

# **Block-3**

**Unit 1 : Short Story as a Literary Genre**

**Unit 2 : British Short Story: Major Practitioners**

**Unit 3 : Rudyard Kipling: “The Man Who would be King” (Background)**

**Unit 4 : Reading Rudyard Kipling’s “The Man Who would be King”**

**Unit 5 : Angela Carter: “The Tiger’s Bride” (Background)**

**Unit 6 : Reading Angela Carter’s “The Tiger’s Bride”**



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## Unit 1 : Short Story as a Literary Genre

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### Unit Structure:

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 Defining the Short Story
- 1.4 Construction of the Short Story
- 1.5 Short Story and the novel
- 1.6 The rise of Modern Short Story
- 1.7 How to Read a Short Story
- 1.8 Summing Up
- 1.9 Reference and Suggested Readings

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### 1.1 Objectives

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After going through this unit, you will be able to

- *appreciate* the concept of short story
- *understand* the evolution of modern short story
- *learn* about the construction of short story
- *gain* a perspective on how to read the short story

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### 1.2 Introduction

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Short story is one of the recent developments in literature. From terms like short tale or short fiction to miniature fiction called short (whose types include sudden fiction, flash fiction, instant fiction, prose poems, microfiction, postcard fiction, nanofiction) short story has many incarnations and has undergone varied lines of metamorphosis. (Cox 13). Short story, like other branches of fictional literature, broadens human experience and sensitizes us to possibilities of life, and deepens our understanding of what it means to be human. Any notion of modern literature is bound to be partial if we do not consider this mode of fictional writing. It is today an intrinsic part of the global, national, sub-national, even regional literature across the world. A

comprehensive understanding of the form of the short story would be a formidable task because of its sheer variety of form and content and the inventiveness of the storytellers that would render any definitive formula of its composition impossible. However, it is important to understand this mode of fictional writing as a distinct genre and to find out its basic traits. This will help you read the texts prescribed in the course and gauge the ‘literariness’ of such texts. A short story must be read as a short story in the first place and should not be seen as a mere form whose content is more important.

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### 1.3 Defining the Short Story:

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M.H.Abrams defines short story as a “brief prose narrative” that has a single effect (*Glossary* 364). *The Chambers Dictionary* calls it “a work of prose narrative shorter than a novel and usually concentrating on a single episode or experience and its effect”. *Merriam-Websters Collegiate Dictionary* mentions two other traits—focus on a few characters and on creation of mood rather than ‘plot’. From these definitions, we can identify the basic elements and properties that lend a short story its status as a distinctive literary genre.

As a literary genre there is not much critical analysis of short story till the mid-nineteenth century. The idea of short story having a unified effect is first distinctively propounded by Edgar Allan Poe. Poe established the link between the brevity and unity of effect by distinguishing it from the novel. A novel cannot be read in a single sitting, and the break in reading also creates a break in the total impression of the work. In the “brief tale”, Poe says, the writer can carry out the intended effect on the reader who finishes the text in one, uninterrupted sitting( Laurence 274). Principle of brevity, then, demands a certain mode of formal organization—the story has to be coherent. Pope even specifies the duration of reading a story which is from half an hour to two hours. According to Poe, interruptions in reading would destroy the total impression. Regarding the wholeness and integrity of short story, Poe opines that every word written must fit into the preconceived design. (*Prose Fiction* 305).

Brevity is generally supposed to be one of the reasons why short story has gained popularity in modern culture. But brevity should not be understood as always something suited to modern condition of (literary) consumption. Brevity does not ensure lesser effort in both reading and writing. Rather, it is

a crucial condition for its conceptualizing, making and receiving as a complex art. The question of ‘effect’ posed by Poe is still relevant in the context of the short story, as a critic says: “The short story is not suited to the soundbite culture: it’s too dense, its effects are too complex for easy digestion.” (Cox 2).

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From the 1980s onwards a new critical interest began to manifest itself through such works as Charles Mary’s *Short Story Theories*(1977), John Gerlach’s *Towards the end: Closure and Structure of the American Short Story* (1985), Susan Lohafer’s *Coming to Terms with the Short Story* (1983) (Cox 6). While the scholar and practitioners continued to dwell on the generic feature of the short story, the risks of a closed definition of short story were also perceived. Further, short story study today has expanded beyond the boundary of generic specificity.

**SAQ**

Give a definition of short story in your own language (60 words).

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### **1.4 Construction of the Short Story**

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There is no well agreed-upon form of the short story. True that it emerged through the periodicals and magazines in the nineteenth century and established itself as a distinct genre, and writers began to reproduce a pattern such as a remarkable opening, solitary voice, representation of fragments of life and so on. The genre’s engagement with modernity opens up the possibility of experimentation. However, its brevity has been a point of discussion among critics and scholars. Such reference to the length , especially in this form of writing, suggests that composition plays a crucial role in giving it the intended effect. These compositional elements are exposition, conflict, complications, crisis, and denouement.

Exposition prepares the reader for the development of conflict through construction of a background to the characters and action. These are a-priori information, a set of assumptions, necessary for the development of the plot provided distinctly in a folk-tale, but may be scattered throughout the text in a

modern story. Whether the author presents the background information or presents it through the story in a piecemeal fashion or suggestive mode, its proportion is conditioned by its ability to push the reader towards the conflict. Conflict is the basic opposition that can extend from character's consciousness to socio-cultural forces enacted in the story's diegesis. The conflict is not necessarily overt, as in a beast fable, and may exist at the subterranean level of the story, but a short story without some conflict is almost inconceivable. Conflict grows and intensifies and complications arise. You may have a look at Guy de Maupassant's story "A Piece of String" to identify conflict and complication. In this story, an honest farmer is accused of stealing a wallet when picking up a piece of string on the road. He suffers because of this false blame, and eventually dies, asserting his innocence. Conflict starts when he is accused of theft. It intensifies and generates complication when his assertion of innocence gets frustrated because nobody believes him now. Conflict leads to crisis which is the turning point in the narrative. Conflict is followed by denouement when the narrative descends with the conflict being settled, and the story is brought to a close. Conflict is not necessarily external; there may be dramatization of inner conflict. Crisis is the point where the 'action' of the story (for whatever it may mean) is heightened and the opposing forces come to a standstill. Denouement is also that space in the narrative line where reversals may happen. This reversal, for instance, is manifested through the 'twist ending' in O. Henry's short stories. In his "The Gift of Magi" Jim and Delia's confessions as to how they manage to buy each other's favourite items is an example of such reversal. It is important, however, to note that there may be great variations in the use of such compositional elements in terms of their configuration and emphasis. Flashback, for instance, is a mode through which scenes that took place prior to the narrated time can be presented in the story.

These conventional plot elements can be identified and exemplified in many of the detective stories. Creation of suspense is a major aesthetic aim of these stories, and suspense is created by giving readers clues to the mystery that needs to be unraveled while plot complication leads to crisis and final discovery of truth.

However, as already suggested, this conventional plot pattern is in no way the formula of all short stories. Modern short story differs from the conventional plots because of their greater focus on the subjective articulation of experience. For instance, some of the modern stories, as Suzanne C. Ferguson

argues, distinguish themselves from the conventional counterpart in their very notion of ‘event’ in a plot. Thought and feeling in many stories constitute the ‘action’. The fiction of Virginia Woolf (regarded primarily as a modernist novelist) can illustrate how a character’s inner thought and consciousness can be the core of such ‘action’ in a fictional tale. Secondly, modern short story omits certain expected elements of plot and substitutes them with characters and events that do not go well with the rest of the plot. We can think of stories that exclude exposition, denouement etc. Thirdly, Ferguson relates some of the ways in which short stories may delete certain elements of plot but has a deep structure which tells “what happens” in chronological order.

The actual plot/ story assumes meaning in the backdrop of these ‘hypothetical plot’ (“Defining the Short Story” 17). On the other hand, the omitted part of the plot may be written metaphorically in the story. They are images and events and images at the surface level and are analogous to events in the hypothetical plot. At a deeper level, deeper themes are developed.

**SAQ**

Take a short story you have read, and identify the compositional elements in it. Are all these elements intact in the text? (100 words)

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### **1.5 Short Story and the Novel**

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If we keep aside its pre-history, short story as a distinct genre is a late nineteenth century development while the novel had long been an well-established form. These are obvious similarities between these two forms. They represent fictionalized experience through the elements of plot, character, setting etc, and elaborate certain themes and ideas. But novel is an extended narrative, while the short story, as its name suggests, is characterized by brevity. Let me make it clear here that there is no hard-and-fast rule as to the length of these genres. But magnitude is not something that can be manipulated from outside so that a short story can be extended into a novel or vice-versa. Secondly, there may be novels shorter than a short story, as there may also be a story longer than a novel. Magnitude of these genres, then, must be seen in terms of how they treat the fictional elements so as to achieve a distinctive

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narrative aim. Generally, a novel provides greater scope for development of character or elaboration of setting or milieu as well as for elaborate descriptions required for the fulfilment of the author’s artistic design and intent. A short story has limited scope for such elaboration of character and background but has to achieve the artistic effect within the economy of the text. Novel presents an expansive paradigm where a heterogeneous material —cultural, textual, experiential—can have a place and elaborate description of diverse moods, sentiments, events, consciousnesses can be accommodated. (A reading of Virginia Woolf’s novels will usher you into the inner recesses of the characters’ mind. Does this inward meditateness fit into the condition of the short story? Think about it.)

A short story writer negotiates these fictional elements so as to create a fictional totality. A fragment-of-life story in the Chekhovian mode does not entail artistic incompleteness. Billie Travalini stresses “wholeness’ as a characteristic of short story: “Subsurface thinking and surface action work together; without losing one or the other, to create a sense of wholeness” (51). Brevity of short story, further, can be seen as an enabling condition: it impels the author to look for other ways to convey the truth of human experience and character. In other words, brevity increases the suggestive potential of short story. What may not be explicated through elaborate narration of a big external event can be suggested briefly yet effectively through symbol or imagery.

A major difference between the novel and the short story can be seen in terms of their magnitude. The shortness of the short story, however, should not be understood as characteristic of a lesser form, but must be assessed in terms of the artistic effect and unity as emphasized by Poe. Both genres share common elements such as plot, character, setting, dialogue etc, but in a short story there is limited scope to elaborate these elements. Development of character requires a considerable length of narrated time.

**Check Your Progress**

How do you find similarities between the short story and the novel?  
(40 words).

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What are the differences between the short story and the novel? Briefly discuss with reference to known text in each genre. (100 words)

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## 1.6 The Rise of Modern Short Story

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The history of tale covers a huge time span of thousands of years. It developed through various forms such as parable, fable, Creation myth, novella, fairy tale, art tale etc. largely rooted in an oral tradition. An orally transmitted tale is susceptible to change because the contexts of telling (such as the contact between the speaker and the listener) can change. Art tale evolved in the nineteenth century which had a distinct artistic purpose and provides scope for social commentary. An important milestone in the trajectory of short story, both as a concept and practice, is Edgar Allan Poe. (We have already discussed Poe's definition of short story). It is important to note here that Poe's definition does not make the short story a predictable pattern. Poe's notion of predetermined effect and design does not merely talk about logical development of events but suggests that succession of events or incidents should finally create the intended effect without making the plot predictable to the reader. Robert Louis Stevenson, much in tune with Poe's formulation, says that the "body and end of a short story is bone of the boe and blood of the blood of the beginning."(Russel 45)

Brander Matthews, author of *The Philosophy of the Short Story* (1901), popularized short story in England placing it at par with the novel. Poe's theory provided a model for magazine editors and writers, and was carried forward by creative writing handbooks. In this way an idea of 'well-made story' cropped up. Well-made stories, as Russel points out, foregrounded plot and character but at the same time attended to the nuances and subtleties of impression and emotion as well as the play of irony as exemplified by the stories of Somerset Maugham, A. E. Coppard, H. E. Bates, V. S. Prittchett, Elizabeth Taylor and others. One of the most important figures in this trend is O. Henry. Though his 'twist ending' later invited criticism.

Apart from the manipulation of conventional plot elements, modern story also focusses on the subjective articulation of experience. In fact, a preoccupation of modern writers has been representation of experience in

the context of modern life. Walter Benjamin argues that crisis of storytelling lies in its failure to communicate ‘authentic experience’ in the modern society. Baudelaire in his essay “The Painter of Modern Life” (1859) asserts art’s capacity to depict the ephemeral and contingent aspects of modernity. The modern writer sees around her myriad fleeting impressions all of which cannot be recorded in memory. The objects of sensation have to be registered before they elude consciousness or gets synthesized into cognition. Many modern storytellers aim to capture such fleeting moments of experience. That is why Nadine Gordimer says that the present moment is the focus of the short story writer. (Russel 24). Another critic, Eileen Baldeshwiler privileges a small group of short story writers such as Anton Chekhov, A. E. Coppard, Catherine Mansfield, Sherwood Anderson etc. over the makers of plot-driven narratives (26).

In fact, in the very notion of experience not as objective knowledge but as a subjective category explains an important trait of modern short story. This subjective and impressionistic drift of the modern short story is deeply linked to the issue of ‘point of view’. Though omniscient narration is not discarded altogether, its reliability as a vehicle of human experience came to be increasingly questioned. Alongside presentation of experience, rejection of chronology and increasing reliance on metaphor and symbol to describe events and characters came to be noticed as important aspects of modern short story. (Ferguson 13-24).

#### **Stop to Consider**

Some of the great short story writers are Rudyard Kipling, Robert Louis Stevenson, Guy de Maupassant, O. Henry, Somerset Maugham, A. E. Coppard, Leo Tolstoy, Herman Melville, H. E. Bates, H.H. Munro, Stephen Crane, Irwin Shaw, Ralph Ellison, Sherwood Anderson, Maxim Gorky, Joyce Carol Oates, Flannery O’Connor Elizabeth Taylor, Ernest Hemingway, J.D. Salinger, John Updike, John O’Hara, James Joyce, Katherine Mansfield, Gertrude Stein, Angela Carter, Georg Luis Borges, —just to name a few. Different dimensions of the story such as plot, character, setting, point of view, theme, style and tone, form and conflict, Irony and humour, symbol and imagery, fantasy and myth etc. can be studied in various writers.

### Check Your Progress

Write a short note on the features of a modern short story. (100 words)

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## 1.7 How to Read a Short Story:

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A common mode of reading a short story to read it to ‘extract’ the story out of the text (i.e. to reconstruct the chronological order of the events narrated) and to identify its characters. While this may be a convenient starting point, it can be frustrating and limiting at times, especially when a ‘plotless’ story is at hand. It can be tricky, even difficult to reconstruct the character from the given story-line or from direct description of character. Further, mere extraction of the ‘story’ may not guarantee nor pose a condition for, adequate engagement with the text. There are stories where the story order may not be explicit in the text, and may remain entangled with the text-order. The writer may work through manipulation of both orders towards a certain culmination or effect by employing the techniques of flashback and foreshadowing and pushing the reader through the linear text-order, allowing her to make sense of the narrated ‘event’ through anticipation and retrospection. Detective story is a good example of how the writer propels the reader through creation of suspense by manipulating the textual elements.

Secondly, knowing a character interestingly complicated matter in some stories. Especially in modernist stories such as those of James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf, making sense of human personality figuring in the text requires a closer reading with some sensitivity to language, form and consciousness depicted in them. Modern short stories rose in the 1880s and 1890s concomitant with the advent of modernism. Modernism radically differs from conventional literature on many counts. For one thing, a new concept of character is endorsed by the modernists, which was radically different from ‘total personality’ characteristic of previous narrative literature. The characters are most often a fragmented, de-humanised self, alienated and stripped of the certitude of the external reality. The external world is not pushed aside altogether, but a new focus on the feeling of a moment or a succession of moments was discernible in fiction. In this changed climate, we

cannot restrict ourselves to simple binary of ‘flat’ and ‘round’ character as expounded by E.M.Forster. External details of course may suffice to evoke a mood without resorting to a character’s consciousness, as in Hemingway’s story “Hills Like White Elephant”. It is a single scene story depicted from an external point-of-view where we can feel the pathos from a small detail towards the end. But external traits of a character may not suggest her inner psychology. In nineteenth century fiction you will see this dependence on externality as an indicator of people’s inner reality. In Charles Dickens, for instance, we can cite innumerable examples of characters whose visible traits of dress and facial expression indicate a character’s inner nature. In modernism, in contrast, the flow of consciousness of characters presents a very malleable notion of human self. Identification and understanding of a character requires in many modern stories an awareness of the concrete totality of the text, because a character may dissolve itself into disparate textual spaces or moments in forms of description, imagery or symbolism or even other character’s impressions.

Traditional novels often depict elaborate setting for action. Setting is the space and time and the social environment of the action, which may vary from an elaborate landscape to a familiar interior space of ordinary life. Setting in a story may be relatively unimportant, but it may establish credibility of the story or may reinforce action and characters. (*Literature* 83). In Dorris Lessing’s story “The Old Chief Mshlanga”, you may look at how description of the setting conveys the growth of the protagonist. In a modern short story, however, choice of particular details of setting is important because it must carry special significance. In some stories setting itself evokes the predominant mood. In Washington Irving’s “The Devil and Tom Walker” the swampy and desolate forest creates a perfect setting for the sinister mood that the story develops. Further, setting may carry suggestions of a more abiding reality .

Similarly, it is important to see whose point-of-view is upheld in the narration and description. Besides the widespread use of the third person omniscient narration, modern short stories play with points-of-view by shifting between third-person to first person narration, or with the gap between the narrator and the character. Assumption of first person point of view creates a more authentic view of imagined reality. In first person narration, the reader’s knowledge of the narrated world is mediated through the narrator who can have varying degrees of epistemological certainty about the world she narrates. Thus, the reader must not see the character, (if she is the first person narrator) just as window onto reality. The character’s relationship to reality she describes/

narrates can allow us to learn about the values and mental disposition of the character herself.

