparrows. As a remedy *Ferdinand Schmu* the restaurant and night spot owner, who loved to shoot sparrows, gave them his Onion Cellar for playing for fourteen and a half marks an evening apiece. As soon as the Onion Cellar had filled up, Schmu asked the ladies and gentlemen to help themselves to the onions. Oskar had a vision of floodgates opening. Once the customers had finished crying and unburdening themselves, Oskar's band which had been sitting under the companion way or staircase, took up their instruments and provided a musical transition to normal everyday conversation. They made it easy for the guests to leave the Onion Cellar and made room for more guests.

Scholle had no ground for sorrow; tears made Klepp laugh. But Oskar had plenty of ground for tears: Sister Dorothea, Maria, his son Kurt who called Maria's husband 'Papa Stenzel', all those who lay in the Saspe cemetery, his poor mother the foolish and lovable Jan Bronski, Matzerath etc. All of them needed to be wept for. But Oskar was one of the fortunate people who could still weep without onions. His drum helped him. Just a few very special measures were all that it took to make Oskar melt into tears.

Once Madame Schmu turned up with Woode the music critic. She cut up an onion and laid her husband bare, told horrible stories about him. Schmu was very upset. The situation soon became tensed up. Klepp and Scholle considered the whole thing a joke. At last Oskar became a three year old drummer and played with his heart. He drummed up the world as a three years old saw it. And the first thing he did to those post-war humans incapable of a real orgy was to put a harness on them. "Where's the Witch black as

pitch?" He drummed and scared them out of their wits, so that they all wet their pants! Forgetful of home, they continued for some time to make childish mischief, until at last the police helped them to remember their age, social position and telephone number. As for Oskar, he giggled and caressed his drum as he went back to the Onion Cellar.

### Critical Comments

This chapter brings out the ingenuity of Oskar to bounce back and earn his living. His capacity as a drummer is still intact.

#### 3.3.9. On the Atlantic Wall, or Concrete Eternal

Oskar had only been trying to help him; but Schmu, owner and guiding spirit of the Onion Cellar could not forgive him for his drum solo which had transformed his well - paying guests into babbling, riotously merry children who wet their pants and cried because they had wet their pants, all without the benefit of onions. Oskar understood that Schmu feared competition from Oskar. Schmu fired the whole *Rhine River Three*. But he was forced to compromise as many of his guests threatened to leave. The band played thrice a week, having demanded and obtained a raise. Oskar started a savings account and rejoiced as the interest accrued.

Shortly after that Schmu died in a car accident. He was accorded a decent burial. Klepp was in hospital with four broken ribs. Soon Oskar was approached by a gentleman who introduced himself as Dr. Dosch. He ran a concert bureau. He had been a frequent guest at the Onion Cellar. He had been authorised to offer Oskar a terrific contract: In return for enormous sums of money. Oskar the drummer had to give sole performances in large theatres before audiences numbering two to three thousand. Oskar said that he needed some time to think it over; may be he would take a little trip somewhere. However, though he signed no contract at the cemetery, Oskar's financial situation impelled him to accept an advance from Dr. Dosch.

Oskar did take the trip, with Muse Ulla's fiance Lankes as his



travelling companion. Their destination was Normandy. They came across a few nuns. One Sister Agneta, a novice went towards the sea causing her superior much concern. Lankes the typical painter quipped that there was scope for a fine painting "*Nuns at High Tide*". If the nun drowned, they would call it "*Nuns Drowning* and if the nun were to come back and fling herself at Lankes's feet, he would call the painting "*Fallen Nun*!"

With Lankes, it was always either - or, head or tail, drowned or fallen. He did whole series of nuns, exhibited and sold several. Some of the critics even saw it fit to compare Lankes with Picasso. It was Lankes' success that persuaded Oskar to dig up the visiting card of Dr. Dosch, the concert manager for Lankes' art was not alone in clamouring for bread. The time had come to transmute the *pre-war* and *wartime* experience of Oskar, the three-year old drummer, into the pure resounding gold of the *postwar* period.

### Critical Comments

Like the previous chapter, this too brings out, Oskar's 'never-say-die' attitude to life. After all, life is a long series of alternatives, particularly in a world of mediocrity. Can you blame Oskar, or for that matter even Lankes?

### 3.3.10 The Ring Finger

After weighing the various pros and cons, Oskar contacted Dr. Bosch who welcomed him most cordially and introduced him to his boss. Oskar was shocked when he saw the boss on a wheelchair, for it was his friend and master Bebra, paralysed, living only with his eyes and fingertips. He was on the verge of tears. The wall behind Bebra's wheelchair had a life-size bust of Roswitha Raguna. Bebra observed regretfully that Oskar had altered his proportions immoderately and not at all to his advantage. Roswitha had worshipped him. But one day Oskar was disinclined to bring her a cup of coffee. She herself went for it and lost her life. Secondly Oskar had handed over his presumptive father Jan Bronski over to the centurions (commanders) who shot him. Oskar had drummed his

poor mother into her grave. Next Oskar confessed that he had murdered second presumptive father Matzerath because he wanted to be rid of him and told the judge how he had made him choke to death. Indeed Bebra who had set himself up as his judge played the role to perfection.

Bebra then made Oskar sign a contract for his professional services. To say the least Oskar was a stunning success. Those who flocked to hear him were the middle-aged, the elderly, and the doddering. Oskars message was addressed most particularly to the aged, and they responded. His biggest triumphs were with numbers evoking stages of infancy and childhood. Oskar drummed "*The Wicked Black Witch*", upon which fifteen hundred miners, who had lived through cave-ins, explosions, strikes and unemployment, let out the most blood curdling screams he had ever heard. Their screams demolished several windows; indirectly Oskar had recovered his glass-killing voice. However he made little use of it; he did not want to ruin his business.

His second meeting with Bebra the master was a pleasant one. The newspapers were building Oskar up into a cult, Oskar and his drum had become healers of the body and soul. And what they cured best of all was loss of memory. *The word Oskarism* made its appearance in the papers. Bebra was pleased. Oskar felt embarrassed. With his immense wealth Oskar bought Maria a modern, up-and-coming delicatessen store, on condition that she give up Stenzel. Maria prospered well.

Meanwhile Bebra died. Oskar had not been informed as Bebra had not wished that his illness should interfere with Oskar's tour. Bebra had left a small fortune and Roswitha's photo in his will for Oskar. Bebra's death was a severe blow to Oskar and he did not recover soon. He bought a dog called Lux. One day Lux brought from the field a lady's ring finger to Oskar. As he was returning home, Vittlar who had been observing Oskar and the dog, addressed him.

### Critical Comments

This is a rather packed chapter full of information and a prepa-

ration for winding up the long saga of Oskar's life. The role of the drum as well as the drummer seems to assume even more significance in the post-war period.

### 3.3.11 The Last Streetcar, or Adoration of a Preserving Jar

This is a long chapter which contains the testimony given by Vittlar against Oskar. Vittlar testified that the ring finger which Oskar had got from Vittlar's mother's field and which he preserved in a jar of alcohol belonged to the murdered woman Sister Dorothea. As both Oskar and Vittlar travelled they found two men hounding poor old Victor of the Polish Post Office; the two were executioners. Oskar drummed the message that Poland was still alive and managed to save Victor. When Vittlar congratulated him on his success, Oskar replied: "I have had too many triumphs, too much success in my life. What I would like is to be unsuccessful for once. But that is very difficult and calls for a great deal of work". This reply struck Vittlar as arrogant. He had never had the least success in life; and how he wished that his name would appear in the papers and make him famous. Then Oskar coolly suggested that all that he had to do was to take the jar containing the ring finger drive to the Police Headquarters and report Oskar; the next day he would see his name in all the papers. And that is what Vittlar did! Meanwhile leaving his drum Oskar embarked, laughing, upon his flight.

#### Critical Comments

This is a thought-provoking chapter. In the name of jealousy and ill-will people like Vittlar do not mind bearing false testimony against people whom they call their friend. And what do you make of Oskar? He is so indifferent and vain that he literally invites danger. Do you think he is insane?

### 3.3.12 Thirty

Oskar started running at the age of twenty eight and now he is thirty. His flight was mainly motivated by a desire to enhance the value of Vittlar's case. Oskar's lawyer came and announced

that Sister Dorothea had apparently been killed by Sister Beata, owing to jealousy, as Dr. Werner loved Dorothea and not Beata. Oskar dreaded the prospect of acquittal for it would imply being thrown into the cold street. Finally he submits to being judged insane, obsessed with the Black Witch and thus arrives in the mental hospital.

#### Critical Comments

At the end of the novel, we find Oskar Matzerath atoning for guilt not strictly his own, even though, he is finally, to his own sense guilty by implication, an emblem of the modern world even in his isolation from it. The number 'Thirty' implies or brings to mind Judas who betrayed Christ for *thirty* pieces of silver. Who is the Judas here? Vittlar? Or is it Oskar himself? Is his conscience free of guilt? Or does he feel responsible for the deaths of his mother, his two fathers, Roswitha and so on? So is it a fitting Nemesis?

We have come to the end of this thought-provoking novel. Read the study material carefully and understand the entire story. In the next *Unit*, we shall study the various aspects of the novel *The Tin Drum*.

## UNIT FOUR

### THE TIN DRUM - A CRITICAL STUDY

#### 4.0 Objectives

At the end of this *Unit*, you should be able to:

- (i) understand various aspects of Gunter Grass's novel *The Tin Drum*; and
- (ii) make an overall estimate of the novel and its author.

#### 4.1 Introduction

Before you began to read this *Unit*, it is imperative that you read and assimilate the matter given in the previous *Unit*. If you do



so, you will be able to form your own impressions of the novel its plot, the characters, the narrative techniques and so on. Then when you read this *Unit*, you will be able to appreciate the several aspects of *The Tin Drum*.

**Let us study them one by one.**

## 4.2 Critical Summary of The Tin Drum.

### Critique:

*The Tin Drum*, a panoramic, satiric novel in which the anguished and the amused mingle, and in which the history of modern Germany is viewed through the eyes of a self-willed dwarf, marked the beginning of Gunter Grass's career as a novelist. In its way, the book is a milestone in the history of German letters somewhat reminiscent of the appearance of *Thomas Mann's Buddenbrooks* (1901). But to say that Grass's book is about as auspicious a novelistic beginning as *Buddenbrooks* is to suggest little more similarity with Mann than that of length and quality, for *The Tin Drum* though it shows some signs of being a curiously gnarled hybrid variety of the German family chronicle, though in fact one can trace its lineage back to a multitude of traditions, is a novel which cannot fit neatly into any fixed category, which is a category in itself.

### Story:

The narrator of the story is OSKAR MATZERATH who tells his story from the lunatic asylum, in which he is being held for a murder he did not commit. The question of Oskar's sanity is a little pointless. In the light of the mad world around him his violent, bizarre (strange) outlook is the only vision imaginable. Oskar's story begins in 1899 when his Kashubian grandmother sitting in a potato-field, conceals under her wide skirts, from the view of the pursuing constables the fugitive JOSEPH KOLJAICHEK, and thereby conceives Oskar's mother. The incident in its wild humour and eroticism as also the suggestion of political chaos is endemic

of (indicates) what is to come. In 1923, in the free city of Danzig, AGNES KOLJAICHEK marries ALFRED MATZERATH, a citizen of the German Reich and introduces him to her Polish Cousins and lover JAN BRONSKI, with whom he becomes fast friends. Thereafter the amazing Oskar is born, an infant whose mental development is complete at birth.

Oskar is promised a drum for his third birthday, the drum which in its many atavistic (remote) recurrences will allow him mutely to voice his protest against the meaninglessness of a world which formulates its destructive nonsense in empty language and to recreate the history of his consciousness, to recall in the varied music of the drum to rhythms of the mind's apprehensions, earlier accompanied by the drum. It is also on his third birthday, that Oskar decides to stop growing by a sheer act of the will to remain with his three year old body and his totally conscious mind for the rest of his life. As he boasts, he remains from then on a precocious three year old in a world of adults who tower over him, but superior to them because he is complete both inside and out, free from all necessity to grow, to develop, to change as time passes and they move toward old age and the grave.

Oskar's refusal to grow, to measure his shadow by that of older persons, or to compete for the things they desire is the assertion of his individuality against a world, which, misconstruing (misunderstanding) him, would force him into an alien pattern. He is pleased when he discovers his ability to shatter glass with his voice, a talent which becomes not only a means of destruction, the venting of his hostility and outrage, but also an art whereby he can cut in the window of a jewellery shop, a neat hole through which Bronski upon whom he heaps the filial affection he does not feel for his more mundane father can snatch an expensive necklace for his beloved Agnes.

The later period of Oskar's recorded existence is crammed with outlandish events. His mother witnesses a revolting scene of eels being extracted from the head of a dead horse submerged in

water, perversely forces a diet of fish upon herself and dies. Oskar becomes fascinated with the hieroglyphic scars on the massive back of Herbert Truczinski, his friend; but Herbert, who works as a maritime museum attendant grows enamoured of a ship's wooden figurehead called Niobe, and in an attempt to make love to her is instead impaled to her by a double edged ship's axe. Jan Bronski is executed after a Secret service raid on the Polish Post Office, where he has gone with Oskar; and Oskar is overwhelmed with guilt for the death of his mother and the man who was probably his father. In one of the most preposterous (strange) seduction scenes in literature, Oskar becomes the lover of Herbert's youngest sister Maria, and fathers her child. Maria then marries Alfred Matzerath, and Oskar turns to the ampler comforts of *Lina Greff* whose latent homosexual husband, shortly upon receiving a summons to appear in court on a morals charge, commits a fantastically elaborate and grotesque suicide. Oskar is prodigious sexually as he is diminutive physically.

Oskar then goes on to join Bebra's troupe of entertainers, and becomes the lover of the timeless *Roswitha Raguna*. When the Russians invade Dancing, Matzerath, to conceal his affiliations, swallows the Nazi party pin which Oskar has shoved into his hand, and dies. Once again Oskar feels responsible for the death of a parent. Before long, against his will he begins to grow, and to develop a hump. His postwar life takes him to West Germany, where he is, at various times, a black marketer a model and a nightclub entertainer; and eventually at Duseldorf, where a destiny not his own catches up with him in the guise of the accusation that he has killed Sister Dorothea, the woman in the room next to his. The testimony of *Vittlar* which has earlier thought him guilty, ironically, damns him, and Oskar submits to being judged insane, and atones for a guilt not strictly his own, even though he is finally to his own sense, guilty by implication, an emblem of the modern world, even in his isolation from it.

Let us move on to the different levels at which the novel may

be read.

### 4.3 Themes and Interpretations

*The Tin Drum* can be read on two levels, one *realistic*, the other *symbolic*. As seen in the previous section, ostensibly, it is the life-story of the dwarf Oskar, who recounts his exploits in the *pre-war*, *war-time*, and *post-war* periods. Oskar is born as a precocious child, who would rather not have been born at all; but the prospect of the drum prevented him from returning to the womb. With the rise of National Socialism Oskar finds himself more and more isolated, and he laments his plight. Left with his drum as his own comfort and *raison d'etre* (reason for existence) he concentrates more and more intently on it, even though the political climate is against him and replacements become increasingly difficult to find as the Nazi threat grows. Driven by the need to repair his drum Oskar makes his way to the Polish post office and fortuitously (by chance) becomes involved in its defence at the time of the German invasion of Poland in September 1939. His dream is to establish "a dynasty of drummers"; however his son *Kurt* has different ideas. Jan Bronski's execution, Matzerath's death, his mother's death - all these mark decisive stages in Oskar's life. His father's funeral coincides with the German capitulation. At the cemetery Oskar decides to externalise his coming of age by resuming growth and burying his drum. But attempts to become a good citizen" are thwarted by the widowed Maria's refusal to marry him. After a long period of deprivation, Oskar returns to his drum, this time as a highly successful Jazz drummer. He becomes a celebrity, but loneliness and fear of life haunt him more relentlessly than ever. He has himself locked up in a mental asylum by fabricating a criminal charge at the end of the novel. At the age of thirty, he faces his discharge into a hostile world, where the Black Witch, the omnipresent personification of his own insecurity threatens his existence.

