Indira Gandhi
National Open University
School of Humanities

BEGC-106
Popular Literature

Block

3

GENRES OF POPULAR LITERATURE II: DETECTIVE & SCIENCE FICTION

ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This block introduces you to two important genres of Literature – the detective novel and science fiction. This course on Popular Literature introduces us to a whole world of genres that we may have not been aware of or even taken seriously. In Unit I, we trace the evolution of the detective novel and place Agatha Christie in the genre and then move on to analyse her novel, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* was first published in June 1926 in the United Kingdom by William Collins & Sons, and in the United States by Dodd, Mead and Company. The novel was adapted into a play, *Alibi*, by Michael Morton. It opened at the Prince of Wales Theatre in London on 15 May 1928 and ran for 250 performances. Charles Laughton was Hercule Poirot. Charles Laughton (1899 - 1962), was an English stage and film actor who had trained in London at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and first appeared professionally on the stage in 1926. He also starred in the Broadway play *The Fatal Alibi* staged in 1932. The play was then adapted into Christie's first sound film and was released in 1931. Thereafter, in more recent times (2002), the story was made into a Russian film titled "*Poirot's Failure*". *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* was adapted as a drama and also transmitted in the UK on TV again in 2000. In 2013, it was voted the best crime novel ever by the British Crime Writers' Association, and it has also been included in Howard Haycraft's list of the most influential crime novels ever written.

"The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" by Le Guin was originally published in *New Dimensions 3*, an anthology of science fiction edited by Robert Silverberg, in 1973. In 1993 it was marketed as a novel for young adults. You need to read the following texts:

Agatha Christie: *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*
Ursula Le Guin: "*The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"*

ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 1 CRIME AND DETECTIVE FICTION : AN INTRODUCTION

Structure

1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit seeks to provide a brief outline and overview of the historical evolution of the literary phenomena of crime and detective fiction. For this purpose, the introduction is divided into four sections. The first section will seek to delineate the important discussions pertaining to this literary artifact through its generic understanding and its evolving social status over the years. The second section will chart the history of its evolution briefly. The third section shall enumerate the major types of detective and crime fiction that have emerged over the years. And the final section shall discuss the major criticisms and debates/themes that have proliferated around this literary product called crime fiction. Let's begin with our first section. How are these classifications like detective, mystery or crime fiction different from each other? And what is the present social status of crime fiction? We shall address these issues by the time we finish going through this unit.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the most popular literary genres of all time - crime narratives have continued to hold sway over popular imagination. And in recent decades, with the refashioning of "**Arthur Conan Doyle**'s Sherlock Holmes in the widely acclaimed BBC series *Sherlock* featuring **Benedict Cumberbatch** and the debates surrounding violence against women prompted by Nordic Noir author **Stieg Larsson**'s Millennium trilogy, and the explosion of the true crime subgenre, contemporary crime culture is enjoying increasing popularity" (Beyer 1).

Throughout the evolution of this popular genre, different monikers have been applied to categorise and describe the nature of this literary product. From **Edgar Allen Poe**'s "tales of ratiocination" to the present-day classification of crime writings as "play", "metaphysical riddles", this literary artifact has managed to engage the minds of scholars and fans from all across the world. But how do we define crime fiction? Let us attempt to do just that in the next section.

1.2 DEFINING CRIME FICTION

Can we define crime fiction as a narrative about crime dealing with the origin, the nature and the social/psychological resolution of the crime? Can all fiction which includes murder or robbery or incest or rape or other social crimes and the consequence of these crimes constitute crime fiction? Can, as **Charles J Rzepka** posits, **Thomas Hardy**'s novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* or **Matthew Lewis**'s gothic novel *The Monk* or **Shakespeare**'s *Othello* or *Macbeth* be classified as crime fiction? All these works have their main characters committing murder, being tried and punished for it and yet, these works have not been classified as crime/ mystery/ detective fiction. So, what constitutes the nature of crime that can qualify as crime narratives? Crime fiction or even detective narratives demand a special sense of aesthetic and cultural lens to comprehend its political and mass appeal. Throughout the 18th and till the mid-19th century, numerous broadsides, court proceedings, testimonies and confessions of criminals and printed ballads related to the crimes and activities of criminal behaviour were hugely popular. In the 21st century, even with the rise of all kinds of digital simulation, the popularity of crime narratives refuses to abate. What makes crime narratives so hugely popular? Do the early crime writings and the later crime fictions develop and elaborate on the same themes? What led to the rise of crime fictions as a separate cultural category? Let us explore that next.

1.3 INTRODUCTION TO CRIME FICTION: RE-EVALUATION OF THE LITERARY CANON

In the words of **Schmid**, true crime is a "pop culture phoenix" (198), that transcends our sense of morality and speaks volumes about human consciousness and our proclivity towards violence in general. The rise and evolution of detective and crime fiction from the roadside corner into the drawing rooms of genteel society reveals the spread of crime to all corners of society. Rzepka asserts, crime and detective fiction has attained a "mythic status transcending even human history, they seem hybrids of gods (or demons) and men" (2). Even as crime and detective fiction continued to weave its magic over readers both young and old, laymen and intellectuals alike (W H Auden compared the reading of detective fiction to "an addiction" ["The Guilty Vicarage"]), critics sought to classify detective and crime narratives as low and vulgar literature. For many critics, crime fiction and detective stories have been nothing more than "guilty pleasure" (Auden) or frivolous entertainment catering to our baser instincts. Although critics like **Thomas De Quincey** in his seminal essay "Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts," sought to aestheticise the love human beings have for violence, nevertheless, crime narratives in its content, style and in the very reasons for its origins have often led it to be placed at the margins of canonical literature. However, with the rise of post-structuralism since the 1960s, there has been a significant shift in the way we study and read crime narratives. The reappraisal

of crime and detective fiction within the academia has led to newer insight on the association of crime fiction with gender, class, race, imperialist and capitalist concerns, sexuality and philosophical issues. And this has invariably led the critics and scholars to revisit the terms - crime, detective and mystery.

For Rzepka, the word 'crime' is a slippery term while detective that initially seemed to fall within the rubric of crime is vaguer and an altogether undefined categorisation (2). Mystery, on the other hand, is a narrow category that deals majorly with suspense and requires a resolution of the inscrutable. **John Cawelti**, demarcated the "archetypes" of popular literature into three main types - Adventure, Romance and Mystery. While our initial impression of detection leads it to fall under the category of mystery, these classifications are not rigid and both crime and detective fiction "straddles some gaping generic divides" (Rzepka 3). Most crime stories do not involve any proper mystery and even detective fiction whose primary focus is the solving of the crime puzzle by the investigator nevertheless is also, a cultural determinant of its time. While the classic detective stories - 'Whodunit' puzzle mysteries have led to the growth of crime narratives, nevertheless, many critics and authors of detective fiction like **Raymond Chandler** have criticised these puzzle mysteries as being stilted and artificial with no connection to empirical reality ("A Simple Art of Murder"). The criticism of hard -boiled writers like Chandler, **Dashiell Hammett** of the classic detective plots of Agatha Christie, **John Dickson Carr** for their rule bound, formulaic stories showcases how the archetypal classification of popular genres by John Cawelti needs to be made far more flexible. With the rise of the noir or hard-boiled detective fiction, crime narratives breached the boundaries of adventure stories and the Western classics. While the fiction popularised by Agatha Christie and Arthur Conan Doyle sought to examine the motives and psyche of criminals through the lens of an investigating eye, *noir fiction* engaged with mind games, close scrapes, run and chase, representation of gruesome violence; in a world typically identified as a masculine terrain. For many critics, crime narratives of the post First World War (particularly the hard-boiled variety of American detective fictions) tend to be more physical than intellectual in its story-telling method and in its use of suspense. The investigator is often invariably a male protagonist fighting both his inner demons as well as the crisis borne out of political and cultural nihilism of the post-world war scenario. However, despite the difference between the classical detective stories of Christie, Doyle, Chandler and Hammett, in terms of the milieu depicted or the characterisation of the detective, there are obvious similarities between the two. Both hard-boiled and classical detective stories include a puzzle element with its numerous clues and string of suspects, and which invariably leads to the involvement of the reader in trying to solve the puzzle. And this is one of the many reasons for the popularity of detective and crime stories in that the reader is asked to participate to analyse and "disentangle" the threads of crime (Poe 397). Rzepka put it succinctly when he stated, "[the] point of the puzzle element is to enable readers not to solve the crime but to exercise their retrospective imaginations. As we read forward, we imagine backward, analeptically. (3)"

In general, detective stories have invited, as **Heta Pyrhönen** observes, "a great deal more critical discussion than crime fiction" (44). Primarily, detective fiction with its dual patterning of the plot (story of crime and story of its investigation) allows a more nuanced understanding of the narratological pyrotechnics that constitutes such narratives. Detective fiction has been thematically analysed through its structure and technique by critics and scholars as varied as the

formalists to postmodernists. If, crime fiction represents the psychological and ethical consequences of our modern world where ethics is closely aligned with both politico-cultural consciousness of an age; detective fictions allow us to read the interface of reason, law and social relationships and to comprehend the process of validation of dominant social groups (Pyrhönen 49-50). The very form of detective fiction leads to a sustained and critical interrogation of the nature and causes of injustice, racism, poverty and class issues.

We move on to the next section, dealing with the criticism, debates and themes that has proliferated the long history of crime and detective fictions. Crime narratives, in the words of **Beyer**, "has had a complex relationship to mainstream culture: on the one hand frequently deemed too popular or mass culture to be taken seriously; yet on the other hand, due to its focus on criminality, able to explore and expose crime on micro- and macro-levels" (3). It is thus, a fascinating dual relationship which has irrevocably led to the re-reading of crime fiction in the present times as a significant scholarly exercise. The next section seeks to provide a brief outline of the strategies to read and comprehend crime narratives.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Attempt a brief introduction to crime fiction.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

1.4 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF CRIME FICTION: AN OVERVIEW

While critics like Rzepka have pointed out the undecidability of the nature and representation of crime in such fiction, nevertheless, critics have sought to categorise crime and detective fiction within certain frameworks. Ranging from such fiction being categorised as secondary or of low artistic merit than mainstream literature; or crime narratives as being distinct from literary studies; the fictional representation of crime and detection has provided one of the most fascinating studies on social relationships and its disruption.

One of the earliest scholarly reflection on detective and crime narratives is to be found articulated by the most popular fictional detective of all time - Sherlock Holmes. In Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four* (1890), Dr Watson, the narrator friend of Sherlock informs him that he had written an account of his methods and earlier feat of detection under the title *A Study in Scarlet*. Holmes expresses his disappointment at Watson's narrative owing to what he feels is a romanticisation of his ratiocinative methods:

> Detection is, or ought to be, an exact science, and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner. You have attempted to tinge it with romanticism, which produces much the same effect as if you worked a love - story or an elopement into the fifth proposition of Euclid.
>
> *(Doyle 1986: 1.108– 9)*

For Holmes, detection ought to be more like a mathematical formula and has no place within the medium of a fictional narrative. For Heta Pyrhönen, this discussion "draws attention to the fact that detective fiction exhibits a self-reflexive understanding of its own ingredients. It invariably mirrors its own form, commenting on the nature of its narrativity. The genre thus, comprises its own first level of criticism." (43) Literary debates and scholarly discussions pertaining to this rich and varied literature have literally continued with this self-reflection to include a variety of responses since the last hundred years. Scholarly discussions on crime and detective fiction over these last hundred years or so can be categorised into majorly three theoretical frameworks: first, the study of the narrative structure of this genre, second, as a reflection of societal and political ethos, and lastly, as psychological narratives.

The first framework or the narrative study of plot and the structure of these fiction sought to reflect on the nature of detective stories. Read primarily by formalists and structuralist theorists, this framework reflected on the formulaic structure of the plots of detective stories (particularly, Golden age detective fiction) and also, explored the difference between detective fiction and crime writings through their plot structures. In the earlier section, we discussed that basically detective narratives seek to answer the query "Whodunit?" and "Who is guilty?" These questions have inevitably led the narrative structure of detective fiction to begin with a crime puzzle and end with its solution. The detective stories, in particular, whodunit fiction, according to Pyrhönen, with its narrative scheme unfolding backwards "aims at establishing a linear, chronological sequence of events that will eventually explain its baffling initial situation" (44).

Concentration on plot structure and narrative techniques enabled the critics such as the formalists, new critics, and even the structuralists to elaborate on "what set detective fiction apart from all other modes of literature." These critics mostly focused on the 'whodunit' type which was the most acknowledged form of detective genre till the mid-nineteenth century. Narratologists also sought to comprehend detective fiction through the notion of "fair play" (Pyrhönen 46). Fair play encapsulates the pivotal roles accorded to readers to solve the puzzle alongside the detective. The readers are provided clues and simultaneously, confused about the validity of these clues. While this has led to the increasing popularity of such narratives, it also, has posited the uniqueness of such fiction. Moreover, structuralists like **Hilfer**, **Carl D Malmgren** differentiated the world of 'whodunits', 'hard-boiled' novels and crime fictions and British detective fiction with those of American ones through different values accorded to certain elements within the plots of such stories. Hilfer claimed that if the plot structure of whodunits was based on an explainable and stable social world and the hard-boiled reflected a fluid world otherwise dominated by a stable self, the world of crime fictions undermined both the certainty of the social world of whodunits and stable sense of identity of hard-boiled fictions (2, 6-7). For Malmgren, the plot of British detective fiction sought to describe a close fit between appearance

and reality whereas, American fiction represented a world where signs are fluid and neither people nor context is grounded.

Since the 1970s and 1980s, with indigenous detective literatures well established in different parts of the world, crime writings and detective stories were read as "reproduce[ing] values and subject positions maintaining socio-cultural stability" (46). The instance of this socio-political model was prevalent in early twentieth century as well. In fact, one of the first literary discussions on detective fiction, that of **G K Chesterton**' s essays published in "The Defendant" in 1902 embodied this socio-cultural model. The creator of the 'Father Brown' detective stories, Chesterton defended detective fiction on the grounds that it expresses the sense of poetry of modern life in contemporary cities. What also made the genre valuable for him was that it takes the side of civilisation against the intruding forces of criminal chaos. This socio-political framework of the rise and growth of crime and detective stories by mid-seventies and early eighties was appreciated alongside an established police force in Western societies.

Critics like **Stephen Knight**, and **Denis Porter** focused on the causes of increasing popularity of detective novels amongst the masses. They posited that since these narratives embodied the interface of law, legal proceedings, justice and morality, these stories encapsulated the underpinnings of ideology. Furthermore, detective stories were understood by these critics as legitimising the power of dominant social groups. This second framework read such narratives as a central site of the repository of social and cultural values, at once hegemonic, and ideological. Later research spanning from 1980s onwards focused on the issues of how sex and gender dynamics play out within the texture of this genre. The postcolonial, and the feminist intervention into these popular genres allowed an investigation of the social conditions under patriarchy and the reworkings of race and class led to an understanding of the nature of crime and psychology of criminals.

This leads to the last framework whereby detective and crime stories are understood through psychological motives and causes. Including the plot, characterisation of both the detective and criminal and the very nature of crime as intricately connected with the social conditions of an age, the psychological study has enabled scholars to move beyond the narrow framework of the earlier two rubrics. John Cawelti (1976) stated that detective fiction was no less than moral fantasies allowing the readers to engage in socially unacceptable behavior without the necessary social compulsion attached to such reprehensible thoughts. Using Aristotelian poetics, W H Auden compares the plot structure of Golden age detective fiction with the psychological significance of Greek tragedies. The detective story follows the same pattern as described by **Aristotle** of, Greek tragedy in his Poetics: ignorance, discovery and peripeteia. Auden claimed there was a double twist in the plot. On the one hand, the story moves from guilt to innocence with the initial suspects turning out to be mere accidental victims while the second story twist follows the structural design where by innocence is transformed to guilt through the disclosure of truth. In Auden's understanding, detective fiction enables the localisation of guilt and which in turn, is cathartic for the readers. So, for Auden, detective fiction was therapeutic allowing the readers to comprehend the workings of guilt in an unfeeling society. However, like the Greek tragedies, Auden explains that the characters within a classic detective fiction lack a substantial growth in their characterisation as the plot is already predetermined. This differentiates both the detective story and Greek

tragedy from a modern tragedy wherein the characters evolve and transform through the course of the story. While dealing with murder, violence and death, the formal structure of this fiction invariably includes concerns as "interpersonal conflicts, human motivations and moral choice." For Pyrhönen, crime narratives emerged "as an oppositional discourse that violate[d] the basic generic conventions of detective narratives."Crime fiction, according to Pyrhönen, "focuses on a criminal's mind and deeds. Knowledge of the culprit's identity reformulates the two generic questions: whodunit changes into "why dunit," and the issue of guilt is re-inûected as the integrity and stability of the self are placed under scrutiny."

In recent decades, a few other frameworks for analysing detective and crime fiction, has been in existence. One of the significant variations of the structuralist approach has been the postmodern model. **Umberto Eco** in his postscript to *The Name of the Rose* added a chapter entitled 'The Metaphysics of the Crime and Detective Story (romanzopoliziesco).' In it, Eco states that the crime novel represents the purest form of conjecture. Comparing the role of the investigator to that of a metaphysician, Eco asserts, that the detective as well as the reader engages in the game of speculation and the validation of those premises. For Eco, the fundamental philosophical query is 'who is to blame?' - a logic that is basic to the very premise of detective and crime fiction. Eco's understanding of detective/crime fiction can be encapsulated as a postmodern variation of the structuralist procedures wherein the author plays a game or asks a riddle to the readers. However, the focus is less on solving the riddle itself rather, the aim is to play with the assortment of riddles in order to represent the chaotic and multifarious nature of our world.

Though most detective stories like police procedurals, psycho thrillers do not follow the classic plotline of a Christie or a Doyle in trying to find the perpetrator of the crime nevertheless, most crime writings to can be understood through the tagline 'what can we know?' We move on to the next section, dealing with the growth and evolution of crime and detective narratives. This section evaluates the causes which led to the extreme popularity of this popular literary genre of all time.

Check Your Progress 2

1) What do critics have to say about crime narratives and detective fiction?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

1.5 BEGINNINGS OF CRIME: A HISTORICAL APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF CRIME FICTION

The study of detective and crime fiction has often been underscored as rule-bound, following certain principles of story-telling, at once formulaic and rigid in its plot devices with hardly any conflict in the representation of characters. Nevertheless, these narratives have shown a remarkable tendency to outlive its own premises. The detective story was invented in 1841 by Edgar Allan Poe. But, before Poe invented his famous detective Auguste Dupin and his sidekick friend, the history of this genre reveals a fascinating network of crime, policing, novelistic terrain, seduction of crime and the disruption of ideological state apparatuses like family and community.