Further, behind the event or the character (s) is the storyteller herself whose style (choice of words, their placing and patterns etc.) you can attend to. The relationship of the writer's style to the material of narration suggests the tone of the story. If an incident serious and somber is narrated with a style and tone of casual everydayness, the point for you to see is whether this incongruity is intended. The discrepancy between style and matter, form and content is seen as an instance of faulty writing if it is not part of overall artistic design. Intended discrepancy gives rise to irony. The writer may employ various kinds of irony such as verbal irony, situational irony, understatement, hyperbole, dramatic irony etc. (*Literature 245-247*).

Short story has affinities with poetry as well. Its brevity allows it to look for a more concentrated mode of expression, or other modes of suggestivity such as symbolism, imagery and motifs. However, symbols must be integrated into the texture of the total form, and its interpretation should make us consider the story as a whole.

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### **Stop to Consider**

Given below is a set of questions/issues that you may consider when you read short stories. The questions are not exhaustive, but they will help you in reading the short story in a way that would be rewarding for you.

- Can you identify the type of the story that you are reading? Some of these types are story of adventure, ghost or supernatural story, comic story, story of ingenuity, psychological story, character-sketch, fantasy story etc.
- Think about the significance of the title. Does it offer a clue to what the story is about? Does it foreground characters, setting, or ambience? Does it uphold symbolism or present an irony or offer a critique? Does it set the tone of the story?
- How does the story begin? Does it present a clear exposition or start in medias res or towards the end of action?
- Does the story have a plot? If it does, is the plot realistic or improbable and is the succession of events fast or slow?

- Identify the climax, if any, in the plot.
- Do you find episodes or elements that have little connection with the development of the plot?
- How does the shift between dialogue and narration, description and action, observation and comments, character and narrator take place?

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## 1.8 Summing Up

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We have discussed salient aspects of the short story and dwelt on the dimensions of the ‘modern short story’. However, no discussion of short story is complete without an adequate reading of a considerable body of a variety of short story. We are surrounded by stores in our daily life, and many of are actually accessible to us in print or on the internet, but not all of them are of high literacy standard. Classic short stories of the world, besides the world view or sense of reality that is depicted in them, also provides ample scope for you to learn this ‘art’ and ‘craft’.

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## 1.9 References and Suggested Readings

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## Unit 2 : British Short Story: Major Practitioners

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### Unit Structure:

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 Early Writers and Works
- 2.4 Major Practitioners
- 2.5 Summing Up
- 2.6 References and Suggested Readings

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### 2.1 Objectives

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After reading this unit the student will be able to

- *discuss* the development of the British short story
- *identify* the important writers of the British short story
- *recognize* the major stories of the genre
- *comprehend* certain concerns that were central to the British short story

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### 2.2 Introduction

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The short story is a brief fictional prose narrative. It is shorter than a novel and usually deals with only a few characters and a singular situation. The chief features of the short story are a concise narrative, economic setting and omission of complex plot. Despite its limitations, the short story has been successful, oftentimes, in the complete treatment of its characters and plot. J. A. Cuddon in *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1999) defines the short story as “a piece of fiction shorter than short novel ranging words from 500 to 5000”. For Edgar Allan Poe the short story is one that “can be read at one sitting.” The modern short story became a major literary venture in Britain only after the 1880s, almost forty years after it had become well-established genre in the US and almost all of Europe. The appearance of *The Strand* magazine in 1891 paved the way for short stories to become an established literary form in Britain.

**Check Your Progress**

What is a short story? (50 words)

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As a literary form the prose short fiction is as old as the language itself. It had always existed as an informal oral tradition and it was only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the genre became popular. With the rise of literacy in the middle classes, magazines and periodicals catered to the reading public who wanted to read short stories, and writers suddenly were busy developing this form. However, the beginning of the modern short story is dated to Sir Walter Scott’s story “The Two Drovers” that was published in *Chronicles of the Canongate* in 1827. The genre developed rapidly and writers such as George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Honoré de Balzac, Alexander Pushkin, James Fenimore Cooper and Nathaniel Hawthorne in America emerged as major advocates of this form. Despite these influences, the short story in Britain hardly existed in the mid-19th century since the literary scene was dominated primarily by the novel. It was not until Robert Louis Stevenson literary endeavors in the 1880s that the modern short story emerged and flourished in Britain once more.

**Stop to Consider**

Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) is regarded as one of the greatest short story writers. He revolutionized the short story by transforming the narrative form. He abandoned the manipulated beginning-middle-and-end plot and was not judgmental of his characters. He did not strive for a climax or narrative resolution.

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**2.3 Early Writers and Works**

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One of the earliest writers of British short fiction was Daniel Defoe. His story “A True Relation of the Apparition of One Mrs. Veal” that appeared in 1706 emphasizes on the distinction between “fact” and “fiction.” Critics recognize this story as a key text that highlights many differences between the novel and the short story. Oliver Goldsmith’s “The Disabled Soldier” that was published in 1765 concerns itself with the wretchedness of the little man rather

than the misfortune of the great one. However, it was Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1765) that had a decidedly marked effect on the short story form. This work, in many ways, set the tone for all nineteenth-century English short fiction. The year 1773 saw the publication of Anne Letitia Aiken's "Sir Bertrand." The narrative was enriched by the twin features of the gothic, i.e. suspense and the marvelous.

In the Romantic period Charles Lamb's "Dream Children" (1822) stands out a definitive example of the short story. It deals with the precarious existence of a childless mother who discovers many years later that she has a son. The narrative moves seamlessly between the past and the present, and this element highlights the emergence of the short story from the essay. John Polidori's "The Vampyre: A Tale" (1819) did not directly influence the short story in English literature but deserves mention, nevertheless, as the first vampire story in English, which inspired many other gothic stories in the latter half of the century. Sir Walter Scott's often anthologized tale, "Wandering Willie's Tale" acts as the bridge between the traditional folk tale that generally dealt with the ideas of good versus evil and the later British mystery stories where the supernatural is held accountable for the turn of events. Wilkie Collins's "The Traveller's Story of a Terribly Strange Bed" (1856) helps in the realistic understanding and naturalizing of the supposed supernatural. This feature is drives the narrative as equally as the inherent mystery in the tale itself. "The Haunted and the Haunters; or, The House and the Brain" (1859) by Edward Bulwer Lytton is a story that deals with a predominant motif in nineteenth-century British short fiction—the blurring of lines between the physical and the spiritual. This adds an aura of the unknown to the narrative as it progresses.

The Victorian period witnessed writers like George Eliot dabbling with the short story. Her story "The Lifted Veil" (1859) makes an interesting study of what happens when a novelist who writes in the realist tradition tries her hand at short fiction. The other popular novelist who experimented with short fiction is Charles Dickens. He wrote "The Signalman" in 1866 where he problematizes the genre by questioning the various forms of the short story and classification. His literary contemporary Thomas Hardy wrote "Barbara of the House of Grebe," which is perhaps the best-known story in *A Group of Noble Dames* published in 1891. The narrative focuses on the blurred lines between the real and the fictional. This bewilderment allows the characters to project inner desires outwardly and then respond to them as if they were real.

With the publication of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Hand and Soul" (1850) was heralded the "aesthetic" element in short fiction. This fully develops in the nineties, an age that has been hailed as the so-called "golden age" of the short story in England. In Walter Pater's "Child in the House" (1878) the reader is presented with a half-way point between the "moments of vision" emphasized by Wordsworth and the "moments of vision" that Virginia Woolf presents in her short narratives.

#### Stop to Consider

The 17th and 18th centuries marked the temporary decline of short fiction in the West. The emergence of the novel, a fascination with drama and poetry and a growing preference for journalistic sketches can be seen as the main reasons for this.

#### Check Your Progress

Name some early writers of the short story.

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## 2.4 Major Practitioners

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This section discusses some of the major practitioners of British short fiction beginning with Robert Louis Stevenson. Although the list is not exhaustive, a careful selection has been made to acquaint the learner with some of the major names in this genre.

1. **Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894):** Novelist, essayist, poet and travel writer, Robert Louis Stevenson was the first British writer to be recognized as a specialist in the short story. Critics are of the opinion that the true modern short story began in England with his work. A celebrity in his lifetime, Stevenson is best known for works such as *Treasure Island* (1883), *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) which was a short novel about a dual personality, *Kidnapped* (1886) and *A Child's Garden of Verses* (1885) that was written for children. He also co-wrote with his stepson, Lloyd Osbourne, a novella called *The Ebb-Tide* that was published in 1894, the year Stevenson died. Stevenson has been ranked, after Charles Dickens, the 26th-most-translated author

in the world. For him technique and form were equally important as content for a story to flourish. “Markheim” (1885) is one of Stevenson’s most unsettling short stories. It is inspired by Fyodor Dostoevsky’s popular novel *Crime and Punishment*. Here the protagonist, Markheim, murders a shopkeeper. Soon he is plagued by a series of ‘visions’ that serve as reminders for his terrible deed. “The Merry Men” is an 1882 story set on the fictional island of Eilean Aros that is based on the Isle of Erraid, in the Inner Hebrides off the Scottish mainland. The title derives from the local name given to a group of waves in the story. It is a treasure-hunt story where a young man goes in search of a rumored treasure that has been lost in a nearby island. At the end of the story a mysterious stranger appears that lends the tale a supernatural aspect and raises questions as to whether he is the ghost of a murdered man, or the Devil himself. In 1884 Stevenson wrote “the Body Snatcher” which happens to be his darkest story. It is based on a real event from nineteenth century Scotland’s history that involved body-snatching and murders. The story revolves around two friends, Macfarlane and Fettes. Fettes suspects that has not only been collecting bodies for medical dissection, but has also been murdering the victims first. The story ends in a chilling manner when one of the ‘bodies’ return to haunt them. “The Bottle Imp” was written when Stevenson was living on Samoa to recuperating from tuberculosis. It was published in 1891. The story is premised on one of the most popular storytelling tropes in the world: the magical creature who can grant wishes but at a cost. Keawe, a Hawaiian man, buys a bottle with an imp inside. The imp grants wishes but the bottle is cursed. If the holder of the bottle dies while bearing it, his soul will go to hell. Keawe learns that the bottle was previously owned by renowned people including Napoleon Bonaparte and Captain Cook. He is now worried: will he meet the same fate as the earlier holders of the bottle or should he get rid himself of the bottle imp and, with it, the curse.

*Space for Learner*

### **Stop to Consider**

A trope refers to a common or overused theme or device, figure of speech, theme, image, character, or plot element that is used many times.

**SAQ**

Highlight some defining features of Stevenson’s short story. (50 words)

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2. **Joseph Conrad (1857-1924):** Joseph Conrad was a Polish-British novelist and short story writer. An early modernist, Conrad is regarded as one of the greatest writers in the English language; he was a master prose stylist and literary impressionist. His most popular novel is *Heart of Darkness* (1899) that was set in the Congo and contained bitter reflections on the colonial project. In 1975, noted author Chinua Achebe denounced *Heart of Darkness* as racist and dehumanizing work in his essay “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*.” Conrad also wrote a number of short stories. His complex portrayals include a range of subjects from sea stories to domestic tales that centered on the subject of human psyche, its unpredictable nature and unfathomable depth. He depicted the essence of human struggle through an extensive use of figurative language that allows him to express the anguish and disintegration of his characters. Some of his well-known stories are “The Idiots” (1898) which happens to be his first story, “Youth”, an autobiographical work of short fiction that appeared in Blackwood’s Magazine in 1898, “The Duel (1908), adapted into the film *The Duellists* in 1977, and “The Tale” which appeared in the *Strand Magazine* in 1917.

**Stop to Consider**

Impressionism in literature refers to stories dependent on a character’s subjective point of view. These stories are based around that character’s impressions of their experiences.

3. **Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936):** Kipling writes from his experiences in India and they convey his understanding of the British Empire. He was perhaps the first English writer to embrace the characteristics of the short story form whole-heartedly; his stories are near perfect representations of the transition between the old-fashioned tale of the nineteenth century and the modern short story. *The Jungle Book* and “The Man Who Would Be King” are notable examples of his fascinating storytelling. The latter

was published in 1888. It tells the story of two men who leave for Afghanistan with the intention of becoming kings. Although they succeed to the extent that the locals worship them as gods, they are soon revealed to be mere mortals when one of them is bitten by his would-be-wife. On this discovery they are punished to death. The story highlights the ideas of the imperialist project and its aftermath. In “The Phantom ’Rickshaw” Jack Pansay is haunted by the image of a ghostly rickshaw in which his dead former sweetheart sat. He had spurned her for a new girl. The poor girl died with a broken heart but seemingly came back from the dead to destroy Jack’s chances at happiness. A similar theme frames “The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes” (1885) where the title character falls down from his horse one night and finds himself in a strange realm where the living dead—people on the brink of death but brought back from that fate—are imprisoned in a kind of camp. The story “Mary Postgate” (1915) is about a servant who falls in love with Wynn, the son of the family for whom she works. When Wynn dies in flight training for the war, Mary is heartbroken but gives little away to those around her. One day a German airman, crashes into the garden and Mary finds her chance to exact revenge for her beloved’s death. Set during the World War I, the story challenges the reader to use their discerning abilities to resolve the ambiguities inherent in the narrative. Kipling’s most famous story is called “The Gardener” (1925). It uses the idea of the notion of a double life, a split between external reality and a tenuous inner reality to tell the tale of a woman named Helen Turrell whose embarks on an inner journey to understand sorrow and pain that is inflicted by the losses individual people suffer.

*Space for Learner*

**SAQ**

How does Kipling’s stories express his political views? (60 words)

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4. **Hector Hugh Munro (1870–1916):** Popularly known as Saki, H.H. Munro wrote stories that are characterized by wit, satire and dark humor. He marks a shift in Edwardian short fiction to the trick-ending story that became in England and America at the turn of the century. His most

anthologized story, “The Open Window” (1914) is a clear example of a fiction that depends for its impact on the means by which story itself works. “The Open Window” is his most popular work. The protagonist, Framton Nuttel, has come to stay in the country for his health. His sister believes that he should socialize more and gives him letters of introduction to families in the neighborhood. Framton visits Mrs. Sappleton and, while waiting for her, is entertained by her witty, fifteen-year-old niece, Vera. She tells him that the French window is kept open, even though it is October, because Mrs. Sappleton believes that her husband and her brothers, who drowned in a bog three years before, will come back one day. Framton becomes sad on hearing this story. When Mrs. Sappleton comes down she talks about her husband and her brothers who are going to come back from shooting soon; Framton, believing that she is deranged, tries to distract her by explaining his health condition. However, to his horror, Mrs. Sappleton points out that her husband, her brothers are coming with their dog. He sees them walking towards the window and, convinced that he is seeing ghosts, flees. Mrs. Sappleton was puzzled by his strange behavior but Vera explains that Framton ran away because of the spaniel. He is afraid of dogs ever since he was hunted by a pack of stray dogs in India and had to spend a night in a newly dug grave with creatures grinning and foaming just above him. The last line summarizes the situation, saying of the niece, “”Romance at short notice was her speciality.”

- 5. William Somerset Maugham (1874-1965):** Somerset Maugham was an English writer, known for his plays, novels and short stories. He was a modern exponent of the art of the literary narrated story. His stories were written in the first person and in an easy style peppered with a number of verbal clichés for the scene or character to unfold. His was inspired by the French master Guy de Maupassant because of the definite ‘story-line’ of his narratives, his remarkable dramatization of the facets of life as he created characters and backdrop of his stories. It is for this reason he said, “I have never claimed to create anything out of nothing; I have always needed an incident or a character as a starting point”. His use of such expressions as ‘grey with anguish’, ‘crumpled into a chair’, ‘his eyes blazed with passion’, ‘forced a laugh to his shaking lips’, ‘his voice was rasping’, are indicative of his attention to detail that is crucial in evoking human reactions and responses to any given situation. The underlying theme of most of his stories is that truth could have multiple perspectives; it may be totally different from outward appearances.



Maugham’s first volume was *Orientations* that was published in 1898. *Creatures of Circumstance*, his last work, was published in 1947. He wrote *On a Chinese Screen*, during his travels through China and Hong Kong in 1920. It dealt with the lives of British and other colonial expatriates in the Pacific Islands and Asia. Among the best-known stories are “Rain” (1921), “The Letter” (1924), “The Book Bag” (1932) and “Flotsam and Jetsam” (1947). Almost all these stories deal with interpersonal human relationships and provide interesting insights into the workings of the human mind and heart. “The Alien Corn” (1931), “Lord Mountdrago” (1939) are other stories that deserve mention for their narrative style and theme. Maugham’s comic stories include “Jane” (1923), “The Creative Impulse” (1926) and “The Three Fat Women of Antibes” (1933). In the last story three middle-aged friends engage in a highly competitive game of bridge while attempting to slim. However, the reversals at the bridge table at the hands of an effortlessly slender fourth player provoke them to break their diets. Some other popular stories that Maugham wrote are “The Verger”, “The Vessel of Wrath”, “The Book-Bag”, “The Facts of Life”, “The Colonel’s Lady”, “The Treasure” and “P&O.”

**Check Your Progress**

Assess Somerset Maugham as an important writer of the short story.  
(100 words)

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- 6. **Virginia Woolf (1882–1941):** Virginia Woolf is one of the leading modernist writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She is known for her novels like *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and the much-acclaimed piece of non-fiction, “A Room of One’s Own.” She pioneered the use of the *stream of consciousness* technique as a narrative device. Her short stories include “Kew Gardens” and “The Mark on the Wall” which is her first published story in 1917. The story was later published in a volume titled *The Mark on the Wall and Other Short Fiction* (2008). In this story, the narrator talks about a mark that she noticed on the wall. Using the stream of consciousness technique the reader embarks on a journey where he/she follows the narrator’s thoughts, memories and daydreams.

The mark on the wall becomes the motif for Woolf to narrate the temporality of the material world and the importance of spiritual delight, something that conventional fiction seldom takes into account, which inspires the mind. Another story titled “Kew Gardens” focuses on four groups of people as they pass a flowerbed in the London botanical gardens. Taking a snail’s view of the world (which also occurred in “The Mark on the Wall”) the narrative presents the story through ‘events’ or, rather, snatches of conversation between the people. The story aims to focus on the small and insignificant and find the beauty and delight of the world in unlikely places.