#### b) Symbolic Interpretation

The first question arising on a symbolic level concerns Oskar's



*stature*. As he himself informs us he decided to interrupt his growth and remain a crippled dwarf in order to keep adults at a distance. As a precocious infant he has already seen through the moral bankruptcy of his parents, so that his stature represents a *deliberate act of protest*, an act based on a refusal to adapt to his surroundings, even physically. In the pre-war years, up to the German capitulation, Oskar's gnome-like appearance is to be considered as an asset: While the adults blindly prepare their own destruction, Oskar is retreating behind the guise of a three-year old, offering - within his limitations - some measurement of resistance to National Socialism. During the Nazi period, Oskar's withdrawal into infancy was the only way to play the part of the critical observer, and yet survive; after 1945, the time had come for him to leave his hide away and to participate openly in the reconstruction of West Germany; hence he resumes growth, with partial success: his height increases, but he develops a hunchback.

Oskar's symbolic role has changed. During the war, he represents the sane element in a crippled society. After the war, disguises have become superfluous and Oskar's resumed growth possibly symbolises Germany's coming of age. Oskar's diseased back on the other hand, may signal the resurgence of tendencies opposed to a genuine German liberation. Grass implies that the affluent society is a mere facade. In reality, a promising post-war Germany has developed into a hunchbacked cripple. But Grass does not leave the readers on a pessimistic note. Though the hunch backed Oskar represents the Germany of the "economic miracle" of the 1950s, the author intimates that the disease may be cured, since the hunchback is anything but self-willed.

### Themes

Three main themes are inter-woven into the texture of the novel: *politics*, *religion* and *love*. Oskar's protest is most conspicuous in the realm of politics, a secularised vision of hope. Although, far from being a heroic resistance fighter, he does his best to em-

barrass the Nazis. His elaborate refutation of involvement becomes a proof of the depth of his religion. All types of dogmatic thinking are suspect to Grass, whether he is dealing with Catholicism, National Socialism or Communism. He finds all "isms" equally objectionable, for where blind faith replaces doubt man abdicates (gives up) responsibility. Oskar objects just as violently to the dangers of blindly accepted religious beliefs. Only criticism can save Oskar from the fascination that Catholicism holds for him. On the other hand, he feels that the Church, above all other places, ought to be the rightful home for his drum, for both drum and Church have pledged themselves to fight for the highest ideals of mankind, for *Faith*, *Hope* and *Love*. Oskar is thunderstruck by his, resemblance to the statue of young Jesus. By not drumming, Jesus fails him, and Oskar deduces from this disappointment that the role of the protestor is reserved for him alone. God may still exist, but his Son's refusal to drum confirms his powerlessness in the face of war and persecution. The third and final sphere in which Oskar protests is the realm of love, where the drum plays as full a part as in politics and religion. The purest form of love taught in the New Testament is compassion for the suffering. In Oskar's case, this love expresses itself most vividly in his relationship to Markus, the Jewish toy merchant and the source of his drums. A close link is therefore established between Oskar, the protester against National Socialism, and Markus, its victim. The Jewish survivor Fajngold, too, belongs to the realm of love. The characters' attitude to the drum reveals their political and moral tendencies. "When a whole society fails Oskar finds his responsibility" [Ann Woods]. Faced with a changed historical situation, Oskar has to adjust to a potentially new German society. Many critics interpret his return to the drum as a return to irresponsibility. According to Idris Parry, Oskar's drum is "the source and symbol of his aristocratic nature"

In another sense, *The Tin Drum* exists on two other levels: the *universal* and the *political*. In this novel Oskar's external defences have their internal counter part in his refusal to grow, a ges-

ture symbolising outright rejection of society. But Oskar adapts his decision to changing circumstances for, after the German capitulation he considers a future within society and resumes growth. He undergoes three distinct stages in his moral development each representing an advance on the previous one! He knowingly steps outside society; he chooses to be an outsider. His deformation is self-inflicted. His disguise as a three year old is deliberate camouflage (mask). Oskar fights his society by opposing it with his own brand of morality. He laments the debasement of Christian values in the chapter "*Faith, Hope, Love*". His aloofness seems to verge on opportunism, but is in fact its very opposite. Oskar's lament is mainly centred on man's wilful misrepresentation of the notions of the Epistle to the Corinthians; his protest is thus directed against vast areas of human behaviour. The novel is thus replete with anti-war innuendos (hints)

Let us examine some of the stylistic aspects of the novel.

#### 4.4 Imagery, Structure And Style in *The Tin Drum*

All Grass's prose revolves around one or two central images, which denote reality on the one hand, and a certain response to reality on the other. The very titles of the books reveal where the emphasis lies. In *The Tin Drum*, it is the challenge to reality that is emphasised, a challenge through art. Oskar's drumming denounces reality, his art is an art of protest. Reality is symbolised by the Black Witch, so that the drum and the Black Witch are diametrically opposed to each other. But the drumming, however moral in its intention, is merely a signpost to morality not morality itself; it remains a quest. As it takes into account complexities of man and society, refusing to reduce them to concepts, it adds depth to the symbol.

The drum also has a structural significance for it encompasses all realms of human experience dealt with in the novel; art, love, politics and religion. It functions as an upholder of integrity exposing in each case the corruptions against which it protests. With

his drumming, Oskar attacks all dogmas, demanding movement and life, a life that even includes destruction, out of which new life emerges. In *The Tin Drum* this creed is postulated in a passage about a *partisan*, who like every true artist "undermines what he has just set up, because he consistently rejects what he has just created.

Dialectical thinking (logical argumentation) constitutes the most striking structural element in Grass's compositions. In *The Tin Drum*, it extends to the individual images as well as to their overall pattern. The drum has its dialectical opposite in the Black Witch. Oskar's drumming is an attempt to synthesis the two extremes of morality and amorality of construction and destruction. This general duality also governs the details of the novel down to its smallest episodes. The drum itself is made up of contradictions, for it can be put to both good and bad purposes, radiate love as well as hatred, even if its primary function is positive. The negative aspects of Oskar's gifts the purely destructive impulses are symbolised by his glass-shattering voice. Such polarity between light and dark is followed throughout, in juxtaposing (placing side by side) Goethe and Rasputin, Apollo and Dionysus, Jesus and Satan and is further evoked in the colour symbolism of white and black.

If the drum symbol is multi-dimensional and dialectical (logical), it is also a dynamic symbol with its inherent energy manifesting itself through musical properties. Quite independently of its owner the drum generate a moral force. It propels both plot and character. Oskar is as it were, subservient to the drum, defining his identity either in alliance with, or in opposition to it. This means that the alliance in *The Tin Drum* is on art, not the artist who is totally subsumed by it. Thus in the final analysis, the symbol of *the drum as a fusion of art and protest*, grows with the novel, as an organic image of creativity against the background of a fragmented universe, inhabited by a disintegrating Oskar

Let us wind up this *Unit* with an overall estimate of the novel.



#### 4.5. Gunter Grass's *The Tin Drum*: An Overall Estimate

*The Tin Drum* is a surreal picaresque. [Refer Unit I for explanation] a mock-epic chronicle of West Europe's (and by extension, the world's) twentieth century madness; a sardonic, shocking hilarious reflection of a world in upheaval, a world in which values become inverted and undistinguishable, in which the tragic is at the same time the comic, and the agonising the ludicrous. The novel violates all modes of decorum; its chaos is the outward appearance and inner principle of the world it seeks to capture; but the imaginative vitality of its creation is somehow its own decorum, and is, of itself, an affirmation in the face of the dissolution it postulates.

Grass's exemplary use of imagery and characters deepens his analysis of National Socialism and its consequences for Germany. The tin drum ends with a forceful reminder of *everybody's individual* guilt, a guilt coupled with an equally obsessive fear. A large question mark hangs over the future. There is a suggestion that Hitler's role was not an inexplicable accident, but rather the result of totalitarian modes of thinking prevalent in German philosophy. Only by exposing the roots that nurture totalitarian regimes, can their growth be prevented. This requires not only knowledge of the intellectual climate we live in, but also profound self-knowledge. In fact, each successive novel in the *Danzig trilogy* [*The Tin Drum*, *Cat and Mouse*, *Dog Years*] represents an intensification of political awareness, a process evinced by Grass's use of narrative perspective, metaphors and treatment of themes.

The one common denominator that characterised the immediate critical response in Germany to *The Tin Drum* was admiration for the originality and the sheer super-power of the work. Three schools of thought emerged: (a) those who saw in Oskar the personification of immorality; (b) those who exempted him from moral criteria altogether; (c) those who considered Oskar's drumming a moral activity. *Gunter Blocker* was the most violent in his condemnation of *The Tin Drum* as a monument of immorality. However Grass had supporters in plenty. The majority of English critics settled

for the 'amoral', the apolitical interpretation for instance, *R.C. Andrews*, Times Literary Supplement reviewer, saw the "moral neutrality" of the novel. To conclude with the observations of *Idris Parry*: "Grass is outraged by what he finds; social injustice, hidden Nazis .... murderers living respectable lives. His feelings are admirable - for a politician. For an artist, they are disastrous. *He sacrifices art to morality.*"

#### 4.6. Important Topics

(i) Discuss the novel *The Tin Drum* as a surreal picaresque.

[Hints: Explain the terms 'surreal' and 'picaresque' - a plot narrating various adventures of the protagonist - elaborate - events, a blend of realism and fantasy: tin drum, glass-shattering - give examples - central idea of novel: portrayal of 20th century madness]

(ii) The use of the drum symbol.

[Hints: symbolic interpretation of *The Tin Drum* - drum Oskar's symbol of protest - examples: at school, in church, mother's death - later as means of livelihood in Onion Cellar - Oskar the solo drummer - drumming and glass shattering related - how?]

(iii) Significance of the title of the novel *The Tin Drum*

Refer Answer (ii)

(iv) The satirical elements in *The Tin Drum*

[Hints: a satire on modern madness in Europe before and after war - politics and religion satirised - Oskar's way of protesting]

Study all the four *Units*; then you will be able to prepare your own essays.

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## 3.

## UNIT ONE

**MILAN KUNDERA : AN INTRODUCTION****1.0 Objectives**

At the end of this *Unit*, you should be able to:

- (i) form a general idea of Czechoslovakian literature, particularly fiction, of the modern times: and
- (ii) understand about the life and personality of *Milan Kundera* (1929 - ).

**1.1 Introduction**

Before you embark on the study of any author, it is advisable to know something to know something about his age, since however conventional or individualistic he may be, he nevertheless belongs to his age, and is a product of his society. So let us begin this *Unit* with a brief note on the Czechoslovakian literature of the modern times.

**1.2 Czechoslovakian Literature (fiction) of Modern Times**

Czech is a west Slavonic language spoken in the western part of Czechoslovakia, in Bohemia, Moravia etc. It has a Latin script. The literature of Czechoslovakia consists of works written in Czech and those written in Slovak, a west Slavonic language spoken in the eastern part of Czechoslovakia. Literature has occupied an important position in Czechoslovak cultural life, since the late 18th century, when the development of an urban middle class created a public for it. The modern Republic of Czechoslovakia came into being in autumn 1918. However literary Czech was fully developed in 1348, when Prague University was founded. (Czech literature flourished in all genres. (literary forms). Compared to the Slovaks, the Czechs have dominated the modern period.

Czechoslovakian literary development parallels that of Europe: Romanticism flourished in the early 19th century. The reaction to Romanticism came in the 1840's with the *Realist* writings of

the Czech novelist *Bozena Nemcova* and others. *Liberalism* and *nationalism* were followed in the nineties by *scepticism* which existed side by side with the *Decadence*, a movement common to every country.

After the Great War, (I World War) Czech literature was virtually taken over by writers of the Left who produced almost all the literature of any lasting value in the 1920s and 1930s. Among such writers were *Vancura*, *Nezval*, and bohemian *Jaroslav Seifert*. After the establishment of the Communist regime in 1948, *Socialist Realism* became dominant stylistically and interest in literature declined. In the 1940s and early 1950s, Czech literature endured a period of grim state-enforced stagnation. But even after the demise of Stalinism, although literary activity was feverish few writers of any merit emerged. The period of the "thaw" brought a number of writing critical of the events of Stalin's era, the first success among which was that of *The Taste of Power* by *Ladislav Mnacko*.

One of the most intelligent of Czechoslovakian writers was *Karel Capek* (1890 - 1938). He threw himself heart and soul into the affairs of his country but his real attitude to life is expressed in his dictum. "*A short life is better for mankind, for a long life would deprive man of his optimism*"! Capek's novels, written in a clear language, try to educate his countrymen into democracy and vigilance against fascist aggression by means of Wellsean fantasy.

Most important of the writers who helped to shape the intellectual atmosphere leading to the *Dubcek* experiment in 1968 were *Hrabal*, *Holub*, the underrated *Ludvik Vaculik* (1926 - ), the over-rated **MILAN KUNDERA** (1929 - ) the novelist of conscience *Jaroslav Putik* (1923 - ) and *Vladimir Paral* (1932 - ). [*The Dubcek Experiment* refers to the abortive reform movement of 1968 - '69 presided over by Alexander Dubcek (1921-92) who was Czechoslovak party leader from 1967 to 1969.] After Dubcek's fall in 1969, followed by his expulsion from the Communist Party, Czech literary production was reduced to a minimum, but from 1973 onwards writers began to come to terms with the new regime. Of the



writers of the 1970s the most highly esteemed is *Jiri Medek* (1950 -).

Thus we see that Czechoslovakian literature has fluctuated in theme and quality according to the political upheavals. The end of the 17th and 18th centuries witnessed the virtual death of national literature; not till the latter half of the 18th century were systematic attempts begun to revive Czech as a literary literature. The failure of the Revolution of 1848 brought an end to the movement for independence, and to the first wave of romanticism. After 1860s, the national cause was once again dominant, but now found a more practical expression through the creation of popular institutions, including a national theatre. Writers were concerned with social problems; democracy, the emancipation of women, the correction of economic injustice, as well as with the longing for national independence. The early 1920s brought a wave of so-called *proletarian literature* expressing a warm but naive sympathy for the Soviet experiment. The late 1920s saw a sudden and violent shift to "poetism", a school of pure poetry which had its roots in *Dadaism*, *Futurism* and *Vitalism*. [Please refer to the Glossary for explanation]. The early 1930s saw the sudden collapse of poetism as a movement, and a switching over to *Surrealism* and a more personal literature of sensual imagery. The II World War and the subsequent communist coup virtually destroyed the older literary tradition. Several writers were silenced, imprisoned or repressed. In the springs of 1956, demands for greater freedom began to be heard and several influential writers sharply criticised the restrictions imposed on literature. It is against all this varied background, that Milan Kundera and his novel are to be studied.

Let us move on to a brief sketch of the author.