To understand this history, one needs to go back to as early as the late 17th and early 18th century Britain when accounts, biographies and reports of criminals were being published by the state itself known famously as *The Newgate Calendar*. *The Newgate Calendar* is "the name given to a number of 18th and 19th century texts that comprised collections of criminal biographies that derived from London's Newgate Prison, where criminals were lodged before their trial and (often) execution" (Worthington 13-14). The reports comprising the lives and accounts including even the executions of these criminals were published in the form of cheap pamphlets. The accounts so published were appreciated widely by the common public. They were mostly moralistic and religious in tone aimed at uneducated readers to note the tragic waste of lives wrought in because of disturbing the social order. In the development of crime fiction, according to **Heather Worthington**, "the Newgate novels (modelled on The Calendar few proto-novels were published as well) are important in a number of ways: they represent an increasing interest in the construction and motivation of the criminal; they have an element of detection or feature a detective figure; they bring crime firmly into mainstream fiction and so make possible the later genre of sensation fiction" (19). These accounts were so popular amongst the ordinary public that newer forms of providing an account of crime and morality was necessitated. And much cheaper than the accounts of criminals published in *The Newgate Calendar*, these other reports of criminality were made available to the public by mid-nineteenth century in the form of broadsides and ballad sheets. As much these cheap publications brought home to the public the idea that crime was widespread in the length and breadth of the land they also, blurred the distinction between fact and fiction; popularised crime and criminality as a profit-making exercise, and somehow managed to lend a popularity to this genre amongst the middle classes.

Theories of detective fiction for Worthington, is intricately connected with the rise of novel (46). Novels like **Daniel Defoe**'s *The True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of the Late Jonathan Wild* (1725), **Godwin**'s *Caleb Williams*; Or *Things As They Are* (1794) and gothic novels like **Ann Radcliffe**'s *The Mystery of Udolpho* (1794) represented a proto-mystery of secrets, and dark secrets with amateur investigation thrown in for good measure. Poe's popular 'tales of ratiocination' had acknowledged some debt to the structure as well as content of his crime writings on to the other side of the Atlantic, particularly, to William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*. Godwin's novel is a narrative of systematic corruption

and a flight from it, published in a period of political repression and the rise of revolutionary ideas of equality and liberty. However, Godwin's novel was itself modeled on the earlier fabric of *The Newgate Calendar*. Defoe sought to present a vivid description of the life of the famous criminal Wild in a manner that constituted both journalistic factualism and sensationalism. Such novels also contributed to the increasing popularity of crime in the fictional domain. However, the professional detective figure in the modern sense is first witnessed in France. Eugène François Vidocq's autobiography *Mémoires de Vidocq* (1828–9), elaborates on his dual role as a criminal as well as an informer to the police.

However, the first major writings on crime and detection in English can be found in the three short stories written by Edgar Allen Poe: "*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*" (1841), "*The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*" (1842 – 3) and "*The Purloined Letter*" (1845). Influenced by Vidocq's *Memoirs*, Poe's popular 'tales of ratiocination' included imaginativeness with pragmatism. Poe as the creator of both the classic "locked room" puzzle ("The Murders in the Rue Morgue") and the classic crime caper of duelling wits ("The Purloined Letter"), is often credited as being the father of modern English detective stories. In the words of Worthington, "these narratives are not, then, the straightforward pursuit of the criminal seen in Vidocq's Mémoires…but something new – an intelligent analysis of facts that leads to a resolution, a process of inductive thought. Dupin's combination of active investigation and cerebral organization becomes the model for later detective protagonists and it is the establishment of narrative patterns that makes Poe's Dupin stories such an important element in the development of crime fiction" (22).

Alongside Poe's investigating process of deduction, on the other side of the Atlantic, *Blackwood Magazine* in Britain adapted the form popularised in the broadsides and The *Newgate Calendar* and presented the sensational aspects of crime laced with a touch of horror. This magazine introduced the pleasures of reading crime for 19th century middle class homes and was responsible for a new type of novel to emerge in the popular publishing market of Victorian society:

Wilkie Collins is regarded as the greatest exponent of sensational fiction with *The Woman in White* (1859-60) labeled as the first sensational novel in English literature. This novel with its instances of gothic horror, mistaken identity, unhappy arranged marriage, trope of madness and a fascinating villain thrown in, was more remarkable in the way that it showed the circulation of crime within aristocratic households. Crime was no longer relegated to the margins of society but, entered inside the household of upper middle-class homes with women being as much responsible as men for any event of crime. Sensational fiction represented the pervasiveness of crime with aristocracy and lower-class households being caught in the vortex of crime. In 1868, Collins bridged the private and public worlds together in *The Moonstone*, termed by **T S Eliot** as the first and greatest of English detective novels (1951 [1934] 464). For Worthington, "*The Moonstone* pre-figures classic English detective fiction, featuring a country- house setting, clues, witnesses and a combination of amateur and police detectives" (25). Sensational fiction with its amateur detection and representation of crime as both seductive and threatening the foundations of society, paved the way for detective fiction to establish as a recognisable genre by the 1880s. In December 1887, the first Sherlock Holmes was published in **Beeton**'s *Christmas Annual* and crime fiction was never the same again.

Arthur Conan Doyle's detective and his narrator friend, Dr Watson, are more than a global phenomenon, they are literally the face of detection, crime and mystery in the world of fictional crime. Drawing on earlier models of Poe, Vidocq, Doyle's Sherlock inaugurated a veritable industry of crime and detection that has never since waned in popularity. According to **Lee Horsley**, Sherlock stories "elude simple categorization, undermining rational confidence by representing inner division, the serial recurrence of crime and the impossibility of imposing lasting order" (29-30). One of the most popular successors to Holmes rational, scientific deductive method of investigation but, slightly different kind of fictional investigator was Father Brown, created by **G K Chesterton**. Father Brown series unlike Holmes' scientific understanding of crime sought to solve crime as akin to a religious exercise in the manner of a spiritual-intuitive Catholic priest.

Doyle's classic form of investigation "settled into its most recognizable form – the golden age clue - puzzle model – in the period immediately following World War I. The influence of this highly evolved form has persisted its conventions so well established that variations on the basic elements find an immediate readership" (Horsley 30). The Golden Age of detective fiction was dominated by Agatha Christie, **Dorothy Sayers**, **Margery Allingham** "often comment self - consciously on the fuctional devices of the novels they inhabit, drawing attention to both the artificiality of the genre and the contrived nature of the crimes represented" (Horsley 31). Lasting well into the seventies, Golden Age fiction defined this genre as both formulaic, conventional and a world comprising of certainties despite the two World Wars. Meanwhile, in the USA, an oppositional form of the study of detection and crime arose - a fictional world far removed from the cosy world of golden age fiction- the hard-boiled private fiction of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. Full of the tensions and contradictions of post-war American society, hard-boiled fiction questioned both the morality and the novelistic pretensions of golden age fiction. Hard-boiled fiction since the 70s and 80s has been appropriated by writers to interrogate the tenets of detective and crime tradition. For **Breu**, the white male investigator constitutive of "a fully pathological version of American individualism" (1– 2) is adapted and subverted by both black and female writers to challenge the "conservative [ethos] of the white male value system" (Horsley 36). Between 1987 and 1997, according to Horsley, "several of the black crime writers who are currently best known published the first in their series of detective novels: **Gar Anthony Haywood** (1987), **Mike Phillips** (1989), **Walter Mosley** (1990), **Barbara Neely** (1992), **Gary Phillips** (1996) and **Charlotte Carter** (1997)" (ibid.).

The variety of crime and detective novels that have emerged since the 60s onwards has sought to question both the ethical and political status of a society, exposing the moral conundrum of the detectives and the transgressors as well as critically interrogated the structural and thematic biases of earlier types like classic detective fictions and hard boiled fictions to "fulfill the roles of moral and social critique in very complex ways, with psychopathic killers replacing detectives in a world where redemption is no longer singularly possible" (Horsley 42).

We now move on to the next section wherein we describe the major types of detective and crime fiction that have emerged in its long history of evolution.

1.6 TYPOLOGY OF CRIME AND DETECTIVE FICTION

This section shall enumerate in brief the major types of detective fiction that has emerged during the last hundred years or so. In this context, the present introduction shall only describe in brief a few popular types of detective fiction that has shaped the canon and continues to be included within academia. The following types are:

1.6.1 Sensation Fiction

Influenced by developments in newspaper press in terms of wider circulation to middle class households and the increasing reportage of crime happenings across Britain that provided sensational plots to the writers alongside changes in acts pertaining to social relationships, led novels to represent the insidious nature of crime within aristocratic and middleclass homes. According to **Lyn Pykett**, "the sensation genre was a journalistic construct, a label attached by reviewers to novels whose plots centred on criminal deeds, or social transgressions and illicit passions, and which 'preached to the nerves'. Sensation novels were tales of modern life that dealt in nervous, psychological, sexual and social shocks, and had complicated plots involving bigamy, adultery, seduction, fraud, forgery, blackmail, kidnapping and, sometimes, murder" (33). Apart from Collins's famous sensational novels, (Mrs Henry) **Ellen Wood**'s *East Lynne*, **Mary Elizabeth Braddon**'s *Lady Audley*'s Secret (1861–2) were other successful novels in this genre. Sensational novels did not represent the dark underbelly of crime amongst the underworld rather, the novels of this genre sought to puncture the notions of familial respectability. Crime occurred within households and was committed by family members rather than by outsiders. Class or education was not an exclusive domain of crime but rather, they constituted the central locus of crime. In most sensational novels, legal machinery was hardly visible and hence, amateur detectives were increasingly on the rise to decide on the outcome of social and moral perversity committed by one of their own. Sensational novels, an adaption of the earlier Newgate novels moved from crime to detection, from low-life to respectable households where men and women were both perpetrators of crime. For Pykett, sensation novels depicted a "world in which everyone was potentially a criminal, was a world of universal suspicion in which everyone became a detective or a suspect, hence the 'detective fever' of *The Moonstone*" (34-35). The next sub-genre will look at the Golden age Detective Fiction.

1.6.2 Golden Age Detective Fiction

Building upon the conventions established by Edgar Allen Poe in his short stories and the sensational novels, golden age detective fiction starting from the late 19th century and spanning post World War II scenario is the one generic convention that established the credentials of detective novels for generations to come. Set against the technological innovations of the late Victorian age and the imperialistic tendencies of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the novels of Arthur Conan Doyle with his legendary fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes, can be said to have set the ball rolling for the formulaic nature of this classic detective fiction and also, to establish a veritable industry for detective fictions. According to **Martin A Kayman**, "Doyle expertly achieved the right balance of elements to

provide the male middle classes with relaxing reading which ûattered them by providing an intellectual adventure, while assuaging their anxieties about the modern world" (48). But more, importantly, Doyle's creation of Holmes sought to reassure the readers in an age of materialism that reason despite being aloof and cynical, arrogant or brusque can still act as a buffer against a chaotic world order. Furthermore, the fashioning of Dr Watson not only served to enhance the intellectual appeal of a Holmes but more so, allowed the readers to believe that even though they might be lesser mortals than a Holmes; they are nevertheless, more intelligent and perceptive than a Watson. "The reader is impressed, made to feel part of a modern scientific world which, although he can never master it, neither bores nor alienates – most of all, which protects him while demanding nothing of him" (Kayman 49-50). Though Sherlock Holmes stories are often placed outside the golden age proper, yet, the persona of Holmes looms large over his fictional successors since then. So, where do we begin with golden age fiction? According to **Stephen Knight**, golden age fiction was written primarily between the two world wars (77). Often criticised as being formulaic and unduly romantic, these novels were mostly set in secluded, country houses built on capitalist riches. Avoiding international politics, these novels are "socially enclosed" with both victims and criminals belonging to middle class or upper middle-class households (Kayman 78). Including the novels written by Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, Vine Dine, golden age detective fiction often included psychological motivation along with rational deduction to study the circumstantial evidence of a surfeit of clues and suspects in order to solve crime. Socially conforming and conservative, these novels were described as trying to further perpetuate the dominant voice. One of the most famous of detective writers of all time, Agatha Christie with her eccentric investigator, *Hercule Piorot* and the octogenarian detective, *Miss Marple*, focused on a thorough plotting of crime. The use of 'grey cells' by Piorot feminised the rational approach of detectives and her novels "invoked a world of unnerving uncertainty, in which only the ûction of detection brought security"(Knight 82). Knight further explains that her novels through the mode of domestic inquiry sought to eradicate uncertainty and conflict invoked by criminals by the private investigators. Her novels, formulaic and conventional in nature, sought to reinstate belief in a credible and stable world of aristocratic values. Hard Boiled Novels will be dealt with next.

1.6.3 Hard-Boiled Novels

The post- world war American novels of Dashiel Hammett, Raymond Chandler often termed as hard-boiled, noir fictions or private eye novels "suggests among other things: a solitary eye, and the (forbidden) pleasures associated with Freud's scopic drive; an on - organisation man's eye, like the frontier scout's or the cowboy's; an eye that trusts no other; an eye that's licensed to look; and even, by extrapolation, an eye for hire" (Porter 95).This genre was generated primarily because of the mechanised industrialism of the early years of the 20th century and the rapid urbanisation that evolved through the developments in electrical technology and the world of moving pictures. In a largely urban milieu, disrupted by social and economic corruption, disenfranchisement of a significant number of ordinary citizens by wars and economic recession where a new organised crime was becoming endemic, the hard-boiled fiction of Chandler, Hammett sought to describe the life lived on the mean streets. In his essay, *The Simple Art of Murder* (1944), Chandler posits the role of his detective "[d] "own these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor

afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor…" (533). In a world where values and institutions have turned morally bankrupt, it is the personal code of ethics of a detective like Chandler's Philip Marlowe that manages to uphold the rights in a fallen society. In the words of Porter, "Marlowe combines the roles of muck-raker and racket-buster. In behavioural terms, this means he is first of all, a pragmatic man of action but one with a work ethic that requires him to take all the punishment low-life hitmen or venal cops can hand out and come back for more" (105). However, unlike Piorot or Holmes, Chandler's Marlowe is a man trying to earn a honest living and his "hourly fee plus expenses are the means by which he supports his loner's marginal but honourable life. Ideologically then, he is an anti-elitist and even a populist hero. Formed by the new, Californian West, he expresses little respect for the Eastern Seaboard and its establishment values. In many ways he shares the attitudes and values of ordinary working Americans toward the rich and the powerful in business or government, who seemed to have failed them so badly during the inter-war years" (Porter 106).

Check Your Progress 3

1) Write short notes on:

a) Sensation fiction

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

b) Golden age detective fiction

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

c) Hard- boiled novels

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

1.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have looked at what constitutes crime/ detective fiction. We have tried to define crime narratives/ detective fiction and traced the evolution of it through the ages. We have also looked at some of the popular crime/ detective writers. These are major types of detective and crime novels that has continued to influence the later generic variations of this genre ranging from postcolonial detective fictions to feminist and metaphysical riddles of **Jorge Louis Borges** or **Umberto Eco**.

1.8 QUESTIONS

1) Trace the evolution of the genre called detective fiction?

2) How have critics down the ages looked at detective/ crime fiction?

1.9 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) Read section 1.3 carefully and write the answer in your own words.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Read section 1.4 carefully and write the answer in your own words

Check Your Progress 3

1a) Read section 1.6.1 carefully and write the answer in your own words

1b) Read section 1.6.2 carefully and write the answer in your own words

1c) Read section 1.6.3 carefully and write the answer in your own words

1.10 GLOSSARY

Aristotle : Aristotle (385 - 323 BC), was a Greek philosopher and polymath during the Classical period in Ancient Greece. Taught by Plato, he was the founder of the Lyceum, the Peripatetic school of philosophy, and the Aristotelian tradition.

Ariadne : Ariadne was a Cretan princess in Greek mythology. She was mostly associated with mazes and labyrinths because of her involvement in the myths of the Minotaur and Theseus.

Arthur Conan Doyle : Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle KStJ DL (1859 – 1930), was a British writer and amedical doctor. He created the character Sherlock Holmes in 1887 when hepublished A Study in Scarlet, the first of four novels and more than fifty short stories about Holmes and Dr. Watson.

Barbara Neely : Barbara Ann Neely (1941 – 2nd March, 2020), was an African-American novelist, short story writer

and activist who wrote murder mysteries. Her first novel, Blanche on the Lam, introduced the protagonist Blanche White, a middle-aged mother, domestic worker and amateur detective.

Benedict Cumberbatch : Benedict Timothy Carlton Cumberbatch CBE (1976), is an English actor. A graduate of the Victoria University of Manchester, he continued his training at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art, obtaining a Master of Arts in Classical Acting.

Carl D Malmgren : Carl Malmgren has taught twentieth-century literature and literary theory at the University of New Orleans since 1980. In that time he has published three books of literary criticism and theory—on postmodern fiction, on science fiction, and on mystery and detective fiction—and more than 30 articles. His fields of specialization are twentieth-century fiction and narrative theory, and most of his scholarship has combined these interests.

Charles J Rzepka : Rzepka, Charles J. Charles Rzepka is a professor of English at Boston University. He is author of The Self as Mind (Harvard UP, 1986) and Sacramental Commodities (U. of Massachusetts, 1985), as well as articles on several Romantic authors, including Austen and De Quincey.

Charlotte Beyer : Beyer founded the Institute for Private Investors (IPI) to help improve the relationship between wealthy investors and their financial advisors and is co-creator of the first Private Wealth Management curriculum for ultra-high-net-worth investors at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

Christopher Breu : Christopher Breu is professor of English at Illinois State University where he teaches contemporary literature and culture and critical and cultural theory. He is the author of Insistence of the Material: Literature in the Age of Biopolitics (2014) and Hard-Boiled Masculinities (2005).

Dorothy Sayers : Dorothy Leigh Sayers (1893 – 1957), was an English crime writer and poet. She was also a student of classical and modern languages.

Edgar Allen Poe : Edgar Allan Poe (1809- 49), was an American writer, poet, editor, and literary critic. Poe is best known for his poetry and short stories, particularly his tales of mystery and the macabre.

Ellen (Mrs Henry) Wood: Ellen Price (1814 -87), was an English novelist, better known as Mrs. Henry Wood. She is best remembered for her 1861 novel East Lynne, but many of her books became international bestsellers and widely read also in the United States. In her time, she surpassed the fame of Charles Dickens in Australia.

G K Chesterton : Gilbert Keith Chesterton KC*SG (1874 – 1936), was an English writer, philosopher, lay theologian, and literary and art critic. He has been referred to as the "prince of paradox".

HetaPyrhönen : HetaPyrhönen is professor of Comparative Literature. Her research has concentrated on British and American literature, dealing with both popular, and 'highbrow' literature. Recently, she has extended her range to include television and film.

John Cawelti : John G. Cawelti (1929) is the author of The Spy Story as well as other literature on the genres of detective fiction and westerns. Cawelti was one of the pioneers in establishing an academic respectability to the study of popular culture. His 1971 book The Six Gun Mystique, analyzes the messages contained in the western novels which were very popular for many decades with the public. His seminal Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture dissected the formulas used in these popular genres and argued for their importance alongside "high" literature.

Jorge Louis Borges : Jorge Francisco Isidoro Luis Borges Acevedo (1899 – 1986) was an Argentine short-story writer, essayist, poet and translator, and a key figure in Spanish-language and universal literature. His best-known books, Ficciones (Fictions) and El Aleph (The Aleph), published in the 1940s, are compilations of short stories interconnected by common themes, including dreams, labyrinths, philosophy, libraries, mirrors, fictional writers, and mythology. Borges' works have contributed to philosophical literature and the fantasy genre, and have been considered by some critics to mark the beginning of the magic realist movement in 20th century Latin American literature. His late poems converse with such cultural figures as Spinoza, Camões, and Virgil.