In the story “An Unwritten Novel” the female narrator travels on the train from London to the south coast. She watches people and takes an interest in her fellow passengers. In turn they try to avoid making eye contact with other people in the carriage except for one woman sitting across the narrator. She stares straight ahead as if harboring some secret. This moment allows the narrator to invent a whole new life for this unknown woman and imagining her story. In one of her shortest stories titled “A Haunted House” Woolf explores and subverts the established conventions of the ghost story. She offers a modernist take on the genre and describes the sounds of a ‘ghostly couple’ in the house where she and her partner live. The narrator claims to be able to hear the ghostly couple talking to each other as if they are looking for something.

- 7. D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930):** D.H. Lawrence was an English author who wrote novels, short stories, poems, plays, essays, travelogues and letters. His most popular novels include *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *The Rainbow* (1915), and *Women in Love* (1920) that established him as one of the most significant English writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A number of short stories by Lawrence deal with the themes of love, sexuality, and human relationships, the best known among which are “The Captain’s Doll”, “The Fox”, “The Ladybird”, “Odour of Chrysanthemums”, “The Princess”, “The Rocking-Horse Winner”, “St Mawr”, “The Virgin and the Gypsy” (which was published as a novella after he died) and “The Woman who Rode Away”. Among his most celebrated collections is *The Prussian Officer and Other Stories* (1914). *The Woman Who Rode Away and Other Stories* (1928) is premised on the theme of leadership that finds expression in novels such as *Kangaroo* and *The Plumed*

*Serpent* and the story "Fanny and Annie." "The Rocking-Horse Winner" is an important story, published in 1926, that is centered on the ideas of luck, money, and success and the potential dangers of hankering after these. The story is psychological and multi-layered, leaving the reader with a lot of unanswered questions. Young Paul wishes to win money for his mother and manages to do so by riding his rocking-horse until he enters a state of near-frenzy. This is the moment when he manages to 'predict' the name of the horse that will win the next major race. After doing this for several times the frenzy gets to him and he falls dangerously ill. "Tickets, Please" (1918) centers on the war between the sexes. The newly empowered female workforce on the Nottingham trams take arms against the very cocksure John Thomas. They avenge the young man for his false hopes and promises to the many women he dates. "Odour of Chrysanthemums," a modernist *tour de force*, is a powerful story published in 1911. It focuses on Lizzie Bates, a miner's wife, who lives among the mining communities of Nottinghamshire. One day when Lizzie's husband does not return home from work in the mine, she becomes angry, worried and fearful for her him. The story follows her trajectory of thoughts as she waits for her husband to return. Almost all of Lawrence's works deal with the psychology of the human mind and encourage a rethinking of established social and gender norms.

8. **Graham Greene (1904-1991):** Recognized primarily for his novels, he wrote a significant number of short stories that probe into themes of moral ambiguity, espionage, and political intrigue. Of these "Twenty-One Stories" (1954) and "May We Borrow Your Husband?" (1967) are well-known collections of his short fiction. Captivating and poignant, the stories are dominated by themes central to Greene's novels—emotions such as humor, anxiety, fear, pity and violence, pursuit, betrayal and man's endless quest for salvation propel the narratives. "I Spy" (1930), for example, is a well-anthologized story where a young boy attempts to pilfer cigarettes from his father's shop. However, even as he attempts to carry out the deed, he surprisingly discovers interesting insights about his family that was not known to him earlier. In "The Blue Film" a husband is humiliated when he sexual indiscretion is revealed while in "When Greek Meets Greek" two conmen hatch a scheme only to meet with unexpected results. Most of Greene's stories are hauntingly tragic but, at the same time, is full of compelling entertainment.

9. **Ronald Dahl (1916-1990):** Ronald Dahl was a British a poet, writer of children’s literature and a wartime fighter. He is hailed as “one of the greatest storytellers for children of the 20th century.” He is known primarily for his children’s books but his adult short stories are equally engaging, full of dark twists and turns and often end unexpectedly. His children’s books contain dark comic elements, the unsentimental and the macabre, violence of a gruesome nature and death. The protagonists are generally little children who are imperiled by malicious adults. His notable works include the very popular *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) that was made into the films titled *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* (1971) and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005). Other works written for children are *James and the Giant Peach*, *Matilda* (1988, film versions in 1996 and 2022, stage play in 2010), *The Witches* (1983, film version in 1990), *Fantastic Mr Fox* (film version in 2009), *The BFG* (film versions in 1989 and 2016), *The Twits*, *George’s Marvellous Medicine* and *Danny, the Champion of the World*. For the older audiences his collections include *Tales of the Unexpected* and *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Six More*. He wrote *James and the Giant Peach* in 1961. It was made into a film in 1996.
10. **Angela Carter (1940–1992):** An English novelist, short story writer, poet, and journalist. Angela Carter is known for her feminist take on popular classics, her use of magic realism and the picaresque in her works. Her short stories challenge the conventions of recognized narratives by subverting the morals as well as the themes of traditional fairy tales. *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979) is her most recognized work. She has been ranked at the tenth position by *The Times* in their list of “The 50 greatest British writers since 1945” published in 2008. Her other works include *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces* (1974), *The Bridegroom* (1983), *Black Venus* (1985; published as *Saints and Strangers* in the United States), *American Ghosts and Old World Wonders* (1993) and *Burning Your Boats* (1995). Her short story “The Company of Wolves” was adapted into a film in 1984 while *In Nights at the Circus* was selected as the best ever winner of the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 2012. *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* won the Cheltenham Festival Literary Prize. The stories in the volume are based on popular fairytales that Carter writes from a feminist point of view. She subverts the stories to write new stories. She states “My

intention was not to do ‘versions’ or, as the American edition of the book said, horribly, ‘adult’ fairy tales, but to extract the latent content from the traditional stories and to use it as the beginnings of new stories.”Written chiefly from a heterosexual female viewpoint and narrated by an unnamed heroine, the tales in *The Bloody Chamber* are subversions of some selected timeless tales by Charles Perrault and Marquis de Sade. The stories are premised on the latent sexual and violent content of the traditional tales. The stories “Puss-in-Boots”, “Beauty and the Beast”, “The Courtship of Mr Lyon”, “The Tiger’s Bride”, “The Erl-King”, “The Snow Child”, “The Lady of the House of Love”, “The Werewolf”, “The Company of Wolves” and “Wolf-Alice” are Carter’s imaginative responses to the traditional children’s tale. “Wolf-Alice”, the most popular amongst them, is framed in a Gothic terrain and the narrative takes place gloomy mansion of a werewolf-duke. The story borrows from an early medieval version of Red Riding Hood titled “De puella a lupellis servata”. The narrative is about a feral child who is suckled by wolves and draws from the Biblical tale of the first beginnings in the Garden of Eden. There is also an episode of rejection where Adam and Eve pick lice from each other’s pelts, thus evoking disgust and revulsion. In “Wolf-Alice” when the werewolf-duke is shot and severely wounded, Wolf-Alice saves him by tenderly licking the blood and dirt from his face.

**Check Your Progress**

Highlight Angela Carter’s contribution to the development of the short story. (100 words)

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**2.5 Summing Up**

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In this unit, we have traced the development of short story as a literary genre in England. We have also focused on the major writers in this genre and introduced you to their distinctive style and contributions. This unit should familiarizes you with the British short story as a whole, and prepare you for an in-depth study of individual writers. In the next units we are going to discuss two major short story writers, namely Rudyard Kipling and Angela Carter.

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## Unit 3 : Rudyard Kipling: “The Man Who would be King” (Background)

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### Unit Structure:

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 Biographical Sketch
- 3.4 His Works
- 3.5 Kipling’s Writing Style
- 3.6 Themes and Motifs
- 3.7 Ideology and Legacy
- 3.8 Kipling’s Timeline
- 3.9 Summing Up
- 3.10 References and Suggested Readings

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### 3.1 Objectives

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After reading this unit the student will be able to

- *discuss* the life and works of Rudyard Kipling
- *identify* the important works by Kipling
- *explain* the important ideas of Kipling’s works
- *understand* Kipling’s ideological and political stance that influenced his work

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### 3.2 Introduction

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This unit provides an introduction to the life of Rudyard Kipling. Joseph Rudyard Kipling, more popularly known as Rudyard Kipling, was an eminent English journalist, short-story writer, poet, and novelist. A major literary figure of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Kipling was regarded widely in the late-19th century as an unofficial poet laureate of the British Empire. He was one of the first serious practitioners of the short story in English, and the first to use Cockney dialect

(that is local to the natives of London and England's East End) in serious poetry. Often criticized for romanticizing the colonial project Kipling's timeless appeal nevertheless continues to influence and inspire readers across the world even in the present day. He was the recipient of many honorary degrees and awards. He received the Gold Medal of the Royal Society of Literature in 1926, an honor which only Walter Scott, George Meredith and Thomas Hardy had been awarded before him. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1907.

#### Stop to Consider

Rudyard Kipling was the first Englishman to be so honored with the Nobel Prize for Literature and the youngest laureate till date. He received the award at the age of forty-one.

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### 3.3 Biographical Sketch

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Kipling was born on the 30<sup>th</sup> of December, 1865 in Bombay, during the 'British Raj', an era when the Indian subcontinent was part of the British Empire. His father John Lockwood Kipling (6<sup>th</sup> July, 1837 – 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1911) was an English art teacher. He was also an illustrator and museum curator. After his marriage to Alice Caroline Kipling in 1865, he relocated to India where he served as a professor of architectural sculpture in the Jeejeebhoy School of Art in Bombay (now Mumbai) and later went on to become its principal. He was also commissioned by the government to make a series of sketches of Indian craftsmen during his tour of the Punjab, North-West Frontier and Kashmir in 1870-1872. This was an initiative by the government to preserve the art, sights and sounds of the region. The year 1875 saw Kipling appointed as the Principal of the prestigious Mayo School of Arts, Lahore, British India (now known as the National College of Arts in Pakistan). He was also the editor of the *Journal of Indian Art and Industry* which was a platform for the students of Mayo School to publish their drawings. Later Kipling became the curator of the old original Lahore Museum. Kipling also claims credit for illustrating many of his son, Rudyard Kipling's, books as well as other works, such as *Tales of the Punjab* by Flora Annie Steel. Besides the decorations for the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, Kipling also beautified the friezes on Crawford Market in Bombay. After his retirement he returned to England in 1893. Rudyard Kipling's mother, Alice Caroline



Kipling(4<sup>th</sup> April, 1837 – 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 1910) was a writer and poet. She belonged to a well-known family that was known for their contribution to the arts. Her poems were published in various collections such as *Quartette* in 1885 and *Hand in Hand: Verses by a Mother and a Daughter* in 1901. The later volume was written in collaboration with her daughter Alice Fleming. Alice Kipling died in November 1910.

Kipling spent his early childhood in India until he was about six years. He was keenly observant of the bustling spectacle of India, that caught his interest and affection from early childhood. However, he was soon sent to South sea in Britain with his younger sister to pursue his school education in a small private school. This was a very sensitive period of his life as he lived under foster care since his parents were still in India and it would be a while since he would meet them again. He missed the vibrant sights and sounds of India dearly. In his book extracts from *Something of Myself* (1937), Kipling recalls the happy times with his ayah and writes:

Our evening walks were by the sea in the shadow of palm-groves which, I think, were called the Mahim Woods. When the wind blew the great nuts would tumble, and we fled— my ayah, and my sister in her perambulator—to the safety of the open. I have always felt the menacing darkness of tropical eventides, as I have loved the voices of night-winds through palm or banana leaves, and the song of the tree-frogs.

He writes of the “far-going Arab dhows on the pearly waters,” the “gaily dressed Parsees wading out to worship the sunset.” He recalls the hot afternoon and the post-lunch siesta when his ayah would tell ”stories and Indian nursery songs all unforgotten.” However, this idyllic childhood in India was not replicated in his foster home where he was not treated by Mr. and Mrs. Holloway, in whose care Kipling and his sister were entrusted. As a result he had a very difficult and disturbing childhood the horrors of which he described in the story “Baa Baa, Black Sheep” in *Wee Willie Winkie* (1888). He had also famously referred to his foster home, Lorne Lodge in Southsea, as the “House of Desolation”. His maternal aunt was married to the artist Edward Burne-Jones. Young Kipling and his sister spent most of their Christmas holidays with the Burne-Joneses in England and this was perhaps the only happy times he experienced while his parents remained in India.

### Stop to Consider

Kipling's worldview was deeply influenced by conservative values from the nineteenth century, especially those that he experienced in colonial India.

### Check Your Progress

1. How does Kipling describe his childhood experience of India?
2. What was Kipling's experience in his foster home? What impact did it have on him?

In 1878, when he was twelve years old, Kipling was sent to boarding school called the United Services College at Westward Ho, Bideford. His closest friend at Westward Ho, a boy named George Beresford, describes Kipling as "cheery, capering, podgy, little fellow who wore a thick pair of spectacles and had a "broad smile." Kipling had brilliant blue eyes framed by heavy black eyebrows. Unfortunately, Kipling was subjected to bullying and brutality that later found expression in his schoolboy stories of *Stalky & Co.* published in 1899. During this difficult period he found temporary relief in the books he came into contact with. He read the poems of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Wilkie Collins. He was soon at the verge of a nervous breakdown when his mother came to know of his condition and immediately removed him from foster-care. She placed him in a school in Devon and this was a major turning point in his life. The other friend that Kipling had was the headmaster, Cornell Price, who was quick to recognize Kipling's flair for writing and encouraged him by assigning him the task of editing the school paper. Kipling wrote poems for the paper that garnered praise from the headmaster. Later, when Kipling sent some his literary endeavors to his father in India, the latter privately published them as *Schoolboy Lyrics* (1881) and this was Kipling's first published work. The headmaster continued to encourage the young child to hone the art. Kipling developed his writing skills which would later help him gain employment.

After his schooling, Kipling was unable to join Oxford or Cambridge universities, due to lack of funds. Consequently, Kipling went back to India in 1882. He joined his family at Lahore (in modern-day Pakistan) and lived with them for many years. This was also the time when he began seeking employment

and soon joined a Lahore-based newspaper called *The Civil & Military Gazette* that was founded in 1872 in British India. Kipling was an assistant editor and it must be mentioned here that his father's social standing and professional position was instrumental in securing this job. Stephen Wheeler, the editor of *The Civil & Military Gazette*, was a hard taskmaster and ensured that Kipling worked very hard. He writes:

My Chief took me in hand, and for three years or so I loathed him. He had to break me in, and I knew nothing. What he suffered on my account I cannot tell; but the little that I ever acquired of accuracy, the habit of trying at least to verify references, and some knack of sticking to desk-work, I owed wholly to Stephen Wheeler. I never worked less than ten hours and seldom more than fifteen per diem; and as our paper came out in the evening did not see the midday sun except on Sundays ... Our native Foreman, on the News side, Mian Rukn Din, a Muhammedan gentleman of kind heart and infinite patience, whom I never saw unequal to a situation, was my loyal friend throughout. My legitimate office-work was sub-editing, which meant eternal cuttings-down of unwieldy contributions—such as discourses on abstruse questions of Revenue and Assessment from a great and wise Civilian who wrote the vilest hand that even our compositors ever saw ... There were newspaper exchanges from Egypt to Hong-Kong to be skimmed nearly every morning and, once a week, the English papers on which one drew in time of need; local correspondence from outstations to vet for possible libels in their innocent allusions; 'spoofing' letters from subalterns to be guarded against (twice I was trapped here); always, of course, the filing of cables, and woe betide an error then! I took them down from the telephone—a primitive and mysterious power whose native operator broke every word into mono syllables ... (*Something of Myself*, Ch. III, 'Seven Years Hard')

*Kipling was assigned the task of editing the many telegrams from the news agencies that arrived during the day. He would summarize official reports, and skim through as many as thirty odd newspapers scouring for stories besides sub-editing the countless contributions that were sent in by readers. He also dealt with the social, sporting and other local events of relevance that needed to be covered in the newspaper. He also had to create the entire copy and read the proofs in time so that everything could go to press by midnight. It was not long when he was given opportunities to report local events himself. These included village festivals, riots, murder trials and other events that*

threaded the rural life of the people. He was also sent to cover the Viceroy's visit to the native state of Patiala in 1884. The new Viceroy's ceremonial reception of the Amir of Afghanistan was a major event and many journalists arrived to cover the event. Kipling proved his mettle by reporting this first. He rode back thirty miles at night to send a dispatch to his office much ahead of his rivals. The proprietors of CMG were highly impressed with the young reporter's efforts and as a reward increased his salary 360 to 420 pounds per year. An important aspect his stint as a reporter in CMG was the publication of *Departmental Ditties* in 1886 that contained satiric verses about Anglo-Indian society. His poetic style displayed the influence of masters like Edgar Allan Poe, Bret Harte and Guy de Maupassant.

#### Check Your Progress

1. What work was assigned to Kipling by Stephen Wheeler?
2. Why was Kipling's salary increased?

Despite this, Kipling found little or no time to pursue his creative talents. When the new editor, Kay Robinson, joined the newspaper in 1886, Kipling enjoyed more creative freedom since he was asked to contribute stories to the newspaper. Simultaneously, he began writing poems. He was sent as a special correspondent to Shimla which was the summer seat of the Viceroy's Government for six months. During his period he produced editorial notes, reviews, articles, and letters that described the social scenario and beauty of Shimla. His memorable experiences at Simla later provided the basis for most of the stories in his first collection titled *Plain Tales from the Hills* published in 1888. This collection explored the psychological and moral problems of the Anglo-Indians and their relationship with the colonized people. He also collaborated with his sister Alice in his literary efforts but soon he began to write independently and it was only a matter of time when his works found readership. *Soldiers Three* published in 1888 is a collection of short stories that presents the lives of soldiers. This assured Kipling of his literary prowess and he soon left *Civil and Military Gazette* in 1887, to join its sister-newspaper called *The Allahabad Pioneer* that was published from Allahabad. Here, besides engaging in the routine work of a reporter Kipling wrote and edited longer stories for the weekly supplement. He was commissioned to

travel to many parts of the country, mainly Rajasthan, and wrote a series of articles titled 'Letters of Marque' about his experiences. Throughout his travels across the length and breadth of India, Kipling absorbed knowledge of Hindu customs and practices, though his experience of British colonial life remained central to his temperament.