### 1.3 Milan Kundera: An Introduction

*Milan Kundera* was born in Brno in Czechoslovakia in 1929. He was the first of the younger Czechs novelists to react sharply against the dreary social realism of the Stalinist years. He was a novelist, dramatist and a writer of short stories. He was the first

Czechs author to emphasise in his writings the private emotional and erotic spheres of the individual in contrast to the writers of the Stalinist period, who saw man merely as a unit in the socialist collective. His novel *Zert* (1966) which describes with wry humour the emotional and moral decline of a young man deformed by pseudo-socialist society gives a documentary picture of a single generation in Czechoslovakia. Kundera's chief novel is *The Joke* (1967), a proper English translation of which - replacing an inaccurate one - appeared in 1974. This novel is at once a satire on the fake communism of the Stalinists, on the opportunists who thrived under it, and on the Czechs character itself. *Life is Elsewhere* (1979) was published by Skvorecky on his emigre press - it first appeared in a French version in 1973 - long after Kundera had left Czechoslovakia (1975), since he was not allowed to publish there. *The Farewell Party* (tr. 1976) seems frivolous by the side of this study of a poet who sells out to Stalinism, but *The Joke* remains Kundera's best novel. The ideas and the tone of the novel can be identified in his plays like *Majitele Klicu* (1962) and his short stories [*Smesne Lasky* I (1963); II (1966)]

### 1.4 Interior Monologue

A monologue is a long speech in which one person speaks alone: An interior monologue resembles a long speech, but it has to be interpreted not as a speech but as the thoughts, probings and musings of the speaker. It enables the readers to understand the mind and character of the speaker and also see a particular event or person from his point of view. *The Joke* is written in the form of a series of monologues. Each monologue gives us a partial or limited view of the story. It is only by connecting and coordinating the different monologues that a total picture emerges.

Let us summarise the novel in the succeeding *Units*.

## THE JOKE : A SUMMARY OF PARTS I - IV

### 2. Objectives

At the end of this *Unit*, you should be able to:

- (i) have a general idea of the plot of the first part of *Milan Kundera's* novel *The Joke*; and
- (ii) form your initial impressions about the main characters particularly their state of mind.

#### 2.1. Introduction

The best way to enjoy a novel, of course, is to read it in the original. Even in the most authentic translation, something of the original flavour and flair is bound to be lost. The difficulties are all the more evident in case of a novel like *The Joke* which has been translated five times, since the author himself was not happy with the earlier versions! A chapter-wise summary of this sort is twice removed from the original. It will certainly help you to know the plot of the novel, form ideas about the characters, especially their state of mind, etc. But if you can lay your hands on the translation, do read it. Only then will you be able to understand and enjoy Kundera's masterpiece. Anyway, something is better than nothing. So let us begin to summarise the first section of the novel consisting of *four parts*.

We shall begin with the *Author's Note*.

#### 2.2 . Author's Note

Kundera explains the special circumstances that culminated in the *fifth English language version of The Joke*. The first version was published by in London in 1969 by Macdonald, in a translation by David Hamblyn and Oliver Stallybrass. Kundera was amazed when he received the book in Prague; he did not recognise it at all; the novel was entirely reconstructed; divided into a different number of parts with chapters shortened or simply omitted. The irony

is that between December 1965 and early 1967, the original Czech manuscript had been kept from publication in Prague by communist censorship; Kundera had rejected all the changes they had wanted to impose on him, and the novel was finally allowed to appear in April 1967, exactly as he had written it.

Living in a country, occupied by the Russian army, deprived of his passport, and so without any possibility of leaving, Kundera found it very difficult to defend himself. He managed to bring about the publication in Britain, of a revised complete version without deletions and with the chapters in their original sequence. But this book (Penguin Books, 1970) gave him only relative satisfaction for the translation was still free. The Penguin version was actually the *third*. The *second* had been published by Coward. McCann in New York in 1969, not long after the first British version; in this the entire text was systematically curtailed, and the American publisher did not seem very sympathetic towards the protests of the censored author.

A dozen years after the first three mutilated versions Kundera's new editor AARON ASHER at Harper and Row proposed that *The Joke* should appear in a faithful as well as unabridged English-language version; so he approached Michel Henry Heim, a young American professor of Slavic studies, who had translated Kundera's novel *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1980). At Aaron's request, the author wrote a preface for that new *fourth* edition of *The Joke*. There he recounted the novel's eventful history in Czechoslovakia and in France, evoked the sad tale of its three earlier English-language versions, and added two paragraphs to convey *his exacting concept of the novel*:

Goethe never trusted his secretary to read proof for him, while dealing with poetry. In Goethe's time, prose could not make the aesthetic claims of poetry; perhaps not until the work of Flaubert, did prose lose the stigma of aesthetic inferiority. Ever since *Madame Bovary*, the art of the novel has been considered equal to the art of poetry, and the novelist endows every word of his prose with



the uniqueness of the word in a poem. Once prose makes such a claim, the translation of a novel becomes a true art. A novelist, whose novels are banned in his own country is doubly conscious of the difficulties involved.

The fourth English language version of *The Joke* appeared in 1982. Later in 1990 Aaron proposed the republication of *The Joke* at Harper Collins. Only then did Kundera decide to re-read the translation with care. In the beginning, there was nothing seriously wrong, and *Part Two*, "*Helena*" was quite good, but from the start of *Part III*, the author felt that what he read was not his text - words and syntax were changed, there was inaccuracy in the reflective passages, the distinctive voices of the characters - narrators had been altered drastically, and so on. The American professor had clearly resorted to *translation - adaptation* - in keeping with the taste of the time and of the country for which it is intended. The whole thing was unacceptable to Kundera. He regretted having warmly approved of the fourth English version without taking care to read and check the translation earlier.

Finally Kundera and his editor immediately set to work. Kundera worked on both his original and the earlier translations, entering word-for-word translations from the original, and retaining some of the faithful renderings and good formulations in Heim's translation. He sent his work in regular instalments to Aaron, who created an English-language version from these disparate elements and sent it to Kundera for final correction and approval. They had begun in the spring of 1991 and working without respite they finished only towards the end of the year. Kundera concludes his *Author's Note* with a promise to the readers, that there will not be a sixth English-language version of *The Joke*!

### 2.2.1 Critical Comments on Author's Note

From the Author's Note two things become evident. Firstly *The Joke* is not an easy novel to translate, because it is not the conventional sort with its emphasis on a regular plot, and well-drawn

but directly delineated characters with clear outlines. Secondly Kundera is a fastidious writer, a perfectionist. He cannot tolerate changes even in his mode of punctuation. Naturally, the best course is for him to be involved in the translation of his own works.

Let us begin with *Part One* of the novel.

### 2.3. Summary of Part One

#### Ludvik

The narrator of this part is LUDVIK. He had returned to his home town after several years. Standing in the main square, he felt no emotion whatsoever. All that he could think was that the flat space looked like a huge parade ground. He told himself that he had grown indifferent to his home-town, for he had been away for *fifteen years*, had almost no friends or acquaintances left there; his mother had been buried among strangers in a grave he had never tended. But he realised that he had been deceiving himself, for what he had called indifference was in fact rancour. (bitter hatred) and it was this journey that had made him conscious of it. The mission that had brought him there could easily have been accomplished in Prague, after all, but he had been tempted to carry it out in his own home town, because it was a cynical and low mission.

Ludvik gave the unsightly (ugly) square a final look and then set off for the hotel where he had booked a room for the night. It was on the third floor. He inspected the room, especially the *bed*, which sank so much under his weight that it was obviously not only unsatisfactory as a seat but equally unlikely to perform its function as a bed; it was impossible to imagine anyone else in that bed with him. He sat down on the chair and began to think. Just then he could hear two people, a man and a woman, having a conversation about a boy named Peter, who had run away from home, and his Aunt Klara, who was a fool and spoiled the boy, Ludvik could hear every word of their conversation; even the woman's sighs were audible.

He stood up, his decision firm. He did not want to jeopardise

(upset) the success of his long arduous (difficult) journey with that unsuitable hotel room. He had no choice but to ask some local acquaintance for the discreet, confidential favour of lending his room. He suddenly remembered a man there, whom he had helped to find a job and would probably be only too glad to repay one good turn with another. His name was KOSTKA. He was a strange character, at once scrupulously moral and oddly unsettled and unstable, whose wife had divorced him years before for living anywhere and everywhere except with her and their son. Ludvik walked fast in the direction of the hospital, where Kostka worked in the Virology department. Luckily he met him and recognised him. Ludvik felt that Kostka was pleasantly surprised, and the spontaneity of his welcome delighted him.

Ludvik told him that he would be in the town for two or three-days concerning some unimportant business. They started talking. Kostka told him that after work in the hospital he was leaving town in the evening. He had a fiance (a girl he was engaged to) in another town fifteen miles away, a school teacher with a two-room flat of her own. He was still on his own and had a one-room flat in a new building near the hospital. He was unlikely to move in with his fiancée eventually because of the problem of finding another job at her place. Ludvik sincerely began to curse the ineptitude (absurdity) of a bureaucracy unable to arrange for a man and woman to live together. But Kostka did not mind. Travelling back and forth did cost time and money, but his solitude remained intact and he was free. Ludvik asked him, "Why is your freedom so important to you?" He countered with the same question. Ludvik answered that he was a skirt-chaser (One who chased/made love to women); he needed the freedom not for the women, but for himself.

Kostka invited Ludvik to his flat. Ludvik noticed with great pleasure a wide comfortable divan in the corner of the room. He asked Kostka if he could lend him the place for the next afternoon, when he would need a pleasant atmosphere. Kostka understood and deliberately avoided prying into Ludvik's plans. He readily

offered his flat, as it was a favour. Before going, Kostka gave him the keys. During a lifetime of sleeping in various beds, Ludvik had developed a personal cult of keys, and he slipped Kostka's keys into his pocket with silent glee.

On their way out Ludvik, in reply to Kostka, said that he hoped Kostka's flat would help Ludvik to achieve a beautiful demolition. He explained that Kostka was a quiet workman on God's eternal construction site, whereas Ludvik was not one of God's brick layers. Instead of walls all he saw was stage sets. And stage sets were made to be demolished. Both had not changed and even after years were as different as ever. It was these differences that endeared Kostka to Ludvik and made him enjoy their arguments. He used them as a touchstone of who he was and what he thought. Kostka replied thus: "How can a sceptic like you be so sure he knows how to tell a stage set from a wall?" The illusions Ludvik ridiculed may not be mere illusions. What if there were genuine values and Ludvik were a demolisher of values? A value debased and an illusion unmasked had the same pitiful form: they resembled each other too closely.

Walking with Kostka back through the town to the hospital, Ludvik said that he badly needed a good shave. Kostka took him to a small barber shop. It was a female barber who attended on him. Ludvik mused on how strange and ridiculous it was to be caressed so tenderly by an unknown woman who meant nothing to him and to whom he meant nothing. He imagined that he was a defenseless victim entirely at the mercy of the woman who had sharpened the razor which was waiting on the nearby table there merely to consummate that beautiful independence. Suddenly, he realised that he knew the woman, his tender assassin; it seemed an older sister's face. He had not seen her for fifteen years.

Just then a new customer came in and Ludvik could not speak to her. Even when he paid, she kept her head indifferently turned away from him, avoiding eye-contact and taking the money so briskly and impersonally that he suddenly felt like a madman fallen



prey to his own hallucinations and could not find the courage to say anything to her. He left the barbershop feeling oddly frustrated: all he knew was that he knew nothing and that it was a great *callousness* to be uncertain of recognising a face he had once so dearly loved.

Ludvik hurried back to the hotel. On the way he avoided an old friend JAROSLAV, first fiddle of a local cimbalom (musical instrument) band. He phoned Kostka and confirmed that the woman barber was LUCIE SEBETKA.

### 2.3.1. Critical Comments on Part One

The character-narrator of this part is *Ludvik*. What are your initial impressions about him? Kundera has portrayed him as "a thoughtful melancholy intellectual" to quote his own words from the *Author's Notes*. Who is Lucie Sebetka? Why is Ludvik filled with rancour? Nothing is clear at this point. Let us wait and see.

Let us move on to *Part Two*.

### 2.4. Summary of Part Two

#### *Helena*

This part consists of *three* chapters and they comprise Helena's monologue.

1. Helena was thinking about *Pavel* and her daughter little *Zdena*. ZDENA worshipped PAVEL. He was the first man in her life, he knew how to handle her just as he knew how to handle all women including Helena. He had left for Bratislava that afternoon. This week he was his old self again, stroking Helena's face, and promising to stop off for her in Moravia on his way back from Bratislava. He wanted to talk things over. She wondered why he had to wait until now, now that she had met Ludvik. It was painful, but she would not give in to sadness; she would let sadness never be linked with her name - this was Helena's motto, derived from Fucik's words; even when they tortured him, even in the shadows of the gallows, Fucik was never sad. Helena liked Ludvik very

much because he was very normal, straightforward, cheerful and definite about everything, she did not have to alter her ideals and tastes, and that is what she always loved.

Helena was not ashamed of the way she was. Until she was eighteen, all she knew was the well ordered flat of a well-ordered bourgeois clan and schoolwork, totally isolated from real life. When she arrived in Prague in 1949, it was like a miracle, she was so happy. It was there she met Pavel; he sang tenor, she sang alto, they gave hundreds of concerts and demonstrations, they sang Soviet songs, their own socialist-construction songs and of course folk songs. Helena fell in love with Moravian folk songs, they became the leitmotif (recurring theme) of her existence. Even though she did not love Pavel any more, even though he had hurt her, she could not forget him; Pavel was her youth.

It was at the anniversary of the Liberation that Helena had fallen in love with Pavel. A big demonstration was going on in Old Town Square. Togliatti the leader of the Italian workers' movement was speaking. Suddenly Pavel screamed out a song trying to get the crowd to hear him and join him. The crowd including Helena responded Pavel and Helena held hands all the way to the end of the demonstration and they fell in love with each other. Seven years later, when little Zdena was five, Pavel told Helena, that they did not marry for love, they married out of Party discipline. Helena felt it was a lie uttered in the heat of an argument; Pavel had married her for love. Helena felt that it was a terrible thing to say.

Life was becoming more and more busy; they did not take time to eat. Helena would wait for Pavel until midnight when he came home from the endless six-hour, eight-hour meetings. He attached much importance to his conferences and political training sessions. She knew how much the success of his political appearances meant to him; he never tired of repeating that the new man differed from the old in so far as he had abolished the distinction between public and private life; years later now, he complained about how back then the comrades never left his private life alone.

Helena and Pavel went together thus for nearly two years, and she was naturally getting impatient and discontented, for no woman could ever be content with puppy love. Pavel was perfectly content, he enjoyed the convenient lack of commitment; every man had a selfish streak in him, it was up to the woman to stand up for herself and her mission as a woman unfortunately. Finally Pavel was called before the party committee. Helena thinks they must have been tough on him; morals were pretty strict in those days, people really overdid it, but may be it was better to overdo morality than immorality, the way we did now. After a long period of absence, almost goading Helena to commit suicide, Pavel returned to her, asked her to forgive him and gave her a locket with the picture of the Kremlin on it, his most treasured possession. Two weeks later they were married and the whole ensemble (Party members) came to the wedding. Helena told Pavel that if they betrayed each other, it would be tantamount to betraying everyone at the wedding, and at the demonstration in old Town square as well as betraying Togliatti. Now it made Helena laugh when she looked back on everything they ultimately did betray.

2. Helena reviews her life. She was getting on in years. A nineteen year old boy JINDRA was strongly attracted to her; that was reassuring, considering the fact that she had not been particularly popular at the radio station. People called her a bitch, a fanatic, a dogmatist, a Party blood hound etc., but they would never make her ashamed of loving the Party and sacrificing all her spare time to it. Pavel had other women, she did not even bother to check on them anymore. For ten years now her work had been hopelessly routine: features, interviews broadcasts about fulfilled plans etc, and the equally hopeless situation at home. It was only the party that had never done her any harm and Helena had never harmed the Party, not even in the days when almost everyone was ready to desert it, in 1956, when there was all that talk about Stalin's crimes, and people went wild and began rejecting everything, saying that their papers were a pack of lies, nationalised stores did not work culture

was in decline, farms should never have been collectivised, the Soviet Union had no freedom, and worst of all, even Communists went around talking like that and at their own meetings, Pavel too, and again all of them applauded Pavel as ever. It all began when his mother treated him as a child prodigy taking his picture to bed with her; but he was adult mediocrity, he did not smoke or drink but he could not live without applause it was his alcohol and nicotine. How thrilled Pavel was at the new chance to pull at people's heart strings.