Lyn Pykett : Lyn Pykett (1947), is Professor of English and Head of Department at the University of Wales,

Aberystwyth. She is the author of numerous books and essays on nineteenth and early twentieth century culture, and edits the Journal of Victorian Culture.

Margery Allingham : Margery Louise Allingham (1904 - 66), was an English novelist from the "Golden Age of Detective Fiction", best remembered for her hero, the gentleman sleuth Albert Campion.

Mary Elizabeth Braddon: Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835 – 1915), was an English popular novelist of the Victorian era. She is best known for her 1862 sensation novel Lady Audley's Secret, which has also been dramatised and filmed several times.

Martin A Kayman : Professor Martin A Kayman is an Emeritus Professor and a former Head of School and College Dean of Postgraduate (Research) Studies; prior to his time at Cardiff, he was a Professor of Anglo-American Studies at the University of Coimbra, Portugal.

Noir fiction : Noir fiction (or roman noir) is a subgenre of crime fiction. In this subgenre, right and wrong are not clearly defined, while the protagonists are seriously and often tragically flawed. In its modern form, noir has come to denote a marked darkness in theme and subject matter, generally featuring a disturbing mixture of sex and violence. While related to and frequently confused with hardboiled detective fiction, the two are not the same. Both regularly take place against a backdrop of systemic and institutional corruption. However, noir (French for "black") is centred on protagonists that are either victims, suspects, or perpetrators—often self-destructive. A typical protagonist of noir fiction is forced to deal with a corrupt legal, political or other system, through which the protagonist is either victimized and/or has to victimize others, leading to a lose-lose situation. Otto Penzler argues that the traditional hardboiled detective story and noir story are "diametrically opposed, with mutually exclusive philosophical premises".

Pyrotechnics : Pyrotechnics is the science and craft of using self-contained and self-sustained exothermic chemical reactions to make heat, light, gas, smoke and/or sound. The name comes from the Greek words pyr and tekhnikos.

Shakespeare : William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616), was an English poet, playwright, and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's greatest dramatist. He is often called England's national poet and the "Bard of Avon".

Stephen Knight : Steven Knight CBE (1959), is an English screenwriter and film director. Knight wrote the screenplays for the films Closed Circuit, Dirty Pretty Things, and Eastern Promises, and also directed as well as wrote the films Locke and Hummingbird.

Stieg Larsson : Karl Stig-Erland "Stieg" Larsson (1954 – 2004) was a Swedish journalist and writer. He is best known for writing the Millennium trilogy of crime novels, which were published posthumously, starting in 2005, after the author died suddenly of a heart attack. The publisher commissioned David Lagercrantz to expand the trilogy into a longer series, which has six novels as of September 2019. He was the second-best-selling fiction author in the world for 2008, owing to the success of the English translation of The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo, behind the Afghan-American Khaled Hosseini. The third and final novel in the Millennium trilogy, The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest, became the bestselling book in the United States in 2010, according to Publishers Weekly.[2] By March 2015, his series had sold 80 million copies worldwide.

Theseus : Theseus was the mythical king and founder-hero of Athens. Like Perseus, Cadmus, or Heracles, Theseus battled and overcame foes that were identified with an archaic religious and social order. His role in history has been called "a major cultural transition, like the making of the new Olympia by Hercules."

The Newgate Calendar : The Newgate Calendar, subtitled The Malefactors' Bloody Register, was a popular work of improving literature in the 18th and 19th centuries. Originally a monthly bulletin of executions, produced by the Keeper of Newgate Prison in London, the Calendar's title was appropriated by other publishers, who put out biographical chapbooks about notorious criminals such as Sawney Bean, Dick Turpin, John Wilkes and Moll Cutpurse.

Thomas Hardy : Thomas Hardy OM (1840 -1928), was an English novelist and poet. A Victorian realist in the tradition

of George Eliot, he was influenced both in his novels and in his poetry by Romanticism, especially William Wordsworth.

Thomas De Quincey : Thomas Penson De Quincey (1785 – 1859), was an English essayist, best known for his Confessions of an English Opium-Eater. Many scholars suggest that in publishing this work De Quincey inaugurated the tradition of addiction literature in the West.

T S Eliot : Thomas Stearns Eliot OM (1888 – 1965), was a poet, essayist, publisher, playwright, literary critic and editor. Born in St. Louis, Missouri, to a prominent Boston Brahmin family, he moved to England in 1914 at the age of 25 and went on to settle, work and marry there. Well known for: The Waste Land, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, Gerontion

Umberto Eco : Umberto Eco OMRI (1932 – 2016), was an Italian novelist, literary critic, philosopher, semiotician, and university professor. He is widely known for his 1980 novel Il nomedellarosa, a historical mystery combining semiotics in fiction with biblical analysis, medieval studies, and literary theory.

Walter Mosley : Walter Ellis Mosley (born January 12, 1952) is an American novelist, most widely recognized for his crime fiction. He has written a series of best-selling historical mysteries featuring the hard-boiled detective Easy Rawlins, a black private investigator and living in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, California; they are perhaps his most popular works.

W H Auden : Wystan Hugh Auden (1907 – 73), was a British-American poet. Auden's poetry was noted for its stylistic and technical achievement, its engagement with politics, morals, love, and religion, and its variety in tone, form and content.

Wilkie Collins : William Wilkie Collins (1824 – 89), was an English novelist, playwright and short story writer best known for The Woman in White and The Moonstone. The last has been called the first modern English detective novel.

1.11 SUGGESTED READINGS & REFERENCES

Auden, W. H. "The Guilty Vicarage." Ed. R. W.Winks. Detective Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays (rev. ed., pp. 15-24). Foul Play Press, 1988.

Beyer, Charlotte. “Introduction: Crime Fiction.” Ed. Beyer. Teaching Crime Fiction. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 1-16.

Breu, Christopher. Hard-Boiled Masculinities. University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

Cawelti, J. G. Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture. University of Chicago Press, 1976.

Horsley, Lee. “From Sherlock Holmes to the Present.” Ed. Rzepka and Horsley, pp. 28-42.

Hilfer, Tony. The Crime Novel: A Deviant Genre. University of Texas Press, 1990.

Hoffman, Josef. Philosophies of Crime Fiction. No Exit Press, 2013.

Kayman, Martin A. “The short story from Poe to Chesterton.” Ed. Priestman, pp. 41-58.

Knight, Stephen. “The golden age.”Ed. Priestman, pp. 77-94.

Malmgren, Carl D. Anatomy of Murder: Mystery, Detective and Crime Fiction. Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 2001.

Porter, Dennis. “The private eye.” Ed. Priestman, pp. 95-114.

Priestman, Martin, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction. CUP, 2003.

Pykett, Lyn. “The Newgate novel and sensation fiction, 1830-68.” Ed. Priestman, pp. 19-40.

Pyrhönen, Heta. “Criticism and Theory.”Ed.Rzepka and Horsley, pp. 43-56.

RaymondChandler,inJamesNelson,ed., The Simple Art of Murder. Norton, 1968.

Rzepka, Charles and Lee Horsley, ed. A Companion to Crime Fiction. Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Rzepka, Charles J. “Introduction: What is Crime Fiction?” Ed. Rzepka and Horsley, pp. 1-9.

Schmid, David. “True Crime.” Ed. Rzepka and Horsley, pp. 198-209.

Worthington, Heather. “From TheNewgate Calendar to Sherlock Holmes.” Ed. Rzepka and Horsley, pp.13-27.

UNIT 2 AGATHA CHRISTIE: *THE MURDER OF ROGER ACKROYD*

Structure

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to analyse **Agatha Christie**'s *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. This is being done with the aim of supplementing your reading of the novel and is not a substitute for your reading of the novel. The unit looks at the rise of detective fiction genre, its conventions, and how Christie both subscribes and deviates from the established conventions detective fiction in her bestselling murder mystery *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (MRA) published in 1926. Before we get down to the business of delving into the novel straight away, it would be pertinent to look at the rise of the detective fiction genre briefly next.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Even though you have read about the history of how detective fiction as a genre developed in unit 1, it would be pertinent to refresh your memory as we actually analyse a novel of this genre.The 1920s are often referred to as the golden years of detective fiction. The popularity of suspense thrillers peaked during the interwar years of the early 20th century where a mood of suspicion prevailed between the countries and gave a huge impetus to this genre. The '*whodunit*' or '*who has done it*' category flourished during the golden age of detective fiction. There were several social, scientific and cultural factors that contributed to the popularity of the detective fiction genre. The age witnessed a dramatic rise in crime rate as a result of urbanisation and industrialisation and it was a time of great social reforms and class upheavals. Critics opine that "sensational literature grew out of the crimes of the period" and the literary output mirrored the society that recorded a rise in crime (**Kobritz**, 5). The realism and sensationalism of crime

intrigued and "piqued the interest, both prurient and intellectual". However, detective fiction genre was not always considered intellectually stimulating and often dismissed as encouraging "a lurid interest in the sensational" that appealed to popular tastes (21).

Cultural theorist Sharon Kobritz says that the popularity of mystery and detective fiction "coincided with the invention of science of modern criminology" (21). The age took great strides in the field of science and people evinced great interest in reading about forensic investigation and advancements in modern scientific methods which made the detective fiction genre quite popular. The latter half of the 19th century had seen the evolution of print and mass media in the UK that had given an impetus to the birth and rise of the detective fiction genre. Crime fiction enjoyed great popularity and was widely consumed. By the turn of the 20th century, the genre of detective fiction gained popularity with the proliferation of the works of the likes of Fergus Hume, Anne Green, Wilkie Collins and Arthur Conan Doyle. Agatha Christie was well aware of the work left by her literary predecessors such as Edgar Allen Poe with his *The Murders in Rue Morgue* (1841) and had read Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes series. Somewhere around this time, detective fiction writing began to see a paradigm shift with its focus less on external action and more on the inner workings of the mind. The literary scene was ripe for Agatha Christie to leave a mark when she appeared as the writer of crime fiction with her first novel *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920) which was also the novel that introduced the readers to detective **Hercule Poirot**. Though Christie initially wrote in imitation of Conan Doyle, she soon began experimenting with other versions and styles of sleuth fiction and authored famous works such as *Murder at the Vicarage* (1930), which marked the first appearance of **Jane Marple**, and *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934). However, her bestselling work is taken to be *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) that is taken as a genre classic and the author's bestselling work. With MRA, Christie broke new ground with her incredible choice of narrator as the murderer which made MRA an overnight success and earned her the title of "Queen of Crime". Let us examine the conventions of detective fiction as a genre next.

2.2 CONVENTIONS OF DETECTIVE FICTION AS A GENRE

Before we discuss MRA, let us look at the traditional elements of a detective fiction. W H Auden identifies five elements of a detective fiction — the milieu, the victim, the murderer, the suspects and the detective. A work of detective fiction is a contract between the author and reader in which a seemingly perfect crime has taken place and the readers are asked make suppositions. The mystery unfolds as a seemingly unsolvable crime with the dim-witted and bungling police ineffective in solving the case. In comes the hero-like figure of the detective, with his acute powers of observation and superior intellect to solve the crime and save the day. Once the murder is discovered, investigation involves collecting information about the murder by inspecting the crime scene and conducting a recce. The next step involves gathering evidence, drawing up a list of suspects and interrogating them to ascertain the motive of the murder. Alibis are established and corroborated in the process. This is followed by elimination of red herrings (or misleading clues) that threaten to derail the investigation. The detective examines and interprets clues and, pieces everything together to build up a hypothesis, for which he uses the powers of logical reasoning and deduction.

The narrator goes along as the assistant to the detective, describing the case to the readers and giving his own inputs wherever necessary. The readers try to solve the mystery with the detective. Often the original assumption or suspect proves to be misleading before the denouement has the detective revealing the identity of the murderer.

There are some basic rules and listed conventions that critics unanimously agree upon. Over the years critics such as Van Dine and Raymond Chandler have condensed and distilled the rules of the genre. However, the rules of detective fiction were first drawn up by W H Auden in his 1948 essay *The Guilty Vicarage* where he laid down certain conventions detective fiction writers must conform to. According to one of the listed conventions, the crime must not turn out to be a case of accident or suicide, that is, the murder should have a "*personal motive*" behind it and should not be "*an irrational act*"(Auden). Also, a servant as the accused is taken to be, an easy solution that does not have the shock element. The murderer must necessarily be an insider/a close friend or a family member from the same social strata, additionally, the motive should necessarily be personal not political. In MRA, Dr Sheppard kills Ackroyd to cover up his crime of blackmailing Ms Ferrars and pushing her to commit suicide.

Another convention states that the investigating detective himself should never turn out to be the killer and should essentially be an outsider to the social circle which he interrogates. This outsider status not only aids his critical eye in judging things impartially, but also helps him treat everyone as a suspect. Rule-of-the-book also states that the mystery should be solved by the detective through scientific means of ratiocination and deduction and not through some imaginative or intuitive faculty. The success of detective fiction novels is attributed to a set formula that includes determination of locales, suspects, murder motive(s) and other basic structural parameters. The novels usually follow a set formula with infrequent deviations. However, blind adherence to a set formula sometimes ceases to be arresting for the readers. That is why detective fiction writers break rules and subvert conventions from time to time and this is precisely what Christie does in MRA where she adheres and subscribes to some of the rules and discounts/ disregards other laid down conventions. A look at the narrator and the narrative strategy will help our understanding of the MRA.

2.3 NARRATOR AND NARRATIVE STRATEGY

Agatha Christie had been a faithful follower of the detective fiction conventions up until MRA. However, with MRA, she breaks one of the vital rules and shocks the reader by revealing the narrator to be the murderer. She defies the readers' expectations by performing this incredible feat of making Dr Sheppard the killer, but tries throughout the novel, to divert suspicion regarding his culpability in the crime. She reduces the chances of Dr Sheppard arousing readers' suspicion by giving him all important roles. He is not only a well-regarded, trusted doctor, but also the narrator and the detective's assistant/Watson- like helper in turn. The readers never question Dr Sheppard because all these important roles played by Dr Sheppard reduce the chances of him being suspected. When in the early 20th century a novel was written, the narrator of any detective fiction was taken to be above suspicion. This is because traditionally, the narrator is taken to be a reliable figure upon whose narration readers base their judgement. Not only does the narrator handhold the readers through the narrative, he also provides a lens through

which the readers filter it all.

Though Christie remains stereotypical with regard to the overall structure of a *whodunit*, she has taken a novel step by making the narrator the murderer. In the entire novel, Christie concentrates on playing a literary subterfuge on the readers by revealing and concealing Dr Sheppard's culpability in the crime, which comes out as a shocking revelation for the readers at the end. All throughout, Christie cleverly employs the narrative strategy to shield Sheppard. The entire novel is Sheppard's first person account of the murder mystery. **P D James** states the first person narrator is effectively employed by Christie to "create immediacy, realism and credibility and encourage reader identification" with the narrator (640). Simply by virtue of being the narrator, Dr Sheppard puts himself beyond all doubt and readers never even examine his role in the murder as one of the possible suspects. He is our window to the case and the least likely person as his views are accepted as the truth.

Dr Sheppard's personal narration and reportage are the only truths given to us that shape our perspective about the murder. At the very outset, the narrator gives out plenty of information and establishes himself as a reliable chronicler of facts. The story begins with the narrator reporting the death of Ms Ferrars "on the night of the 16th – 17th September - a Thursday…" (9). Right in the manner of detective fiction novels, at the very outset, the day and date of the murder of Mrs Ferrars is provided by the narrator who gives out precise information and portrays himself as a faithful recorder of facts. As the narrator, he also describes the people and events. However, the readers learn a little about Dr Sheppard and find out more about him only through other characters as the story develops. We find the doctor miffed at his tattletale sister for trying to ferret out information from him about Mrs Ferrars' murder. It gives the impression of him being a dignified gentleman with a strong dislike for gossip: "as a professional man, I naturally aim at discretion. Therefore, I have got into a habit of continually withholding all information possible from my sister." (10) The persona that Christie builds of him is that of a serious and rational physician.

Dr Sheppard unveils very little of himself and writes without revealing his role in the crime. Throughout the text, he never sheds light on his own self and keeps himself in the background. As the narrator, he cleverly disguises his intent by giving out less information than necessary and hiding behind too little information, omitting some details altogether. One such instance is when he leaves Ackroyd's room and looks back to check: "the letter had been brought twenty minutes to nine. It was just ten minutes to nine when I left him, the letter still unread. I hesitated with my hand on the door handle, looking back and wondering if there was anything I had left undone" (63). In this first person account, Dr Sheppard never tells us why the letter was still unread when he left Ackroyd's room. It was because he had stabbed Ackroyd. Instead, he lets the readers assume that Ackroyd simply refused to read the letter. And yet, this innocuous line hints at Dr Sheppard having to do something with the letter still being unread.

Dr Sheppard lies by omission and covers his tracks by leaving out important information to deflect blame onto other suspects. He remains tight-lipped when the murder is discovered, and it is only through the eavesdropping butler Parker's volunteering revelation about the blackmail letter that the police are able to establish blackmail as the motive of the murders. Sheppard to save himself, lies to the police that he was going "to tell (about the letter), but was going to wait for

a favourable opportunity" (87). It is noteworthy that the inspector comes to know of the "blackmailing business" not through Dr Sheppard but through Parker who had been listening at the door. On another instance, he makes no mention of his visit to *Three Boars* until Flora asks him and eludes the mention of the Dictaphone, or the letter altogether. As a first-person narrator, Dr Sheppard does not lie but conceals the truth by simply omitting its mention. He is not too vocal regarding his own personal observations and plays a true chameleon by hiding his own role and reflections. Let us reflect on the character of James Sheppard the Doctor next. Having introduced the narrator as Dr James Sheppard, let's examine him as a medical doctor in the next sub section in order to understand the many facets to his character.

2.3.1 James Sheppard: The Doctor

The very nature of Dr Sheppard's profession also puts him beyond all doubt. Being a village physician precludes the possibility of suspicion falling on Dr Sheppard and he is almost written off as blameless. Medicine is taken to be an ethical and unimpeachable profession with a great regard for life. From the very beginning, Dr Sheppard comes across as a conscientious doctor who is concerned about the welfare of his patients and even becomes a confidant for their private sorrows. He rushes to the Fernly Park on hearing the news of Ackroyd's death and assists the police and Poirot by providing them with details and medical information. With his helpful demeanour, it is inconceivable for us to imagine any doctor to be associated with murder and Christie reaffirms this notion in the minds of her readers before the end exposes him as the culprit. In his capacity as a doctor, he aids the detective medically by conducting the autopsy, but hides the fact that Mrs Ferrars had poisoned her own husband. Only in the end does Poirot reveal that Sheppard blackmailed Mrs Ferrars because he knew that she had poisoned her husband and used this knowledge to his advantage to blackmail her. In the next section we shall examine James Sheppard as the Watsonian figure.