In 1888, he was suddenly recalled to Lahore to take charge of the CMG since Kay Robinson was on leave. Although Kipling had decided to leave India and return to England, he spent his last summer working in Lahore. In March 1889, at the age of twenty-three, Kipling left India. However, he was commissioned to write a series of travel articles for the *Pioneer* as he journeyed home via Burma, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan and the USA. "The Ballad of East and West" is an account of his travels and is remembered for the famous lines "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet." Kipling never returned to India, except in 1891, to briefly visit his parents in Lahore.

*Space for Learner*

#### **Stop to Consider**

In 1898 Kipling met diamond magnate and South African statesman Cecil Rhodes in South Africa. This association was crucial in the formation of Kipling's imperialist outlook that only grew stronger with the years.

#### **Check Your Progress**

1. What work was assigned to Kipling by Stephen Wheeler?
2. Why was Kipling's salary increased?

In 18 January 1892, Kipling married Alice Caroline Balestier. She was the sister of Wolcott Balestier, an American publisher and writer with whom Kipling had collaborated in *The Naulahka* (1892), a romance that did not do very well. The same year the young couple moved to the United States and settled in Brattleboro, Vermont where their daughter, Josephine, was born on 29 December, 1892. It was after her birth that Kipling began writing the 'Mowgli stories' which later became famously known as *The Jungle Book*. However, they were unable to adapt to the American way of life and soon returned to England in 1896.

### 3.4 His Works

When Kipling returned to England in 1889, his reputation as a successful writer preceded him. Soon he gained recognition as one of the most brilliant prose writers of his time. The publication of the verse collection *Barrack-Room Ballads* in 1892 cemented his reputation. The volume contains some of his popular poems such as “Mandalay,” “Tommy,” “Fuzzy-Wuzzy,” “Gunga Din,” and “Danny Deever” that made explicit use of the Cockney dialect. His poems and stories were extraordinarily popular in the late 19th and early 20th century but post World War I his reputation was dented and many considered him to be a jingoistic imperialist. It is true that he used colloquial speech to narrate the lives of the common soldiers and this, many critics agreed, did not merit as good poetry. For example, his use of popular ballads, songs and lyrics to in works such as “Recessional” (1897) among others, has been severely criticized for its seemingly rhetorical tone rather than imaginative depth.

#### Check Your Progress

Why was Kipling considered to be a jingoistic imperialist?

Kipling’s most memorable book is *The Jungle Book* that was published in 1894. His experiences of India were largely influential in the writing of Mowgli’s story. *The Second Jungle Book* appeared in 1895. His other notable works include short stories such as “The Man Who Would Be King” (1888), “The White Man’s Burden” (1899), “The Gods of the Copybook Headings” (1919), *Kim* (1901), and “If—” (1910). “If—,” from the volume *Rewards and Fairies* (1910), enjoys the reputation of being one of the most favorite poems in English literature. In an opinion poll conducted by BBC in 1995, it was voted Britain’s favourite poem that exhorts one to practice self-control and stoicism. He also wrote his autobiography that was published posthumously and is called *Something of Myself for My Friends Known and Unknown* (1937). Other notable works include *Many Inventions* (1893), *The Seven Seas* (1896), *Captain Courageous* (1897), *The Day’s Work* (1898), *Stalky and Co.* (1899), *Trafficks and Discoveries* (1904), *Puck of Pook’s Hill* (1906), *Debits and Credits* (1926), *Thy Servant a Dog* (1930) and *Limits and Renewals* (1932). In 1902 Kipling published *Just So Stories* that went on to gain worldwide acclaim and continues to remain one of the most popular

children's books even today. He also went on to write two science fictions titled *With the Night Mail* and *As Easy as A.B.C.* which were published in 1905 and 1912 respectively.

*Space for Learner*

### Stop to Consider

Kipling is best known for the poem "If" and *The Jungle Book*.

The 1890s witnessed novels such as *The Light That Failed* (1890) that tells the story of a painter who becomes blind and is soon spurned by the woman he loves. This novel was not successful. *Captains Courageous* (1897) contains a sense of adventure but has been criticized for its long descriptions. *Kim* (1901) narrates the story of an Irish orphan Kimball O'Hara and his adventures in the Himalayas. A key feature of Kipling's prose style is the technical proficiency that allows him to explore profound and perplexing themes. India is the major setting for many of his early works including *Life's Handicap* (1891), *Many Inventions* (1893) and *The Day's Work* (1898). The themes of his works are wide-ranging. *The Phantom Rickshaw* (1888) is premised on the element of the supernatural while the "The Wish House" or "A Madonna of the Trenches" (1924) touches upon the theme of exploitation. "The Man Who Was" (1890) highlights the chauvinism *Mary Postgate* (1915) is framed by xenophobia and the terrible consequences of death. *Just So Stories* (1902) is a popular children's book and *From Sea to Sea* (1899) is a record of his early travels.

The first decade of 20th century saw Kipling at the peak of his creativity. 1907 brought him the Noble Prize for Literature. At the award function held at Stockholm on 10th December 1907, Kipling became the first English language recipient of this honor. A significant feature of Kipling's style is the fact that his works appeal to both young readers as well as adults. "Traffics and Discoveries" (1904), "Actions and Reactions" (1904), "A Diversity of Creatures" (1917), "Debits and Credits" (1926), and "Limits and Renewals" (1932) are examples of complex subjects that are dealt with subtlety and finesse. The year 1899 was marred by personal tragedy when Kipling lost his daughter Josephine. His son, John, passed away in 1915. The above listed works are reflective of his worldview that has now been darkened by the loss of his children.

**Stop to Consider**

Kipling's eldest son, John, died in 1915 at the Battle of Loos, after which he wrote "If any question why we died/Tell them, because our fathers lied."

Kipling continued to write until the early 1930s, but the success eluded him. On 18<sup>th</sup> January 1936, he died of a brain haemorrhage at the age of 70. Just like his life his death too contains an anecdote. A magazine had incorrectly announced his death previously to which Kipling wrote "I've just read that I am dead. Don't forget to delete me from your list of subscribers." He is buried in Poets' Corner, in the South Transept of Westminster Abbey where many great poets and authors are finally rested.

**Stop to Consider**

Kipling has always been viewed as a defender of Western imperialism. He coined the phrase "the white man's burden."

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### **3.5 Kipling's Writing Style**

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Kipling wrote a number of poems, essays and novels. Each work reflects his personal and political beliefs and earned his praise and success from across the world. His works reveal a deep observation of life around him including the social customs, practices, ideas and beliefs of the people in the many countries that he lived. His stint as a reporter gave him endless opportunities to engage with people and learn about the everyday trials and tribulations. It was during this time that he started writing prose and poetry that was powered by his imagination as well as his ability to present his characters and ideas realistically. The technical sophistication of his style of writing becomes apparent in his works such as *Debits and Credits* and *Limits and Renewals*. He also invoked humor in his writing as is evident in works such as "Gunga Din." The poem "If" reflects the possibilities that life gives us and the power of choice that helps in deciding what may be the most appropriate thing to do for man.

Kipling's style is a mix of influences that include the English cockney, schoolboy slang, the varied Indian dialects as well as the Bible. While this has been a matter of controversy it also reveals his ability to draw from many sources. His style is mostly autobiographical. His desire to share stories of his



travels and experiences with his readers also led him to write about his miserable childhood experiences in the boarding school in England. Another important feature of his writing style is the dualism that is inherent in his representation of the Indians. While on the one hand he romanticizes India's beauty and culture, he also reveals the country's lack of development through an imperialist lens as is evident in *Kim*. He glorifies India, the land of his birth, but does not hesitate to criticize her backwardness and ignorance, much of which has been the result of British colonialism. It is due to these reasons he was severely criticized that resulted in the decline of his popularity. His later works are generally considered less popular than his earlier writing but one cannot deny the fact that his children's writing continues great popularity and recognition among modern readers.

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### 3.6 Themes and Motifs

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Some of the major themes evident in Kipling's writings are:

1. **Imperialism:** Kipling was a strong supporter of imperialism and encouraged its practice. He believed that the white man was far more superior to his colonial counterpart and the colonial project was a noble mission that the white man undertook to improve the life and conditions of the non-white people. He held strongly to the idea that the by spreading the ideas of law, order and civilization the white man was ultimately saving the non-white people from doom. These views are highly racist for which Kipling was severely criticized. *The Five Nations*, which was a book of South African verse that appeared at the end of the Boer War in 1903, greatly comprised Kipling's reputation due to the anti-imperialist stance he displayed in the work.
2. **Satire:** He wrote a lot of satirical verses such as *Departmental Ditties* (1886). A similar strain is found in *Kim* that focuses on life in British India.
3. **Nature/Environment:** many of his children's stories including *The Jungle Book* and *The Second Jungle Book* display the beauty and magical quality of nature. Through these books the Western audience was able to gain insight into the Indian landscape.

4. **Patriotism:** Kipling was patriotic and showed great support for the English Empire. He wrote in favour of the English rule and advocated its spread across the world.
5. **Masculinity:** The theme of manhood finds clear expression in “*If*” and “*The Thousandth Man*.” The poems clearly demonstrate the English values of self-control and stoicism. Kipling advocated the qualities of courage, bravery and strength of spirit which are indispensable to the character of man. He believed that manhood is essentially a set of qualities such as honesty, courage, stoicism and pride.
6. **War:** Kipling wrote a number of war poetry to encourage and motivate soldiers. He was sensitive to the problems that soldiers face in the battlefield and wrote about them too in “*Tommy*,” “*Danny Deever*,” “*Boots*” and “*Gentlemen Rankers*.”

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### 3.7 Ideology and Legacy

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After his death Kipling’s work continued to witness a steady decline in the literary and critical circles especially for his social and political views and his open support for the “civilizing mission”. In the literary sphere poetry found new exponents and styles while in the political ecosphere European colonial empires collapsed. By the mid-20th century many of Kipling’s works seemed outdated. Kipling had always been politically expressive. Despite his artistic talent, Kipling’s writing was often intertwined with his social and political views. His early stories and poems about life in colonial India that had established him as a favorite with English readers soon became targets of harsh criticism. His support of English imperialism that had contributed greatly to his popularity soon evoked a huge backlash after the imperial project had politically ended.

His writings often displayed a vision of a classless society where everyone worked towards serving the Empire. Critics argue that Kipling’s portrayals of Indian characters were racist and pro-imperialism. His works reflected the colonialist view that the Indians and other colonized peoples across the world were incapable of survival and progress without the aid of Europeans. He was a staunch opponent of the Principles of Democratic centralism and quasi-military discipline, all of which found expression in his work. Noted critic Angus Wilson recognizes an interesting trait in his writing that he calls “indulged

hatred.” Through his writing Kipling seemed to nurse resentments. His works display a ferocious desire to settle scores –a trait that is deeply disturbing given his stature and influence. Some believe that perhaps helped him to exorcise the dark realities and emotions to allow him peace of mind and tranquility. However, his distinctly pronounced hatred towards the Germans, the Jews, the pacifists, members of the Liberal Party, academics and other members of the literary world, suffragettes, Roman Catholicism and the papacy point to a disturbing aspect of his personality. Kipling believed that the individual is truest to himself when he does his duty and this includes recognizing and accepting the superior person or cause and pledging allegiance. This was a controversial stance particularly with regards to his response to India and her people. While he valued Indian culture and Indian religion, his support of the imperial project that was in operation in India is problematic and contradictory. He was critical of the social pretensions of the British in India and openly disapproving of their policies in India. In a letter to Cecil Rhodes he wrote of England as a “is a stuffy little place, mentally, morally and physically,” whereas India, for him, was expansive and bighearted. Despite this point of view, Kipling never openly questioned the distinctions that the colonial rule practiced between Anglo-Europeans and native Indians. To his mind India was “the happy Asiatic disorder” that required British law and order to maintain order and regulation.” “The White Man’s Burden” (February 4, 1899) that supported the American annexation and colonization of *the Philippine Islands*, is said to be the most glaring example of his encouraging outlook on nations spreading their power throughout the world. For Kipling, the “white man” meant citizens of the more developed nations whose duty was to extend the benefits of law, literacy and morality throughout the world. He referred to less developed peoples as the “lesser breeds” who are unable to live a life of order, discipline, sacrifice and humility that are the essential qualities of colonial rulers. Such racist and elitist outlook dented his reputation greatly. Despite possessing immense talent and intellect asset and enormous popularity, he was never made Poet Laureate and the reason may be attributed to his political outlook. While some argue that he was offered the opportunity that he himself turned down, others believe that Queen Victoria disapproved of him and his ideology. Nevertheless, the outreach of his legacy and popularity cannot be denied.

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### **Stop to Consider**

*Just-So Stories* have been illustrated several times. *The Jungle Book* has been made into several movies; the first was made by producer Alexander Korda, and others by the Walt Disney Company.

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### Check Your Progress

1. Briefly highlight the reasons for Kipling's descent in popularity?
2. Why was he considered a racist?

### 3.8 Kipling's Timeline

1865	Born in Bombay, Father is Professor of Architectural Sculpture, Bombay School of Art
1870	Kipling and younger sister taken to England, placed in Calvinistic foster home
1876	Removed from foster home, sent to a private school—the United Services College
1881	<i>Schoolboy Lyrics</i>
1882	Returns to India. Joins as assistant editor of <i>The Civil and Military Gazette</i>
1886	<i>Departmental Ditties</i>
1887	Sent to Allahabad to work on <i>The Pioneer</i> ; given editorship of the weekly. <i>Soldier Tales</i> , <i>Indian Tales</i> , and <i>Tales of the Opposite Sex</i>
1888	<i>Plain Tales from the Hills</i> , <i>Soldiers Three</i> , <i>The Story of the Gadsbys</i> , <i>In Black and White</i> , <i>Wee Wee Willie Winkie</i> and <i>Turn Overs</i> from <i>The Civil and Military Gazette</i>
1889	Leaves England, settles down in Villiers Street, Strand.
1890	<i>The Courting of Dinah Shadd and Other Stories</i> and <i>The City of Dreadful Night</i>
1891	<i>The Light that Failed</i> , <i>Letters of Marque</i> and <i>Life's Handicap</i>
1892	<i>Barrack-Room Ballads</i> , <i>Rhymed Chapter Headings</i> and <i>The Naulahka</i> . Marries Carolyn Balestier
1893	<i>Many Inventions</i>
1894	<i>The Jungle Book</i>
1895	<i>The Second Jungle Book</i>
1896	<i>The Seven Seas</i> and <i>Soldier Tales</i>

1897	Moves back with wife to England, <i>Captains Courageous</i>
1898	<i>An Almanac of Twelve Sports, The Day's Work</i> and <i>A Fleet in Being</i>
1899	Goes to South Africa, eldest daughter Josephine dies. <i>Stalky and Co.</i> and <i>From Sea to Sea</i>
1900	<i>The Kipling Reader</i>
1901	<i>Kim</i> and <i>War's Brighter Side</i>
1902	<i>Just So Stories</i>
1903	<i>The Five Nations</i>
1904	<i>Traffics and Discoveries</i>
1906	<i>Puck of Pook's Hill</i>
1907	<i>Collected Verse</i> . Nobel Prize for Literature
1909	<i>Actions and Reactions</i>
1910	<i>Rewards and Fairies</i>
1911	<i>A History of England</i>
1912	<i>Collected Verse</i> (British edition) and <i>Songs from Books</i>
1914	Official writer-up of the new armed forces of the Crown.
1915	<i>The New Army in Training</i> and <i>France in War</i> , "Mary Postgate"
1916	Son killed with the Irish Guards. <i>Sea Warfare</i>
1917	<i>A Diversity of Creatures</i>
1919	<i>The Graves of the Fallen</i> and <i>The Years Between</i>
1920	<i>Horace Odes, Book V</i> and <i>Letters of Travel</i>
1923	Elected Lord Rector of St. Andrews University. <i>The Irish Guards in the Great War</i> and <i>Land and Sea</i>
1924	<i>Songs for Youth</i>
1926	<i>Sea and Sussex</i> and <i>Debits and Credits</i>
1927	<i>Songs of the Sea</i>
1928	<i>A Book of Words</i>
1929	<i>Poems, 1886-1929</i>
1930	<i>Thy Servant A Dog</i>

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1932	<i>Limits and Renewals</i>
1934	<i>Collected Dog Stories</i>
1936	Dies on 18 <sup>th</sup> January

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### 3.9 Summing Up

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A major writer of the short story, Kipling is criticized for his imperialism and for romanticizing the colonial project for which his critical popularity declined in recent times. Yet, one cannot deny his historical contribution to the development of genre of short story. In this unit we have discussed his life and works, his style of writing as well as his thematic preoccupations. We have also dwelt in brief on the ideological and political underpinnings of his literary works which are essential to arrive at an understanding of the policies and practices of the British Raj during his time.

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## Unit 4 : Reading Rudyard Kipling's "The Man Who would be King"

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### Unit Structure:

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 Context and Background
- 4.4 Summary
- 4.5 Characters
- 4.6 Themes
- 4.7 Symbols
- 4.8 Summing Up
- 4.9 Sample Questions
- 4.10 References and Suggested Readings

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### 4.1 Objectives

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After reading this unit the student will be able to

- *understand* the context of "The Man Who Would Be King"
- *appreciate* the story "The Man Who Would Be King"
- *identify* the important themes in the story
- *explain* the important symbols in the story.