Luckily the Party gave the squawkers (those who opposed) a good *rap on the knuckles* (warning, punishment) Pavel too calmed down; he did not want to risk his cushy (easy, pleasant) lectureship in Marxism at the university, but a germ of apathy (indifference), mistrust, misgiving did remain behind, Helena clung to the party more tightly then before. The party was almost like a living being. Once, one of her colleagues a married man, was having an affair with a girl single, irresponsible and cynical, and his wife turned to the party for help. The Party intervened and warned both the culprits. Unfortunately words are merely words, they agreed to split up only to keep them quiet, and in fact, they continued to see each other on the sly. At last Helena who found the truth proposed that the man who lied may be expelled from the Party, but her proposal was defeated and the culprits did not suffer much.

The party took it out on her by making her look like a monster; it was a regular smear campaign; they started poking about in her private life, and that was her Achilles' heel (weak point), no man can live without feelings, she wouldn't be a woman if she did, so why deny it? Since Helena did not have love at home she sought it elsewhere. They called her a hypocrite at a public meeting, trying to criticise others for breaking up marriages, when she herself had been unfaithful to her husband at every opportunity behind her back they said that she was a nun in public and a whore in private as if they could not see that the only reason she was so hard on others was that she wished to prevent an unhappy marriage if she could.



Helena mused that she hated lies; she could only act as she felt. She had always believed that man was one and indivisible and that only the petty bourgeois divided them hypocritically into public self and private self, such was her credo. Helena admitted that she hated those young girls so sure of themselves and their youth and so lacking in solidarity with older women. Compared to them she, a married woman, had a few affairs with other men; the difference was that Helena was always looking for love, and if she had made a mistake, she would turn away in horror, even thought it would have been simpler to cross the border into the realm of that monstrous freedom where shame, inhibitions and morals had ceased to exist, where everything was permitted where deep inside all one needed was to understand the throb of sex. If she had crossed that border, she would stop being herself and she was afraid of that awful transformation. That is why Helena kept desperately looking for love, so that she might remain whole from beginning to end. That is why, she told Ludvik, that she was fascinated when she saw Ludvik.

3. Helena remembers her first meeting with Ludvik how nervous she had been how he had tried to reassure her. He made it clear from the start he was interested in her more as a woman than as a reporter. He was very nice to her, they understood each other; he was not one of the intellectual types she disliked, he had a rich life behind him. The thing that excited her most was that he was from Moravia, he had even played in a cimbalom land; it was like hearing the leitmotiv of her life again, seeing her youth return from the shadows, her heart and soul went out to him.

Ludvik advised Helena to devote more time to the joys of life. She replied that joy had always been part of her credo and what she hated most was the present day fashionable cynicism; Ludvik replied that credos meant nothing and that cynicism; Ludvik replied that credos meant nothing and that people who shouted joy from the roof tops were often the saddest of all. Soon Helena realised that in spite of knowing she was a married woman, Ludvik was in love with her. She also noticed that he looked sad. The next day he

took her out for a drive out into the country and they had a splendid time. Helena was in a real dilemma now. On the one hand Pavel had offered to marry her. She was ready to do anything to save her marriage, but she did not have the strength to say no to Ludvik.

#### 2.4.1. Critical Comments on Chapter Two

The most striking aspect of Helena's monologue is that each paragraph is one long "infinite" sentence in Kundera's original. It reveals the state of mind, life, hopes and disappointments of Helena. We also learn about Pavel, about the hypocrisy of the communists Ludvik also is brought in adding complication to the theme. What are your impressions about Helena?

Let us pass on to the next *part*.

#### 2.6. Summary of Part Three

##### Ludvik

This *part* consists of *seven* chapters. The narrator is *Ludvik*.

1. He walked along the bridge that spanned the river Morava. He was aware that the ghostly atmosphere of the landscape was merely a metaphor for everything he had tried not to recall after his encounter with Lucie. He seemed to be projecting suppressed memories onto everything he was around him. He understood that there was no escaping the memories which surrounded him.

2. The events leading to Ludvik's first major disaster could be traced to his fatal predilection for silly *jokes* and MARKETA'S fatal inability to understand them. Marketa was the type of woman who took everything seriously; that made her totally at one with the spirit of the era; she was credulous, gifted and full of naive (simple and innocent) trustfulness. Everyone at the university liked this nineteen year old girl, and poked gentle non malicious fun at her. But the fun went over badly with her, and even worse with the spirit of the age. It was the first year after February 1948. A genuinely new and different life had begun, marked by rigid seriousness; people were expected to rejoice in the victory of the working

class, without giving way *individualistically* to inner sorrows.

Ludvik had few inner sorrows at that time, had a considerable sense of fun; but his *Jokes* were not serious enough to keep pace with the joyousness of the era. Contemporary joy was a grave joy that proudly called itself "*the historical optimism of the victorious class*", a solemn and ascetic joy, in short, Joy with a capital 'J'. Ludvik held an important post in the Students Union and like every communist at the time, he had a number of functions; being a good student, he could expect a positive evaluation in formal evaluation of each member. Ludvik was rated as an individualist with an intellectual smile. Honestly, he felt that he was a man of many faces, which kept multiplying. About a month before summer, when he was finishing his second year, and Marketa her first, Ludvik began to get close to her. Like all twenty year olds, he pretended to be older, assuming an air of detachment. At meetings he was earnest, enthusiastic and committed; among friend, unconstrained and given to teasing with Marketa cynical and fitfully witty; and alone, unsure of himself and as agitated as a schoolboy. All these were real faces Ludvik asserted that he was not a hypocrite, with one real face and several false ones.

The psychological and physiological mechanism of love is so complex that at a certain period in his life, a young man must concentrate all his energy on coming to grips with it, and in this way, he misses the actual content of the love; the woman he loves. It was his actual lack of self-assurance which caused Ludvik's agitation to ease the burden of his embarrassment and awkwardness, he showed off in front of Marketa; disagreeing with her, making fun of her etc. Marketa was a girl of trusting simplicity. She was sent during the summer to a two-week Party training course to fortify her zeal with concrete knowledge of the strategy and tactics of the revolutionary moment, based on the principle that *the end justified the means*.

Ludvik was disappointed because he had planned to spend the two weeks alone with Marketa in Prague. With an eye to im-

proving their relationship. He reacted with pained jealousy when Marketa did not share his feeling. From the training centre in Bohemia, she sent him a letter full of enthusiasm for the effects of the Revolution. Ludvik too believed in the imminence of a revolution in Western Europe. What he could not accept was how she could be so happy. When he was missing her so much. So he bought a postcard, and in order to hurt, shock and confuse her, he wrote: "*Optimism is the opium of the people. A healthy atmosphere stinks of stupidity. Long live Trotsky!*"

3. Marketa respond to Ludvik's provocative postcard with a brief and banal note. Her silence overwhelmed him with heavy sadness, when she failed to respond to his mournful infatuation. He could not understand what had happened. When he met her in Prague in August, she claimed that nothing had changed between them. The next day he was informed that Marketa had left Prague. Ludvik was unhappy as only a womanless twenty-year old could be, one who had known few encounters with physical love. The days were unbearably long and futile, it was difficult to kill time.

In September when classes resumed, Ludvik received a phone call summoning him to the District Party Secretariat. Three Comrades whom he knew well and had always bantered, suddenly wore serious expressions and started interrogating Ludvik about the provocative postcard he had sent Marketa. Even though he told them that he had written the words as a joke, they refused to believe him. He understood that the comrades had read all his letters to Marketa. They asked him if he was laughing at Marketa for taking seriously things like the Party, optimism, discipline etc. He could have written only what was inside him; he wrote what he felt. Now the Comrades knew that Ludvik had two faces - one for the party, another for everyone else. He had twisted Marx's statement. "Religion is the opium of the people" and Trotsky's belief that "optimism builds socialism". At last, they told him that they were relieving him of his post in the Students Union effective immediately and asked him to hand over the keys of the office. Ludvik gave the keys away.



Later Ludvik remembered that he had a few personal items at the Student Union office. He managed to get the house-key from the porter and went in. Just then the three Comrades came in; they were agitated to see him there. He told them that he had come for the half-eaten rum-*cake* baked by his mother, and his socks. However they allowed him to take all his things and told him not to show his face there again. Ludvik felt he was innocent, he had written nothing terrible on the postcard; the best thing would be to talk to someone well acquainted with Marketa. He looked up a fellow student, a Communist, who listened to the whole story and observed that the Secretariat was bigoted and humourless. He told him to see ZEMANEK, who was going to become Party Chairman at Natural Sciences and knew both Marketa and Ludvik very well.

4. Ludvik felt that Zemanek who had been chosen Party Chairman, would be sympathetic towards him, chiefly because of his Moravian origins, for Zemanek loved singing Moravian folk songs. Ludvik, Marketa and Zemanek had often been together on various occasions during their student days. Once he had fabricated a story about some dwarf tribes living in the Czech mountains. Zemanek too had added funny details to endorse his account - all for fooling Marketa. On this black day, Ludvik's hope was that Zemanek knew well both Marketa and Ludvik's style of comedy and would understand that the provocative postcard was only a joke. So when he got the first opportunity, Ludvik told the party chairman the whole story, and the latter said he would see what he could do. In the meantime, Ludvik lived in a state of suspended animation. Marketa continued to avoid him, he was too proud and sensitive to ask for anything. Then one day, she herself stopped him in a corridor and said that she wanted to talk to him.

Ludvik and Marketa went on a walk. She told him how the whole thing had come about. She had been questioned by the Comrades and persuaded to show them all the letters of sentimental effusions in addition to the provocative postcard he had sent her. She had to tell them that she thought him a little odd and that nothing

was sacred to him. Marketa told Ludvik that since he was a Party member, they had every right to know who he was and what he thought. Comrade Zemanek had met her recently, praised her for her good performance at the training course and advised her to keep out of Ludvik's company. Through she had kept off Ludvik for months, she felt guilty at trying to break a friendship merely, because the friend had made a mistake and once again she sought permission to meet Ludvik for months, she felt guilty at trying to break a friendship merely because the friend had made a mistake and once again she sought permission to meet Ludvik and talk to him. She told him that he had committed a great crime, he had no right to remain in the Party and that she had decided not to leave him.

Ludvik knew that if agreed to acknowledge his very deep guilt, and satisfy Marketa's salvationist urge he would achieve the long-cherished goal of her body; but he could not take it at that price. He did not give in to Marketa. He refused her help and lost her. He was shocked at the farcical nature of the whole affair. Ludvik began to feel outraged by his three sentences in the postcard, to fear that something serious did in fact lurk behind their comedy, to know that he never really had been one with the body of the Party, that he had never been a true proletarian revolutionary; a man was either a revolutionary, in which case he completely merged with the movement in one collective entity, or he was not and would always consider himself guilty of not being one.

Looking back on his state of mind at the time he was reminded of the enormous power of Christianity to convince the believer of his fundamental and never-ending guilt. Ludvik gradually became reconciled to the idea that his words, though genuinely intended as a joke, were still a matter of guilt and a self-critical investigation started up in his head. No wonder the Comrades had reproached him for his "traces of individualism" and "intellectual tendencies". He told himself that he had taken to preening himself on his education, his university status, his future as a member of the intelligen-

tsia etc. What he resisted most was the expulsion from the party and the concomitant designation of *enemy*. But at last in spite of his suppliant pleas to various committees, Zemanek recommended in the name of the organisation that Ludvik be expelled not only from the Party but from the University too; Zemaek was supported by Ludvik's closest friends and his teachers!

Ludvik was unable to work up courage to tell his mother about his expulsion, for she took great pride in his studies. But on the day of his arrival home, he was met by JAROSLAV, a school friend who had played in the cimbalom band with him; upon his request Ludvik agreed to be his best man and thus celebrated his down fall with a wedding ceremony; but he was not able to enjoy himself due to his personal crisis.

5. Having lost the right to continue his studies, Ludvik also lost the right to defer military service. He signed up for two long work brigades. He along with a number of conscripts, were turned into soldiers; they were given black insignia as uniform. Hectic drill, political instruction and compulsory singing marked day after day; and for private life, a room with twenty bunks. The depersonalisation was overwhelming; and even in the *penumbra of depersonalisation* the soldiers began to see the human in human beings. Their main job was to work in mines. They were treated roughly and condemned to the company of men Ludvik considered his sworn enemies. Ludvik refused to accommodate himself to them. He preferred to be alone. He believed he had only one thing to accomplish; flight for his right "not to be an enemy", for his right to get away.

Ludvik repeatedly told the unit's political commissar that he had been expelled from the Party for intellectualism and cynicism, not as an enemy of socialism. After hearing everything and making enquiries he said that he had found out that Ludvik was a known Trotskyite! Ludvik realised that it was impossible to free his real self from this falsely imposed image; the non-resemblance was his

cross and he really wanted to bear it. Ludvik worked very hard, volunteered for the political pep talks etc but no one took all that as an expression of his political convictions.

Among the noncoms was a mild Slovak utterly devoid of sadism. Once Ludvik asked him how he was such a good shot. The Slovak replied that he thought of the bull's eye as an imperialist, and he got so bad that he never missed. He continued in a serious pensive voice that if there was a war on, Ludvik and the others would be the ones he would be shooting at. Hearing these words from the good hearted fellow, Ludvik realised that the line tying him up to the Party and the Comrades had irrevocably slipped through his fingers. He had been thrown off his life's path.

6. Everything meaningful in the course of life had broken off. All he had left was time - sheer empty time. Men with black insignia could be kept on indefinitely. Little by little Ludvik grew used to the idea that his life had lost its continuity and that it only remained for him finally to begin to exist in the reality in which he inescapably found himself. He began to notice the people around him. *Honza* and *Bedrich* were like him with the rare feeling of inner freedom. All the rest were plagued by fear and despair. It was Honza whom Ludvik liked best. Many of them had been conscripted for petty reasons like getting drunk on May Day, urinating in public, drawing Cubist paintings and so on. The soldiers had their heads shaved clean every two weeks to rid them of all thoughts of self-esteem. The only positive aspect of their dreary existence was the two nights free a month when they could spend and make up for the chronic frustration of all the other endless days. One evening Ludvik, Honza Stana and others went out, outwitted the artillery men, drank and enjoyed the company of a nice blonde. Ludvik was disgusted with another ugly woman of monstrous height who was nicknamed *lamp-post*. Suddenly he was gripped by sadness; this type of love life with prostitutes had simply become the fundamental and *customary* condition of his existence; it was an expression not of his freedom, but of his submission his limitation, his *con-*



*damnation*. And Ludvik felt fear of that bleak horizon, of that destiny. He felt his soul shrivelling; he was frightened by the thought that he could not escape its encirclement.

7. Sadness over their bleak erotic horizons was something nearly all of them went through. In March Stana got two day leave to marry. On that day, Ludvik preferred to be alone. He took a long walk. He reached a building with a CINEMA sign. The film on was *Court of Honour*. Not wanting to see it, Ludvik headed for the alley to the street. It was then he first set his eyes on Lucie, whose appearance was utterly ordinary. Later, it was this very *ordinariness*, and her slowness radiating a resigned consciousness that there was nowhere to hurry to and that it was useless to reach impatiently toward anything, that touched and fascinated Ludvik.

Ludvik kept following Lucie who did not seem to notice him. He felt that Lucie had revealed herself to him the way *religious truth* revealed itself he grasped the essence of what she was later to become for him - tranquility, simplicity and modesty qualities which he needed badly. Ludvik bought a ticket for the detested film and took the seat next to Lucie. After the film was over he talked to her in a natural manner - not with a joke or a paradox as had been his custom. Lucie told him that she worked in a factory and lived in a dormitory; she liked being alone because she felt sad. Ludvik observed that nothing brought people together more quickly than shared melancholy. They parted after agreeing to meet when Ludvik got his next leave.