2.3.2 James Sheppard: The Watson Figure

In a *whodunit*, a detective's assistant performs several roles. Though the assistant is not clever enough to overshadow the detective by solving the case, he helps the detective by collecting background information and clues about the suspects and does other legwork. Secondly, he helps readers understand the case and acts as the reader-surrogate to pose questions to the detective. In Christie's earlier works, Captain Arthur Hastings is presented as the companion-chronicler of the detective. Poirot fondly remembers his assistant Hastings who helped him "with his practice of keep(ing) a written record of the cases" (326). However, with Hastings absence in MRA, Dr Sheppard becomes the "the new Hastings" for the detective and is continually associated with the Sherlock Holmes' associate Dr John Watson. The readers subconsciously trust Dr Sheppard all the more because he too is a doctor like Watson. From here on, we would also need to look at Hercule Poirot the detective who uncovers the entire mystery of the murder of Roger Ackroyd in the next sub section.

2.3.3 Hercule Poirot: The Detective

Christie was a fan of her predecessor Sir Authur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes series and was well-aware of his work. She is credited with producing the fictional

character of Hercule Poirot who was first introduced as an inspector in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920). Poirot featured for the third time in MRA (1926), where he is shown to have retired to the sleepy countryside of King's Abbot. The murder mystery, however, proved to be a runaway success and revived the literary fortunes of Christie overnight, so much so that post MRA, the fictional detective Poirot had to be brought back from his retirement and subsequently ended up featuring in many more novels.

In MRA, when readers first meet him, the crime has been committed and the detective is staying incognito in retirement. Poirotis is shown to be a Belgian exiled in Britain and an outsider to the social milieu of King's Abbot. It is noteworthy that by making Poirot a Belgian national, Christie follows another convention of detective fiction which states that the detective must necessarily be an outsider to the scene he investigates. This removes him emotionally from the crime and gives him a neutral stance so that he suspects everyone without discrimination. Not bound by any emotions, we find that Poirot is as unbiased as he is impersonal, without being prejudiced towards anyone. The detective's Belgian identity is also a comment on the political climate of the age where the country had adopted a neutral stance during the world wars but Germany's occupation of Belgium drove many detectives out and finally forced the country to enter the war against its policy.

Poirot is a peculiar character whose talent as a detective is undermined. His oddity and foreignness distance him from society in a way, but his queer "egg-headedness" and penchant for growing vegetable marrows are the very eccentricities that humanise him. He goes about unofficially investigating in his own quirky manner and scores where the Scotland Yard fails. While inspector Raglan finds too many clues, he is unable to interpret them or connect the dots. The police team's linear, unimaginative way of working is contradicted by Poirot's "study of human nature" (34). His "method, order and grey cells" display an astute understanding of human mind and motivations. Like any seasoned detective, Poirot does what a detective does. He takes nothing at face value, cross-checks and verifies the body of evidence; interrogates suspects and establishes their alibis by which he rules them out one by one. He makes a list of those who had either visited or were present in Acroyd's household when he was murdered, and takes everyone to be a suspect. Going about in the manner of detectives, the first thing he does is to inspect the crime scene and the summerhouse minutely to ascertain any indication of an outsider's entry. Thereafter, each occupant and visitor is interviewed individually and their versions corroborated. Poirot tries to find answers to the basic question—who had a motive strong enough to kill Ackroyd.

However, the detective's way of inquisition is different from the direct interrogation of the police. At Fernly Park, he plays the suspects cleverly to ferret out secrets from each through psychological manipulation. Poirot accuses everyone of holding back something, where each one is "concealing something… has something to hide" (190). By putting the suspects in a tight spot and accusing them all of hiding something, Poirot encourages them to come clean with their confessions and establish their alibi/innocence. This prompts the suspects to prove their innocence and clear their name by coming out with whatever little they know related to the case and also own up to their other offences and indiscretions. Many secrets tumble out of fear and a guilty conscience. Mrs Ackroyd confesses

checking up on Ackroyd's will and owns up to stealing silver from Ackroyd's study while searching for the will. Fear and guilt is used to wring out the truth from suspects and own up to their true feelings. The detective can be credited with penetrating observation and attention to detail. He sees things that are not manifest to the ordinary eye and is able to draw connections. Conducting a reconnaissance of the summer house, Poirot relates the discovery of the 'goose quill' to the habit of snorting snow drugs popular in America. He then connects Ms Russell's inquiry on drug addiction to the quill found at the summer-house and notices the resemblance between Ms Russell and Charles Kent to reveal the identity of Ms Russell's drug addict illegitimate son.

While the body of evidence unnerves the police, Poirot joins trivial details like puzzle pieces to uncover motives. His deductions are not always scientific but based on ratiocination or reasoning ability. Laying out facts, Poirot concludes that the blackmailer and murderer are the same since Ackroyd is killed shortly after receiving the blackmailing letter that has disappeared. The detective is far ahead in recognising the importance of minor clues that are overlooked or ignored. He confirms the exact position of the chair and knows that starched cambric is no handkerchief but a maidservant's apron. And that Ralph Paton seems too obvious a suspect with his sudden disappearance and boot prints on the scene. His sharp perception of human nature is compounded by his understanding of the suspects' personalities and backgrounds. He is able to look beyond Flora's charms, to her insolvent condition and her love for Major Blunt, and observes the incongruity between Ursula's impoverished upbringing and her aloof demeanour and digs more information on her only to reveal her as Paton's wife. In an ingenious move, he has false news of Paton's arrest published to force him out of hiding and to clear his name. Learning of Ralph's arrest, Ursula seeks Poirot's help to save her husband by claiming his innocence. The false report of Paton's arrest reveals Ralph's secret marriage to Ursula.

To nail the murderer, the detective considers the time of murder and finds out what everyone was doing from nine-thirty onwards when Ackroyd was last 'heard' by Raymond. It was at half-past nine that Ralph Paton was found at Fernly Park. Though Flora initially admits to seeing Ackroyd alive at a quarter to ten, it turns out to be a lie when her theft is revealed. Poirot explains that every suspect had an alibi except Dr Sheppard who had already left Ackroyd at eight fifty (ten minutes to nine). Dr Sheppard's alibi depended on the dictaphone that he had timed for half-past nine—evidence that does him in. Not only this, Poirot displays knowledge of past incidents and is able to make connections. He links Sheppard's "mechanical turn of mind" and his interest in clocks and machines to the use of the dictaphone that works on the same principle (358). Hethen connects the use of the dictaphone to the unusually drawn out chair that stands "in direct line between the door and the window" and was used to screen the timed-dictaphone that played the recorded voice of Ackroyd at half-past nine: "at nine-thirty Mr Ackroyd was already dead. It was the dictaphone speaking—not the man" (353-55). The phone call made from a pay phone by a patient of Dr Sheppard helped him remove the dictaphone to its receptacle just in time by reaching the crime scene.

Considering the time Dr Sheppard should have ideally taken on a cold evening to return home, Poirot questions why Dr Sheppard took longer than usual—the unexplained discrepancy in time that nails Dr Sheppard as the accused. While

the goose quill and other red herrings expose other characters, the dictaphone and phone call both serve as Dr Sheppard's alibi. It is finally Sheppard's manuscript that gives Poirot a peek into his personality. The detective reads Sheppard's account on the investigating case and points out Sheppard's deliberate "reticence" on revealing little about his own personality or his personal judgement upon the case "(while) recording all the facts faithfully … (and giving) a very meticulous and accurate account" (329). Unlike Hastings, Sheppard leaves himself out of the narrative, stays hidden and "kept (his) personality in the background" and gives himself away to the detective's discerning eye. Interestingly, all through the investigation, Poirot keeps his thoughts regarding the findings to himself. Unlike other murder mysteries, the readers do not follow the detective's thoughts or get to solve the case with him. **Janelle Hann** opines that there is a certain "external focalisation" present in the novel. External focalisation is when the narrative focus is more on external happenings. With the focus directed outwards, the inner goings - on of the detective's mind remain unknown to the reader. Which means Poirot remains inscrutable and does not reveal his thoughts until the very end. We've mentioned the red herring and other false clues; let us see what red herring is in the next section.

2.3.4 Suspects, Red Herrings and the Body of Evidence

Red herrings are false trails and misleading clues that may or may not be directly connected to the case and tend to throw the investigation off track. Several red herrings are presented in the form of incidents and sub-plots that are unrelated to the crime but that helps the detective discover the true identity of the criminal. A detective fiction story is usually interspersed with red herrings that make the plot both complicated and convincing, and that is what we shall seek to explore in the MRA. The biggest red herring is that the story is presented through the eyes of an unreliable narrator. He diverts our attention to other suspects with his narrative style. Like Dr Watson he is also an assistant to the detective and the readers never suspect him. Seemingly, Sheppard reluctantly agrees to Flora's suggestion to have Poirot on the case. This could be because he is confident of having committed a perfect crime and tries to exonerate himself of all suspicions by helping the detective. He is rather proud of his writing skills and wishes to record the great detective Poirot's failure in solving this case.

Red herrings are necessary to expand the plotline and maintain readers' interest in the gallery of suspects drawn. Almost every character has the opportunity and motive to kill Ackroyd and falls within the ambit of suspicion. Each suspect appears to have something to hide and has a vested interest in lying. Christie's *whodunit* investigates lies and half-truths of a large number of suspects who are realistically drawn in shades of grey. Everyone is shown to harbour a secret and the readers are made to suspect everyone. These suspects are exonerated one-by-one before the identity of the culprit is finally revealed. The main red herring is that all evidence squarely points towards his adopted son Ralph Paton, who, everyone testifies, had a strained relationship with his stepfather and was staying separately at Three Boars inn. He is initially assumed to be the murderer as he has gone missing from Three Boars after the murder. Inspector Raglan is confident that Paton is the murderer as Paton's boot prints are found on the scene and also because he visited Fernly Park on the night of the murder. However, Poirot points out that Paton as a suspect seems too plain and obvious and deliberate with the marks of footsteps indicating "so much evidence of his presence".

Paton is shown to be debt-ridden due to his extravagant spending habits and is taken to be the prime suspect for going into hiding and not showing up to clear his name until the false news of his arrest forces him out. Ralph surfaces only to reveal that it was Sheppard, posing as a well-wisher, who helps him, hide in a mental asylum to save him from the police. After murdering Ackroyd, Sheppard goes into the summerhouse to put on Paton's purloined shoes and returns to the house through the window and leaves boot prints as misleading evidence. Many secrets are revealed during the course of the investigation. Ulterior motives come to light and facades are blown off as the mystery nears its resolution. Ackroyd's charming niece Flora is revealed to be a thief who stole forty pounds and lied about the time she last saw her uncle alive. She never met her uncle that night and was near her uncle's room stealing money when she heard Parker coming. Flora is secretly in love with Major Blunt with her engagement to Ralph being nothing more than a financial arrangement to secure her future. Hard-pressed for monetary assistance, both Paton and Flora depend on Ackroyd's bequest.

In a *whodunit*, the class of servants as social inferiors also comes within the circle of suspects. There are several red herrings related to the servants and housekeepers that both help and derail the investigation. It is Parker who discovers the murder and reveals key details that helps Poirot's investigation. While Sheppard eludes any mention of the "blackmailing business", it is Parker who informs the police about the missing letter and the pulled out chair. Sheppard is caught off-guard at Parker's mention of the oddity of the drawn-out chair that was found displaced from its usual position- "I never dreamed that Parker would have noticed that chair. Logically he ought to have been so agog over the body as to be blind to everything else. But I hadn't reckoned with the trained servant complex" (367). It was this drawn out chair that screened the dictaphone that played Ackroyd's recorded voice. Being in-charge of the household, Parker is shown to have an observant eye for detail, trained as he is to be a sharp and sophisticated butler for the rich. Despite his "passivity of countenance" (67) and being impeccable and deferential in his services, he is caught for his suspicious eavesdropping outside Ackroyd's door and is revealed to have blackmailed his former employer. Ursula Bourne, the parlour maid who had resigned the afternoon of the murder is taken to be a suspect. Reading the report of Ralph's arrest, Ursula reveals herself to be Paton's wife and seeks Poirot's help claiming her husband's innocence. The housekeeper Miss Russell is revealed to be the unwed mother of Charles Kent, the stranger who Dr Sheppard saw on the night of the murder. Christie turns our ideas about each of the suspects and everyone with a secret up their sleeve, upside in this novel. Let's look at Caroline as a detective with her powers of womanly intuition and inquisitiveness next.

2.3.5 Caroline

Sheppard's older spinster sister Caroline is presented as the local grapevine who, has her own network of servants and informants and has a knack for finding out facts. Sheppard dislikes her curious interrogation but admits that Caroline's uncanny guesses based on intuitive knowledge and hearsay are often true: "Caroline has constantly asserted without the least foundation for the assertion that his wife poisoned him" (10). While Dr Sheppard thinks Mrs Ferrars died due to accidental overdosing, his sister Caroline is convinced that Mrs Ferrars committed suicide out of guilt for poisoning her husband. Seemingly, Caroline's intuitive insights are mostly correct and she comes across as a better judge of

character. Christie indirectly characterises Sheppard mostly through his annoyance towards Caroline's overly curious and gossipy nature, and for often giving him an "uneasy feeling that she saw through (his) transparent device" (65). Dr Sheppard accepts he is wary and intimidated by her: "my greatest fear all through has been Caroline. I have fancied she might guess" (368).This is because Caroline's judgements are often accurate and on the nose. She believes that Ralph Paton could not be the killer for being the most obvious suspect and is also correct in assuming that Flora is not in love with Ralph. Caroline is sought out by Poirot as an informer for her understanding of human nature and instincts though she never doubts her own brother's duplicity. As an informant, she gives Poirot details of Sheppard's patients and also complements the information on her brother. Hercule Poirot praises her "womanly intuition" and acknowledges Caroline has "makings of a born detective" to be able to see things "like a detective" (145). Her intuitive insights are pitted against the male detective's rational intelligence. The detective acknowledges that while men focus on parts, women unconsciously notice patterns and add them up to arrive at a correct analysis; shifting the focus from the external observable action to the internal psychological aspects of human motivation. However, with her female intuition, Caroline appears to be a more reliable judge of character than her brother Sheppard. She judges her own brother's weak moral nature very astutely but regards him too well to see him as a suspect. While Sheppard believes she is "full of curiosity", Caroline knows her brother is "equally curious but hides it well" (65)

Caroline Sheppard becomes a precursor to Christie's famous female detective Miss Jane Marple who first appeared in *Murder at the Vicarage* (1939) as Poirot's intellectual equal—a nosy, independent detective with her uncanny insights into things. Both of Christie's fictional creations Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple went on to become famous literary figures. Mah- Jong the Chinese game is a tile-based game belonging to the Qing dynasty, commonly played by four players. This game too finds a place in the MRA and we shall look at its significance next.

2.3.6 Mah-Jong

Somewhere in between the narrative, Christie inserts a game party involving a game of Mah-Jong that Dr Sheppard plays with his sister Caroline, Colonel Carter and Miss Gannett. Mah-Jong is an exotic Chinese game that was popular in the cold war era and was played in clubs during Christie's time. Ostensibly a tile-game, Mah-Jong is a variation of the card game rummy that requires a player to outwit his opponents to stack tiles in a particular arrangement. The game calls for powers of concealment and an observant eye. However, the game party hosted at Sheppard's house becomes much more than a mere game. It provides a meeting ground for the inhabitants and gives a glimpse of the society whose chief preoccupation is gossip: "our hobbies and recreations can be summed up in one word, gossip" (17).The game gives a veritable picture of the inhabitants of King's Abbot with their penchant for gossip where they air and exchange their views.

The game of Mah-Jong can be read symbolically. It is similar to the murder mystery where players are suspects in the murder game who try to hide their cards. As in the card-game, all the concealments in the murder mystery eventually come to light. This analogy/parallel between the game and the murder mystery

also gives an insight into Sheppard's mind by the very way he plays the game. Sheppard remains quiet throughout the game/narrative and reveals nothing of his own thoughts while faithfully shedding light on everyone else. As the players gossip to entertain and outwit one another, Sheppard deftly hides his hand all along and cleverly practices the art of concealment. He gives no inkling before he lays out all the tiles to surprise everyone as the winner with a 'perfect hand'. Sheppard's way of playing is similar to the way he constructs his narrative. It shows us a reflection of his psyche where he conceals the truth simply by omitting its mention, by being reticent and keeping himself in the background to stay unnoticed. He keeps his cards close to his chest and secrecy is his characteristic trait. Much like the game he plays cleverly and secretly, he quietly goes about hiding his blackmailing business or his visit to the Three Boars. His writing and game playing styles are similar. What comes to the fore is Sheppard's hubris to gloat over his achievements and a desire to outfox everyone. Having won the game and believing he "played rather cleverly", he impulsively ends up sharing the discovery of the ring from the pond and regrets his act immediately since he wanted to conceal it. His game playing and narrative are all about withholding the whole truth. We shall look at the social milieu next as a convention of detective fiction was that the criminal had to belong to the same social class.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Critically comment on the narrative technique used by Agatha Christie in the Murder of Roger Ackroyd.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2) One of the most memorable features of the Murder of Roger Ackroyd is the quite writerly pride with which Sheppard directs our attention to the moment of murder. Discuss.

.....

.....

.....

.....

3) "Dr. Sheppard has been a model of discretion … but me, I discover all the little secrets. It is my business". In the light of the above statement critically examine the role of the detective in the novel.

.....

.....

.....

.....

4) Write short notes on:

i) King's Abbot

.....

.....

ii) Women characters in the novel.

.....

.....

.....

.....

iii) Mah Jong

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2.4 SOCIAL MILIEU AND CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

One of the conventions of detective fiction writing states that the criminal should belong to the same social milieu as the victim. Roger Ackroyd belongs to the moneyed class who has made a large fortune by being a successful manufacturer of wagon wheels. He belongs to the landed gentry of King's Abbot and is a man of great fortune with his trusted friend doctor Sheppard from the same English upper class. It is noteworthy that Ackroyd's rise is due to his earned not inherited wealth that is illustrative of great social and economic churning. A nouveau riche like Ackroyd exemplifies the rise of capitalist society in England during this time, when the landlords rode high on the industrial revolution in Europe and gained by investing their wealth in the manufacturing business and industry. According to **Meenakshi Malhotra**, MRA documents the "socio-historical discontinuities of English life and the advent of new money" of the interwar years (183). Ackroyd's wealth is attributed to the industrial revolution that spurred a wave of social mobility. He has class aspirations to live like a country squire and extends his patronage to cricket matches, clubs and parish funds. On the one hand, the changes brought about by industrialisation and education threatens to disturb the established class hierarchies, the rise in capitalistic society also has a bearing on the socio-cultural ethos. The pastoral countryside setting of King's Abbot is taken to be away from the perversions of the city. However, this "peaceful village" is soon revealed to be far from innocent and idyllic. There is heavy curiosity and gossip mongering about the private lives of the rich and influential of the village.