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### 4.2 Introduction

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"The Man Who Would Be King" is a short story written by Rudyard Kipling. It was first published in *The Phantom Rickshaw and Other Tales* in 1888. It also appeared in *Wee Willie Winkie and other Child Stories* (1895) and has been adapted for other media a number of times. The story has been recognized as one of his best early stories. It illustrates Kipling's skill that

allows him to transform what looks like an apparently simple tale into a piece of fiction that operates at multiple levels. The story is narrated by a British journalist living in India. It tells the tale of a two people, a pair of adventurers who, for a brief while, become kings of a native tribe Kafiristan in a remote part of Afghanistan. The story presents the theme of friendship and British imperialism. It also explores the theme of ambition and the kind of things people do to achieve the same. The story offers a psychological insight into the lives of ordinary soldiers and their everyday problems and issues. Kipling had written a number of such stories that portrayed the ironic conditions of British Indian and highlighted the cultural disparities between the colonial rulers and their subjects.

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### 4.3 Context and Background

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At the time of the writing the story, India was part of the British Empire. The English arrived in India and established of the East India Company as early as the 1600s. With the expansion of trade and commerce, they soon began exercising greater control on India. The colonial project aimed to bring together the entire subcontinent under British rule. During Kipling's time the British rule over India was popularly known as the Raj. This lasted formally from 1858 to 1947. British citizens enjoyed superior status than the natives who were looked down upon and not considered as equal. They introduced English language and culture to the natives. India adopted the English language that soon became the language of instruction in most schools as well as official work. Many Anglo-Indians also learned the native languages, the chief among which was Hindi. Since Kipling spent his initial years of childhood in Indian and later returned to join his profession, he was proficient in Hindi. He took keen interest in the lives of the Indian people irrespective of their social and class status. He used this knowledge to write about the people of India as is evident in his many literary works.

Kipling was an imperialist and held a racist view of the Indians despite the fact that he was also sympathetic to their condition. He had described India as one of the “*dark places of the earth, full of unimaginable cruelty*”. His exposition of the “the white man's burden” to improve the conditions of the indigenous people (and by extension all colonized people) has been shrouded in controversy. He argued that the colonial powers had a moral responsibility to instill the values and ideologies of Western civilization



in the so-called “inferior” nations. For Kipling the Indians were an inferior race and he despised their “unclean habits and immoral characters.” While his depiction of the non-whites has disturbed the modern readers, it is the attitude that justifies characters Peachey and Dravotin “The Man Who Would Be King” as they embark on their empire-building exploits in Afghanistan.

Many critics claim that “The Man Who Would Be King” was inspired by the real-life adventures of Josiah Harlan (1799–1871). He was an American from Pennsylvania who ventured to Afghanistan and later became involved in Afghan politics. From 1827, for almost fifteen years, Harlan engaged in espionage and political machinations in both Afghanistan and the Punjab. In Afghanistan he met the Hazaras, an Afghan tribe. They lived in the province of Ghor, a region near western Afghanistan. They recruited Harlan to muster an army to defeat their enemies. Harlan laid down a condition that he would do so only if he is required that he is named their king. Thus, Harlan later was given the title of the Prince of Ghor in 1839. During his lifetime he retained this title and later handed down to his descendants.

Noted Kipling scholar, David Gilmour, states that Kipling heard Harlan’s story from another Freemason whom he met in India. He set his tale in Kafiristan, a mountainous region that begets heavy rainfall. It lies in eastern Afghanistan and is called Nûrestân in the present day. When the ruler of Afghanistan conquered the region he named it Kafiristan which means “the land of the Infidels.” The name is derived from the word *kafir*, which is an Arabic term for a non-Muslim non-believer. When the Kafirs eventually converted to Islam, the region was renamed Nûrestân, which means “Land of Light.”

“The Man Who Would Be King” belongs to the genre of adventure fiction. In such works there are one or more characters and the story revolves around the challenges and risks they face and eventually overcome using their inner strength and wit. The protagonists may be ordinary people who, when confronted with dangerous situations, use wits and bravery to save their lives and escape the situation. The action is usually fast-paced and entertaining and oftentimes the reader is able to identify with the protagonist.

### **Stop to Consider**

Some popular examples of adventure fiction include Alexandre Dumas’s *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844–46) and *The Three Musketeers* (1844); Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* (1881–

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82); Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870) and *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1863), Jack London's *Call of the Wild* (1903), Michael Punke's *The Revenant* (2002) and Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park* (1990).

#### Check Your Progress

1. What is adventure fiction?
2. Mention a few writers and their works that belong to the genre of adventure fiction.

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#### 4.4 Summary

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“The Man Who Would Be King” is an adventure story told in the past tense. The story is about the ambitious plan of a man to become a king and the exciting adventures he and his companion experience and undergo during the process. It is told in the first person, frequently from the perspective of an unnamed frame narrator who interacts with the in the story. The two protagonists are Peachey Carnehan and Daniel Dravot. Interestingly, the narrative becomes a story within a story when Peachey narrates the events in Kafirstan that lies in Afghan territory and that eventually leads to his departure. The narration then returns to the frame narrator so that the story can reach its conclusion. The epigraph that opens the narrative echoes Masonic ideas on equality and is central to understanding the comradeship between the narrator and the protagonist as well as to comprehend the narrator’s act of putting Carnehan in the asylum towards the end of the story.

#### Stop to Consider

A frame narrative is a story told within a story. Typically, one story is told by the protagonist and the other is told by a narrator or a relatively minor character. The various narratives intertwine to provide greater context, as well as multiple points of view about the characters and events in the story. In “The Man Who Would Be King” there are two frame narratives: that of the narrator and that of Carnehan.

The story is set in 19<sup>th</sup> century India. The narrator of the story is a British Indian newspaper journalist who works as a correspondent of paper called “The Northern Star.” This is an autobiographical element in the story for Kipling himself was working as a reporter at the time of writing the story. The story begins with the narrator revealing that he knows a certain king who had once offered him the chance to rule a kingdom. Today, that king—”my King” says the narrator—is dead. Once, while he was travelling to some native Indian states on an intermediate-class car, he meets a “wanderer and a vagabond”, who enters the car and regales the narrator with tales of his many adventures in the remotest corners of India. The man requests the narrator for a favor. He wanted a message delivered to a red-haired friend at Marwar Junction. Reluctantly the narrator agrees. A few days later, the narrator meets the red-haired man in a second-class train carriage at the station. He delivers the message: “He has gone South for the week.” Late one steamy Saturday night, when the narrator, charged was alone in his office when he notices two unkempt and disheveled men standing outside. He recognizes his train carriage companion. The latter introduces himself Peachey Tolliver Carnehan and his red-haired friend as Daniel Dravot, “the less said about our professions the better, for we have been most things in our time.” Carnehan is a

a huge gentleman, . . . a wanderer and a vagabond like myself, but with an educated taste for whiskey. He told tales of things he had seen and done, of out-of-the-way corners of the Empire into which he had penetrated, and of adventures in which he risked his life for a few days’ food.

Dravot is “a big man with a red beard, and a great swell he is. . . We have been all over India, mostly on foot. We have been boiler-fitters, engine-drivers, petty contractors, and all that . . .” They are larger-than-life adventurers; Dravot is a conman and casual worker living in India while Carnehan is a self-described loafer and occasional worker living in India. Both are brothers in the Masons fraternal order of which the narrator too is a member. He listens to their tale of woe and agrees to help them. They had planned to blackmail a minor rajah. However, he later regrets his decision and decides to inform the authorities about them.

A few months later both Dravot and Carnehan visit the narrator’s office in Lahore and tell him of the plan they had hatched. They declare that after all these years of trying their hands at various things and professions they that

India “isn’t big enough for such as us.” So they had decided to go to Kafiristan and become “kings in their own right.” Dravot would disguise himself as a mad priest and Carnehan would pretend to be his servant. They said,

We have slept over the notion half a year, and require to see Books and Atlases, and we have decided that there is only one place now in the world that two strong men can Sar-a- whack. They call it Kafiristan. By my reckoning its the top right-hand corner of Afghanistan, not more than three hundred miles from Peshawar. They have two and thirty heathen idols there, and we’ll be the thirty-third. It’s a mountainous country, and the women of those parts are very beautiful.

Together, they would go to the unexplored region armed with twenty Martini-Henry rifles and their knowledge of the British military. On reaching there, they would find a king or chief. They would help him defeat his enemies but soon they would take over everything for themselves for the people in Kafiristan are “an all-fired lot of heathens.” After disclosing their plan they ask the narrator to consult books, encyclopedias, and maps about the area so as to gain knowledge about the geography and landscape of the place. They argue that since the narrator had foiled their earlier scheme of blackmailing, he should do this for them as a favour. To convince him, they further state that because they are fellow Freemasons and thus he should help them. In order to prove to the narrator that they are in their sane minds and their plan is not a foolish one they show him the contract that they had drawn up between themselves. The “Contract” said that they would remain loyal to each other. They would also abstain from women and alcohol until their plan succeeds and they become kings:

This Contract between me and you persuing witnesseth in the name of God—Amen and so forth.

(One) That me and you will settle this matter together: i.e., to be Kings of Kafiristan.

(Two) That you and me will not while this matter is being settled, look at any Liquor, nor any Woman black, white or brown, so as to get mixed up with one or the other harmful.

(Three) That we conduct ourselves with Dignity and Discretion, and if one of us gets into trouble the other will stay by him.

Signed by you and me this day.

Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan.

Daniel Dravot.

Both Gentlemen at Large.

*Space for Learner*

### **Stop to Consider**

Freemasonry as a well-known social order that dates back to the guild of stoneworkers, or stonemasons, in the Middle Ages. The oldest reference to Freemasonry dates back to 1390. When the medieval cathedral building declined, the stoneworkers created an organization to help add fellowship among the stonemasons. This is a male-only organization or fraternity. It is a secret organization that has its own rituals, dress, phrases and manners of address. Freemasons address each other as “Brother.”

American cultural and literary historian Paul Fussell Jr. states that the Masonic Law in Freemasonry rests fundamentally on the “principles of self-mastery, order, and restraint” within a strict hierarchy. The Masons are ranked from the lowest level to the highest Master level.

### **Check Your Progress**

What did Dravot and Carnehan have when they thought India was not big enough?

The narrator finds them at the bazaar the next day. He is amused to see a mad priest behaving outrageously and recognizes him to be Dravot. The local people believe that mad priests bring good luck. A trade caravan headed towards Afghanistan decides to take the two men along with them. Dravot shows the narrator the twenty rifles he and Peachey have acquired to assure their conquest of Kafiristan meets with success. The narrator wonders whether the two men would survive or be killed in their adventure. Ten days later he receives a letter from a friend in Peshawar wherein he describes Peachey and Dravot’s popularity among the people in the caravans and he is convinced that the two men would be successful.

The story then moves forward to two years later. On a particularly hot summer night, the narrator notices someone who “crept to my chair what was left of a man. He was bent into a circle, his head was sunk between his shoulders, and he moved his feet one over the other like a bear.” It was Carnehan. He is now a broken man. He has turned into a cripple, a beggar clad in dirty and torn rags. He begged for a drink, his words slurred and he did not seem to be in the right state of mind but called himself the King of Kafiristan. He begins to narrate a story that goes something like this: he and Dravot had gone to Kafiristan and finally succeeded in becoming kings. He cautions that his tale may be erratic because “my head isn’t as good as it might be ... They drove nails through it.” They travelled through dangerous mountains and valleys and discovered the Kafirs who are described as “utter brutes ... a mixed lot ... it won’t help us to know the names of their tribes.” They raided and plundered the villages all the while driven by their dream of building a nation or, perhaps, even an empire. Together they attacked two groups of fighting natives in a valley with their rifles and even killed some of them. After the bloodshed, Dravot “shook hands all around to make them friendly like” and ordered the other natives to carry the boxes of rifles up a hill “where there were ... stone idols,” including Imbra, most important god of the natives. Dravot laid a rifle at Imbra’s feet and declares to the assembled group, “All these old jim-jams are my friends.” The Kafirs were impressed by the arms and ammunition. They had never seen the guns and rifles that both men carried and so they were struck with awe and wonder. They also realized that, unlike them, Dravot did not fear their Pagan gods. The color of the skin was whiter than the natives, “*so hairy and white and fair it was just shaking hands with old friends.*” It did not take them long to conclude that Carnehan and Dravot are not ordinary mortals. The two men conquer other valleys and expand their kingdom. They train the men of the villages to form a disciplined military force. They cunningly exploit the enmity among tribes to use their discord as an opportunity to expand their kingdom. They help the chiefs fight their enemies and thus win the trust and loyalty. Dravot realizes that “this is a tremenjus business” as they now have a “whole country” to rule. Dravot now wears a gold crown. The local people believe him to be a god and the son of Alexander the Great. They also believe that Carnehan is Dravot’s younger brother and, therefore, also a god. Dravot offers a gold crown decorated with turquoise, amber, and garnets to Carnehan who tries it on but decides that it is “too small and too heavy.”

**Stop to Consider**

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Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE), a Macedonian king, was a well-known ruler who conquered much of the eastern Mediterranean region, Egypt, the Middle East, and parts of Asia in a remarkably short period of time. He conquered Egypt, where he was welcomed and proclaimed a pharaoh (a god), and overthrew the mighty Persian Empire. Under his rule significant cultural changes were introduced in the land that contributed greatly to the course of the region's history. The Kafiris identify Dravot with Alexander and worship him as a god.

*Space for Learner*

### **Check Your Progress**

1. Briefly describe the terrain of Kafiristan?
2. Who is Imbra?

Dravot decides to end the fight between the chiefs and calls them over. He introduces Carnehan to two native chiefs namely Billy Fish and Bashkai. When Carnehan shakes hands with them He realized that two chiefs return the Masonic handshake of “the Craft” he offers. He also notes that the chiefs know the Fellow Craft Grip but not the Master Grip. Dravot informs Carnehan that the chiefs know the secret Masonic word, and they have even carved the Masonic marks on the idol stones. In a meeting the following night Carnehan senses the chief's kepticism about his and Dravot's status. His fears are soon dispelled when Dravot puts on the Master Craft apron and the chiefs fall on their faces to worship him. The chiefs' beliefs are further confirmed when they discover the same mark on Imbra's stone as on Dravot's apron. Dravot declares himself “Grand-Master of all Freemasons in Kafiristan ... and King of Kafiristan equally with Peachey” and both men put on their jeweled golden crowns. With time the kingdom expands but Dravot becomes more and more obsessed with this new-found power and the authority it brings. He becomes more and more ambitious and wants to be the “Emperors ... of the earth.” His lust for power leads him to imagine the queen of England honoring him as he gives her his golden crown:

I'll take a census in the spring if the priests don't get frightened. There must be a fair two million of 'em in these hills. The villages are full o' little children. Two million people — two hundred and fifty thousand fighting men — and all English! They only want the rifles and a little drilling. Two hundred and fifty thousand men, ready to cut in on Russia's right flank when she tries for India! ... When everything was ship-shape, I'd hand

over the crown — this crown I'm wearing now — to Queen Victoria on my knees, and she'd say:— "Rise up, Sir Daniel Dravot."

Carnehan realises that Dravot is now beyond control. The latter's superior attitude annoy him.

As they continued to be revered and worshipped by the villagers, Carnehan and Dravot enjoy the fruits of their exploits. However, their happiness was short-lived when Dravot decided to marry a Kafiri girl because he realized he needed a son to carry on his royal lineage, "a Queen to breed a King's son for the King. A Queen out of the strongest tribe, that'll make them your blood brothers, and that'll lie by your side and tell you all the people thinks about you and their own affairs. That's what I want." He further asserts that marriage with a Kafiri woman is acceptable because Kafiris are pale-skinned, thus highlighting the story's theme of colonial superiority. Carnehan advised him against it but to no avail. He decided that kingship going into Dravot's head and he had lost sense of who he really was. The girl chosen for marriage was terrified by the idea of marrying a god. During the wedding ceremony when Dravot asks the girl to kiss him. The terrified girl sinks her teeth into the side of Dravot's face causing him to bleed. Seeing him bleed thus, the priests cried that he was "Neither God nor Devil but a man!" The Kafiris were angered and soon turned against Dravot and Carnehan. A few of the Kafiris continued to remain loyal to the two, but they were soon overpowered and the two kings were captured. Dravot was made to stand on a rope bridge over a gorge,

They marched him a mile across that snow to a rope-bridge over a ravine with a river at the bottom. . . . They prodded him behind like an ox. . . . Out he goes, looking neither right nor left, and when he was plumb in the middle of those dizzy dancing ropes, 'Cut, you beggars,' he shouts; and they cut, and old Dan fell, turning round and round and round, twenty thousand miles, for he took half an hour to fall till he struck the water, and I could see his body caught on a rock with the gold crown close beside.

Carnehan was crucified between two pine trees,

They used wooden pegs for his hands and his feet; and he didn't die. He hung there and screamed, and they took him down next day, and said it was a miracle that he wasn't dead. They took him down—poor old Peachey that hadn't done them any harm—that hadn't done them any . . .



Peachey's survival convinces the Kafirs that a miracle had just happened and they let him go. He then slowly made his way to India, begging and borrowing for survival. To prove that his tale is true, Peachey shows Dravot's severed head and golden crown to the narrator:

He fumbled in the mass of rags round his bent waist; brought out a black horsehair bag embroidered with silver thread; and shook therefrom on to my table—the dried, withered head of Daniel Dravot! The morning sun that had long been paling the lamps struck the red beard and blind sunken eyes; struck, too, a heavy circlet of gold studded with raw turquoises, that Carnehan placed tenderly on the battered temples.

“You behold now,” said Carnehan, “the Emperor in his habit as he lived—the King of Kafiristan with his crown upon his head. Poor old Daniel that was a monarch once!”

### **Check Your Progress**

How do the Kafiris discover that Dravot was a mere mortal?

Before he left, he takes the head and crown with him, swearing that he would never sell them. The next day the narrator sees Carnehan again, “I saw a crooked man crawling along the white dust of the roadside, his hat in his hand, quavering dolorously after the fashion of street-singers at Home.” He was crawling along the road in the hot noon sun with his hat off. The narrator concludes that the “poor wretch” Carnehan has lost his mind and decides to send him to the local asylum. When he inquires about the latter's health with the Superintendent of the Asylum two days later he is told that Carnehan has died due to sunstroke. The authorities could find no belongings on him.