8. From that evening, Ludvik was a different inside. To no other woman had he felt such gratitude as Lucie; firstly for releasing him from the pathetically limited erotic horizons that surrounded them; freeing him from the overall nausea he felt after his bleak erotic adventures. All he needed was to feel Lucie close to him, a life in which there was no room for questions of cosmopolitanism and internationalism, political vigilance and the class struggle, controversies over the definition of the dictatorship of the proletariat, politics with its strategy and tactics. These were the concerns which

had led to his downfall. What had attracted Ludvik to the Communist movement more than anything was the feeling of standing near the *wheel of history*; for in those days, the Communists in the student body ran the Universities almost single handed, making decisions on academic staffing, teaching reform, and the curriculum. They had experienced the intoxication of power there was still an altogether idealistic illusion that they were inaugurating a human era, in which man would be neither *outside* history nor *under the heel of history*, but would create and direct it. Lucie knew nothing of the *great and contemporary* concerns; she lived for her *small and eternal* concerns she had come to liberate him.

Lucie was nineteen, came from western Bohemia, from an unhappy home, for her parents did not like her. She left for Ostrava; she was serious and liked to go to movies, especially war films. She listened receptively when Ludvik spoke. Ludvik found great solace in the poems of *Frantisek Halas*; he wanted to commune with someone else who had been *excommunicated*. He recited his poems before Lucie, who became so emotional that she held Ludvik round the neck like a child and cried and cried.

9. It pained Ludvik to think that not since reaching maturity had he been able to establish a true relationship with a woman. He could not forget the way he had been expelled. It was hard to live with people willing to send him to exile or death, to become intimate with them or love them. Nothing was more repugnant (hateful) to him than brotherly feelings grounded in the common baseness people saw in each other. Ludvik had no desire for that slimy brotherhood. But now Ludvik was passionately in love with Lucie, desired her and even wanted to marry her one day. In reply to his letters she gave him flowers. Ludvik once took Lucie to a dress shop and made her try out a few dresses. He was bowled over by *the revelation of her body*. He at last managed to make her agree to meet him in her room a month later.

10. Stana messed up his life by beating his wife for disloyalty; he was tried for deserting her; later he lost a leg in an accident

and the botched amputation cost him his life. His wife had divorced him and later married a famous Prague actor. Stana's wife was the downfall of all of them. Soon after they had a very strict boy-commander. Cenek drew a very vulgar mural showing some men and women in obscene poses and explained the mural in terms of the Red Army. The officer considered it an insult to the Red Army and told Cenek that he would have to face the consequences. When Ludvik told him that he liked it, he retorted that he was not surprised, it was perfect for masturbators.

Once the boy-commander gave Ludvik two days' detention for lying down on the job. Ludvik reflected that the young man, himself incomplete, was play acting the role of a *fully grown* person, a superman, because he was forced to do it. Ludvik felt that his comrades at the postcard interrogation, wearing the mask of the hard ascetic revolutionary, Marketa, as the female saviour in some movie, Zemanek who was suddenly seized by the sentimental pathos of morality, and perhaps he himself were all mere actors. History was terrible because it so often ended up as a platform for the immature. Thinking of all that, Ludvik's whole set of values went awry, and he felt deep hatred towards youth.

Alexej was the son of a highly placed Communist official who had recently been arrested. He confided to Ludvik that come what may, he was determined never to betray the party. Ludvik, thanks to Lucie, no longer suffered this desperate torment.

11. Ludvik was granted an evening pass two days before Lucie's roommates were due back. He went to meet Lucie and make love to her but she resisted so hard that he had to return disappointed.

12. After a taxing racing exercise, the boy commander ordered no leaves for Ludvik's company for two months. Ludvik and Alexej discussed socialism. According to Alexej, the line between socialism and reaction held everywhere. He had been sent to the regiment because his father had been arrested for espionage and it was the Party's duty not to trust him. However, among his compan-

ions, the good natured sabotage of the relay race strengthened their feeling of solidarity; they reviewed the possibilities of going absent without leave; a bribery fund was set up for the purpose. But soon the scheme flopped. Honza was court martialed, convicted and got a year in prison. Leave for the entire company was cancelled for another two months. Everyone suspected Alexej and made life miserable for him. Alexej told him that the commander was saboteur and that told him that the commander was a saboteur and that Alexej had sent a complaint about him to the Party. Alexej repeated that he was a communist and as Communists they were responsible for everything that went on there. Ludvik told him that responsibility was unthinkable without freedom. Cenek felt Alexej was a rat for he had renounced his own father as a spy.

Ludvik was sad he could not see Lucie. He sent her a letter. The next day she came to the barbed fence and told him that she loved him.

13. Lucie came to the fence almost everyday and met Ludvik. It was the most intensive period of their love. He was loved publicly and demonstratively; it was the love of a woman and it aroused wonder, nostalgia and envy. The longer the soldiers were cut off from the world and women, the more women dominated their talk with their every particular, every detail. The feeling of comradely solidarity that had led Ludvik to paint so detailed a picture of Lucie's nakedness (which he had never seen!) And erotic behaviour had the effect of painfully intensifying his desire for her. He experienced *total desire for a woman* in which everything was involved: body and soul, desire for vulgarity and consolation as well as for eternal possession.

Ludvik fixed a day to sneak out and meet Lucie at an appointed place. On that day the boy commander called Alexej a sneak and forced him to read a letter expelling Alexej from the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Later Ludvik reached the house where Lucie was waiting. But once again he was disappointed. Lucie resisted more than ever. The pitiful misery of a failed youth,



the humiliating eternity of unfulfilled desire everything was too much for Ludvik.

14. The soldiers appeared to have developed a sudden surge of solidarity for Alexej following the commander's cruelty. The next day they discovered that Alexej had committed suicide. The young boy had assumed his mad role blindly and bravely, but had lacked the strength to remain in the ranks, in his *dog's mask*. Ludvik felt that his death concealed a reproach to him as if Alexej had wished to let him know that the moment the Party banishes a man from its ranks, that man has no reason to live. Ludvik felt that he had lost more than Alexej; he began to doubt their solidarity which was based solely on the force of circumstance and an urge for self-preservation. He felt he was a desert within a desert.

Ludvik wrote a letter of apology to Lucie but it came back. She had gone away. Ludvik was terror stricken. He sneaked to find out, more details about Lucie but failed. In two weeks' time he was court martialled and given ten months for desertion. It was when he lost Lucie that the long period of hopelessness and emptiness began. His mother died when he was in jail, and he could not go to her funeral. He spent the next three years mining coal as a civilian.

Ludvik takes no pleasure in remembering his past - the destiny of a man cast out from a movement he had trusted. It was false pride that had made him glorify his outcast destiny. As for fifteen years, he had not set eyes on Lucie.

### 2.5.1. Critical Comments on Part III

Part III is very long, consisting of fourteen chapters. It tells us about the Joke of the postcard which caused the major disaster in Ludvik's life - his expulsion from the Party and his university studies, his disappointments at the hands of Marketa and Lucie and the shattering of his ideals. The chapter contains lots of reflective passages.

Let us pass on to the *fourth* part

## 2.6 Summary of Part Four

The character-narrator of *Part Four* is *Jaroslav*. It consists of ten chapters.

1. Jaroslav dreamt a fascinating folk lore in which he was king, who was taken to safety by one of his cavalry men who asked him to put a veil on his head. They reached their destination, He wanted to see Vlasta.

2. The only object in Jaroslav's room was a black harmonium. It was a couple of days before Sunday's Ride of the kings. Vlasta came into the room. Jaroslav attended a meeting in connection with it. In the square he saw Ludvik, who pretended not to see him. The District National Committee had proposed Jaroslav's son *Vladmir*, a fifteen year old boy, to be that year's king, as a reward and honour for the father. The boy admitted that he did not want to be king if it was arranged from above. He did not want to pull strings. Jaroslav was sad.

3,4. Jaroslav wished that his son would try to understand that he was not a mere crackpot folklore addict, but heard in folk art the sap that kept Czech culture from drying up. His love for it dated back to the war when they tried to make them believe that they were only Czech-speaking Germans, who had no right to exist. In the last year of the Nazi occupation the Ride of the kings was staged in their village, and Jaroslav then fifteen years old was made king. He had been proud. He wished his son could share his feeling.

5. Jaroslav could not forget Ludvik, his oldest friend. Both were half orphans. Ludvik's father, a bricklayer was hauled off to a concentration camp by the Germans when the boy was thirteen. Jaroslav's mother had died in childbirth. Ludvik had to depend on father sister and her husband *Koutecky* and he could not bear them, for she looked down on his poor mother. Though Ludvik was ripe for rebellion, his mother would beg him tearfully to be sensible. Ludvik and Jaroslav were like twins. Jaroslav's father even bought him a cheap clarinet. Towards the end of the war when the Koutecky's daughter got married, Ludvik was displayed as their

charity case. Ludvik was so furious that he deserted the festivities. He proclaimed that he hated the bourgeois. He cursed the marriage ceremony and said he spat on the Church and was going to leave it. He broke all ties with them and went to lectures the communists sponsored. In 1947 after school, Ludvik joined the University in Prague, Jaroslav in Brno. He did not see him until the following year.

6. The February Communist coup of 1948 meant a reign of terror. Jaroslav and the other were irritated by Ludvik's certainty. He had the look all Communists had at that time; he associated the fate of their band with the fate of the Communist Party. In his mind Jaroslav called him the Pied Piper. Capitalism had destroyed the old collective life. Jazz not only disappeared from their country but became a symbol of Western capitalism and its decadence. The Communist Party went all out to create a new way of life. It based its efforts on Stalin's famous definition of the new art: socialist content in national form. And national form in music, dance and poetry could come from nowhere but folk art. The Communist Party supported them. In 1949 Jaroslav himself joined the Party.

7. The shadow fell between them at Jaroslav's wedding. While at the university, Jaroslav was always anxious about his father's health. In the third year he gave it up and came home and became a violin teacher. He could devote his time to things he loved. He decided to marry *Vlasta*. Jaroslav's friends from the ensemble staged a real Moravian wedding for him.

8. Ludvik explained that he had been expelled from both the Party and the University; that is why he had not been able to enjoy the wedding. He bade farewell. He had volunteered for a labour brigade and Jaroslav went abroad with the ensemble. Jaroslav was unable to face Ludvik's fall, and equally ashamed of his own success in life. Then one day his father received an obituary announcement signed by the Kouteckys that Ludvik's mother had died. There was no mention of Ludvik. Jaroslav was shocked Ludvik did not

come. Only later did Jaroslav come to know that Ludvik had been in prison. The Kouteckys had robbed him of his mother.

9. Ludvik had been through military service, a prison sentence and several years in the mines. He was making arrangements in Prague to resume his studies and had come to the town to take care of a few legal formalities. Jaroslav realised he had changed: Ludvik had a toughness and a solidity about him and he was much calmer. Jaroslav had not been prepared for Ludvik's venom, his ironical hatred. He learnt that it was with great difficulty that Ludvik had got permission to complete his last two years at the university. Being expelled from the Party had branded him for life. Wherever he went he was distrusted. Jaroslav was stunned. He realised that Ludvik had stopped speaking to him because he was afraid that his friend too would denounce him. Ludvik was afraid of Jaroslav.

10. Ludvik and Jaroslav had never done anything to hurt each other. Jaroslav wondered if, with a little good will, they could be friends again. As it turned out neither their estrangement nor their reunion was in his hands. Nine years elapsed Ludvik graduated and found an excellent job as scientist in a field he enjoyed. Jaroslav could never regard Ludvik as an enemy or a stranger. He was his friend. Jaroslav could not get over the fact that Ludvik had seen him that day and turned away.

### 2.6.1. Critical Comments on Part Four

In this part, we have the relationship between Ludvik and Jaroslav depicted by the latter. Some of the details of Ludvik's life are repeated. It is interesting to compare this with the earlier parts.

Read the study material carefully a number of times and become familiar with the plot so far. Also note down your impressions of the main characters the different points of view, plot development etc.

We shall study the latter parts of the novel in the next *Unit*.



## UNIT THREE

## THE JOKE : A SUMMARY OF PARTS V-VII

## 3.0 Objectives

At the end of this *Unit*, you should be able to:

- (i) understand the plot of the novel *The Joke*;
- (ii) analyse the important characters, particularly their states of mind; and
- (iii) discuss the main ideas presented in the novel.

## 3.1 Introduction

Please read *Unit II* a few times and understand the plot of the novel so far. Only then can you appreciate the whole novel. In this *Unit* we shall summarise the latter parts of the novel, starting with the *fifth*.

## 3.2. Summary of Part Five

**Ludvik**

The character narrator of this part is *Ludvik*. This part consists of 5 chapters.

1. Ludvik came across *Kovalik*, a schoolmate who was associated with the National Committee. He said that there were two opposing institutions: the Catholic Church with its traditional thousand year old rites and the civil institutions that must supplant them. The Communist Party persuaded people to marry or have their children christened at civil ceremonies with as much dignity and beauty as at church ceremonies. The national Committee used attendance at their civil ceremonies as a touchstone for evaluating people's sense of citizenship and their attitude towards the State, and in the end people realized that and came. Ludvik observed that in that case, the National Committee was stricter with its believers than the Church was with theirs. Ludvik then took leave of his old classmate. He was expecting Helena Zemanek. She got down from the bus and came to the hotel where he, comrade Jahn, met her.

2. Everything that had happened between Ludvik and Helena was part of a precise and deliberate plan. He particularly wanted to meet her because her husband was a man Ludvik hated. Ludvik had been sent by his institute to meet Helena, who worked for the radio, and give her some information about their research. He hated journalists; he had a stronger aversion for radio folks. Ludvik did his best to make things tough for her, he deliberately spoke in complex and confusing sentences. He got out of her facts which identified Zemanek beyond a doubt. Soon he realised in spite of his rancour, that behind the veil of Helena's journalistic playacting, there was a woman capable of functioning as a woman. He tried his best to hide his true intentions and state of mind. Ludvik's rancour was increasing, but his conversation was very lighthearted and amiable, so that Helena became more and more feminine. Soon she bid farewell and left.

Helena rang up Ludvik to ask if she might see him. They met at a cafe. He saw that he had upset her equilibrium, and that he had begun to dominate her. He succeeded in making her accept his invitation to go to the country with him, though she was a married woman. Ludvik joked about it. He had dreamed this plan up with the power of fifteen years of rancour, he was optimistic of ultimate success. Ludvik took Helena to People's House and ordered rye. Helena's behaviour in general revealed her pride) for a special pose - one going back to the years when revolutionary in anything that was common", "plebian", "Ordinary or rustic". In Helena's pose, Ludvik recognised the period of his youth and in Helena's person Zemanek's wife.

Helena remarked that she had always yearned for a man like Ludvik who was simple direct unaffected and straightforward. Ludvik was amazed at the human capacity for transforming reality into a likeness of desires or ideals, but he was quick to accept Helena's interpretation of his personality. He told her bluntly that he desired her, though she was a married woman. It was embarrassing but Ludvik managed to persuade Helena to ender Kostka's

flat.

3. Helena did not seem in the least taken aback Ludvik realised that she was defenseless and available as he had imagined. Helena was excited all too ready to make love, but Ludvik deliberated. He made her speak about her husband Zemanek, how they had met, the pendant he had given her etc. She further told him that though they were living in the same house, it was not as man and wife. Succulently Ludvik saw Helena's nudity in a new light; it was nudity *denuded* of the power to excite him any longer. He asked her to dress up and leave, as Kostka would be coming back soon. He longed for her to be gone, he had stolen her body from no one; he had vanquished no one; it was a body abandoned, deserted by its spouse, a body he had intended to use but which had used him and was now insolently enjoying its triumph, exulting, jumping for joy. It was a few minutes before seven when Helena left.