The way Ackroyd's murder is looked at/ analysed/ accepted, signals a fundamental change. Ackroyd's death is treated in a clinical and emotionless way. There is no

emotive grieving that follows his murder and he dies un-mourned. Even the language used to describe his murder is formulaic and the tone evaluative. Most of the suspects stand to gain from Ackroyd's will and are shown to be mercenary in seeking Ackroyd's wealth. Flora's marriage to Ralph is a way of escape from her impecunious life that was becoming insupportable. Both Ralph and Flora are weak financially and stand to inherit a sizeable fortune. Mrs Ackroyd has accumulated debts with her extravagant lifestyle and plans to live off Ackroyd's wealth, but is annoyed to know he has left her nothing in his will. However even Ackroyd is not above using his wealth as a means of control. Ackroyd displays class consciousness when he compels Ralph to marry Flora and stands stern against disrupting the class structure with Ralph's marriage to the parlour maid Ursula. Ralph will not be allowed to marry a penniless girl like Ursula and is forced to keep his marriage secret until he is financially self-reliant. With the bucolic life disrupted by Ackroyd's murder, Christie critically touches upon the socio-cultural issues of her day such as the rise in the capitalistic order, increase in crimes and the question of will and succession in families. The change in the capitalistic order and its attendant socio-economic changes in the larger world outside are shown to have cast their shadow on the cozy, rustic English setting that is initially taken to be unsullied but proves otherwise.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have looked at what constitutes detective fiction, who the predecessors of Hercule Poirot and Jane Marple were, we have taken *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* up for close analysis and looked at it critically. Now, summing up we need to look at how the discovery of the dignified doctor as the murderer comes as a breach of readers' trust at many levels. Not only is he the most trusted friend of Roger Ackroyd, he is also the narrator who assists Poirot all along and is eventually revealed to be a Jekyll-and-Hyde figure—a proverbial snake in the grass—who betrays the confidence and trust of everyone. Towards the end, the novel becomes self-reflexive as Dr Sheppard confesses to the murder and pens his own suicide note as 'apologia'. The suicide note is not only his admission of having committed the crime but expresses his dismay at his failure to conceal it. Readers realise that the very novel they are reading is Sheppard's manuscript, the one he had written to document Poirot's failure in solving the case. It paints Sheppard as a proud and apathetic man who nurtures a desire to document Hercule Poirot's failure. However, he does acknowledge documenting the narrative truthfully without giving away his own role in the scheme of things.

The last note has Sheppard informing the readers of Poirot's plan to preserve the doctor's reputation by allowing him to exit with dignity. He will take veronal, just as he had administered it to Mrs Ferrars for sleeplessness, and that his death would be seen as accidental overdosing. This taking 'life for a life' is seen as a fair bargain. It can be viewed as Poirot's poetic justice to expunge a remorseless doctor who had no regard for life and felt no compunction for the life he had taken. The biggest irony of the plot is that a doctor who is supposed to be the saviour of lives is revealed to be the murderer. As a doctor, Sheppard was hardly a humanist. He was an astute opportunist with a weak morality who blackmailed Mrs Ferrars to his advantage. In his moral fallibility, he posed a threat to the society. There is no pity or compunction for a being like him.

It is debatable why the detective allows Sheppard to die without putting him through the shame of a trial, public disgrace or persecution. It could be Poirot's consideration for Caroline and her regard for her brother. Or to let Sheppard go with his reputation intact while preserving the faith that society reposed in doctors. Needless to say, the discovery of Dr Sheppard as a criminal would have shaken the society and brought in a sense of distrust against the medical profession. Some critics believe that by not handing him over to the police, Poirot gave Sheppard the opportunity to finish his manuscript. Others opine that the detective wanted Sheppard to take the fall for his sister. Whatever it may be, the plot twist at the end reminds the readers that their understanding relied heavily on the narrator-doctor's subjectivity. Dr Sheppard is neither Captain Hastings nor Dr Watson. By trying to divert attention from the narrator all along and then establishing his guilt with this antithetical ending, the author does exploit the mentality of the lay reader by playing with the rules of the detective fiction genre.

Check your Progress 2

1) What makes The Murder of Roger Ackroyd one of the most controversial murder mysteries till date?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

a) Discuss the rules of detective fiction that were rewritten in Christie's The Murder of Roger Ackroyd.

.....

.....

.....

.....

2.6 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) Read Section 2.3 carefully and then write the answers in your own words.
2) Read Sections 2.3, 2.3.1, 2.3.2 carefully and then write the answers in your own words.
3) Read Sections 2.3, 2.3.1, 2.3.2, 2.3.3, 2.3.4 and 2.3.5 carefully and then write the answers in your own words.
4) Read Section 2.3 entirety and then write the answers in your own words.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Read Section 2.5 and then write the answers in your own words.
2) Base your answer on the entire unit but focus on section 2.5

2.7 GLOSSARY

Alibi : Evidence that proves that a person was in another place at the time of a crime and so could not have committed it.

Nouveau riche : People who have recently become rich and like to show how rich they are in a very obviousway.

Ratiocination : Reasoning ability, the process of thinking or arguing about something in a logical way.

Red Herring : An unimportant fact, idea, event, etc. that takes people's attention away from the important ones; False and misleading clues that throw the investigation off-track.

Jekyll and Hyde : A person with two very different sides to their personality, one good and the other evil Snake in the grass: a person who pretends to be a friend but who cannot be trusted.

2.8 SUGGESTED READINGS & REFERENCES

Auden, W H "The Guilty Vicarage". *Harper's Magazine*. May 1948. URL: https://harpers.org/archive/1948/05/the-guilty-vicarage/?single=1

Christie, Agatha. *Murder of Roger Ackroyd*.Harper Collins. 2002.

Halder, Deb Dulal. *Popular Fiction: Critical Essays*. Book Age Publications, Delhi: 2014

Hann, Janelle. "Concealing the Story: A Study of Agatha Christie's Use of Narrative Focalisation."

https://www.academia.edu/3569914/Concealing_the_Story_A_Study_of_Agatha_Christies_Use_of_Narrative_Focalisation

James, P D "The Art of the Detective Novel". *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*,Vol.133,No 5349.August 1985. pp 637-649.

Jarag, Anand. "Major Socio-cultural Issues in the Genre Fiction by Select British Women Novelists" (URL-http://hdl.handle.net/10603/148959)

https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/148959/8/08%20socio%20cultural%20issues%20in%20british%20genre%20fiction.pdf

Kobritz, Sharon. "Why Mystery and Detective Fiction was a Natural Outgrowth of the Victorian Period". *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 2002.URL-https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/etd/483

Malhotra, Meenakshi. "Caring for Roger Ackroyd". *Agatha Christie's The Murder of Roger Ackroyd: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Nilanjana Gupta, ed. Worldview Publications,Delhi, 2013.174-186

UNIT 3 SCIENCE FICTION: AN INTRODUCTION

Structure

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This introductory unit seeks to provide a brief outline and a historical overview to the literary phenomena called Science Fiction**.** We will delineate the important discussions pertaining to its definition, generic understanding, methods of reading and its evolving social status over the years. We will also chart the history of its evolution; enumerate the major types of science fiction that has emerged over the years; and discuss the major criticisms and debates/themes that have proliferated around it. The definitions, criticisms and types mentioned here have been drawn from an Anglo-American perspective. Let's begin our journey into Science Fiction.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The first thing that we need to keep in mind is that, though science fiction (SF) is commonly thought to be of Western origin; over the years, science fiction has been appropriated, consumed and acknowledged by all cultures. From India to China, to Japan, to Russia, to Latin American and to African countries, SF has emerged as a viable medium to represent, subvert and challenge the accepted models of reality, history and identity. So what do we do now? Let us begin with trying to define SF? How do we define the genre of SF? How do we read SF? And what is the present social status of SF?

Our contemporary age has often been postulated as being nothing less than a science fiction with the development of new modes of technologies,

communications, and multifarious forms of digital simulation. As a literary product widely categorised as central to one's culture, the history of science fiction's rise as a ubiquitous and fundamental aspect of society that has undergone several stages and transformations. From its early description as a low-brow aesthetic product described pejoratively as trash, pulp and read not by critics or scholars but by 'fans', suffering from what **Brian Baker** terms as "crisis of legitimation", SF criticism and scholarship (science fiction and its acronym SF will be used interchangeably throughout this unit) have evolved since the late 1960s in America and Britain as a legitimate area of study. In fact, earlier the novels like **George Orwell**'s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), **Thomas Pynchon**'s *Gravity Rainbow* (1973), **Margaret Atwood**'s *The Handmaid's Tale* (1984), as **Mark Bould** in his introduction to *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction* (2009) describes, have often been interpreted as "not really SF" but, rather as "transcending the genre" itself (1). The vulgar form of science fiction understood earlier as mainly a publishing gimmick has given way to an understanding as, novelist **Thomas M Disch**, who declared in 1998: "science fiction has come to permeate our culture in ways both - trivial and/or profound, obvious and/or insidious."

Science fiction's urge to be assimilated within the mainstream canon, as **Roger Luckhurst** explains in his well-known essay "The Many Deaths of Science Fiction: A Polemic" (1994), "seeks to elaborate a fantasy of non-origin, of being indistinguishable, identical, to the 'mainstream': in such narratives of embedding SF into a larger historical unfolding there is clearly a desire to return to an earlier state of things, before the genre divide, before the boundary of high and low." So, the different trends and thematic concerns over the years as it has developed in science fiction texts or criticism are really just an account that acknowledges this literary product as Luckhurst suggested, "apply[ing] for citizenship in literature" (38). **Joanna Russ** in her essay "Towards an Aesthetic of Science Fiction" (1975) locates science fiction as a type of literature (prose literature) that includes many structural elements similar to other kinds of prose fiction and inclusive of an aesthetic sense and value. But, more importantly Russ underlines that the way to read science fiction calls for different cognitive skills and evaluative criteria than so-called mainstream literature. So, how does one read SF? Let's try and understand that next. Borrowing from Russ' and Luckhurst's accounts of SF, the tensions, the dialogues, the dissents and the arguments within the terrain of science fiction can be read as offering interesting insights on the economic, political, cultural and social governance of imperial and neo-imperial politics as it pans out within the colonial/postcolonial/global arena. Science fiction, then, is a polemical and social terrain encapsulating multiple perspectives pertaining to social variables like gender, race, class, sexuality and technology that constitutes our society. Having said that, what needs to be remembered is that the arena of SF is not only vast but also in a state of flux, as is obvious from its constant fascination with reinventing itself either through new modes of narrative strategies or by using thematic content differently to represent a code, as **Gary Westfahl** in his book *Science Fiction, Children's Literature, and Popular Culture: Coming of Age in Fantasyland* posits, "challenge old beliefs and construct new paradigms." Defining or re-defining the genre is the next stage of our journey into the world of SF.

3.2 TOWARDS A USEFUL DEFINITION OF SCIENCE FICTION: REDEFINING THE GENRE

In the analysis of Russ and Luckhurst, we find that SF demands a different reading than say the type of reading required by realist literatures; and in the evolution of SF, we see that it requires the blurring of the boundaries between canonical literatures and mass literatures. So, what we find is that, the function and nature of SF is at the same time, similar to and different from mainstream literatures. It therefore, allows us to envisage SF as a contradictory terrain forever in confrontation with the theoretical pretensions of canonical literature. The terrain of science fiction is riddled with problems because of its contrary origins and theorisation. Science fiction is a literature that defies explanation as its multiple characteristics, tropes and ever changing landscapes are an inescapable fact of its mutable identity. To document the protean character of SF, one needs to move away from a single comprehensive explanation of SF, because as **David Seed** rightly asserts, "to reduce these explanations to a single, comprehensive definition [is the] way madness lies." However, this hasn't stopped critics and scholars from trying to define this varied and mind boggling body of literature. And over the years, there have been several attempts to elucidate this literary product by providing a working definition either through market dynamics or its social impact or its theme or setting. The definitions of what constitutes SF are plenty but, there is no consensus regarding its nature and this lack of agreement has a bearing on its social value. Regardless of the numerous definitions that proliferate the terrain of SF it should be kept in mind that defining science fiction is, as **Brian Baker** asserts, "not a neutral activity." The very process of definition is marked by a sense of boundary which excludes and includes certain paradigms and in effect, demonstrates a certain conception of SF's social role.

Critics like **Norman Spinrad** (qtd. in Clute and Nicholls: 314) argue that science fiction is something which is marketed and published as science fiction. So, science fiction for them is a literature that most readers claim to understand by the covers of the text itself with its glossy designs of aliens, spaceships, robots. However, this explanation fails to reflect on the varying themes and tropes that have emerged within this genre. For **Brian Aldiss**, the well-known British science fiction writer and critic, science fiction "is a search for the definition of man and [points towards] his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge." While at once philosophical, this explanation of Aldiss points towards the social, psychological truth that constitutes mankind and the veracity of available knowledge systems. Aldiss' definition suggests the close affinity of SF with the very existential knowledge that constitutes humanity. For **Ursula K Le Guin**, (whom we will be studying in the next unit), SF is a "modern myth", while **Fredric Jameson** terms it as "a representation of the future" and **Robert Scholes** and **Eric Rabkin** terms SF as "modern conscience." All these definitions allow us to read science fiction as being closely connected with society, history, identity and as fundamental to human existence.

Then again critics like **Darko Suvin** (1979), **Carl D Malmgren** (1991) and **Adam Roberts** (2006) argue that the term science fiction itself is contradictory as it is built using an oxymoron - 'science' and 'fiction' critics. SF can be understood as a study that enables a fantastical elaboration of science or fictional

narrative about science and its impact on society. In almost all illustrations of SF, both of these definitions hold to elaborate on the diverse elements of our society.

The earliest understanding of SF locates its origin and nature in relation to other pre-existing generic types. In the early stages of it growth, science fiction was read primarily as an instance of fantastic literature. **Tzvetan Todorov**, in his *A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1973), defined the fantastic through three modes – the Marvellous, the Uncanny and the Fantastic. Todorov's description of the fantastic provided the base for further theorisation on that in-between space between science and fiction. He states the fantastic as, "an integral part of reality—but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us [. . .] The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event" (25). **Rosemary Jackson** in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981), reads fantasy "as the inside, or underside, of realism, opposing the novel's closed, monological forms with open, dialogical structures . . ." (25). Jackson's and Todorov's explanation of the fantastic allows us to revisit the science aspect of this terminology in a more nuanced manner. Todorov's hesitation between the real and unreal, the actual and the possible, makes science fiction a dynamic terrain. **Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr**, identifies this "oxymoronic fusion of the rational and marvellous" as that which enables science fiction "to challenge received notions of reality - sometimes seriously, sometimes playfully" ("Criticism" 43). This elaboration of science fiction's contradictory and opposing perspectives to "challenge" is described by Jackson's premise of fantastic as the 'other' side of realism, one which leads to a re-conceptualisation of reality itself. This finds its most famous explanation in Darko Suvin's description of science fiction:

> a literary genre or verbal construct whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the *presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment*.
>
> (Emphasis in the original; 37)

Suvin's description entails a balance between the cognitive and the estrangement equation as, **Eric D Smith** has rightly pointed out, "[a]n overbalancing or neutralizing of this dialectical tension in favor of cognition results in the mundane familiarities of an aesthetic 'realism,' while one in favor of a mere estrangement not cognitively tethered to the present (and thus not critically charged) yields the irrationalist projections of purely generic 'fantasy'" (3). Suvin's explanation of SF as "cognitive estrangement" allows a critical examination of the familiar, everyday reality by looking at it through the lens of defamiliarisation. Science fiction in Suvin's discussion traverses the sameness of quotidian life and the unfamiliar radical alterity of a strange other through the use of the 'novum' to disrupt the bourgeois, capitalist status quo. In course of time, certain motifs, tropes, images like that of aliens, artificial intelligence, space travel, time travel, new-fangled technological innovations have all become entrenched as "megatexts," a term coined by **Damien Broderick** (57-9). However, even though certain tropes, elements or 'megatexts' or novums are common characteristics which have become codified and institutionalised as generic features of science fiction, this explanation of SF is still largely unsatisfactory. So, the question is can we really define science fiction in a simple manner? Think about it. The next

aspect of Science Fiction that we need to look at is whether it's a genre of literature or whether it's a mode of writing within literature?

3.2.1 Genre or Mode

In this sub-section, we shall look at how Science fiction can be recognised as a genre. For this to happen, it requires that the texts move within its generic boundaries, but this does not really happen. As **Farah Mendlesohn** claims, science fiction texts are less a "genre" and more a "mode" of writing. Unlike other literary genres, science fiction is more an "ongoing discussion" (Mendlesohn) which borrows and sources from any available genres like romances, horror, mystery, and thrillers. **John Reider** in his essay titled "Defining SF, or Not" argues for an accretion of repetitions, echoes, imitations, allusions, identifications, and distinctions" (196) whose meaning differs in terms of its socio-historical context. **Sherryl Vint** rightly suggests that science fiction "is not a 'thing' but is always actively being made from heterogeneous materials, and larger questions of market, cultural politics, and aesthetics inform these struggles over definition" (13-4). While science fiction might be the object of critical theory, **Carl Freedman** asserts, that critical theory is at the same time explained by science fiction. Freedman's analysis of SF and dialectical thinking as accounts of each other allowed it to traverse beyond the rigid generic boundaries as formulated by Suvin. Freedman espouses that generic identification of this literary phenomenon fails to take into regard the technical virtuosities of this cultural product. To sum up, the myriad definitions and generic slippages of this varied literature, encompasses a whole history of literary canonical frameworks and revisions. Labelled pejoratively as vulgar, mass-marketed initiative lacking emotional depth, comprising of melodramatic plots and stereotypical characters, its later rise as literature to redefine boundaries of the real and unreal, actual and possible, human and non-human, male and female, enabled the readers to not only redraw the present historical and political scenario but also, to envisage our future in a new light. In the words **of Andy Sawyer** and **Peter Wright**, "[science fictions'] speculative nature, its incessant philosophizing on 'what if?' invites a comparative speculative response; it requires engagement with thought-experiments that confront and often overturn passive acceptance of contemporary conditions; it has the capacity to stimulate, to unsettle, to provoke the reader into an intellectual response. Constantly reinventing itself to react imaginatively to transformations in its cultural and ideological milieu, it remains the most vibrant of the popular genres and affords considerable scholarly pleasure to those involved in its teaching and study".

In the next section we shall enumerate a brief history of this genre. This historical mapping is merely a means to explicate certain key linkages of this ever-shifting and fluctuating genre with other literary genres as well as enables us to read through this outline certain elements and tropes that continue to sustain in the field of SF till this date. However, considering the contradictory nature of this terrain and its mutable nature as seen in the plethora of definitions provided by critics over the years, one needs to keep in mind that the historical lineage of SF is also, devoid of a clear agreement between scholars.

Check Your Progress 1

1) How would you define science fiction? Is it a genre or one which surmounts generic understanding?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

3.3 A SHORT HISTORY OF SCIENCE FICTION

Adam Roberts in *The History of Science Fiction* (2006) locates the beginning of science fiction in the ancient Greek novel of *travel extraordinaires*. Moving on from the instances of travel, science, and adventure woven in Greek novels, Roberts interrogates the disappearance of this mode for about two thousand years and its next major appearance in 16th century Europe. His reading of this disappearance, presence, and re-emergence of science fiction leads to his assessment of this mode as the movement from Catholicism to that of the birth of Protestantism. As a "function of western Protestant culture" (x), SF grew

> "as an imaginatively expansive and (crucially) *materialist* mode of literature, as opposed to the magical-fantastic, fundamentally religious mode that comes to be known as Fantasy" (x).