### **Stop to Consider**

Asylums were a new innovation in medical care in the 19th century. At the time of the story, a belief existed that those with mental illnesses could be cured. When the narrator witnesses Carnehan crawling on the roadside in the hot sun with his hat in his hand singing “The Son of Man goes forth to war, / A golden crown to gain,” he realizes that he had no choice but to act like a “Brother” and help Carnehan.

*Space for Learner*

## 4.5 Characters

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**Narrator:** The narrator is a journalist who works for an English-language newspaper in colonial India. He is also a Freemason and this unites him in Masonic brotherhood with Peachey and Daniel. Although he has misgivings about their, he is the one constant presence in their lives until Carnehan returns to narrate his adventure.

1. **Peachey Carnehan:** Peachey Carnehan is an Englishman who does occasional odd jobs to sustain a living in colonial India. He is a member of the Freemasons and this connects him to the narrator. Extremely talkative and fearless in nature, Carnehan is adventurous and a risk-taker. His story-telling skills animate the story.
2. **Daniel Dravot:** Daniel Dravot is a British scam artist in colonial India. Like Carnehan he too is a Freemason. He is elevated to the rank of a god in Kafiristan but his scheming ways lead to his death. As a ruler he was just and fair, but his pride and lust for power lead to his end.

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## 4.6 Themes

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### 1) Imperialism and Civilization:

Both characters, Dravot and Carnehan, are products of British imperialism. Like the author they have lived for many years in India during the Raj. It is therefore but natural for them to embark on a nation-building project that mirrors the civilizational endeavors of the British in India. The conquest of a non-western society is based on the idea of the superiority of the west that is made more acute by the glaring disparities in the living conditions, cultures and social practices of the East. The inherent racism that Dravot and Carnehan display is reflective of Kipling's own outlook for which the latter has been severely criticized. Their desire to consolidate their empire in Kafiristan is premised on their superior notions of self, nationality and culture.

### 2. Power and Ambition:

The main characters in this story are guided by power and ambition that rests on a fantastical dream. In India they feel restricted by the British bureaucracy and thus decide to seek another country where can they rule and

live on their own conditions. At the same time they mirror the British imperialism in their desire to gain profit from the country or land they rule. Fuelled by ambition, they become recklessly determined to establish their own empire at all costs. Critics argue that Dravot and Carnehan's lust for power exposes the blind greed of the imperialists as well as their folly. Their strategy of "divide and control," that is also seen in the story, their ignorance of the landscape and environment, and their indifference to the concerns of the natives may seem humorous in the story but is clearly reflective of the vanity and arrogance of the British. For many "The Man Who Would Be King" is a sharp critique of British imperialist policies and methods.

### **3. White Superiority:**

Dravot and Carnehan's belief in the superiority of the white Europeans determine their attitudes and actions. Their mission to travel to distant and exotic lands and create an empire underlines their sense of superiority vis-a-vis the Afghans who need to be conquered and ruled for their greater good. The protagonist are surprised to discover that some local chiefs are "white and fair" unlike their assumptions. Despite the difference in their beliefs and practices, it is their fair kin that make them acceptable to Dravot and Carnehan. The fact that the non-white natives are looked upon as lesser beings and treated poorly reflects the racial contours of white supremacy. Interestingly, the notions of racial superiority and infallibility lead to the downfall of the protagonists. It may be mentioned here that the army that Dravot and Carnehan organize comprise of native soldiers. While they have been treated as ignorant and uncultured, the whites actually need them to strengthen their kingdom and consolidate their position and their so-called empire. The narrative can be read as an allegory on the failure of white imperialism.

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## **4.7 Symbols**

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### **1) The Master's Mark:**

The Master's Mark represents divinity but is also symbolic of dishonesty. Dravot achieves god-like status when he displays the mark on his apron that is present in the native god Imbra's stone as well. The Kafiris worship him and in their eyes he is a symbol of divinity. However, the mark also leads to his downfall. On being elevated to the status of a god, Dravot forgets his real self and becomes complacent in his newfound status. He does

not explain the source to the Master's Mark to the unsuspecting Kafiris and instead continues to enjoy their servitude while misleading them. The fraud that he commits in order to validate himself as the worthy ruler of his empire seals his fate. His exposure during the marriage ceremony was an inevitable moment that culminates with his death. Like his false Masonic mark, Dravot is a false god and thus had to be punished accordingly for his deception.

## **2. The Crown:**

The golden crowns that the protagonists wear are symbolic of what they consider to be their right to rule over Kafiristan. When Dravot wears the crown, he has dominion over his empire and is its undisputed ruler. When he is killed, the crown falls off his head and so does all power, ambition and authority. He no longer commands the Kafiris but is at their command instead for they decide his fate. In a reversal of fortune, Dravot is now at the mercy of those very people he dominated and exploited. He no longer remains a god or a king but becomes an ordinary mortal who is destroyed by his unrelenting ambition. The crown symbolizes greed. It is made up of gold and inlaid with a number of precious stones that is representative of man's lust for power and luxury. Carnehan carefully retains the crown after the death of his friend but when the story ends with Carnehan's own demise, the narrator is told that the dead man did not possess any belongings. Perhaps the crown was lost or stolen. The larger implication here is that wealth and power are momentary and should not determine the course of human life.

## **3) The Contract:**

The contract or "contract" symbolises the moral values at the heart of the imperial project. During their rule of the subcontinent the British were guided by a set of moral codes of conduct that forbade any breach of the ethical standards that are central to the white community. While the contract justifies the project of the protagonist, greed and lust for power pushes Dravot to forgo the terms of the contract and seek a wife. He thus violates the rules set by him, thus becoming an exemplar for others to follow. Unable to remain true to his own terms and conditions Dravot pays with his life and reminds the reader that when one fails to uphold the values one stands for the downfall is quick and dreadful.

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## 4.8 Summing Up

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In this unit we have discussed Kipling’s popular short story “The Man Who Would be King.” It is an adventure story that throws light on the imperialist psychology of man that leads the two protagonists, Dravot and Carnehan, to seek new lands and set up their kingdom. We have also discussed the story’s context, genre, characters, themes and symbols. Their death in the end symbolizes the failure of the imperial project of the white man as it is premised on greed, ambition and racial supremacy—all of which are detrimental to the organic unity and development of the humankind

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## 4.9 Sample Questions

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1. Discuss the comradeship between the three main characters in the story.
2. What ideas does Kipling suggest about the British imperial project when he labels the story’s proponents as thieves and “rogues?”
3. What is the significant of the contract?
4. Attempt a reading of this story together with Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Do the two narratives display a shared understanding of the “white man’s burden”? How?
5. Examine the role of women in the story. Also consider the attitudes of Carnehan and Dravot towards them.

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## 4.10 References and Suggested Readings

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## **Unit 5 : Angela Carter: “The Tiger’s Bride” (Background)**

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### **Unit Structure:**

- 5.1 Objectives**
- 5.2 Introduction to Angela Carter**
- 5.3 Biographical Sketch**
- 5.4 Angela Carter as a Novelist**
- 5.5 Angela Carter as a Short Story Writer**
- 5.6 Other Works of Angela Carter**
- 5.7 Summing Up**
- 5.8 References and Suggested Readings**

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### **5.1 Objectives:**

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This unit aims to acquaint the learners with Angela Carter, one of the most well-known English writers. The unit will provide a comprehensive view of the author as a novelist and a short story writer along with briefly mentioning her other creative pursuits. The objectives of this unit are:

- *to situate* Angela Carter as an author and map her position in the literary canon.
- *to outline* a biographical sketch of Angela Carter along with a brief discussion of the critical reception of her works.
- *to introduce* the range and variety of Carter’s literary inspirations and works.
- *to discuss* the different genres of creative output produced by Carter including short story, novel etc.
- *to critically* analyse the way Angela Carter’s literary oeuvre represents a constant shift and improvisation of the conventions of various literary genres.

## 5.2 Introduction to Angela Carter

Angela Carter (1940-1992) occupies a liminal or in-between space in the canon of twentieth century English Literature. Carter's literary oeuvre has been studied from various perspectives of literary criticism, such as, postmodernism, deconstruction, feminism, eco-criticism, gothic fiction and popular literature etc. Carter's way of living, her robust energy along with her peculiar choice of subjects for literary creation had naturally positioned her away from the 1960s preoccupation with realism in the post-war period. Her experimentations with forms and genres such as fantasy, fairytales, gothic, science fiction and horror made her prose blur the boundaries of what is generally considered high-brow and popular literature.

### Stop to Consider

**Post-War British Literature:** World War II had a tremendous impact on the British literary scene. The effects and futility of War were some of the most important issues dealt with in the immediate years after the war. There was an inertia that crept in along with the romantic glorification of past Victorian literary aesthetics. This slump and pessimism in literature and literary criticism changed after in the 1970s the French theoretical tradition made its way into Britain's literary scholarship. The concepts developed in the works of Althusser, Barthes and Derrida inspired newer ways of looking at texts. The different genres of literature such as poetry, short story, novels, drama etc. were all revamped with fresh, contemporary as well as relevant subjects and techniques to the texts. Some of the subject matters of Post War British Literature are, war stories, modernist self-reflexivity, economic crisis, postmodern aesthetics, political critique of totalitarian regimes, postcolonialism, magic realism etc. Here are a few of the most notable practitioners of literature of that era— Ted Hughes, John Osborne, Kingsley Amis, George Orwell, Angela Carter, Salman Rushdie, Martin Amis etc.

### High-Brow literature:

The term 'high-brow' literature denotes the division between what is considered more culturally worthy and classically accepted text as opposed to the low-brow popular texts. In postmodern context the term also signifies class bias and arbitrary classification of the norm and the deviance.



Her work often carried a subversive radical feminist perspective which was considered to be ahead of her time. All these definitely contributed to the narrative that she was not appreciated in her life time and only when she breathed her last battling lung cancer at 51, did the world woke up to her brilliance. Her biographer notes how, within days of her passing, the bookshelves carrying her books at the shops, were emptied and a massive interest engulfed the universities with scholars wanting to study her work. Because of all these reasons her journey into the British literary canon had been unique, it was as if an outsider had suddenly been welcomed inside with all her quirks and transgressions. In his “Introduction” to *Angie Carter*, Linden Peach suggests, “As the author of a collection of essays entitled “Nothing Sacred”, Carter would probably have found her own canonisation amusing. She would have found less amusing, however, that as a result she is frequently misunderstood” (02).

In a true postmodernist fashion, Carter employed ways of reading folk literature through deconstruction which laid bare the indefinite possibilities of meaning.

### **Stop to Consider**

**Deconstruction:** Deconstruction is way of reading where the text is not believed to be bound to any singular stable meaning. Deconstruction emphasises on the need to read in between the lines and map out gaps and absences of representation and approach in any given text. Deconstruction rejects the idea of a fixed way of interpretation and analysis. Some of the most significant thinkers of deconstruction are Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida.

She also reimagined conventional structures to unearth newer ways of significance, specially reading hidden agenda of patriarchal conditioning and worldview. Her short story collection *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) is a pioneering work in that direction. Carter’s novels were informed by many philosophical and intellectual school of thought that were gaining prominence in the post-war Britain. The ideas of new-realism, second wave feminism, psychology, philosophy and renaissance literature have influenced her work. Heavily laden with intertextuality and allusions her fiction also reflected her scholarship and academic prowess. The genres relegated to the margins of

mainstream literature such as gothic, science fiction, and mysteries etc, found their echo in Carter’s fiction. Carter’s early career marks her foray into poetry, some which carried seeds of her later fiction. However, her career as a poet was rather short lived than her other creative pursuits. Nevertheless, like her other works, her poetry too carried a sense of the time and place she inhabited, an urban and gloomy postwar Britain stifled and devastated by the ravages of a changing world. Her poetry collections are named *Five Quiet Shouters* (1966), and *Unicorn* (1966).

Apart from creative literature, Carter’s non fictional work such as translations, travel writing, journalistic pieces, criticism and essays exhibit the intellectual prowess of the author. As a radical feminist writer who broke down age-old straightjackets of genre boundaries, structures and meaning making tools, Angela Carter’s world view and literary legacy is incredibly relevant in the contemporary times. The following units are an attempt to read the range and reach of her in a systematic way, so that the learners get a chance to acquaint themselves with the “high sorceress” and “benevolent white witch” of English literature (Rushdie qtd. In Gordon “Introduction”, *The Invention xv*).

#### SAQ

- (a) What do you understand by the term ‘canon’? How do you think a canon is configured in any age of literature?
- (b) Have come across the term Popular Literature before? What do you think constitutes popular literature?

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### 5.3 Biographical Sketch

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Angela Carter was born Angela Olive Stalker, in Eastbourne on May 7<sup>th</sup> in 1940. Her parents were Sophia Olive and Hugh Alexander Stalker. Sophia was a cashier and Hugh a journalist. Angela spent many of her childhood formative years with her maternal grandmother, who used to tell her fairytales. She attended school at Streatham and Clapham High School, in south London and later attended the University of Bristol to study English literature. She began her career in journalism early on and married Paul Carter in 1960. Paul was an avid follower of the upcoming folk music scene of England, and sometimes the couple sang together. Their marriage ended in 1972, and Carter

spoke negatively about her time with her husband, citing lack of intimacy and support for her writing career. Carter's second husband was a construction worker name Mark Pearce, whom she married in 1977 and they had their only child, Alexander.

Carter was fluent in French and German and she travelled extensively. Her academic career included years spent at universities such the University of Sheffield, Brown University, the University of Adelaide, and the University of East Anglia as a writer in residence. Besides her fiction, Carter contributed many articles and work of nonfiction to fields like women studies and cultural studies. Considered too ahead of her time in her ideology of feminism, Carter has admitted her lived experience in her assigned gender role as a woman has informed the politics of her work.

*Space for Learner*

### **Stop to Consider**

**Feminism:** The idea of feminism can be viewed both as a theory as well as socio-cultural activism, probing and demanding gender parity in the frameworks of social justice and human rights. Feminist literary criticism critiques the patriarchal ideology and gender discrimination inherent in any text. By uncovering the prejudiced representation of women, feminist literary criticism studies and exposes the way women have been systematically subjugated. Since its inception as a school of thought feminism has evolved to include a diverse range of concerns of women across region, race and ethnicities. Some of the pioneering names in the field of feminist literary criticism are Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, Simon de Beauvoir etc.

Angela Carter led a pretty bohemian lifestyle and known to smoke quite heavily. The great writer died of lung cancer in 1992 at the age of 51. Many critics argue that only after her death the world has woken up to her genius and her readership has continued to rise.

### **Check Your Progress**

- (a) Do you think Angela Carter was a neglected as a serious writer during her life time?
- (b) What made Angela Carter's popularity as a writer rise after her death?

## 5.4 Angela Carter as a Novelist

In her short career, Angela Carter authored several beautifully written novels which have garnered significant critical acclaim despite their short length; they are titled *Shadow Dance* (1966), *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), *Several Perceptions* (1968), *Heroes and Villains* (1969), *Love* (1971), *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972), *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and *Wise Children* (1991). Commenting on the individuality of each of Carter's novels and thereby the difficulty of labelling them in any particular way Linden Peach writes,

Carter's literary career defies summary and her novels deny, resist and subvert definitions and frames of all kinds - literary, cultural, social, sexual, religious, ontological. She does not write from a particular worldview and throughout her work sociohistorical assumptions and conventions which have prescribed and organised our thinking are disrupted. (Introduction 06).

The novel *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and its success solidified Carter's position as one of the greatest in the history of English literature. The novel is significant for many reasons, such as the unreliable narrator with mysterious origin story, her magical abilities and curious exploits, the turn of the century setting (the novel was set in 1899) and the associated political symbolism and many more. The female narrator-protagonist of the novel Sophie Fevvers is a world-renowned aerialist who claims to be part bird and part human. She is being interviewed by Jack Walser, who wants to discover her true identity. The novel is divided into three parts documenting their adventures. Carter is known to incorporate both fact and fantasy in her fiction and the turn of the century debate on women suffrage finds its symbolic representation in the text,

The arguments centred on the question of whether women were fundamentally different to men – meeker and gentler, less able to cope with the knotty complexities of politics – or whether they had merely been forced to assume that role, to disguise their natural abilities and intelligence, just as Fevvers has to pretend she can't fly. (Gordon 324)

The narrative technique of employing an unreliable narrator and multiple narratorial viewpoints aids the author's exercise in postmodern rejection of singular meaning and grand narrative. The novel is key to understanding Carter

as a writer. However, besides being lauded for its ingenuity, the unconventional subject matter as well as narrative technique, the novel was also criticised as an exercise in postfeminism by Carter.

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### **Stop to Consider**

**Postfeminism:** The term ‘postfeminism’ (or ‘post-feminism’) refers to the common place societal perception that a majority of (if not all) the aspirations of feminism have already been fulfilled, thereby rendering the need for further development of the movement obsolete. The use of the term is replete with negative connotations. Critics are divided on the proper definition of the term as it occupies a hazy middle space between feminism and its rejection. The idea of postfeminism sometimes stems from the limited understanding of the complexities and heterogeneity of feminism and the socio-historical context of its existence.

Carter used myths, legends, folklores as inspirations for her fiction and breathed new life into them through the use of intertextuality, reimagination and feminist point of view.

### **Stop to Consider**

**Myth:** Myth is a part of folklore, where the origin story of something is narrated. Mythical narratives are symbolic, and they appear to present real stories. However, their origins are unknown and they are heavily rooted in tradition and culture of a community’s belief systems whether religious or otherwise. Unlike legends myths are generally not about one specific character or person, rather they are about events or a broader narrative.

**Legend:** A legend is an old story or past story which is popular in a community or tradition, but often historically unverifiable. A legend can often be culture specific. Presented in realistic mode, legends are used to teach moral lessons through a particular incident or character and are infused with dramatic effect. The word has its origin in French.