5. Ludvik yearned to forget that ill-starred, afternoon; he longed for Kostka. He looked forward to him telling him about Lucie, who in contrast to Helena was so sweetly incorporeal, abstract, so far removed from conflicts, tensions and dramas, and yet not without influence on Ludvik's life. Now he realised why Lucie had flashed across the sky those past days: it was to reduce his vengeance to nothing to turn everything he had come there for to mist; inexplicable run from him at the last moment, was the goddess of escape, the goddess of vain pursuit, the goddess of mists; and she still held his head in her hands.

### 3.2.1. Critical Comments on Part V

This chapter describes Ludvik's intention to wreak vengeance on Zemanek, whom he hated for destroying his life; his hopes are dashed to pieces when he comes to know that Helena whose body he had intended to use, is no longer Zemanek's wife. The tone of the whole Part is one of rancour (bitterness). Ludvik feels that in contrast to Helena, Lucie, whom he had loved so much, was the goddess of vain pursuit. To appreciate this part fully, you should

read it alongside Part II: Helena's monologue [Refer Unit II]

Let us move on to Part VI

## 3.4 Summary of Part Six

### Kostka

The character-narrator of this part is Kostka. This part consists of 20 chapters.

1. Kostka and Ludvik had actually met only a few times in their lives. But in his imagination, Kostka met him frequently, and turned to him in his soliloquies as his chief adversary. Each time Kostka was in a helpless situation, it was Ludvik who invariably helped him out of it. Yet beneath that outward alliance lay an abyss of inward disagreement; perhaps Ludvik, who clearly attached greater significance to their outward bond than to their inward difference, was not fully aware of it. Ludvik had been merciless to outward adversaries and tolerant of inward discords. Kostka was the complete opposite. He loved Ludvik, as one loved one's adversaries.

2. Kostka had first met Ludvik in 1947 at one of those turbulent meetings that racked all the institutions of higher learning in those days. The fate of the nation was at stake. Kostka stood with the communist minority. Many Christians, both Catholics and Protestants, held it against him. They considered him a traitor for allying himself with a movement that inscribed godlessness on its shield. Even after fifteen years, he had not changed his position at all. Of course, the Communist movement was godless; but what about the Christians? Kostka could see nothing but pseudo-Christians living exactly like unbelievers. But being a Christian meant giving up private interests, comforts and power, and turning towards the poor, the humiliated and the suffering. But was that what the Churches were doing? Kostka's father was a working man, chronically unemployed, with a humble faith in God; but the Church never turned its face towards the man. And so Kostka's father remained forsaken amidst his neighbours, forsaken within the church, alone with



his God until he fell ill and died.

The Churches failed to realize that the working class movement was the movement of the humiliated and oppressed supplicating (praying) for justice. They did not choose to work with and for them to create the kingdom of God on earth. By siding with the oppressors, they deprived the working-class movement of God. And now they reproached it for being godless. There was a drop in Church membership. Schools were bringing the children up in an anti-religious frame of mind. In Kostka's view, true religion did not need the favour of secular power. Secular disfavour only strengthened faith. He could only lament the tragic error that led socialism away from God. All that he could do was to explain that error, and work to rectify it.

3. Until the February 1948 coup, Kostka's being a Christian suited the Communist quite well. They enjoyed hearing him expound on the social content of the Gospel, inveigh (speak) against the rot of the old world of property and war and argue about the affinity between Christianity and Communism. They tried to win over believers as well. Soon after February however things began to change. As a lecturer at the university, Kostka took the side of several students about to be expelled for their parents' political stance. Suddenly doubts began to be raised about whether a man of such firm Christian convictions was capable of educating socialist youth. It seemed that he would have to fight for his very livelihood. Then he heard that the student Ludvik Jahn had stood up for him at a plenary (of the whole assembly) meeting of the Party. Kostka went to see Ludvik and told him that there was no hope at all of his "outgrowing" his faith. They discussed the existence of God, the finite and the infinite, Desecrates's position on religion whether Spinoza was a materialist etc. Ludvik told Kostka that religious faith was his private affair, and that all in all it was of no concern to anyone else. Kostka never saw him at the university again. About three months after their talk, Ludvik was expelled from the party and the university, and six months later he too had to

leave the university. Through he could have defended himself by making a public statement along theist lines, he did nothing.

4. Kostka experienced a period of soul-searching. On the one hand he was attached to his lectureship. It was relatively comfortable, it left him plenty of time for his own research and it promised a lifetime career as a university teacher. On the personal front he had a wife and their five year old child to support. His wife did everything in her power to make Kostka defend himself and stand up for his position at the university. On the other hand, he was alarmed by seeing large numbers of valuable people, teachers and students, forced to leave the universities; he was alarmed by his attachment to a comfortable life whose calm security distanced him more and more from the turbulent fates of his fellow men. Kostka realised that the voices raised against him at the university were an *appeal*: Someone perhaps God, was calling him, warning him against a comfortable career that would tie down his mind his faith and his conscience. He heard Jesus's words: "Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." Kostka's enemies thought that he would be tormented with worry but instead he felt an unexpected calm; he had just discovered the real meaning of freedom. He realized that man had nothing to lose, that his place was everywhere that Jesus went, which meant everywhere among men. Kostka accepted the wrong his adversaries inflicted on him as a coded appeal.

5. Communists supposed, in a manner eminently religious, that a man who was guilty in the face of the Party, might gain absolution by doing a stint with the working class in agriculture or industry. During the years after February many intellectuals went off that way to the mines or factories, so that after a mysterious period of purification, they might be allowed to return to offices, schools and political posts. Following his expulsion, Kostka secured a very good position on a state farm in western Bohemia. He was truly happy and felt reborn. He was grateful to be able to earn his bread by useful work.

6. It was 1951. A group of boys from a neighbouring village noticed a girl crawl out of a stack; she disappeared before they could run after her. A peasant woman from the same village reported that a twenty year old girl came asking her for a crust of bread. The girl merely said that she had lost her money. Similar stories were added of the mysterious vanishing of food stuff left under a tree and so on. The girl became the children's own pampered fairy and they named her VAGABONDELLA. They allowed her to maintain her invisibility.

7. The fairy-tale was short-lived. One day the director of the farm and the chairman of the district National Committee discovered a drab suitcase in the countryside. Besides the girl's clothes, it contained a bundle of letters; from the letters they learned the name of the recipient: *Lucie Sebekta*. The chairman hid in the tree, while the director went down to the village and sent the local policeman. At dusk the girl returned to her fragrant bower. They let her go in, let her close the door behind her, waited half a minute, and then went in after her.

8. Both the men who trapped Lucie in the barn were decent fellows. The chairman formerly a poor farmhand, was an honest father of six children. The policeman was coarse naive, good-natured; neither of them would have hurt a fly. And yet Kostka felt a strange pain when he heard how Lucie was trapped - with a single door blocked by two hefty men. Later, when he learned more about Lucie, he realised to his astonishment that in both those agonising images the very essence of her fate was directly revealed to him. Those two images represented the *situation of rape*.

9. That night Lucie did not sleep in the barn but on an iron bed in a former shop the police had set up as an office. The next day she was interrogated by the District National Committee. They learned that she had previously worked and lived in Ostrava, from where she had run away as she could not stand it there anymore. She had not gone to her parents in Cheb, as her father had done nothing but beat her. At last she secured the Chairman's permis-

sion to be allowed to stay on and work. The chairman introduced Lucie to Kostka and announced ceremoniously that if she had done anything wrong they forgave her and trusted her. The working class needed honest men and women everywhere; so she was not to let it down. Kostka then took Lucie to the greenhouse and explained her work to her.

10. In Kostka's memory, Lucie overshadowed everything he experienced at the time. Despite that, the figure of the District National Committee Chairman remained clearly outlined. That former farmhand who had hoped to create a paradise for his suffering neighbours, that honest enthusiast speaking about forgiveness, faith, and the working class, was much closer to his heart and mind than Ludvik, who used to declare that socialism grew from the stem of European rationalism and skepticism a stem both non-religious and anti-religious. But Kostka was certain that the lines of European spirit which stemmed from the teaching of Jesus led far more naturally to social equality and socialism. The most passionate Communists like the Chairman who put Lucie in Kostka's care seemed to him much more like religious zealots than Voltairean doubters. The revolutionary era from 1948 to 1956 was an age of collective faith; its sympathisers renounced their ego their person, private lives, in favour of something higher, something supra personal. True the Marxist teachings were purely secular in origin, but the significance assigned to them was similar to the significance of the Gospel and the biblical commandments; their ideas were, in their terminology, sacred.

That was a cruel religion. It did not elevate either Kostka or Ludvik; perhaps it injured both of them. Yet the era that had just passed was much closer to his heart than the era that seemed to be approaching then; an era of mockery, scepticism, and corrosion, a petty era with the ironic intellectual in the limelight, and behind him the mob of youth coarse, cynical and nasty, without enthusiasm without ideals, ready to mate, or to kill at sight. The era then passing or already past had something of the spirit of the great reli-



gious movements, but remained empty and godless. The era finally betrayed its religious nature, and it had paid dearly for its rationalist heritage. The rationalist scepticism had been corroding Christianity for two millennia, but not destroying it. But communist theory, its own creation, it would destroy, within a few decades. Kostka observed that it had already been killed.

11. People treated Lucie with caution, mistrust and suspicion. Her silent nature did not help her either. After about a month, her file from Ostrava arrived at the farm. It said that she had started off at Cheb as an apprentice hairdresser. As the result of a morals charge she had spent a year at the reformatory and had then gone to Ostrava, where she was known as a good worker. Her behaviour in the dormitory was exemplary. Before her flight there had been only one offense an entirely unusual one: she had been caught stealing flowers in a cemetery.

Kostka observed that Lucie was an enigmatic person. She worked silently and with concentration. She was calm in her timidity. Yet there was something in her taciturnity (saying little) that betrayed a life of pain and a wounded soul. She neither believed or disbelieved in God. She did not know anything about Jesus Christ. Kostka talked about him Lucie listened.

12. Kostka coaxed Lucie to give herself to religion which meant to lay aside her past life; to remove it from her soul. Lucie confessed that she had left Ostrava partly because of those flowers she stole from the cemetery. Ostrava was a black town with hardly any nature around it, and beautiful flowers were to be found only in the cemetery. She enjoyed going there. Once she took a fancy to a grave nearly fresh. She knelt and dissolved into ineffable bliss. Just then an elderly man and his wife approached the grave. They saw the unfamiliar girl take the beautiful spray of roses which they had earlier placed on the grave, turn and leave. They shouted at the mortified girl that there was nothing more abominable than robbing the dead. The attendant confirmed that it was not the first flower theft in the cemetery. They called a policeman and she con-

fessed everything.

13. Kostka explained that flowers on the grave belonged to the living. In the beauty of earthly flowers Lucie had found the revelation of the unearthly. She had needed the flowers only for the void in her soul; and they caught and humiliated her. Another reason for wanting to leave Ostrava was that a soldier doing military service whom she did not love, wanted to rape her, ripped off her clothes, but she eluded him and ran, faraway, because he was nasty and brutal like all the others. Kostka asked Lucie whom all she knew before the soldier.

14. Lucie was part of a gang consisting of herself and six boys aged between sixteen and twenty two. They called themselves a pagan sect and one day they were talking about initiation. The boys had brought a few bottles of cheap wine. Lucie had lavished all the unrequited daughter's love on these boys. On that day all six of them gang-raped Lucie in spite of her blind trust in their friendship. It happened in that flat of one of the boys whose parents were on night shift. Gang-rape became a habit with them. Finally the police came and took them all away. The boys had some thefts on their conscience and they got varying sentences. Lucie was the shame of all Cheb and at home they beat her black and blue. She was sent to a reformatory where she spent a year-until she was seventeen. She would not have returned home for anything on earth. That is how she came to live in that black city.

15. Kostka was surprised and somewhat taken aback when Ludvik revealed to him a couple of days back that he knew Lucie. When he asked about Lucie again the previous day, he told him everything that Lucie had confided in him. Though everyone on the farm was nice to her, they constantly reminded her of her past. The director spoke of her as "the little grave robber", though in jest. Kostka told Ludvik that Lucie needed forgiveness, she needed the mysterious purification that was unfamiliar and incomprehensible to him. Few people, by themselves knew how to forgive. They lacked the power to annihilate a sin that had been committed; that

exceeded a man's strength. Divesting a sin of its validity, undoing it, erasing it out of time was a mysterious and supernatural feat. God alone could forgive it. Man can forgive only in so far as he founds himself on God's forgiveness. *Ludvik could not forgive, because he did not believe in God.* He had never forgiven those at the plenary meeting who had raised their hands against him and agreed that his life should be destroyed. Ludvik had not forgiven mankind. From that time on, he had mistrusted it, he felt rancour against it. Kostka could understand Ludvik, but that did not alter the fact that such general rancour against people was terrifying and sinful. It had become his curse. *Because to live in a world in which no one is forgiven, where all are irredeemable, is the same as living in hell.* Ludvik was living in hell and Kostka pitied him.

16. Everything on this earth which belonged to God also belonged to the Devil. Even the motion of lovers in the act of love. For Lucie those had become a province of the odious. She associated them with the bestial adolescent faces of the gang and later with the face of the insistent soldier. The planet we inhabit is a borderland between heaven and hell. No act is of itself good or bad. Only its place in the order of things makes it good or bad; Even physical love. Kostka spoke in this manner to Lucie day after day, each time reassuring her that she was forgiven, that she must give herself to god etc. And thus the weeks went by. Lucie improved; she learnt to smile. One day, she laid her hand on Kostka's cheek and said that she loved him. Before reflecting that he had merely done his duty and leaving quickly, he took Lucie in his arms and sank with her into the bower of nature.

17. What should not have happened, Kostka and Lucie continued to live on the same farm. He was aware that he had a wife and son who waited patiently for his rare visits home. He realised that he desired her, he did not want to go on, but he was afraid of breaking off this beginning of intimacies for fear of wounding Lucie. It seemed to Kostka *that he had been a seducer in priest's robe*, that all his spiritual assistance to Lucie and all his talk of Jesus and

God was no more than a veil for the most base carnal desires. In his vain presumption, he even tried to justify his action by reasoning that he was actually helping Lucie.

One day the central authorities fabricated political charges against Kostka's director, claiming that Kostka himself was one of the suspicious elements that surrounded him. Kostka's situation was almost helpless. Ludvik would have called it injustice, but Kostka felt the hand of God behind the whole thing. He felt that events for the most part were often disguised instructions from above. So he accepted the developments on the farm with relief. He saw in them a clear instruction; to leave Lucie, before it was too late. He precisely did that after saying good bye to a tearfully disconsolate Lucie. Kostka left the farm as a man who himself admitted that he was unfit to carry out work of any significance in the State. And so he became a construction worker.

18. It was an autumn day in 1956 Kostka met Ludvik after five years. Ludvik had just finished his stint in the Ostrava mines and had gone to Prague to resume his studies. Ludvik's eyes revealed sympathy for Kostka, now that he had become a bricklayer. As usual Ludvik had flared up at the injustice and stupidity of the whole thing. Kostka reflected how he had become a bricklayer, while Ludvik had become a miner. *He was forgiving, but Ludvik was irreconcilable.* Inwardly they were very distant. Kostka spoke of a boy in Geneva who was executed because he had filled a notebook jeering at Jesus Christ and the Gospel. He had done it as a joke. He had very little hatred in him, only mockery and indifference. What Kostka was trying to drive home was that *no great movement designed to change the world could bear sarcasm or mockery*, because they were a rust that corroded all that it touched. He asked Ludvik to examine his own attitude. Ludvik became bitter to the depths of his soul, convinced of the great injustice done to him. He was sent to a black insignia battalion among the enemies of Communism. He could have accomplished much, but like Jesus, he had no desire to go among the sinners and the sick.