Sawyer and **Wright** add that science fiction's emergence can be seen as corollary to the rise of the utopian genre. **Thomas More**'s *Utopia* (1516), the first utopian literary text was an illustration of man's rational energies to actualise a better world. So, alongside the rise of humanism and in the wake of Reformist energies to develop scientific temperament, a new discourse of scientific rationalism took precedence. However, the birth of modern science fiction or SF proper as we know it arose out of the twin movement of industrialism and imperialism; a corollary to the rapid developments in the sphere of science and technology. **Brian W Aldiss** and **David Wingrove**'s history of SF titled *Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction* (1988) locates the origins of SF in the changing atmosphere of an Industrial revolution which led to the birth of Gothic fiction. For Aldiss and Wingrove, the genre of gothic and **Mary Shelley**'s *Frankenstein* (1818) remains the original text out of which the mode of science fiction has emerged. Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a novel showing man creating life using pseudo-scientific methods has generated a whole new way of genetically modifying species, foods (Frankenstein Food), discourses related to the reproduction of artificial life. The novel has also, created new possibilities for rethinking the ethical constraints of man vis-a- vis the power to wield scientific knowledge. If the 19th century saw the indomitable rise of science and technology as influencing social, political and imperial regimes, it also, undermined social and religious certainties. Against this backdrop, one can read the importance of H G Wells scientific romances. Whether it's the *Time Machine* (1895) and/or *The War of the Worlds* (1898), Wells "provided," in the words of **Paul Kincaid**, "a vocabulary of images and devices that would set the tone for Anglophone science fiction thereafter".

In his book *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2008), **John Reider** argues that colonialism is science fiction "genre's texture, a persistent, important component of its displaced references to history, its engagement in ideological production, and its construction of the possible and the imaginable" (15). In the same vein, **Patricia Kerslake** posits that the main subject matter of SF is "the theme of empire" (191). As a product of the "techno scientific Empire" (Csicsery - Ronay Jr "Dis-Imagined" 231), this theme of science fiction makes the rise and growth of SF so significant within the Indian/African/Latin American context.

If the First and Second World Wars saw Britain losing its status as a global imperial power, America, by contrast, emerged as the new, economic world power. The period of British SF during the World Wars is one that seeks to encounter the devastating violence through catastrophes like **Aldous Huxley**'s *Brave New World* (1932) – a proto-science fiction and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty –Four* (1949). These texts were not science fiction as Suvin categorised it but, did build up on the tropes and themes of science and technology as it impacted our everyday life. America on the other hand, saw itself at the centre of shaping the future through its manipulation, control and surveillance of scientific and technological knowledge. And against the rapid scientific developments that led America to its super power status, **Hugo Gernsback** first started his science fiction magazine, published in cheap periodicals like *Amazing Stories,* Gernsback's' scientification' magazine related a didactic story of miraculous future technology that propels America to its global supremacy. Hugo's pulp magazines generated a huge interest among young adult male readers who comprised mainly its fandom. From these early fandoms emerged the leading science fiction practitioners like **Isaac Asimov**, **Robert Heinlein** and others who shaped and fashioned nascent genre of SF. By the 1930s, Gernsback's pulp magazines gave way to other magazines and the most dominant of them all being *Astounding Stories*. Led by its editor, **John W Campbell Jr**., the magazine was soon retitled - *Astounding Science Fiction* and it emerged as the main site for casting narratives in strict adherence to scientific laws but without losing grips over character development and moral equilibrium. The 1960's saw the re-emergence of British SF with **Michael Moorcock** as the editor of the magazine *New Worlds*. Moorcock's editorship inaugurated the New Wave SF that in conjunction with literary modernism and counterculture movement challenged the brash certainties of American science fiction. This was followed soon after by a fresh wave of experimentation in American science fiction that primarily questioned the boundaries of sexuality and desire. Both the British and American science fiction interrogated norms of patriarchal society and subverted the claims of the establishment to articulate the concerns of the underprivileged of history. If Ursula K Le Guin confronted gender hierarchies that existed in our society in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969); in *The Dispossessed* (1974) she questioned the problematic status of utopia itself.

Associated to this sequence of events which gave rise to modern science fiction is Adam Roberts' broad delineation of three types of science fiction: firstly, space travel science fiction (to other planets, strange new climes); secondly, time travel science fiction (both to past or to future) and thirdly, technology-oriented science fiction (a form most dominant in the 20th century). Apart from these three major types, Roberts also counts the utopian form as a larger frame to many different types of SF. In accordance with these categorisations, the development of science fiction has been approached through multiple markers like Hard Science,

Magazine-era SF, New Wave and Cyberpunk SF, science fiction from the 1980s to the present times. The 1980s saw a new engagement with the Hard SF of Campbell with the British new wave experimentation that resulted in vivid portrayals of technologised society. The cyberpunk novels inaugurated by **William Gibson** in *Neuromancer* (1984) were a brilliant portrayal of the digitalised world that comprises our contemporary society. By the 1990s, SF became predominantly a means to redefine our postmodern and postcolonial world of hybridity and in-betweenness that marks the liminal existence of man within the globalised world.

Over the years, the various trends and historical developments of this genre can also be understood as part of a larger design to frame the common ethos and framework of this mutable literary genre. In its rise and fall, we see the rise and fall of empires, the questioning of gender and racial attitudes, disrupting gender and sexual orientation as natural and biological in nature, in making ecological crisis as a veritable fact and thus, to change our economic policies. The historical trends of SF have also resulted in several types of SF which has mutated and proliferated in corollary with our historical and political contexts. Let us examine the typology of Science Fiction next.

3.4 A TYPOLOGY OF SCIENCE FICTION

The different kinds of SF that are listed below are the most popular types of this challenging genre. However, within these types, there are several sub-types that have proliferated into a highly marketable literary artefact. The common types as much as it reflects on the changing trends within this terrain also, document the social transformations that have been wrought by the forces of technology and scientific epistemology. There are three significant types of SF – Hard SF, New Wave, Cyberpunk, and Utopian/Dystopian SF.

3.4.1 Hard Science Fiction

Hard Science fictions displayed a heightened association with science and is largely concerned, as **G Hartwell** asserts with, "the emotional experience of describing and confronting what is scientifically true". The rise of science fiction as a haven for marketing and publishing gimmicks started largely during 1926-1960, effectively denominated as Magazine-era SF. This era not only established American science fiction as the most popular and entertaining in the global science fiction publishing industry but also, as **Brian Atterbury** asserts "exerted considerable influence on SF's form and subject matter", particularly on the mediation of science to reshape humanity. The major thematic concern of Hard science fiction was to "display a heightened connection to science" (**Westfahl**) and to educate the masses on the significance of science to everyday life. The two prominent writers of this type were **Arthur C Clarke** and **Hans Clement**. The writing of hard science fiction was both clinical and clumsy and concerned majorly with scientific knowledge to travel to other spaces rather than to reflect on the immediate social reality. It should be noted that Hard SF is not to be understood in monolithic terms suggesting an oppositional stance to a Soft SF. The texts construed under Hard SF are numerous and diverse in their range and themes with only an implied emphasis on the soundness of scientific ideas. Clement's "Fireproof" (1947) deals with the possibility of the survival of fire under weightless conditions and Clarke's "Hide and Seek" (1949) is about a man outmanoeuvring a spaceship while running on the surface of a Martian Moon.

This serious attention to pseudo-scientific terminologies of the day is amply encapsulated in **Heinlein**'s movie *Destination Moon* (1950), a movie helmed at the backdrop of the establishment of the US Space program. Despite its wide appeal among the masses, it was the New Wave SF that reshaped and redefined this literary genre.

3.4.2 New Wave

According to Moorcock (1979), New Wave SF with its boring and pessimistic plotlines, "ushered SF into the realms of serious literature" (qtd. in Latham: 202). Without losing its concern for scientific epistemology, New Wave SF sought to reflect on the issues most significant for modern society. Termed both elitist (**Spinrad** 1990) and as deeply connected with strands of popular culture, New Wave SF brought in a wave of experimentation and innovation for a literary product restrained by pseudo-scientific thought experiments. The writers and critics most associated with this SF (**Judith Merill**, Moorcock) questioned "the format and ideology of traditional SF plotlines" of pulp fiction and sought to move beyond the space exploration stories of Golden Age fictions (Hard SF of 1950s) "to the creation of new states of mind, new states of awareness" (Latham 2011, 117). Writers experimented with both form and content of SF and capitalised on the youth counterculture of the 1960s, anti-war activism, second wave feminism and ecological crisis; themes of alternative gender politics, rejection of the traditional white, male subject of the pulp fictions, interrogations of power networks and configurations in every form and variable of society redefined the shape of SF itself. **Ballard**'s *The Cage of Sand* (1962) sought to represent the cosmic voyagers as troubled, anti-heroes, locked up in their own inner demons rather than representing them in the manner of Hard SF as brave imperialists striding forward on the wave of science and technology. **Latham** believed that New Wave SF expanded the themes of SF and it boosted its stylistic range (in Seed, 214). In the next sub-section, we shall look at what utopia is.

3.4.3 Utopia

Utopian literature and SF are inextricably linked as Darko Suvin pointed out with its core impulse of cognitive estrangement. Defining the Utopian form as "the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where socio-political institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community, this construction based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis" (1979; 49). Suvin's description of Utopian genre as materialist makes it remarkably similar to later SF concerned with the "larger collective social and cultural machinery – socio political institutions, norms, and relationships – rather than individual characters or character psychology"

This creation of a new space, new world, newer environment with the help of 'novum' extrapolated from the world the reader/author inhabits alternatively serves as an analogy for the real, experiential world and connects SF with the utopian genre. Using Suvin's theory of "cognitive estrangement," Fredric Jameson explains that the utopian genre is constructed around the here and the now and thus, "defamiliarize (s) and restructure(s) our experience of our own present" (286). **Tom Moylon** in his book titled *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (1986) draws upon Jameson's exposition on the

connections between science fiction and utopian vision. For Moylon, utopian text "resists the closure of ideology" (18) and is oppositional to the formations and structures of ideology. Introducing the influential term of 'critical utopias', Moylon describes it as one in which the texts "reject utopia as a blueprint while preserving it as a dream" (36) wherein through the broken narrative strategies employed within the text, the ideological structures are dismantled. For Moylon, critical utopias as a textual space emerge as the key impulse "to open up a radical path to a not yet realized future" (50). Utopia informs both the structure and the theme of SF and the historical context out of which it emerges. Through its use of the notion of defamiliarization, Utopian SF makes the readers critically aware of the "problems of the reigning social order" and deconstructs the commonly accepted beliefs and conventions of the society leading it open to change and transformations (Wegner 80). Cyperpunk is a latter type of science fiction that also needs to be looked at.

3.4.4 Cyberpunk

The 1980s recorded a new dimension in the field of science fiction which emerged from the sterility of its earlier subject-matter and old styles. This was the emergence of the form of 'Cyberpunk,' a term coined by **Bruce Bethke** and represented most famously in **William Gibson**'s *Neuromancer* (1984). In the words of **John Clute**, "cyberpunk did not domesticate the future. It treated the future as a god." (68) A slightly edgy artistic and cultural label, Cyberpunk is also a commercial label concerned primarily with computers and the relationship between technology and the body. **Mark Bould** suggests that Cyberpunk has spawned several versions like *cowpunk*, *steampunk*, *biopunk* and others. Derived from a combination of cyber which relates to communication networks and punk that is concerned with marginality, youthfulness, hooliganism, cyberpunk is SF that is anti-authoritarian, filled with "socially excluded, characters living in the ruins and in the shadows of multinational capital" (Bould 218). The best example of Cyberpunk is Gibson's *Neuromancer* – a fiction that cannibalises the styles of the past, in which the Eurocentric binaries of natural and artificial no longer holds value. In the words of Bould, "*Neuromancer* inaugurated the SF of multinational capital and corporate globalization, its depiction of information circulating in cyberspace a potent metaphor for the global circulation of capital" (220). Cyberpunk inaugurated a new field of thought where the tendencies of global capital and postmodern eclectic styles are registered to rupture the outmoded forms of thought and expression. Let us now look at the themes that are taken up in science fiction.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Discuss the various types of science fiction writings that have emerged within the terrain of SF.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

3.5 THEMES

We now come to the themes, debates that have greatly expanded the canon of Science Fiction. Most of these play out within the larger framework of theorisations like marxism, postmodernism, feminision, and ecologcal. Without going into the intricate details of these themes, I would like to introduce the basic concepts that have proliferated around these theoretical debates.

From the 1960s, Marxist criticism vastly influenced the writings and understanding of science fiction. Particularly, Utopian SF and its derivatives like dystopian, utopian, have flourished in its close affinities with Marxist terminologies. Concerned as Utopian SF is, with providing alternatives to current social and political regime and identifying with the possibility of change, the themes so developed in its connection with Marxism is related to a "critique of contemporary conditions or possible future outcomes of current social trends" (**Csicsery Ronay Jr**., 113). The desire to bring forth a change amidst a world filled with despair, exploitation, sexual violence, economic constraints fuels both the utopian and dystopian SF fuelled by Marxist imagination.

From its Marxist underpinnings as elaborated in Darko Suvin's classification, science fiction criticism moved towards feminist fabulation. Science fiction as a genre has typically been understood as a white, male-dominated genre. In the wake of Marxists analysis and the subtext of technological implosion, critics like **Donna Haraway** and **N Katherine Hayles** identify SF as concerned with the consequences of technology on individual lives. As Donna Haraway explains, "science fiction is generally concerned with the interpenetration of boundaries between problematic selves and unexpected others and with the exploration of possible worlds in a context structured by transnational technoscience" (300). Apart from SF criticism's newer perspectives like feminism and cybernetics, recent studies have focused on science fiction's close connection with postmodernism. If postmodernity suggests the hybridised way of being, random, chaotic nature of existence at once plural and meaningless, it has led SF terrain to refashion itself in newer ways to represent and transform reality. The postmodernist debates allowed us to understand the relationship better between science fiction and socio cultural moment (Hollinger 237). Hollinger posits that "Cyberpunk's stories about the implosions of organic nature and inorganic technology imagine processes of denaturalization in which "the human" is *literally* transformed into the posthuman" (237).

3.6 LET US SUM UP

The various new theories/debates around SF reflects the growth of science fiction from its humble beginnings as adventure and escapist literature to a mode concerned with the postulation of man in relation to society. This brief overview reads science fiction from its definition, modes of reading; its social value; generic location within the literary canon; its historical mapping; kinds of SF and the themes that have been extremely popular and in fact, shaped the canon itself. So essentially what we've tried to do in this introductory unit is to try and define what science fiction is; we have examined it as a genre and traced the evolution of science fiction as a genre. We hope you now have some understanding of this genre and its various forms.

3.76 QUESTIONS

1) Explain the literary status of science fiction and how has that led to an evolution within the field of SF itself.
2) Elaborate on Marxist underpinnings of SF.
3) Discuss Feminist fabulation and how it has reshaped the canon of SF.
4) Elaborate the relationship between Cyberpunk and postmodernist thought.
5) Discuss the origins of SF and what impact does it have on the themes of SF.

3.8 HINTS TO CHCEK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) Read sections 3.2 & 3.2.1 carefully and then write the answer in your own words.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Read sections 3.4, 3.4.1, 3.4.2, 3.4.3 & 34.4 carefully and then write the answer in your own words.

3.9 SUGGESTED READINGS & REFERENCES

Aldiss, Brian W. and David Wingrove. *Billion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1973.

— . *Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction*. London: Paldin-Grafton Books, 1988.

Bould, Mark. "Cyberpunk." Ed. Seed. 217-231.

Bould, Mark and China Mieville, eds. *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction*. Middletown, U of Wesleyan P, 2009.

Broderick, Damien. *Reading by Starlight: Postmodern Science Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Clute, John and Peter Nicholls, eds. *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. London: Orbit, 1993.

Csicsery-Ronay, Istvan Jr. "Marxist Theory and Science Fiction." Ed. Mendlesohn and James. 113-124.

— . "Science Fiction/Criticism." Ed. Seed 43-59.

Disch, Thomas M. *The Dreams Our Stuff isMadeOf: How Science Fiction Conquered the World*. New York: Free Press, 1998.

Freedman, Carl. *Critical Theory and Science Fiction.* Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 2000. Print.

Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. London: HarperCollins, 1993.

Haraway, Donna J. "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriated Others. "*Cultural Studies.*Ed.Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler. New York: Routledge, 1992. 295–337.

Hartwell, David G. (1994) "Hard Science Fiction." *The Ascent of Wonder: The Evolution of Hard Science Fiction*. Ed. Hartwell and Kathryn Cramer. New York: TOR Books, 30–40.

Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999.

Hollinger, Veronica. "Science Fiction and Postmodernism." Ed. Seed. 232-247.

Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. London: Routledge, 1981.

James, Edward and Farah Medlesohn, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003.

Jameson, Fredric. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science*

Fictions. London: Verso, 2005.

Kerslake, Patricia. *Science Fiction and Empire*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2007. Print.

Latham, Rob. "The New Wave." Ed. Seed 202-16.

Le Guin, Ursula. "Myth and Archetype in Science Fiction." *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Ed. Susan Wood and Ursula K Le Guin. London: Women's Press, 1989.

Luckhurst, Roger. "The Many Deaths of Science Fiction: A Polemic." *Science Fiction Studies* 21.1 (1994): 35-50. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 Sept. 2016.

Malmgren, Carl D. *Worlds Apart: Narratology of Science Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991.

Mendlesohn, Farah. "Reading Science Fiction." Introduction. James and Medlesohn 1-12.

Moylon, Tom. *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and The Utopian Imagination*. New York: Methuen, 1986.

Reider, John. *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 2008.

— . "On Defining SF, or Not: Genre Theory, SF, and History." *Science Fiction Studies* 37.2 (2010): 191-209. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 Sept. 2016.

Roberts, Adam. *The History of Science Fiction*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. Print. Palgrave Histories of Literature.

Russ, Joanna. "Towards an Aesthetic of Science Fiction." *Science fiction Studies* 2.2 (1975): 112-19. *JSTOR*. Web. 24 Aug. 2015.

Sawyer, Andy and Peter Wright, eds. Teaching Science Fiction. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Scholes, Robert and Eric S. Rabkin, *Science Fiction: History, Science, Vision* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. vii.

Seed, David, ed. *A Companion to Science Fiction*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

— . "Approaching Science Fiction." Introduction. Seed 1-7.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein.* Ed. Anjana Sharma. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2001. Print.

Smith, Eric D. *Globalization, Utopia, and Postcolonial Science Fiction: New Maps of Hope*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Suvin, Darko. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979.

— . *Positions and Presuppositions in Science Fiction*. London: Macmillan Press, 1988.

Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Trans. Richard Howard. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1973.

Wegner, Philip. "Utopia." Ed. Seed. 79-94.

Wells, H.G. *The Time Machine.* 2003. www.1stworldlibrary.org. 24 Aug. 2015.