**Folklore:** In general terms folklore refers to the traditional art, culture, literature, music etc. of a particular culture. French folklorist, Arnold van Gennep, believed that folklore was central to the understanding of a

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community's creative energy. Folklore has been studied by different disciplines from different paradigms. For example, from a literary perspective folklore could be studied for narrative technique, themes, subject matter etc., and on the other hand, in anthropology, folklore is often read to unearth historical and socio-cultural ritual and practices of a particular society.

Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton in their Introduction to *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter: Fiction, Femininity, Feminism* wrote, "Celebrated for her uncompromising fiction, Carter delved into the most unsettling depths of Western culture, only to transmogrify its myths and unleash its monsters" (1).

### SAQ

Why do you think Angela Carter's novels were criticised for being 'postfeminist'? Attempt a reasoned answer.

### Check Your Progress

- (a) What do you think Angela Carter wanted to achieve through her portrayal of Sophie Fevvers in *Nights at the Circus*?
- (b) Comment on the narrative technique of *Nights at the Circus*. Why do you think Carter employed multiple points of view in the narrative?

## 5.5 Angela Carter as a Short Story Writer

Angela Carter's short stories are representative of her growth and evolution as an academic as well as a writer. Carter often told stories about the margin from the perspectives of the marginal and her craft originated a new literary aesthetic. Her study of folklore, myth, gothic and her views on feminism have shaped the ideology of her stories. Many of her stories are replete with traits of postmodernism.

### Stop to Consider

**Postmodernism:** The term 'postmodernism' refers to a shift of aesthetics and perspectives in literature, literary theory, art, culture, music, philosophy etc. since the 1940's. In terms of literature postmodernism

signifies newer experimentations, a rebellion against the established worldview, demystification of any 'grand narrative' as well as refusal to accept the existence of objective knowledge. With the advent of postmodernism, the rigid boundaries of genre fiction started to get blurred and new innovations in science fiction, gothic fiction and horror stories were being introduced. Postmodernism celebrates heterogeneity, cultural in-betweenness and narrative openness. Newer techniques like 'magic realism' influenced fictional narratives, whereas literary theory and philosophy were influenced by 'structuralism' and 'deconstruction'. Jean Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* and Jean Baudrillard's *Simulations* have provided some of the most important ideas of postmodern philosophy. Some of the most prominent postmodernist writers are Martin Amis, John Fowles, Angela Carter, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Salman Rushdie etc.

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Angela Carter has multiple collections of short stories to her credit such as *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces* (1974), *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979), *Black Venus's Tale* (1980), *Black Venus* (1985) and her posthumous publication, *American Ghosts & Old-World Wonders* (1993).

Carter's travel through various regions of Asia, Europe and North America had shaped her life experiences and also in turn her politics. Carter's two years stay in Japan had influenced her in many ways. Japan's postwar society, the patriarchy and its effects on women made her more aware of the gender disparity and nudged her towards a more radicalised form of feminism. Japan was also the place where she met several exiled French surrealists, and who would go on to influence her work as well. Her short story collection, *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces* (1974), carried stories containing autobiographical inspirations. Critics often read three stories from the collection, "A Souvenir of Japan", "Flesh and the Mirror", and "The Smile of Winter" as a trilogy which dealt with the themes of solitude and loss. These stories were written immediately after Carter's divorce from her long-term husband and contained personal experiences of isolation and loss. These are unique in the sense that Carter didn't write many more such stories, in fact, her creative interests would soon change dramatically.

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*The Bloody Chamber and other Stories* (1979), winner of the Cheltenham Festival Literary Prize, is arguably Carter's best-known and most widely read work of short fiction. The anthology united Carter's interests in feminism, fairy tales, pornography, and anthropology. Each a meticulously curated postmodern retelling and revision of classic fairytales, the stories in this collection reshaped the way the readers looked at fairytales. The seed of inspiration for the collection was already there in the writer since her days as a Masters student of English literature. This, coupled with the fact that she was working on the book of translation *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault*, gave her the necessary framework for deconstructing and reimagining the tropes of folklore and fairytales. Apart from Perrault she also adapted Grimm's fairytales for the anthology.

#### Stop to Consider

**Adaptation:** Literary adaptation refers to the process of the conversion or transformation of an existing text into another text of a different genre or style. For example, when a film is based on a novel, we can call it an adaptation. Adaptation can be exact replica of a text or a creative re-imagination.

The anthology featured several cult female heroines of fairytales such as, Snow White, Beauty and Little Red Riding Hood. However, Carter's retellings are not achieved through a complete re-imagination. Instead, she unearths the latent tropes of misogyny, patriarchy and deviance implied in these stories, which are often produced from a stereotypical male perspective. By changing the narratorial voice and point of view, Carter creates a world which is curious of the gaps and silences of narrative.

#### Stop to Consider

**Narrator:** A narrator is an important element in any literary work, who communicates the story of the text to the readers. A narrator may or may not be a character in the text. However, the point of view of the narrator hugely influences the direction of a story. It would be worthwhile to mention that a narrator is not necessarily the author of a text, although it is so in some cases. Based on their function, there are different kinds of narrator such as, first person narrator, third person or omniscient narrator etc.



She creates a bridge between the mythic and the real, between the fantastical and political. Patricia Brooke writes about the impact of Carter's revisions in her essay "Lyons and Tigers and Wolves - Oh My! Revisionary Fairy Tales in the Work of Angela Carter",

Involved not only in exposing the repressive representations - of class, gender, or sexuality - implicit within many tales, Carter's revisions also work to reassess the narratives' composite parts, variously reconstructing them in order to posit multiple re-writings. Issues central to Carter include the construction of a feminist subjectivity defined as active rather than passive. (68)

"The Bloody Chamber" the titular story of the collection adapts the legend of Bluebeard, the mysterious French nobleman who murders his many wives. In adapting the legend Carter follows the old structure of the legend but endows the old symbols with new meanings as well as adds modern setting and nuanced character motivations. In the original legend when the newly wed heroine discovers the secret murder chamber of her husband the infamous marquis Bluebeard, she drops the key to the room on the bloody floor and stains it. Bluebeard finds out about her transgression from the enchanted blood-stained key and prepares to kill the heroine, but the heroine's brother saves her at the nick of time. In Carter's retelling the narrative explores themes of morality, ethics, sexual deviance, horror, virginity, female self-realisation and empowerment. The bloody chamber or the torture room is described in graphic details signalling the marquis's deviant desires. The mark, engraved on the heroine's forehead by the marquis with the blood-stained key to mark her for murder, also symbolises the loss of virginity and shame for her.

### **Stop to Consider**

**Symbolism:** Symbolism is a technique of literature where objects and occurrences are given suggestive meanings through representational imagery. The symbols are used by writers to convey deep and complex ideas which can't be expressed through the literal meaning of the object or word. A symbol can also supply multiplicity of meaning. For example, in many stories of *The Bloody Chamber*, Angela Carter has used the symbolism of jewellery, colour, flowers to refer to signify objectification of women, fear and sexuality and virginity respectively.

The climax of the plot introduces the most important deviations from the original, where instead of her brother, the heroine's mother comes riding a horse to rescue her. "The Bloody Chamber" presents a rich background of the character of the mother and builds her up to be resourceful enough to save her daughter at the end, thereby presenting a feminist revision of the story. The women of the story are presented to be well travelled, experienced, strong and resilient, so much so that the 'damsel in distress' doesn't need rescuing from any male. After the marquis is shot dead by the mother of the heroine, they open a music school in the castle, creating a modern happy ending.

The other stories of the collection such as "The Tiger's Bride", "The Snow Child", "The Werewolf" etc. too have been studied by scholars for their reinterpretation of classic fairytales and legends. Some of these tales are re-written from multiple perspectives by Carter to showcase the rich narrative possibilities embedded in their frameworks.

#### Check Your Progress

- (a) Do you think Angela Carter's short stories demand an unconventional reading? If so, how?
- (b) Can you identify themes of violence and the gothic represented in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and other Stories* (1979)? If yes, elaborate with some examples.

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### 5.6 Other Works of Angela Carter

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Apart from the short story collections and novels, Angela Carter was also a translator, and writer of non-fiction. She published her translation of Charles Perrault's fairy tales in 1977, titled *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault*, a work which is considered to have ignited her interest in revising and retelling fairytales. Her essays are a deeper dive into her position as a feminist writer. Some of her most significant contributions as a non-fiction writer are, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (1979), *Nothing Sacred: Selected Writings* (1982) and *Expletives Deleted: Selected Writings* (1992).

Carter's brand of radical feminism is crystallised in her work of non-fiction *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, which was

reprinted in America as *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*, 1979), The book expresses her feminist reading of the Marquis de Sade, an eighteenth-century French nobleman and author known for his sexually explicit novels. Eroticism and sexual liberation were important issues as well as source of literary inspiration for Carter and she argued that the elitist and literary high-brow sanctioned pornography stripped off of its subversive tendencies which would produce an effect of boredom. She advocated for a moral pornographer who would examine the relationship of the sexes,

A moral pornographer might use pornography as a critique of current relations between the sexes. His business would be the total demystification of the flesh and the subsequent revelation, through the infinite modulations of the sexual act, of the real relations of man and his kind. Such a pornographer would not be the enemy of women, perhaps because he might begin to penetrate to the heart of the contempt for women that distorts our culture even as he entered the realms of true obscenity as he describes it. (19-20)

Initially, Carter faced criticism for her reading of Sade's work as well as the themes of sexuality and violence that heavily informed her fiction. Eventually renowned writer and critics like Mary Kaiser, Margaret Atwood etc. offered a more nuanced reading of her work, situating them in the context of a broader historical and cultural landscape. Women's rights over her body, sexual autonomy, were some of the issues which Carter researched, wrote and advocated passionately about through her non-fictional work. Carter was closely associated with the cinematic adaptations of her work which also won considerable critical acclaim. Carter had also reflected on her ideas of feminism as well as her craft of storytelling in several of her essays, which are widely studied now in the field of Carter studies.

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### SAQ

- (a) How do you think Carter's views on women's rights over her body and sexual autonomy are reflected through her non-fictional works?
- (b) Identify some of the translation projects done by Carter. Do you think they have impacted Carter's fiction?

## 5.7 Summing Up

The previous units have tried to contextualise the author Angela Carter for the learners, through the detailed discussion of a few of her groundbreaking texts. A writer's career is shaped by various factors such as education, life experiences, socio-cultural environment etc. Angela Carter was destined for greatness and from a really early age she exhibited signs of it. Through the discussion of the many faceted writing oeuvre of Angela Carter, her genius as a truly visionary and rebellious writer is palpable. Among many things that she achieved through her writings, she changed the way people looked at genre fiction, she challenged naturalised patriarchal structure hidden in folklore and myths and she shattered the glorification of the passive female sexuality. Her legacy lives on as every new generation finds something unique and thought provoking in her work.

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## Unit 6 : Reading Angela Carter's "The Tiger's Bride"

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### Unit Structure:

- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Introduction to the Story
- 6.3 Reading the Text
- 6.4 Characters
- 6.5 themes
- 6.6 Narrative Techniques
- 6.7 Summing Up
- 6.8 References and Suggested Readings

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### 6.1 Objectives

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This unit intends to familiarise the learners with Angela Carter's short story, "The Tiger's Bride", along with the significant issues related to the text. The objectives of the unit are:

- *to introduce* the story and discuss its plot
- *to contextualise* the story so that the learners are acquainted with the intentions of the author as well as the relevance of the story in the contemporary times
- *to provide* a brief overview of the literary trends pertinent to the story
- *to discuss* the themes and narrative technique of the story

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### 6.2 Introduction to the Story

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A triumphant example of postmodern recreation and experimentation in content and narrative, Angela Carter's 1979 short story collection *The Bloody Chamber*, explores problematic frameworks of gender violence and patriarchy inherent in several cult fairytales. Carter's translation of Perrault's work, *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault* (1977) inspired her to revisit these stories

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and present them in newer light and fresh perspectives. The short story “The Tiger’s Bride” is a part of the anthology *The Bloody Chamber*. A revisionist take or retelling of the classic fairytale “Beauty and the Beast”, the structure of the “The Tiger’s Bride” has significant similarity with the old fairytale. However, Carter has introduced innovations in setting, narrative technique and character motivation and actions to present a quite unique story. Another story from the collection, “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon”, is also a retelling of “Beauty and the Beast”, but with a completely different approach.

### **Stop to Consider**

***Beauty and the Beast:*** “Beauty and the Beast” (French: La Belle et la Bête) was written by French novelist Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve in 1740. Later, in 1756 French novelist Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, republished a shorter version of it. Angela Carter’s “The Tiger’s Bride” is based on this later version. In “Beauty and the Beast”, Beauty’s father who was a widowed merchant who lost all his wealth in an ocean storm and was forced to live in the forest with his family hand to mouth. The beautiful, honest and well-read Beauty was envied by all her siblings, who were cruel and selfish. After spending years in the forest, Beauty’s father sets out on another journey hoping to recover his lost fortunes. He asks his children if they want him to bring anything back as gifts. Where the other children asked for expensive presents, Beauty only requested a rose. Unfortunately, the merchant couldn’t recover his fortunes, and on his way back had to take shelter in an unknown castle under a heavy storm. A hungry and battered merchant helped himself to the food set up in the table and rested the night there. The next morning when he saw a rose garden, he plucked one rose for his youngest daughter Beauty, but was suddenly confronted by the Beast, who was the owner of the seemingly abandoned castle. The Beast was angry and about to kill the merchant because of his attempted theft of his most precious roses. In exchange of his life the Beast demanded one of the merchant’s children. Out of all his children only Beauty agreed to go to the Beast to save her father. After arriving at the castle Beauty turned down multiple marriage proposals from the Beast, until she eventually fell in love with him and agreed. After that the Beast turned into the prince of Beauty’s dream and revealed the curse which made him transform into a Beast.



“The Tiger’s Bride” has attracted considerable critical attention for its nuanced portrayal of gender relations, and exposé of hidden themes of sexual violence. In terms of narrative voice and female autonomy, the story makes quite a few bold statements which secures its place in the annals of the greatest twentieth century English short stories.

The following sections discuss the story in greater detail, and also provide necessary contexts for its interpretation.

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### Check Your Progress

- (a) Explore the significant themes of the story “Beauty and the Beast”.
- (b) Write briefly about Angela Carter’s inspiration behind writing *The Bloody Chamber*.

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## 6.3 Reading the Text

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Before delving into the plot of “The Tiger’s Bride”, let us have a general understanding of plot and how it is different from a simple narrative account or story. The goal of a plot is to give structure and purpose to the storyline. Unlike a simple sequential story narrated chronologically; through a plot the writer leads the narrative to his or her desired concluding effect as well as manipulates the different parts and representation of characters within the story to hold the reader’s attention. The plot holds the various parts of the story together with the principle of cause and effect. The six basic elements of a plot are 1) exposition 2) inciting incident 3) rising action or progressive complications 4) dilemma 5) climax and 6) Denouement

A retelling of the classic fairy tale “Beauty and the Beast” (French: La Belle et la Bête) written by French novelist Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve in 1740, Angela Carter’s “The Tiger’s Bride” begins ‘in medias res’ with the heroine’s declaration, “My Father lost me to The Beast at Cards” (56).

### Stop to Consider

**In medias res:** “in medias res” is a Latin term which means ‘in the middle of things’. In literature, it refers to a story that begins suddenly in the middle and gradually fills in the gaps with flashbacks and expositional dialogues. The foremost examples of the use of the technique were observed in epics. John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* begins in medias res.

Narrated by the heroine, the story documents the journey of the heroine and her father from Russia to Italy. The heroine, who remains nameless throughout the story, narrates how her father's gambling addiction and adultery drove her mother to an early grave. To escape the cold winter of Russia they wanted to travel and reach a warmer place. However, much to their dismay the climate of Italy at that of the year was no better, and the heroine felt that the snow and the dark had followed them there as well. Their journey brought them to the city of The Beast, where everyone who passed through had to play a game of cards with the the Beast also referred to as the *grand seigneur* and Milord. The heroine regretted her decision to come to that remote place because it didn't have any casinos.

### Stop to Consider

**Fairy Tales:** Fairy tales are an integral part of oral folk literature. The Brothers Grimm, German philologists and cultural researchers were considered to be pioneers in the field of recording these oral tales in the early nineteenth century. The origins of fairy tale are not well known. Typically, a fairy tale in its written form is prose narrative documenting the journey of a hero or heroine, through many trials and adventures which culminates in a happy ending. The worlds of fairytales are often created with supernatural elements like magic and spells. These worlds are clever and nuanced representations of human nature.

Intoxicated and engrossed in the game, the father of the heroine gambled one item after another of his vast wealth and possessions. The heroine is exasperated at her father's careless abandon at pawning all his treasure with so much pleasure, "I watched with the furious cynicism peculiar to women whom circumstances force mutely to witness folly..." (56). The Beast seemed embarrassed of his appearance and tried to camouflage his beastly features with wigs, masks, gloves, scarves and a tail coat. The heroine observed that his mask painted with a human face appeared too symmetrical to be of a real human being. He wore a very powerful perfume which assaulted the senses and had a growling voice, which only his valet could decipher. The way the Beast carried himself also seemed a bit off to the heroine, "... he has an odd air of self-imposed restraint, as if fighting a battle with himself to remain upright when he would far rather drop down on all fours" (58). All of those anomalies made the heroine doubt the real identity of the Beast.

The heroine's father lost his possessions to the Beast one after another until nothing was left, except his daughter. And even though the father had proclaimed that he loved her dearly, he ended up staking her as a last resort and lost her to the Beast. Her father regretted his decision immediately and said, "I have lost my pearl, my pearl beyond price" (60). To this Beast's growling reply was, "If you are so careless of your treasures, you should expect them to be taken from you" (60). The valet brought a bouquet of white roses collected from his master's garden and offered them to the apprehensive heroine. When her father asked her for a rose as a sign of her forgiveness, and she offered him one but in doing so pricked her hand and the rose got smeared with her blood. She resented her father for putting her in such a position, "I drew the curtains to conceal the sight of my father's farewell; my spite was sharp as a broken glass" (61). The heroine was utterly humiliated and a passive witness to her fate up until then and travelled to the abode of the Beast thinking about the terms of her stay with the Beast and the nature of his beastliness.