Kostka implied that Ludvik too was a sinner. His faith was weak, so he failed the test that was set to him, because the only reason he turned bitter towards his community was that it placed too-great a burden on his shoulder. Kostka was not on Ludvik's side in his quarrel with the party, because great things on this earth could be created only by a community of infinitely devoted men who humbly gave up their lives to a higher design. Kostka gratefully acknowledged all that Ludvik had done for him. But if Ludvik looked into his soul in depth, he would understand that *the deepest motive for his good deeds was not love, but hatred*; hatred towards those who once hurt him. His soul knew no God, and therefore knew no forgiveness. He longed for retribution. Ludvik was full of hatred even when he helped people. But hatred bred a chain of further hatreds. Kostka repeated that Ludvik was living in hell and he pitied him.

19. Had Ludvik heard Kostka's soliloquy, he would have said that the latter was ungrateful. It was Ludvik who got him his position in the virology department. Several years after Kostka left the farm, Lucie got married and moved with her husband to the city. In the end she prevailed on him to move to the town where Kostka was living, for she wanted to be near him, to see and hear him at Sunday services. Kostka thought happily that Lucie was perhaps the only achievement of his life.

20. Kostka thought that he deluded himself by trying to convince himself that he had taken the right path; and that he paraded the power of his faith before the unbeliever. True, he had brought Lucie to faith in God. But her marriage had not turned out well, for her husband was a brute, who was openly unfaithful to her and mistreated him. Kostka wondered whether the voice he heard each time was the voice of his own cowardice. Though he was not much attached to his wife and son, he could not part from them. He was afraid to love Lucie, fearing the complications it might bring him. He set himself up as the angel of her salvation, but was merely another of her seducers. He had her happiness in his hand, but he

ran away. No one had ever wronged her as he did.

Kostka felt that he invoked supposed divine appeals as mere pretexts to extract himself from his human obligations. He was afraid of women, their warmth, their constant presence. He was terrified of a life with Lucie just as he was terrified by the thought of moving permanently into the teacher's two-room apartment in the neighbouring town. For the same reason he had accepted voluntary resignation from the university fifteen years ago, for he did not love his wife who was six years older than he was. He at last wondered whether he was so wretchedly laughable.

### 3.4.1. Critical Comments on Part VI

This is a long section and presents the events pertaining to Ludvik and Lucie from Kostka's point of view. The whole story of Lucie is laid bare before us - her unhappy home, her repeated experiences of gang-rape, her devotion to Kostka as well as her unhappy marriage. Communism and Christianity are compared. Which is better? Isn't each based on absolute faith? Such challenging ideas are presented before us. Do you agree with Kostka that Ludvik is a sinner? Well, it is all a question of the real man versus the ideal man. After all, not everyone can become Christ, who could forgive even his worst enemies.

Let us pass on to the last part of the novel.

### 3.5. Summary of Part VII

#### *Ludvik, Jaroslav, Helena*

This Part consists of 19 chapters. The character-narrator of Chapter 1 is Ludvik.

1. Ludvik was full of reminiscences and regrets especially regarding Lucie. The goddess of mists Lucie had first deprived him of herself, then the previous day his carefully calculated revenge - to use Helena and humiliate her husband Zemanek his arch enemy - came to nothing. His grouse was that Kostka had meant more to Lucie, had known more about her, and loved her better; she

had confided everything to him, whereas to him she had revealed nothing. Ludvik had made her unhappy, Kostka had known her physically. Ludvik felt a sudden wave of anger against himself, at his age at that time when he had not been able to understand Lucie or her ferocious resistance. *It was all like a bad joke*: he had thought she was a virgin, and she had fought him precisely because she had not been a virgin, and was probably afraid of the moment when Ludvik would discover the truth. Or perhaps, her initial sexual experiences had marked her deeply and had deprived that act of love of the meanings most people gave it. For Lucie the body was something ugly, and love was something incorporeal. Ludvik felt very sad. He was very hungry too. He had almost reached the milk bar. He tried the door, but it was shut. A passer-by told him that everyone had gone to the festival of the Ride of Kings. Ludvik set off in the direction of the Moravian song, cursing. His hunger pangs were leading him to the folklore festival that he had fled like the plague.

## 2. Jaroslav is the narrator

Jaroslav was experiencing fatigue since early morning. His son Vladmir was going to be made King in the 'Ride of the Kings' festival. Kalasek, the cultural adviser of the District National Committee appeared with a Prague radio reporter, an elegant looking woman (Helena). The lady wanted to record interviews for a program about the Ride of the Kings. Jaroslav detested playing the fool, but Kalasek insisted that it was his political duty to go and speak on the radio. So in the end he went obediently. Kalasek began that the cultivation of folk-art was an integral part of communist education; that is why the District Committee supported it fully, etc. Jaroslav was fed up of hearing the same old meaningless words over the past fifteen years. For Kalasek, who cared nothing for folk art it was only a means of boosting his prestige. Jaroslav wanted to speak aloud that real folk art was dead, but he merely said the usual, nice things expected of him, regarding the enthusi-

asm of the organisers and so on. He felt ashamed for talking the way they wanted him to. Was he a coward, or so well-trained he wondered. When he got home at last preparations for the festival were on. Vladmir was dressed as King.

## 3. Ludvik is the narrator.

It took Ludvik barely fifteen minutes to reach the village. He observed signs of the festival. In trying so stubbornly to avoid such folklore events, he had expected the lack of taste, expected the blend of real folk art and kitsch (vulgar showy art), expected the worst bombast and falsity, but he had not expected that sad, almost moving *forlornness*; it pervaded everything. He remembered that the last year of the war, he himself had ridden as a page at the side of Jaroslav, who had then been the king. However he had no desire to let himself be moved by memories.

## 4. Helena is the narrator.

Helena thanked Ludvik for coming into her life at the right moment. She had known him for just *eight days* and she loved him and trusted him. She had gone to record the summoning of the king when he (Zemanek) suddenly came up to her; he had the coarseness to bring his girl-friend, a girl of twenty two, thirteen years younger than her, along with him. Helena had all along been a fool to believe that her marriage was not yet completely ruined she had sacrificed even Ludvik for that rotten marriage. It was so degrading to lose simply because of being born earlier. She had always been pushed around, had always lost, she had always been humiliated, but now she was fighting back. She felt Ludvik and his love behind her. Zemanek had been angling for a divorce for over two years. She readily agreed observing that she wanted to live with Ludvik Jahn.

## 5. The narrator is Ludvik.

Watching the Ride of the Kings, Ludvik wondered what it meant. It was a mysterious rite. To his astonishment his initial



mistrust vanished and all at once, he was completely enthralled by the colourful spectacle. His thoughts flew to Lucie as he looked at the veiled king and he saw Lucie riding ceremoniously and mockingly through his life, Ludvik felt sure that Lucie really loved him; perhaps that is why, she had kept it a secret even from the eccentric Kostka, who combined the obstinacy of reflection with the obstinacy of delusion. Suddenly a man greeted Ludvik. The girl accompanying him introduced herself as *Broz*. The man was Zemanek.

#### 6. The narrator is Jaroslav

Jaroslav was not able to shake off his fatigue. He resented that Ludvik was trying to avoid him. He was happy that his son Vladmir was king. Very few people were watching the show. He observed that drunkards were the most loyal supporters of folk festivals. Jaroslav was talking to an old man *Pechacek*. He was telling him that after the way they had thought that they were about to build a completely new world, and that people would return to folk traditions. A little later old *Koutecky* greeted Jaroslav, who told him that Vladmir was with his grandson *Milos*; the two of them had gone off from their place on his motor cycle.

#### 7. Ludvik is the Narrator.

Ludvik had not expected to meet Zemanek and so he found it extremely unpleasant. Miss Borz remarked that the Ride of the Kings did not interest her. *Zemanek observed that times had changed*. From the strained conversation, Ludvik learnt several things. Miss Broz was one of Zemanek's students. Zemanek said that he taught philosophy, by which he meant Marxism a subject which had declined in popularity especially among the young. Ludvik expressed surprise, for Zemanek had actually studied biology. Miss Broz announced that teachers of Marxism had a political pamphlet in their skulls instead of brain; but that Pavel was entirely different. Ludvik learned that Pavel was one of the most popular teachers and the students worshipped him for sticking up for the young against the university authorities who wanted to throw

him out for not sticking to the rigid, outdated curriculum, and for trying to introduce the young people to everything going on in modern philosophy.

It was evident to Ludvik that *Zemanek had completely abandoned his former views*. This was horrible, it was what he had least expected; but in a way, it was very common the whole society was under going a gradual metamorphosis. Just as some object that we can love only in the singular, Ludvik agreed that the principle held good for hate also. Man pining for equilibrium, balanced the weight of the evil piled on his back with the weight of his hatred. As it is beyond human capacity to hate mere abstract principles, injustice fanaticism, cruelty, or even mankind, man, if he wished to relieve his anger, concentrated it on a single individual. The staggering thought suddenly occurred to Ludvik that any minute Zemanek would make use of his metamorphosis to ask forgiveness in its name. That is what seemed so horrible. How would Ludvik explain that Zemanek embodied all the evils in his life and that Ludvik *needed* to hate him.

#### 8. Jaroslav is the narrator

Jaroslav tried to find out who did the role of the king, but in vain. He could not see who it was behind the veil.

#### 9. Ludvik is the narrator

Miss Broz told Ludvik how she loved *hitchhiking* (to travel by getting free automobile rides and sometime by walking between rides). Ludvik could see at one that he was hearing the *manifesto of her generation*. Submitting to a generation mentality (to this pride of the herd) had always repelled him. He *jokingly* called her a "*dogmatist of the hitch*". She answered sharply that she was neither *dogmatist* nor *revisionist* nor *sectarian* nor *deviationist*, that such words belonged to Ludvik's generation, and that they were completely alien to hers'. Ludvik observed that it seemed terrible to him that the younger generation had no idea of Moscow trial or political trials in Prague; Stalin was just a name to them. Zemanek

observed that he admired the younger generation because they loved their bodies, loved travel and adventure. With their messianism, the older generation nearly destroyed it. Perhaps the youngsters with their selfishness would save it.

#### 10. Joroslav is the narrator

Jaroslav was totally upset that he was not able to ascertain whether the veiled figure of the king was his son or not.

#### 11. Ludvik is the narrator.

While Zemanek poured out his eulogy (praise) of the younger generation, Ludvik contemplated with envious regret that Miss Broz, a handsome and likable young woman belonged to his enemy and not to him. He was reminded that since Lucie, he had no girl whom he loved and respected. Life had mocked him by sending him a reminder of that failure precisely in the features of the mistress of the man (Zemanek), whom only the previous day he thought he had defeated in a grotesque sexual combat. The more he liked Miss Broz, the more Ludvik realised that she, like her contemporaries would not at all be impressed by the story of his expulsion from the party. However, Ludvik fought tooth and nail against the reconciliation offered by time. Unlike Zemanek, he would not shirk his fate, he would not detach himself from *his thirty seven years* even if they represented so insignificant and fleeting a fragment of time, that was already being forgotten. He would certainly refuse, if Zemanek asked for reconciliation.

#### 12. Jaroslav is the narrator.

Jaroslav felt fatigued and wanted to say good bye to this world of material things that he did not understand, that deceived him. He knew at once where he ought to go.

#### 13. The narrator is Ludvik.

Zemanek and Miss Broz talked and behaved as if they knew everything between Helena and Ludvik and as if they were sympathetic. Ludvik imagined that 'Zemanek's' pose was a bribe for

Ludvik to forgive him. Helena came, accompanied by JINDRA, the sound technician who was dangerously in love with her. Ludvik was stifled by humiliation and shame. He wanted nothing more than to disappear, go off by himself, wipe out the whole story, *the stupid joke*, wipe out Helena and Zemanek, and all the days so that not a trace remained. He was stifled by the ridiculous failure of his vengeance; but he did not want to deceive Helena. He blurted out to her that this was their last time together, that he did not love her, and that she must understand that. It was worse than Ludvik had foreseen. Helena went pale, would not believe him or let him go. Ludvik went through a minor martyrdom before he could finally get rid of her and leave.

#### 14. Helena is the narrator

Helena was upset beyond words since Ludvik rejected her love. She asked the insistent Jindra to leave her for a moment. She went over to the District Committee room. She had a splitting headache. She found bottle of tablets in Jindra's trench coat. She knew that *Algena* the tablet was poisonous in massive doses. She started taking more and more of it. She felt enthralled that *she was holding her death in her hand*. Even Pavel had not hurt Helena as much as Ludvik in a single minute. She understood Pavel's capricious (changing) and unsteady nature and hence forgave him. But Helena could not understand Ludvik who came to her in a mask to resurrect her, and once resurrected, to destroy her. She cursed him, yet she pined for him to come to her and have mercy. May be Ludvik did not know how much Helena loved him.

#### 15. Ludvik is the narrator.

Ludvik had to sweep away that bad story, that bad joke, which not content with itself, had gone on monstrosly multiplying itself into more and more silly jokes. Yet he wondered what good that would do when the *entire* story of his life was conceived in error, through the bad joke of the postcard, that accident, that nonsense. Ludvik was horrified at the thought that things conceived in error



were just as real as things conceived with good reason and of necessity. How glad he would be to revoke the story of his life! Who, in fact, had made the error when the silly joke of his postcard was taken seriously. Ludvik alone was not to be held responsible. Did history play jokes? At last Ludvik realised how powerless he was to revoke his own joke, when throughout his life as a whole he was involved in a joke much more vast and utterly irrevocable. Ludvik saw a placard announcing in red letters that at four o'clock that day, a cimbalom band would be giving a concert in the garden of a certain restaurant. He went inside the restaurant.

#### 16. Helena is the narrator

Helena emptied the bottle of tablets. When Jindra came in she asked him for some writing material she wrote: "Ludvik, my dearest, I loved you body and soul and now my body and soul have not reason to live. Farewell, I love you Helena": she sealed it in a cover and wrote. Ludvik Jahn on the front. She asked Jindra to find Ludvik and give it to him. The boy obliged.

#### 17. Ludvik is the narrator.

As Ludvik sat in the restaurant he felt that Lucie and Zemanek were past, and Helena was just a stone he had wanted to throw at that past; the whole of those three days had been nothing but a theatre of shadows. His entire life, it seemed to him had always been overpopulated by shadows, and there was little room in it for the present. And then there was the bond with which he wanted to tie himself to the past that hypnotised him, and that was *the bond of vengeance* but vengeance, as those three days had demonstrated was just as futile as his running against the moving walkway of time. Years ago when Zemanek betrayed him, Ludvik should have gone up to him and punched him in the face, then and only then. *When postponed vengeance was transformed into something deceptive into a personal religion*, that moved away day by day, from the people involved, who in reality had become different people. *Today another Jahn stood before another Zemanek.* Ludvik had

vainly attempted to redress to publish, and to undo, - because what had happened had happened and could never be redressed.

Suddenly Ludvik saw it clearly: most people deceived themselves with a pair of faiths; they believed in *eternal memory* (of people, things, deeds, nations) and in *redressibility* (of deeds, mistakes, sins, wrongs). Both were false faiths. In reality, the opposite was true: *everything would be forgotten, and nothing would be redressed*. The task of obtaining redress (by vengeance or by forgiveness) would be taken over by *forgetting*. *No one would redress the wrongs that had been done, but all the wrongs would be forgotten.*

Presently Jindra came there and gave Ludvik Helena's letter. On reading the contents, he dashed to Helena's place, with the boy at his side. After much difficulty they found her seated in the toilet. She spat in his face. Thinking she had poisoned herself, Ludvik thought of calling up the doctor. But the Jindra confessed that the bottle labelled Algina actually contained laxatives. The boy did not want everybody to know that his guts were messed up. Ludvik then understood that what he had taken for a stupid joke was the truth. Jindra had unwittingly spared Helena's life, and in that moment he loved him. But his relief was short lived. Helena's desperation had settled its account with life at a safe distance from the threshold of death.