— . *The War of the Worlds*. Broadview Press, 2003.

Westfahl, Gary. "Hard Science Fiction." Ed. Seed 187-201.

— . *Science Fiction, Children's Literature and Popular Culture: Coming of Age in Fantasyland*. N.p: Greenwood Press, 2000.

UNIT 4 URSULA K LE GUIN: *THE ONES WHO WALK AWAY FROM OMELAS*

Structure

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will examine Ursula K Le Guin (1929-2018) as a writer of Science Fiction and also analyse her *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas* (1973) as illustrative of the genre. *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas* was nominated for the Locus Award for Best Short Fiction in 1974 and won the Hugo Award for Best Short Story in 1974.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas can be read as a postmodernist parable at one level and as a fable at another, diagnosing the mechanisms that constitute the cultural foundations of our society. The story questions the ethical and political possibility of the utopian dream through complex narrative strategies, establishing the social order in terms of the moral responsibility of individuals to reconstitute it. The story of 'Omelas' continues to remain relevant in a world torn by greed and violence with its corollary of sacrificial economy. The organisation and narrative techniques of this story represents the limits and the inherent contradictions of utopian possibility. However, in its critique of the utopian space, the utopian dream isn't discarded but, held as a beacon of light to usher in a transformative energy in society. Let us now look at the author Ursula K Le Guin's life and works for a better understanding of her short novel.

4.2 URSULA K LE GUIN: LIFE AND WORKS

Ursula K Le Guin's oft-anthologised, the Hugo award winning short story, "*The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas*" was first published in the magazine *New Directions* in 1973. It was subsequently reprinted in Le Guin's popular short story anthology *The Wind's Twelve Quarters* in 1975. A commentary in the online science fiction magazine *tor.com* (2017) stated that in its challenge to both the conceptions of genre and those of ethics, it "packs quite a punch for such a short piece".

Ursula K Le Guin, one of the most popular American novelists and renowned science fiction and fantasy writers of the 20th century was called, an "imaginative creator and major stylist" who "raised fantasy into high literature for our time" by critic **Harold Bloom** (qtd. *NY Times* 2018). Born on October 21, 1929 in Berkeley, California, USA, Ursula's early experiences of having lived in varying and multiple environments informed and shaped her works of fiction. She was the daughter of the distinguished anthropologist **A L Kroeber** and writer **Theodora Kroeber**. The anthropological methods learnt from her father and the research on 'Ishi' conducted by her mother, the last wild Indian of California, stimulated her lifelong fascination of representing alien environments, developing new worlds and modeling unique characters. Her early life was informed and shaped by her coming into contact with scientists, reading a number of mythical tales and rituals, "variety of Native American tales" that she "grew up hearing from her father"(Bernardo and Murphy 3). She spent her teenage years at Napa valley, "wandering the hills on [her] own." This was instrumental in influencing her vision (ibid.). Le Guin's interest in writing science fiction and fantasy stories stemmed from her brothers' interest in reading the science fiction periodical, *Amazing Stories*. She earned her undergraduate degree from Radcliffe University in 1951 and her postgraduate degree from Columbia University in 1952. Ursula met Charles Le Guin and married him in Paris and then returned to America. Later, they shifted to Oregon after having experienced segregation and discrimination in the American South. Her first work of writing began at the age of 12 and though it was rejected it enabled her to understand the intricacies of writing better. Guin's first professional work was published in 1960 and since then she published several novels, short stories, novellas, children's stories, poetry, literary criticism, translations in a career spanning over forty years. She also edited texts like *Interfaces: An Anthology of Speculative Fiction* (1980), *The Norton Book of Science Fiction* (1993), and *Selected Works of H.G. Wells* (2004). She died at the age of 88 in the year 2018.

To trace the trajectory of Le Guin's works, one needs to place it in the context of The New Wave movement. The 'new wave' was a specific trend seen in the history and development of science fiction, wherein British science fiction illustrated a new sensibility that rejected the principles of the early American pulp science fiction texts; and the genre of hard science fiction; to fashion a subjective science fiction – soft science fiction. This new wave of writing inaugurated by the British writer and editor of *The New Worlds* periodical, Michael Moorcock, embraced a poetics that called for a mature style and devoid of clichés like space travel, plundering aliens "in favour of adult themes that explored the depths of human experience" (16). Also, the 1960s saw the rise of countercultural revolution signifying a rejection of traditional beliefs and authoritarian practices and instead turned towards alternate forms of expression. This countercultural expression was an articulation in terms of both aesthetic and political reconfigurations. Amongst the many forms of countercultural expressions seen, was the emergence of hippie culture, rock n roll phenomenon, and political resistance to the Vietnam War, expressive drug use and experimentation, the advent of the birth control pill and a newer mode that articulated sexuality.

Her first three novels, *Rocannon's World* (1966), *Planet of Exile* (1966), and *City of Illusions* (1967), were a representation of the assemblage of ideas drawn from British New Wave science fiction; American genre imagery; and anthropological methodologies drawn from her father; mythical tales of the anthropologist **James**

Frazer; to weave a fiction of "loss, companionship, isolation, redemption, and love" (Bernardo and Murphy 16). She creates in these texts new lives and beings from the planet Hain, that established "human life on habitable planets, including Earth," (Britannica. com "Ursula"). Dealing with alienation, forms of memory and teething problems that informs cultural encounters and our (in) abilities to communicate with varying races and disparate worlds, these three novels attempt to bridge and connect with multifarious forms of culture and varying nature of political economy. These novels collected in the omnibus *Worlds of Exile and Illusion* (1996) function as stand-alone novels but, as **Susan M Bernardo** and **Graham Murphy** suggest, function more effectively when read against the oeuvre's of Guin's work, particularly the Hainish sequence of novels (19). The Hainish cycle, also known as "novels of the Ekumen" deals with the race of Hains whose offspring have circulated across the galaxy and in their various mutations and transformations created offshoots of human species; with a veritable cornucopia of ethnographic diversity. These Hainish cycle of novels do not follow a chronological sequence of historicity making this megatext highly challenging for the readers traversing different galaxies and iconoclastic characters like League of All Worlds, invaders like Shing, and the rise of Ekumen (Bernardo and Murphy ibid.). Though Guin's Hainish cycle of novels are the most popular amongst the readers, yet, these were not the only group of sequence novels written by her. The Earthsea sequence, comprising of three novels – *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), *The Tombs of Atuan* (1971) and *The Farthest Shore* (1972), complicate the relationship of magic and science. Primarily written for young adults, these novels in its morally ambiguous style and where 'naming' is suggestive of dominance over others, is a quest parable to search for balance among oppositions and contrasts, a theme which was adapted from her lifelong fascination – the study of Taoism. She returns to this sequence in her two later novels, *Tehanu* (1990) and *The Other Wind* (2001).

Her most popular and critically studied fiction was the highly speculative, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and *The Dispossessed: An Ambitious Utopia* (1974). *The Left hand of Darkness*, termed by Le Guin, as a "thought experiment" was a text that had eliminated gender from the equation of social, cultural and political economy. In a planet called Gethen, where differentiation between males and females are non-existent and people assume the attribute of either sex according to reproductive fervour, this novel was a feminist exploration on the nature of societies. The fluidity of gender is accentuated in the kind of narrative strategies drawn from "a mosaic of sources, an intersteller's ethnographer's notebook to journal entries to fragments of alien myth" (*The Paris Review* 2013). This fiction won the two top prizes in the field of science fiction, the *Hugo* and the *Nebula* awards. *The Dispossessed: An Ambitious Utopia* pits two contrasting societies against each other. One, is a capitalist society that perpetuates exploitation of the underclass while, the other is a utopia that is nevertheless, found wanting in its passive conformism.

A few of her works have also been adapted for film or television. *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971) saw two adaptations for the television screen. One was shown on PBS (1980) and the other, A & E cable channel (2002). Other adaptations include a Japanese animation series of "Tales from Earthsea" and a 2004 mini-series on Sci-fi channel, "Legend of Earthsea". She won several awards and was also, later knighted by the Science Fiction Writers' Association in 2003.

Le Guin's sensitive portrayals of disparate worlds and her fascinating revision of history set against the context of feminist explosion of the 1960s and the countercultural movement changed the nature and vision of science fiction from equating technological inventions with progress and development to a critique of the very foundations of society. Her stories animate worlds with a sensibility that invites the readers into her imaginative worlds to articulate and insist upon moral change. Her stories demand critical engagement from her readers and frames possibilities where there is none.

The short story of Omelas has often been read as a commentary on the limits and contradictions of the genre of utopia and, it becomes necessary to revisit the nature of the utopian genre and the history of its tradition. Moreover, the connections between utopian literatures and science fiction will be also be highlighted. Then we shall move onto the plot summary and critical analysis of this short story.

4.3 UTOPIA AND SCIENCE FICTION

Darko Suvinin his book *Defined by a Hollow: Essays on Utopia, Science Fiction and Political Epistemology* (2010) specified, "Utopia has had a singularly rich semantic career in our time" (17). The term, a neologism, has often been used, as **Fatima Vieira** has suggested, "for the formation of new words" (3). The new words such as dystopia, anti-utopia, euchronia, heterotopia, and ecotopia are all derivative neologisms, formed out of utopia.

The term was first described in Thomas More's book, *Utopia* (1516), that simultaneously hovered between indications of a space and a state, a space that is non-existent (outopos) and a state that is good (eutopos). Critics have pointed out that the source for More's Utopia is Plato's City in its "imagined alternative ways of organizing society" (Vieira 5). **Warren Rochelle** in her book *Communities of the Heart: The Rhetoric of Myth in the Fiction of Ursula K Le Guin* (2001) stated, "the root myth of utopia is the myth of the Golden Age, when humans supposedly inhabited a perfect world as a gift from the gods. Utopian narratives are examples of wish fantasies through which human attempts to recapture this mythic perfect world, the ideal human past – each one rhetorical, an argument to convince the reader that this is the way to recover lost Eden" (66). However, even though Utopia is constructed on the vision of the myth of a golden age, it is, according to **Robert Elliott**, "the application of man's reason and his will, to the myth [of the Golden Age], … is man's efforts to work out imaginatively what happens – or what might happen –when the primal longings embodied in the myth confront the principle of reality … .(8-9)" This provides us with another important characteristic of utopia that it is human-centered and not driven by any external or divine influence. Functionally, following **Fatima Veira**'s arguments, one can describe utopia through three maxims: one, through the nature of its contents that which is supposedly 'better' than the prevailing society of the author and reader; two, the role it plays in the lives of its readers and, this invariably suggests a political change; third, the alternative society so projected in a utopian text is informed by a desire for a better life implying discontent with the prevailing values of society. This is the most important maxim as it involves "principal energy of utopia: hope" (Vieira 7).

The human conception of utopia has had huge repercussions on the nature of utopian society. In its desire to 'better' human life, utopia has often predicated

itself on a rigid system of values that seeks to bind the unstable, inconsistent desires of men to a monolithic, totalitarian form of ideological thinking. It becomes unduly static and an all-controlling mechanism. And during the latter half of the 20th century, the totalitarian attitude of utopia found itself reflected in the Nazi-inflected dreams of a Golden Age world and the continued endorsement of 'progress' sustained on technology; finally, leading to a rejection of the utopian dream. If the utopian impulse is primarily projected within literary terrains, this rejection of an Edenic version, alternate to our society, led to the formation of anti-utopias fictions – wherein, as Fatima Vieira points out, "the irrelevance and inconsistency of utopian dreaming and the ruin of society it entailed" was posited (16). And this totalitarianism embedded in utopian thought manifested in another neologistic derivative world –dystopia.

Dystopia's first recorded use was by **John Stuart Mill** in 1868, to suggest the impracticality of a utopia. In later years, dystopia suggests a far worse imagined alternative world than the author or readers' empirical environment. **Tom Moylon**, stresses the rise of dystopic imagination in the latter half of the 20th century reflecting the critiquing and radical questioning of the "era of economic restructuring, political opportunism, and cultural implosion" (186). The dystopian genre is "not a new generic form," according to Moylon, but, is a means to present the society in a new "critical light" (188, 45). It follows in the tradition of "critical utopias" in revealing the cracks inherent within the utopian genre. In its alternative re-imaginings, 'critical utopias' suggests a "critical consciousness of the oppressive forms of utopia" (Baker 113). Dissonances and ambiguities become significant as a form of self-critical revision of the form of utopian genre.

Several studies have outlined the connection between science fiction and utopia and in **Peter Fitting**'s words, "it is impossible to study the utopias and dystopias of the past fifty years or more without acknowledging the central role of science fiction" (135). And Darko Suvin, the seminal critic of the study of science fiction has identified utopia's political implications: "Utopia is the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where socio-political institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community, this construction based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis" (49). If one analyses this definition by Suvin, it would become apparent that in utopian fiction the stress is on its socio-political aspects; for instance, on the institutions, practices, norms of a society rather than being concentrated on representing a character and its development. Secondly, utopian fiction, as Wegner claims, "emphasizes the inseparable link between any specific Utopian text and the historical context out of which it emerges" (80), that is, the utopian vision is identified as a perfect vision of a society in comparison to the author's 'present' historical and social context. Also, the utopian text relies on a critical imaginary of 'estrangement', a term borrowed from **Bertolt Brecht**'s concept of 'estrangement' and alienation to showcase a 'perfect' society, an alternative to the present historical moment of the author and readers.

It is in this critical imaginary that science fiction and utopian genre are closely connected. Suvin's understanding of utopia as a positive place is similar to his definition of science fiction as a form of "cognitive estrangement" (37). The use of Suvin's definition of science fiction as 'cognitive estrangement' enables us to distance ourselves, from our everyday environs and thus, critically and rationally

comprehend our contemporary socio-historical moment. Fashioned out of the oxymoronic fusion of science and fiction, Istvan Csicsery Ronay Jr. describes science fiction as, "the fusion of the rational and marvellous" which enables science fiction "to challenge received notions of reality - sometimes seriously, sometimes playfully" (43). Without going into the quagmire of whether science fiction was derived from utopian genre or vice versa, one can see that the close affiliation of utopia/dystopia with science fiction in the imagining of an alternate world leads us to frame utopias as ideological presuppositions hovering between hope and despair for our destined future borne out of the comprehension of our socio-political present.

Le Guin's story of Omelas posits the contradictory nature of utopias and in so doing, allows us to rethink the fundamental values that frames any society. Introducing the short work in her 2012 collection *The Unreal and the Real, Volume Two*, Le Guin noted that *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas* "has a long and happy career of being used by teachers to upset students and make them argue fiercely about morality" (iv). The story explores the nature of utopia as imbricated with the moral choice of individuals. And in its dynamic use of narrative voice that critically engages with the implied readers of the text; the credibility of the utopian impulse is interrogated. Let us look at the summary of the plot of *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas* next.

4.4 PLOT SUMMARY

The short story of Omelas is divided into three sections. The first section opens in, as David Brooks said in *New York Times* in 2015, "an idyllic, magical place". This charmed town literally opens with the Festival of Summer, a merry procession ending with a horse race. The town of Omelas in this grand celebratory mood is filled with music and a "cheerful faint sweetness of the air" informing the setting, mood and atmosphere of this merry, happy town. Omelas is introduced to the readers with the narratorial voice describing people dancing on the streets, children and adults alike, in a celebratory, rapturous setting. Here, both "boys and girls, naked in the bright air with mud stained feet and ankles and long, lithe arms" engaged themselves to rest before the festival procession or horse race began". The atmosphere is "bright", the town decorated with "sparkled" flags and "painted walls". The town itself is lined up with "avenues of trees", "great parks and public buildings". Inhabited by old people in long stiff robes suggesting gravity and wealth of experience, filled with serious, philosophical artists and workmen, merry women carrying babies as part of the procession; this first section's representation of Omelas suggests the rich lushness of life and the happiness that surrounds a society that has no need of "kings or slaves," "nor the stock exchange, the advertisement, the secret police and the bomb". This initial descriptive section representing the town and the inhabitants of Omelas suggests a utopian space "without the pall of poverty, racism, religious dogma, or draconian governmental structure" (Senior 186).

But, then the narratorial voice shifts from the descriptive mode to using the commentator's mode and poses rhetorical questions using the first person voice so as to include the readers to collaborate in creating this utopian town of Omelas. Using strategies of confession whereby the narrator implies his failure to conceptualise a utopian space that suits the "fancy of all", this sexless, nameless narrator invites the readers to participate and co-create the joys and pleasures

they wish to include in this pastoral arcadia of Omelas. The readers are given free rein to use their imagination "as your fancy bids" in the creation of this fantastical town of Omelas. This narratorial voice, identified by **Elizabeth Cummins**, as the voice of the trickster, "the cayote's voice" (19), allows the readers to move beyond puritanical tenets and also, include visions of orgy or drugs ("drooz") if need be, to complete and manifest their vision of Omelas. Religion is permissible but readers are asked not to include clergymen. The narratorial voice, in an intimate and philosophical manner, suggests that to actualise the vision of utopia, the readers ought to represent the people of Omelas as being aware of "happiness" as being "based on a just discrimination of what is necessary, what is neither necessary nor destructive, and what is destructive". In keeping with this maxim, technologies that augment the pleasures of life are welcome in this utopic space of Omelas like central heating, subways but weapons of technology aren't allowed. The narrator though clarifies that he/she isn't aware of all the rules or laws that govern this town but, there seems to be an all pervading sense of harmony and peace. The narrator explains this contentment as based on the fact that the inhabitants of Omelas have nothing to be guilty about. Moving between the shifts in narrative voice from musing on what and why certain elements, practices and institutions can be included, to the use of conditional verbs like "could", there's a further shift to the use of present tense with the narrator describing a young flute player, a child of about nine or ten, playing exquisite music. This music is, according to the narrator, the prelude to the horse race that's about to begin. However, even as the readers wait for the *Ben Hur* race to begin and embrace more festivities and ceremonies, the narrator posits the question - do we now believe in this picture? And this confused narrative voice leads us to the second section of the story.

The second section represents all that is beautiful and pleasurable in Omelas, the happiness and harmony that pervades the lives of the inhabitants of this town is because of the necessary and continuous existence of a single, tormented and miserable child inside, literally, the basement of this beautiful city. In a locked room, probably a broom cupboard where "mops, with stiff, clotted, foul-smelling heads, stand near a rusty bucket" and "[t]he floor is dirt, a little damp to the touch", a child who "could be a boy or a girl" and who "looks about six, but actually is nearly ten" is imprisoned. The demented child's world is comprised of fear, incomprehension of its terrible existence and perplexity regarding everything including time and space. The world of this child is one that is filled with abject neglect. What makes it worse is that the readers are informed that the child hadn't always lived in this filthy, rotten place and "can remember sunlight and its mother's voice". The child is the very picture of deprivation living "on a half-bowl of corn meal and grease a day", a routine necessary not for its survival but for the corresponding scenes of lightness and wisdom to endure for eternity. Every inhabitant of Omelas, when they reach the age of eight and twelve, occasionally even adults return to visit the child so as to be aware that the beauty and achievements that informs the city of Omelas depends on the suffering of this child. Oftentimes, the people are in despair, are desolate and terrified of this knowledge. But, the inhabitants of Omelas are also, made aware of the fact that no change in this social contract can lead to the transformation of the terrible sense of despair that surrounds this child:

They may brood over it for weeks or years. But as time goes on they begin to realize that even if the child could be released, it would not get much good of its freedom: a little vague pleasure of warmth and food, no doubt, but little more. It

is too degraded and imbecile to know any real joy. It has been afraid too long ever to be free of fear. Its habits are too uncouth for it to respond to humane treatment. Indeed, after so long it would probably be wretched without walls about it to protect it, and darkness for its eyes, and its own excrement to sit in. Their tears at the bitter injustice dry when they begin to perceive the terrible justice of reality, and to accept it.