As they arrived at the palazzo of the Beast, she noticed the poor and unkempt way the building stood. Some of the doors and windows were hanging broken by the hinges, the furniture and chandelier were covered with dust sheets, the pictures were turned facing the wall and the entire marble house was uninhabited. When they finally climbed up the stairs to the Beast's room, the heroine was exhausted. It was time for the valet to explain his master's wish to the heroine. After an initial brief awkward pause the valet shared that his master's only wish was to see the heroine's naked body for once, and after that she would be returned to her father along with the full compensation for his father's lost possessions and some additional gifts. The heroine let out a defiant laugh at that proposal and said that she would only agree to show her body from waist down in a dark room for once and that her face and upper body must be covered at all times. Her bravery made the Beast shed a single tear of shame and she was returned to her room, which resembled a prison cell devoid of any natural light. To keep her company the valet produced a mechanical soubrette, which had an uncanny similarity with the heroine. After a period of time had passed, the valet offered the heroine a single diamond earring which she threw away to the corner of her cell. The valet took her to the Beast for the second time and reiterated his wish to see the nude virgin skin of the heroine. Seeing her reluctance to do so, the Beast shed another tear and paced up and down outside her room. Then the valet offered her the second diamond earring which she threw away like the first one. The valet

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then informed her that the Beast wants to go riding with her, and the soubrette fished out a replica of the heroine’s old riding dress from the cupboards.

As they embarked on their riding the heroine felt more akin to the horses and her non-human companions than she ever did with anyone in her former life. She felt that both the animals and she as a woman were regarded inconsequential in a world privileging the human male. As they approached a river frozen in the winter, the valet informed her that since she had refused to show her naked body to the beast yet again, she would have to see the Beast naked instead. Seeing the desperation of the valet she consented. The Beast slowly disrobed and revealed itself in its true form, that of a tiger, and the witnessing the transformation the heroine was overwhelmed with emotion. Persuaded with a feeling of camaraderie she disrobed her upper body and was stopped by the Beast to go any further. After their return from the ride and hunt the Magic Mirror showed the heroine that her father had indeed been well compensated and was enjoying himself. The Beast had kept his promise and was planning to send her home. But the heroine realises that she didn’t want to go back. Instead, she wrapped herself in the fur coat and diamond earring gifted by the Beast and with the help of the valet, who had revealed himself to be an ape, entered the chamber of the Beast. The Beast was now in his tiger self and seemed afraid of her presence. After sensing the heroine’s acceptance of his true self, the he came near her and purred so loudly that the walls of the palazzo shook up. Then he began licking her with his coarse tongue, peeling multiple layers of her skin to uncover her beautiful fur.

**SAQ**

(a) Discuss the evaluation of ‘Fairy Tales’ in the present day context. (150 words)

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(b) Explore the different elements of a plot and their functions in the narrative of a story. (150 words)

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(c) In what ways the Plot of “The Tiger’s Bride”, differ from that of the French fairy tale “Beauty and the Beast”. (100 words).

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## 6.4 Characters

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Characters are integral to a story’s development and direction. The author has the ability to create and present the characters to set the world of his work as well as move the narrative through the situation, dialogue and monologue of the characters. One of the biggest functions of a character is to supply the flow of the narrative with motive. However, it would be worthwhile to mention here that the narrative doesn’t or may not endow each character with equal amount of importance or centrality, with a view to weave a focussed plot. That’s why, based on their degrees of significance the characters could be categorised into major and minor.

The characters of the story are nameless and referred to as their generic identities. Following is a brief discussion of each character mentioned in the story:

**The Heroine:** The term ‘heroine’ in literature denotes to the female protagonist of the text who is associated with admirable qualities and with whom the readers are expected to relate. In mythological texts and folklore, the term ‘heroine’ was used to refer to female characters who had supernatural abilities. Since it’s a retelling of the classic “Beauty and the Beast” story, the heroine of “The Tiger’s Bride” has also been called Beauty in critical works and reviews. However, her real name is never revealed in the story. Beauty is also the narrator of the story and hence quite central to the plot. Beauty has always been observed and objectified because of her attractive physical features. She recalls being admired by people and called a “Christmas Rose” (57). Even though Beauty is bartered off as a prize when her father lost to the Beast in the gambling game, she doesn’t completely surrender to the whims of the Beast. She is written as quite an intelligent character who from the beginning is very perceptive of the world around her, from her father’s shortcomings to the Beast’s fear of her. Her minute observation of the situation and characters around her give the author the desired outlet to present the

newer perspectives of looking at the age-old fairy tale tropes. Beauty doesn't accept the terms and conditions laid out to her by the Beast which is conveyed to her by the valet. Instead, she expresses her own conditions before submitting to the humiliating wish of the Beast to see her virgin naked body. And when it was time to go back to her father, she again takes a ground breaking decision not to go back to her immoral father. Her decision-making ability at crucial junctures of her life, gives her character an agency which is very characteristic of a feminist heroine. Angela Carter has successfully incorporated the ideas of choice and sexual autonomy through the character of Beauty.

**The Beast:** Also referred to as the *grandseigneur* and Milord, the Beast is one the most enigmatic characters of the story. Dressed in human attire to hide his features, it is quite evident from the beginning of the story that the Beast is something else behind all the outer façade. In fact, there is an almost desperate attempt to hide his true features and nature to fit in the human world. Wealthy and powerful, the Beast leads a lonely and mysterious life. His palazzo is devoid of anything living and threadbare. As the Beauty observes, "I saw The Beast bought solitude, not luxury, with his money" (63). Beauty's reluctance to remove her clothes elicits a form of shame in the Beast, and he drops a silent tear. He knows the value of Beauty and thus tells her father that he deserves to lose her, because he doesn't appreciate her value. After Beauty repeatedly refuses his wish to see her nude, the Beast reveals his true appearance as a massive tiger, in the horse riding and hunting trip. And after Beauty reveals herself without her upper clothes to him, he keeps his promise and returns everything that her father lost in the card game. The character of the Beast is quite central to the plot of "The Tiger's Bride". He represents the magical and the mysterious in this postmodern adaptation of a fairy tale, as well as embodies the tropes of uninhibited primal and sexual energy.

**Beauty's Father:** An embodiment of the cruder and less refined of the Russian nobility, the father of Beauty represented an unfortunate type of the male species. His reckless abandon towards his family and ancestral fortune, combined with his decadent lifestyle of gambling and womanising made his daughter resent him immensely. The actions of the father drove Beauty to humiliation and danger.

**Valet:** The character of the valet is quite important to the story as he functions as the Beast's interpreter to the rest of the world. He is the embodiment of many qualities like composure, loyalty and grace. Even though

he had to convey his master's strange wish to Beauty, his hesitation and awkwardness reflected his awareness of the nature and gravity of the wish. Towards the end of the story when both the Beast and the Beauty had forgone their outer garbs, the valet revealed himself to be an ape.

**Maid:** The maid was a mechanical soubrette or actor produced by the valet as Beauty's female companion. She bore an uncanny resemblance to Beauty, as Beauty calls her a "clockwork twin" ("The Tiger's Bride" 66). Dressed in proper ladylike attire the maid carried a small mirror in one hand and a powder puff in the other. But in the place of her heart there was a small musical box, and miniature wheels instead of feet. The valet exclaimed that the entire house was devoid of any human being and was filled with replicas. The Beauty observed that the maid was, "... a marvellous machine, the most delicately balanced system of cords and pulleys in the world" (66). Towards the conclusion of the story, it could be seen that the maid ceased to resemble Beauty. Beauty resolved that she would dress the maid in her own clothes and send her to her father to replace her. The character of the maid functions as a double or reflection of Beauty initially as like a mechanical doll, the flesh and blood beauty too was helpless and fated to act according to others. But towards the end of the story her unaltered mechanical way of being presents a counter to Beauty's changing worldview.

**Beauty's Mother:** Beauty's mother never makes any physical appearance in the story. The readers are introduced to her by Beauty's narration. Beauty inherited her graceful looks from her mother. She was married off to Russian nobility, but she didn't live long owing to her husband's nasty habit of gambling and womanising. She represents the generation of women crushed under the patriarchal expectations of marriage and family.

**Landlady:** The landlady of the lodge in the remote part of Italy, where Beauty and her father were staying. When the Beast sent the invitation to the Beauty's father it was the landlady who received the letter and exclaimed reading the envelop, "La Bestia!" ("The Tiger's Bride" 57).

**Nurse:** The English Nurse is mentioned in the story when Beauty is talking about her childhood, however she doesn't make any physical appearance in the story. The nurse used to scare Beauty when she acted up as a child, referring to a hairy tiger-man. To persuade the child to eat her vegetables the nurse threatened that unless she ate her vegetables the tiger man would come and gobble her up. The nurse represented a disciplinary figure in the heroine's life.

**Check Your Progress**

(a) What, according to you, is the significance of the character of the Maid in ‘The Tiger’s Bride’? (60 words)

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(b) Why do you think the Beast wants to see the heroine nude? Does the story provide any motive behind the Beast’s wish? (60 words)

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(c) Do you consider “The Tiger’s Bride” as a feminist text? (150 words)

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**6.5 Themes**

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In this section the learner will get acquainted with some of the themes and issues of the story. The themes discussed in this section are not exhaustive. The learners are encouraged to discover more such prominent themes from their further study.

**Postmodern Rewriting/Retelling:** The postmodern rejection of the grand or meta-narrative and absolute meaning inspired a trend of revisiting old texts in order to read possibilities of meaning and interpretation. The modern retelling of folk and fairy tales in the second half of the twentieth century is part of that tradition. In Carter’s rendition of the classic “Beauty and the Beast” fairy tale the structure, rules and metaphors of the original is broken down or altered to unveil newer significance of meanings. The characters, setting, motives and outcome are created and read from a different perspective. The demure Beauty of the original is re-imagined as a fierce young woman, as well as the interaction and power dynamics between the Beast and Beauty is more nuanced. Through the “The Tiger’s Bride” Carter’s fascination with fairytales and folklore found a platform to uncover themes of female sexual autonomy, human-animal relationship, etc. Rather than finding escape in the fantastical world of fairy tale, Carter aimed to critique the social and ethical bias inherent in them.



**Simulacra:** In postmodern culture the abundance of reproduction has made it impossible to distinguish the original from the imitation, replica or simulacra. In postmodern philosophy, Baudrillard talks about three orders of simulacra, and in the third or postmodern world the image or simulacra precedes the original, making reality and simulation hard to distinguish. “In *The Tiger’s Bride*”, the mechanical simulacra of the heroine is already present in the castle of the Beast, ready to serve her at the turn of a key. The valet explains that the world of the castle is a simulacrum, where they feel no need for anything original, “We surround ourselves, instead, for utility and pleasure, with simulacra. . .” (66). The old torn riding dress of the heroine is too already present in the castle, ready for use when needed.

**Intertextuality:** Intertextuality refers to the way a text is connected to other texts through different elements. In literary theory, intertextuality studies the way a text incorporates allusions of other texts to enhance or situate it. All the stories of the anthology “*The Bloody Chamber*” by Carter are revisions of fairytales. It is interesting to see how Carter had looked at the existing fairytales and the structural archetypes to present multiples ways of looking at a text. Both “*The Tiger’s Bride*” and “*The Courtship of Mr. Lyon*” takes “*Beauty and the Beast*” as source texts, but their treatment and point of view are markedly different. Rebecca Munford in her essay “*Angela Carter and the Politics of Intertextuality*” writes,

...Carter’s extensive and multifarious engagements with previous literary and cultural frameworks need to be reconsidered in light of a more complex understanding of her intertextuality as a feminist strategy – one that re-examines the correspondences between style and substance, between text and context, in her writing. (05)

**Gothic:** Gothic deals with the dark, fantastical, sinister and the macabre. Carter’s fascination with the gothic can arguably be connected to her admiration of American gothic author Edgar Allen Poe. “*The Tiger’s Bride*” achieves its mysterious and eerie effect through its setting. The dark, cold winters of Russia and Italy are described with poignant detail, so much so that the readers are transported to those locals through the narration. The Beast’s abandoned castle devoid of any living being also triggers fear. The heroine slowly realises through observation that The Beast can’t possibly be human and the valet suggests that, “Nothing human lives here” after producing the life less soubrette as her companion (66).

**Check Your Progress**

- (a) Identify the various tropes of gothic fiction in “The Tiger’s Bride”.
- (b) Do you think that the character of Beauty in “The Tiger’s Bride” represents a feminist heroine?
- (c) “I saw The Beast bought solitude, not luxury, with his money.” Explain the significance of this sentence.

**Lack of Individual Choice:** The first-person narration of “The Tiger’s Bride” brings out the lack of individual choice the heroine faces in every turn of the way. Her threats of escape or suicide for her predicament are casually dismissed by the valet, citing honour and her noble stature. Her rebellion started from actions like not acknowledging the Beast’s presence and indulging him with a smile, “I will not smile. He cannot smile” (64). And gradually she became more and more defiant, bringing the terrifying Beast to remorseful tears at his strange and unjust request. The heroine through the limited opportunities that she is gets chooses a life beyond human patriarchal world order at the conclusion of the story.

**Dualism:** The western society’s binary demarcation of the male and female, rational and emotional, human and animal etc. is represented in the story to bring out the hierarchy within that dualism. Also, the characters in the story through their transformations reveal the dualities within them.

**Sexuality:** Unlike the passive heroines of traditional folk and fairy tales, “The Tiger’s Bride” represents a heroine who though sexually naïve due to patriarchal society’s expectations, is intelligent enough to take control of her sexuality, “For now my own skin was my sole capital in the world and today I’d make my first investment” (62). She knows the value of her virginity and is courageous to take control of her fate. She submits to the Beast on her own terms and finds liberation in taking the reins of her sexuality.

**Gender:** Gender relations and objectification of woman are some of the key focus areas of the story. The women in the story, Beauty’s mother, Beauty, The Maid, The Nurse and the Landlady all are oppressed through patriarchal notions of chastity and moral code of conduct. Beauty’s mother lost her life to a womanising husband and Beauty was pawned off in an economic transaction. This objectification of woman and their sexuality is a prevalent theme in traditional folk and fairytale narratives. However, through Beauty’s character,

Carter has given autonomy of choice to the archetypal heroine. Beauty was by her own admission a wild child, who grew up to be intelligent and courageous.

*Space for Learner*

**Human-Animal Relations:** The human-animal relationship of the story could be read along the lines of the self and the other. The Beast feels out of place in the world of human and desperately tries but fails to assimilate in the society. He creates a life of detachment and isolation with his wealth, “I saw The Beast bought solitude, not luxury, with his money” (63). In the seemingly human world of the story the Beast seems like an anomaly. However, after being in the world of the horses, the ape-valet, the tiger-Beast, the heroine finds herself more at peace. The story can also be read as a narrative which veers the readers gaze away from the western anthropocentrism. Although the heroine first thinks of herself as the lamb, towards the end of the story she embraces her inner tigress with the beautiful fur. The story’s narrative finds the happy ending in the animal world, away from the economic transaction and objectification of the female body. Caroline Webb and Helen Hopcroft in their study of the human animal relationship in Carter’s work writes,

Her fairy tale proposes a worldview in which the binaries through which human “rationality” has been constituted are dismissed; in which the animal body—in the human or in the nonhuman “beast”—is accepted as part of the full human experience; and in which animals, like female humans, must be respected as subjects. (334)

**Colour:** In all Carter’s stories colours are used for their symbolic purpose. In “The Tiger’s Bride”, the yellow eyes of the Beast symbolise the wildness of the Beast, whereas the white skin and red nipples of the heroine symbolises purity or virginity.

**SAQ**

Comment on the heroine’s choice of not returning to her father after the Beast’s terms have been fulfilled. (100 words)

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## 6.6 Narrative Techniques

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A narrative technique is the way through which an author conveys his story to the readers. Along with the style of narration, the point of view of the narrator is quite important for the story's direction. In traditional fairytales the story is told by an omniscient third person narrator, who is not part of the narrative. This style of narration gives the author liberty to approach the story from diverse angles as well as creates an objective distance from the narrator and the story. One of the unique features of Carter's retelling of "Beauty and the Beast" in "The Tiger's Bride" is that it is written in first person narrative, which arguably gives the heroine agency and voice to share her story in her own terms.

The idea of point of view or perspective is directly related to the narrative technique, however it is not limited by it. The point of view is not only reflected through what is present in the story, but also what is absent or beyond the narrative. For example, in "The Tiger's Bride", with the first-person narrative by the heroine, the readers know what she is going through and her initial feeling of indignation and later decision to embrace her sexual liberty. Caroline Webb and Helen Hopcroft writes, "By inserting Beauty's viewpoint as narrator, Carter reshapes the reader's experience of the tale: the protagonist's reflections and responses become central to that experience" (319). But the readers' access to the motives, intentions and feelings of the other characters like The Beast, and the Valet are limited by lack of exposition and direct communication to the readers. These limitations and gaps in the narrative encourage readers to immerse themselves in and actively engage with the text and also fulfil the postmodern notion of open-ended narratives devoid of a predetermined meaning.

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## 6.7 Summing Up

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The previous sections have attempted to acquaint the learners with several aspects of the story, from its plot, theme and characterisation to its narrative technique. By now the learners should have got a fair idea about the story from your reading the text as well as the previous sections in this unit. "The Tiger's Bride" had amassed significant critical attention since its publication in 1979. Along with the other stories of the collection *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, "The Tiger's Bride" has opened up newer ways of looking at the folk stories and fairytales. Comprehension and interpretation of the

story demands an informed historical and theoretical approach from the scholars in the fields of postmodernism, postcolonialism, feminism, sexuality, gothic fiction etc. That the story and its myriad analysis has kept the readers interested after so many decades of its publication, proves its literary brilliance and socio-political relevance.

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