#### 18. Jaroslav is the narrator

Jaroslav realised that his wife Vlasta had conspired with their son Vladmir to deceive him. The boy *had* gone off with the grandson of the Koudeckys to the motorcycle races, while all the time the old man had believed that he was playing the king. Vlasta justified her son's attitude and action: Vladmir was modern; he did not want to be a privileged child Jaroslav saw that the boy took after Vlasta's father who was always a great one for progress. In his fury he turned the kitchen upside down by smashing all the plates breaking the legs of the chair, etc. All the time Vlasta stood with her back turned, sobbing softly; she was terribly scared. Her sobs were heart



rending and some where deep inside him Ludvik felt a painful regret.

19. As he listened to the Moravian folk songs, Ludvik felt a real pang of nostalgia. He felt *the world of Jaroslav represented a world where love was still love and pain was pain and where values were not yet devastated*. He joined the band by taking the clarinet, much to Jaroslav's joy. Ludvik forgot all else and felt at home in the music. Suddenly he noticed that Jaroslav was ill. He at once approached the second fiddle who was a doctor, who after examining the old man, said he was going to phone the hospital, as Jaroslav had a *heart attack*. Finally the cimbalom fell silent too, and they all stood around Jaroslav who looked at Ludvik and spoke excitedly. The second fiddle told him to be calm. Ludvik was thinking that though Jaroslav would recover, it would be a completely different life in future, a life without passionate devotion, without the strain of playing in the band, a life under the aegis of death; Ludvik suddenly felt that one's destiny was often complete long before death, and that Jaroslav's destiny had come to its end. Overwhelmed with sorrow, he gently stroked the top of his bald head and he realised with a shock that his trip home made in the hope of striking at the hated Zemanek had ended with his holding his stricken friend in his arms. Presently they led the old man into the streets where an ambulance stood waiting, all its lights ablaze.

Read the study material carefully and understand the entire plot. We shall discuss the different aspects of the novel in the next Unit.

#### UNIT FOUR

### THE JOKE: A CRITICAL STUDY

#### 4.0 Objectives

- At the end of this Unit you should be able to:
- understand various aspects of Milan Kundera's *The Joke*; and

- make an overall estimate of the novel and its author.

#### 4.1 Introduction

Before you begin to read this Unit it is imperative that you read and assimilate the matter given in the previous Unit. If you do so you will be able to form your own impressions of the novel, its theme, the mode of narration, the characters the various ideas and points of view and so on. Then when you read this Unit you will be able to appreciate the different aspects of *The Joke*.

Let us study these aspects one by one. As you would have noticed the entire novel is written in the form of a series of *monologues*. Let us consolidate all of them in order to get a condensed version of the story.

#### 4.2 Critical summary of The Joke

The central character of the novel is *Ludvik Jahn*. Ludvik's father, a bricklayer, has been hauled off to a concentration camp by the Germans, when the boy was thirteen. Ludvik had to depend on his father's sister and her husband *Koutecky* and he could not bear them, for that woman looked down on his poor mother. Though the boy was ripe for rebellion, his mother would beg him tearfully to be sensible. However Ludvik was a good student and entered the university. He held an important post in the students union. He was rated as an individualist with an intellectual smile. He had few inner sorrows at that time, and had a considerable sense of fun; but his jokes were not serious enough to keep pace with the joyousness of the era.

The events leading to Ludvik's first major disaster could be traced to his fatal predilection for silly jokes and *Marketa's* fatal inability to understand them. *Marketa* a nineteen year old girl at the university was credulous, serious and full of naive (innocent, childlike) trustfulness. It was the first year after February 1948) a period marked by rigid seriousness and exclusive emphasis in the concerns and interests of the Party which represented the working class *Marketa* was sent during the sum-



mer to a two- week Party training course. Ludvik missed her. What he could not accept was how she could be happy when he was missing her so much. So he bought a postcard and in order to hurt, shock and confuse her, he wrote: *optimism is the opium of the people. A healthy atmosphere stinks of mediocrity. Long live Trotsky.*

In September when classes resumed Ludvik was summoned to the District Party Secretariat. He understood that the comrades had read all his letters to Markers the provocative postcard in particular. After interrogating and chiding him at length they bluntly told him that they were relieving him of his post in the students union. Ludvik approached Zemanek for help. But at last in spite of his suppliant pleas to various committees, Zemanek recommended in the name of the organisation that Ludvik be expelled not only from the Party but from the university too. In this matter Zemanek was supported by Ludvik's closest friends and his teachers also.

Ludvik could not muster courage to tell his mother about his expulsion, for she took great pride in his studies. Having lost his right to continue his studies he signed up for two long work brigades. He along with a number of conscripts were turned into soldiers and were given black insignia as uniform. He worked for years in the mines at Ostrava where the process of *depersonalisation* was overwhelming. At Ostrava he happened to meet a young lady *Lucie*. Though he liked her a lot, he was never able to establish a good relationship with her, she left the place abruptly. Ludvik sneaked out to find out more details about her, but failed; for this venture he was court-martialed and given ten months in jail on the charge of desertion. Ludvik's mother died when he was in jail and he could not go to her funeral. He spent the next three years mining coal as a civilian. Then with great difficulty, he got permission to complete his last two years at the university. He managed to get a job as a scientist too. But the party had branded him for

life.

*Helena* was the wife of Pavel Zemanek. They had a daughter *Zdena* who was attached to her father. It was the Party spirit and activities which had brought Helena and Zemanek together. But Helena soon realised that her husband did not really care for her nor did he love her. However they were not divorced. For the sake of his social image, Zemanek apparently lived with Helena off and on under the same roof.

*Jaroslav* was the childhood friend of Ludvik. The Moravian folk song was his soul his very life. He had played the role of king in the ride of the kings for years and he hoped eagerly that his son *Vladmir* would follow his footsteps.

*Jindra* was a young sound technician who loved the middle aged Helena passionately. He used to take laxatives because he had a troubled stomach. He hid his humiliation by keeping the laxative tablets in a bottle labelled *Algena*, a brand of painkillers.

*Kostka* was an academic with a wife and child. He gave up the comforts of the university life and went to work on the farm as a bricklayer when he was about to be expelled from the University. After experiencing a period of soul-searching he decided to follow Jesus and felt an unexpected calm. It was during this period that he happened to come across *Lucie* who had been expelled from Ostrava for stealing flowers. In course of time, Kostka proved to be a real source of solace and compassion for Lucie, so that the girl confessed her story to him. Lucie was an unwanted child. She came from Bohemia. When she was sixteen, she belonged to a gang of six boys who raped her repeatedly. She had developed a mistrust for men. In the guise of a caring counsellor Kostka seduced Lucie and felt terribly guilty of it. Lucie later on married but it turned out to be an unhappy one. She insisted on returning to the town where Kostka lived so that she could see him often.

This then is the background and situation when the novel

opens. Ludvik Jahn has returned to his native town of Moravia after fifteen years on a relatively unimportant task - an interview with a radio reporter. He is thirty seven years old, full of bitterness, rancour and the venom of vengeance. He meets his old friend Kostka who lets him have his flat for one afternoon. Kostka then takes him for a clean shave and to his wonder he notices that the female barber attending on him is Lucie Sebetka., who feigns not to recognise him.

That evening the lady reporter comes. She is Helena Zemanek. Contrary to Ludvik's doubts, Helena is too willing to make love. But when she tells him that there is not much love lost between herself and her husband, Ludvik desires to throw her out. He has come here hoping to wreak vengeance on his arch enemy Zemanek, but his purpose is defeated when he realises that Helena means nothing to him. But Helena has fallen for Ludvik and sincerely desires to love him, to marry him. When he tells her bluntly that he does not share her feelings, she becomes distraught. She consumes a lot of painkillers. She then sends a suicide note to Ludvik through Jindra. Ludvik comes, but is not able to save her, for Helena dies of desperation. Jindra is furious and sad.

During this visit Ludvik sees his friend Jaroslav but tries to avoid them. Jaroslav has been cheated by his own son. With his mother's connivance (secret help) Vladmir creates the impression that it is he who is dressed up as king for the ride of the Kings, whereas he is away on a mother cycle. Jaroslav is heart broken. Ludvik who listens to the singing and the jazz band is drawn towards Jaroslav in spite of himself. He finally takes his friend in an ambulance, for Jaroslav has heart problems. Thus the novel ends on a bitter note - Ludvik is not able to have his revenge, Helena dies, Jaroslav has a weak heart, Lucie refuses to recognise Ludvik. In short, Ludvik realises the futility of rancour and revenge especially when prolonged and postponed without immediate execution.

### 4.3 The Title

The events of the novel which culminate in the final catastrophe of the protagonist Ludvik Jahn are triggered off by an apparently harmless joke by Ludvik himself, when he is a twenty two year old University student. In a mood of despondency or frustration at not being able to enjoy the company of Marketa, whom he loves very much, he sends her a postcard containing three sentences: "*Optimism in the opium of the people. A healthy atmosphere stinks of mediocrity. Long live Trotsky.*" In a casual playful mood Ludvik had twisted Marx's statement; "Religion is the opium of the people" and Trotsky's belief that "Optimism builds socialism". Viewed objectively and with a smattering of humour, what the youngster has written is only a verbal joke, an innocent fun which all languages afford. But the special nature of the times and the characters involved make Ludvik pay heavily for his joke. It is the first year after February 1948. A genuinely new and different life had begun, marked by rigid seriousness; people are expected to rejoice in the victory of the working class, without giving way individualistically to inner sorrows or personal problems. Contemporary joy is a grave joy that proudly called itself "The historical optimism of the victorious class". Naturally Ludvik's statement appears out of place in such an era. Secondly Marketa is an extremely serious girl which makes her totally at one with the spirit of the era. Being credulous and naive, she shows the provocative postcard to the Comrades who act promptly so that Ludvik is expelled not only from the Party, but also from the University.

It is this cruel joke that upsets Ludvik's life after that. The long years spent in the mines at Ostrava lead to his depersonalisation to an overwhelming extent. Lucie is not able to understand his intense love and need for her. Rancour, bitter hatred and the venom of vengeance fill his otherwise cheerful, intelligent self, so that when he returns to his home town after fifteen years, he is a totally changed person - for the worse. The most cruel joke played by fate in Ludvik's life is yet to come : he is soon made to realize the futility



of revenge. He is not able to hurt his most bitter Zemanek in any way. Though he gets an excellent chance to 'use' Helena, he is disappointed because, Zemanek has no love for his wife. The same Zemanek who had so seriously and rigidly denounced Ludvik fifteen years ago, is now leading a life of hypocrisy, compromising his Party principles and behaving ingratiatingly with youngsters like Miss Broz because he has realised that such rigid principles and dogmas are possible only on paper. Perhaps, if Ludvik had been Miss Broz's contemporary, his provocative joke would have passed with a mere word of reprimand or a warning at the most. May be hypocrites like Zemanek would even condescend to laugh at it.

In the matter of Lucie Sebetka also, life plays a very cruel joke. Ludvik loves her sincerely but she revolts and rejects him seriously. At the same time she is drawn towards Kostka who even seduces her. Similarly in the case of Helena, life plays the same joke in a reverse manner. Helena loves Ludvik who tries to use her only as a powerful tool of revenge. Ironically, both lose in the bargain. Helena is driven to suicide by desperation; Ludvik fails in his plan of vengeance. Again it is this joke that makes Ludvik distrust even sincere friends like Jaroslav, and when he realises his mistake it is rather late. Jaroslav's son and his wife Vlasta also deceive him by making him believe that it is Vladmir dressed up as king, where as all the while the boy is away riding on a motor cycle.

The little of Milan Kundera's novel *The Joke* is therefore very apt. The plot of the novel is pivoted on the provocative joke. What might be laughed away in a democratic set up suddenly assumes terrible dimensions because of the specific setting. So the joke has to be interpreted as an attack on the rigidity and dogmatism of the early revolutionary times in Czechoslovakia. It is also a satire on the thoughtless cruelty, hypocrisy and opportunism of people like Zemanek; the biggest joke is that it is only such people who thrive.

#### 4.4 Themes and Ideas

*The Joke* is a highly thought provoking novel. In the first

place, it is a *novel of revenge* or rather *the futility of prolonged bitterness*. The opposing ideas are presented to us in the separate monologues of Ludvik and Kostka. Like Edmund Dantes in Duma's novel *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Ludvik returns to his hometown after fifteen years with the solid intention of wreaking vengeance on his arch enemy Zemanek. For the last fifteen years, he has been accumulating rancour, bitter hatred and the most revengeful feelings towards Zemanek. After his vain attempt to hurt him by using his wife Helena Ludvik sees Zemanek in the company of Miss Broz. His fear is what would he say if Zemanek begs him for forgiveness. Ludvik now understands that fifteen years ago when Zemanek had destroyed his life by denouncing him at the Party meeting, Ludvik should have, then and there, taken his revenge by punching Zemanek. Revengeful feelings nurtured over a prolonged period can produce the worst type of bitterness and rancour to the person himself, and poison his life further.

Kostka, on the other hand, has a more religious and forgiving mentality. Faced with a similar predicament, he does a bit of soul searching. He relinquishes the relative comfort of an academic life and embraces Christ's ideals. He realises that Ludvik's bitterness is due to his inability to forget and forgive. Through these two diverse characters Kundera illustrates the futility of rancour and the need to accept the inevitable with calm resignation as the only other alternative. It is not a passive attitude; it is the only wise way out.

The novel is a powerful satire on dogmas and creeds, whether political or religious. Zemanek and Kostka are both satirised. Zemanek is the typical political hypocrite, opportunist and coward he has no qualms whatsoever in having ruined the young Ludvik's life, for he considers such individuals 'weeds' or unnecessary elements; who have therefore to be eliminated. Kostka rates himself as a seducer in priest's robe. Individualism and intellectualism have no place either in dogmatic political ideology or dogmatic religion. Those who show it are apt to suffer. Another idea is that, in course of time such dogmatic beliefs are likely to lose their vigour and

rigour implying that it is not possible to implement such rigorous principles. Kundera tries to show that what rises above all these is true humanity

#### 4.5. The Joke : An Overall Estimate

Milan Kundera still remains a less read novelist mainly due to the inaccessibility of his works. He is a fastidious writer, a perfectionist, as evidenced by the immense care he has bestowed in translating his novel for the fifth time. *The Joke* is a well-constructed novel. The plot revolves around an apparently harmless joke. The events evolving out of it are presented in the form of separate monologues. The 'interior monologue' mode of narration adds to the intimacy of the novel; moreover it affords the readers different perspections on the same theme. The novel is divided into seven parts, each part constituting a separate monologue. The method however shares a defect with the Epistolary method : there are tedious repetitions. Another drawback is regarding the character of Helena. Her suicide due to desperation following Ludvik's rejection is a little unconvincing considering the fact that she has known him only for a few days. The outstanding features of the novel is the fund of ideas it contains - on Christianity, Communism, bitterness, forgiveness and other grave issues. Characterisation is quite deep; especially the character of Ludvik John has been sketched with profound psychological insight. The novel is a bitter satire on the hypocritical compromising attitudes of opportunists. Altogether it is a disturbing, thought - provoking novel immersed in rancour and pathos.

#### 4.6. Important Topics

- (1) Character - Sketches

*Ludvik, Kostka, Helena, Zemanek, Lucie.*

[You may refer to their respective monologues for points]

- (2) The aptness of the title of Milan Kundera's *The Joke*
- (3) The satirical elements in *The Joke*

[Zemanek - his changed attitudes - hypocrisy, opportun-

ism - his attitude to Ludvik and Miss Broz]

- (4) The themes treated in *The Joke*

[The futility of revenge - need to take movements seriously - Christianity and Communism, both absolute ideologies - bitterness and hatred - hypocrisy, opportunism etc.

You can answer the above questions, if you study all the material given in the four *Units*.

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