This stoic acceptance is, we are told, that which tells us that every inhabitant is "not free". But, this acceptance of the terms of the contract by the citizens of Omelas, invariably leads to the translation of more compassion in their daily lives. In fact, the citizens of Omelas realises that the music of the flute player, the celebration of the summer festival are all possible because of the existence of this child. The narrator then asks the implied readers if they accept the validity of this town. And immediately after this rhetorical question, he goes on to relate another "incredible" story.

This 'incredible' part of the story begins in the third section of the narrative. Here, the narrator informs the readers that a few inhabitants after having witnessed the child's misery don't return home and instead "walk away from Omelas", outside the gates of the city 'into the darkness and they do not come back". The narrator suggests that it's unable to describe this darkness as possibly it might "not exist". But insists, however, that the walkers are aware of where they are going. Having summarised the story, let's now analyse the plot next.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Describe the city of Omelas as an instance of utopian/dystopian genre.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2) Describe the role and significance of the narrative voice.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

4.4.1 Critical Analysis

This short story in its very simplicity suggests the fabric of the cultural, political and social foundation of our society as being premised on the sufferings of the weak, the demented and the alienated – the filthy, monstrous other. The "anthropological preoccupation of this story on cultural foundations, "is that the mythological order of any society is based on, as **Rebecca Adams** suggests, "the scapegoat mechanism" (36). Drawing upon **Rene Girard**'s "victimage

mechanism", Adams identifies the story of Omelas with its great works of art, beauty and music, its compassion as having a 'dark' violent underside to it (36), in the presence of this child's continued agonising existence:

> *They all know that it is there. . . . They all understand that their happiness, the beauty of their city, the tenderness of their friendships, the health of their children, the wisdom of their scholars, the skill of their makers, even the abundance of their harvest and the kindly weather of their skies, depend wholly on this child's abominable misery.*

Le Guin had written in the introduction to the story published in the *The Wind's Quarter Twelve* edition, that the story was a variation of an essay by **William James**, the philosopher. She said that when she found the passage in the essay by James titled *The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life*, there was an instantaneous "shock recognition" and one which shaped the premise of this story. The particular passage which served to shape her vision was:

> *Or if the hypothesis were offered us of a world in which Messrs. Fourier's and Bellamy's and Morris' Utopias should all be outdone, and millions kept permanently happy on the one simple condition that a certain lost soul on the far-off edge of things should lead a life of lonely torture, what except a sceptical and independent sort of emotion can it be which would make us immediately feel, even though an impulse arose within us to clutch at the happiness so offered, how hideous a thing would be its enjoyment when deliberately accepted as the fruit of such a bargain?*
>
> *(qtd. Kennedy 274)*

The notion of the "permanently happy condition", as James postulated, at the expense of "a certain lost soul" leading "a life of lonely torture" is a "hideous bargain" is evocatively described in this story. However, **Shoshana Knapp** points out, that more than James' passage this story was influenced and shaped by Fyodor Dosteosvsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), the story Le Guin claimed to have forgotten (78). Knapp says that instead of the abstract idea presented in James' formulation, the child's abject condition, "malnutrition, mental torment and filth" recalls Ivan talking to his brother Alyosha about whether or not it was acceptable to terrorise an individual at the cost of someone else's sustained picture of happiness. For Knapp, this story in its eerie recall of Dostoesvsky's Ivan and Alyosha's refusal of such happiness; provides a broader picture than James free-floating hypothesis of bargain. Knapp states that in this the readers and the citizens of Omelas are "on trial as moral agents" and that Le Guin's real "subject is the proper morality of art itself" with narrator as deceiver, and being the creator of Omelas is actually an "indictment of God" (75-78).

Kenneth Roemer's insightful essay however, moves beyond the walkers whom he acknowledges are privileged in this story to outline the moral dichotomy that binds those who chose to remain in Omelas. Roemer suggests that in their staying, we are made aware of like,

... the notion that the narrator clearly favors the walkers does not stand up well to a rereading of the text. The opening is still glorious, possibly even more maturely glorious now that we know that those joyous paraders and little flute player know or will soon know that happiness rarely comes unattached. Omelas is not an airy sandcastle. It is deeply rooted in the knowledge of human anguish.

(14)

Lee Cullen Khanna claims that the story is structured around binary oppositions: "Utopian citizens parade, in unity and joy, into their beautiful city; dissenting citizens walk alone and sorrowfully away from it. The young flute player, prototype of the artist, is juxtaposed with the suffering child of the same age. Utopian accomplishment is suggested in the city's glorious public buildings, even as the dark basement houses the secret sufferer"(48).The story of Omelas with its dialectical tensions of beautiful accomplishments, of great parks, and public buildings and its underbelly being the home of a "secret sufferer" (Khanna 48); the story of the citizens who stay and accept the plight of the child as a given and the citizens who choose to walk away because they refuse to partake in the vision of such a society; is a creation of, in the words of Khanna," a neat epitome of 'utopia' as a discourse of indeterminacy" (ibid.). This indeterminacy and the self-reflexive voice of the narrator can be read as a postmodernist parable where the story "foregrounds and fails to resolve traditional generic tensions" (48).

These structural binaries focus on the lack of textual closure of the meanings of this text. Why does any society require an "other" or a scapegoat to organise itself? Is scapegoating the only possible solution for a society to find and secure its happiness? Can works of art be produced in an atmosphere of pain and misery imposed on others? Who decides the terms of this contract? Why is this bargain that is hideous and against sheer logic and decency acceptable to the citizens of Omelas? The readers who are invited to co-create, design and shape the vision of utopic pleasures are they implicated in the co-creation of the suffering and victimisation of this child?

The nature and term of this evil social contract can be understood through the paradoxical nature of the narrative voice. The highly visual and graphic representation of this brutally imprisoned child "whose misery is the condition upon which the entire happiness of the Utopia is founded" (Adams 40) points out contradictions and tensions embedded within the utopian genre itself through the strategies employed by the narrator. The narrator's continuous shift from the past tense to the use of conditional verbs; to the present tense; and the use of rhetorical questions; "makes the reader aware of uncertainties and multiple perspectives" inherent within utopian fictions. The enthusiastic and detailed description of the shimmering city of Omelas by the narrator is indecisive and racked by a sense of failure and hence, compels the readers to visualise and co-create this utopia. **Elizabeth Cummins** asserts that this inability of the narrator to make the utopian imagination accessible to all, is not only a trick to allow the readers to collaborate in this vision of dehumanisation and totalisation but also, to "test the belief of the readers" pertaining to the constitutive elements of Utopia (19). The narrator asks the readers to participate in this conceptualisation through the translation of stereotypical images drawn from literature, at once identifiable and pleasurable. So, the emphasis on drugs and orgy reminds us of the Greek classical traditions of the Dionysian myth, the medieval pageants, the Saturnalian cults, to the reference to nudity recalling Woodstock, these images are a collaborative enunciation of commonly held assumptions that dominate the idea of the pastoral arcadia of Utopia. Yet, the fixed terms and the absolute assertions that resonate in the narrator's voice during the description of the child suggests otherwise. The description of the wretched existence of this child by the narrator repudiates the collaborative validation of the reader. In the description of the misery of the innocent victim, the uncertain voice of the narrator is replaced by an assertive strain. This suggests not only the limits of the utopian genre but, a

more than a tacit acceptance of the scapegoat mechanism as the foundational norms governing the city of Omelas. And since, the readers are co-creators of the fun-filled city, its rituals and myths that are drawn from the readings of the past and present socio-political literary imagination; it implies that our contemporary society of which we are the denizens is no different from the norms and rules that govern Omelas. Omela as we see it is a picture of peace and harmony (No social hierarchies), with exquisite aesthetic achievements, a land free from puritanical restrictions in its representation of sex and orgy being permissible, a land in ecological harmony with the representation of green meadows, animals and humans enthusiastically participating in this procession. But, with the rhetorical manner in which the narrator poses questions to the readers it seems to imply that from this perfect world/land there is an omission. The omission being that one chooses to be "not free" by providing rationalisation for the continued mistreatment of the child:

> *... even if the child could be released, it would not get much good of its freedom: a little vague pleasure of warmth and food, no doubt, but little more. It is too degraded and imbecile to know any real joy. It has been afraid too long ever to be free of fear. Its habits are too uncouth for it to respond to humane treatment. Indeed, after so long it would probably be wretched without walls about it to protect it, and darkness for its eyes, and its own excrement to sit in. Their tears at the bitter injustice dry when they begin to perceive the terrible justice of reality, and to accept it.*

This story is, according to **Rebecca Adams**, "recognition of the impossibility of an alternative vision of culture" (35-36) as if utopia in our world is always another instance of dystopic imagination. For Lee Cullen Khanna, this short story in its representation of the failures of utopian imagination can be read as being "prominently inflected by gender." Khanna points out the early images of the city as warm and inviting, the narrator's enthusiastic and ecstatic voice in its description entails gendered conceptualisations and "may contribute to the perpetuation of other gender stereotypes." For example, "[t]he Omelites, for example, includes "grave master workmen," and "quiet merry women carrying their babies and chatting as they walked." (Guin "Omelas") Later "an old woman, small, fat, and laughing, is passing out flowers from a basket," as "tall young men wear her flowers in their shining hair" (ibid.). The prototype of the artist is, notably, a "he" while the victimised child is, perhaps significantly, not gender specific" (48). Rebecca Adams suggests the victimisation; the scapegoat mechanism operating in the city of Omelas is an instance of patriarchal violence that is ubiquitous in our society. To render an alternative vision, is literally walking into the wild or "darkness"; one that is discernable in those who walk away from Omelas:

> *They keep walking, and walk straight out of the city of Omelas, through the beautiful gates. They keep walking across the farmlands of Omelas. Each one goes alone, youth or girl man or woman. Night falls; the traveler must pass down village streets, between the houses with yellow-lit windows, and on out into the darkness of the fields. Each alone, they go west or north, towards the mountains. They go on. They leave Omelas, they walk ahead into the darkness, and they do not come back. The place they go towards is a place even less imaginable to most of*

us than the city of happiness. I cannot describe it at all. It is possible that it does not exist. But they seem to know where they are going, the ones who walk away from Omelas.

Adams reads the journey of those inhabitants of Omelas who choose to walk away as a journey into the unknown, as rejecting the sacrificial economy of vested patriarchal interests. And the narrator's inability to render the place they go to as an enactment of a "feminine position" to embody a cultural order that is non-violent and that which transcends the scapegoat mechanism as illustrated in the patriarchal structures, institutions and practices of religion, family, law and aesthetic works (36).

Those who walk away from Omelas are "incredible," as the narrator points out because they reject the static and oppressive dimensions of utopia. It entails a moral choice and a responsibility to balance the individual needs with that of the society. This last section can be read as an illustration of Moylon's critical utopias "to open up a radical path to a not yet realised future" (50). The story of Omelas is a story that seeks to quest for a utopian dream when the dream itself appears to be cracked. As a critique of the existing systems and institutions of thought, Omelas can be encapsulated as "a meditation on action rather than on system" (Moylon 49).

Check Your Progress 2

1) Is the inability of the narrator to describe at the end of the story similar to the confusion and failure to represent in the first half of the story? Elucidate your reasons using examples drawn from the text.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2) How do you define the existence of the miserable child in this story? Do you agree with the rationalisations provided by the narrator in the second half of the story?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

4.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have examined the life of the author Urusla K Le Guin and the influences on her life as well as her other works. We also looked at how her upbringing influenced her reading and understanding as well as her perspective

on things. We examined this particular sub-genre of science fiction and identified it as utopian. From there on we have moved to a summary of this short fiction and then analysed it critically. By now you should have read the short fiction else, you will not really be in a position to understand or appreciate this story.

4.6 QUESTIONS

1) How would do you define the ethical dimension as represented in this story. Who do you think so are privileged- those who chose to stay or those who walk away from Omelas? Provide examples from the text.

2) Describe this short story from a feminist perspective or the postmodern turn of counterculture.

4.7 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check your Progress 1

1) Read sections 4.3, 4.4 carefully and then frame the answer in your own words

2) Read section, 4.4 carefully and then frame the answer in your own words

Check your Progress 2

1) Read section, 4.4 .1 carefully and then frame the answer in your own words

2) Read section, 4.4.1 carefully and then frame the answer in your own words

4.8 GLOSSARY

Anti-utopia : (https://www.wordnik.com/words/anti-utopia), An imaginary place or society characterised by misery and oppression; A work describing such a place or society; A world that is the opposite of a utopia, i.e. flawed and maximally unpleasant.

Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) : German dramatist known for revolutionising theatre with his epic theatre, a dramatic forum for espousing social causes. Estrangment or Alienation or A-effect or distancing effect, German **Verfremdungseffekt** or **V-effekt**, was political device to jolt the readers from their passive identification with theatrical characters. So, as to make the readers question intellectually to "complex nexuses of historical development and societal relationships" (Editors Britannica.com "Alienation").

Cornucopia : (https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/cornucopia), In Greek mythology the horn of Amalthea, the goat that suckled Zeus; a representation of such a horn in painting, sculpture, etc, overflowing with fruit, vegetables, etc; horn of plenty; a great abundance; overflowing supply; a horn-shaped container; derived form – cornucopian.

Dystopia : (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/dystopia), a very bad or unfair society in which there is a lot of suffering, especially an imaginary society in the future, after something terrible has happened; a description of such a society;

Ecotopia : is a medical term that describes a situation in which an organ or body part is in the wrong position, either from birth or because of an injury; In Science Fiction or in Utopian and Dystopian Ficiton, ectopian fiction is fiction in which, the author posits either a utopian or dystopian world revolving around environmental conservation or destruction. Danny Bloom coined the term "cli fi" in 2006, with a Twitter boost from Margaret Atwood in 2011, to cover climate change-related fiction, but the theme has existed for decades. Novels dealing with overpopulation, such as Harry Harrison's Make Room! Make Room! (made into movie Soylent Green), were popular in the 1970s, reflecting the popular concern with the effects of overpopulation on the environment. The novel Nature's End by Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka (1986) posits a future in which overpopulation, pollution, climate change, and resulting super storms, have led to a popular mass-suicide political movement. Some other examples of ecological dystopias are depictions of Earth in the films Wall-E and Avatar. (https://en.wikipedia.org)

Ethnographic : Ethnography is a descriptive study of a particular human society or the process of making such a study. Contemporary ethnography is based almost entirely on fieldwork and requires the complete immersion of the anthropologist in the culture and everyday life of the people who are the subject of his study. (https://www.britannica.com/science/ethnography)

Euchronia : The term uchronia refers to a hypothetical or fictional time-period of our world, in contrast to altogether fictional lands or worlds. (https://en.wikipedia.org)

Heterotopia : Heterotopia is a concept elaborated by philosopher Michel Foucault to describe certain cultural, institutional and discursive spaces that are somehow 'other': disturbing, intense, incompatible, contradictory or transforming. Heterotopias are worlds within worlds, mirroring and yet upsetting what is outside. Foucault provides examples: ships, cemeteries, bars, brothels, prisons, gardens of antiquity, fairs, Muslims baths and many more. Foucault outlines the notion of heterotopia on three occasions between 1966-67. A talk given to a group of architects is the most well-known explanation of the term. His first mention of the concept is in his preface to 'The Order of Things' and refers to texts

rather than socio-cultural spaces. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heterotopia_(space))

Mutation : The way in which genes change and produce permanent differences, a permanent change in an organism, or the changed organism itself, (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/mutation)

Neologism : A newly coined word or expression, the coining or use of new words, (https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/neologism)

Saturnalia : An ancient Roman festival celebrated in December: renowned for its general merrymaking(https://www.dictionary.com/browse/saturnalian).

Veritable : Used as an intensifier, often to qualify a metaphor, (https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/veritable); used to describe something as another, more exciting, interesting, or unusual thing, as a way of emphasizing its character

Woodstock : It was a music festival held August 15–18, 1969, on Max Yasgur's dairy farm in Bethel, New York, 40 miles (65 km) southwest of Woodstock. Billed as "an Aquarian Exposition: 3 Days of Peace & Music" and alternatively referred to as the Bethel Rock Festival, it attracted an audience of more than 400,000. The festival has become widely regarded as a pivotal moment in popular music history as well as a defining event for the counterculture generation. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woodstock)

4.9 SUGGESTED READINGS & REFERENCES

Adams, Rebecca. Narrative Voice and Unimaginability of the Utopian "Feminine" in Le Guin's*The Left Hand of Darkness* and "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas"." *Utopian Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1/2, Winter 1991, pp. 35-47. *JSTOR*.https://www.jstor.org/stable/20719024.

Baker, Brian. *Science Fiction*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Bellot, Gabrielle. "Ursula Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" *DefiesGenre.Tor.com*. Aug 7, 2017,https://www.tor.com/2017/08/07/ursula-le-guins-the-ones-who-walk-away-from-omelas-defies-genre/.

Bernardo, Susan M. and Graham J Murphy.*Ursula K Le Guin: A Critical Companion*. Greenwood Press, 2006.

Brooks, David. "The Child in the Basement."*The New York Times Review*, June 12, 2015,

https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/13/opinion/david-brooks-the-child-in-the-basement.html.

Burns, Tony. *Politcal Theory, Science Fiction and Utopian Literature: Ursula K. Le Guin and The Dispossessed*. Lexington Books, 2010.

Claeys, Gregory, editor. *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*.CUP, 2010.

Csicsery-Ronay, Istvan Jr. "Science Fiction/Criticism." Seed 43-59.

Cummins, Elizabeth. ""Praise then Creation Unfinished": Response to Kenneth M. Roemer."

Utopian Studies, vol. 2, no. 1/2, 1991, pp. 19-23. *JSTOR*.https://www.jstor.org/stable/20719021.

Britannica, Encyclopaedia "Ursula K. Le Guin." *Britannica.com*, Oct. 17, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ursula-K-Le-Guin.

Fitting, Peter. "Readers and Responsibility: A Reply to Ken Roemer." *Utopian Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1/2, 1991, pp. 24-29. *JSTOR*.https://www.jstor.org/stable/20719022

— . "Utopia, Dystopia and Science Fiction." edited by Claeys, pp. 135-153.
Jones, Gerald. "Ursula K Le Guin, Acclaimed For Her Fantasy Fiction, Is Dead at 88." *The New York Times*, Jan. 23, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/23/obituaries/ursula-k-le-guin-acclaimed-for-her-fantasy-fiction-is-dead-at-88.html.

Kennedy, X.J., and Dana Gioia (ed.): *An Introduction to Fiction*, 8th ed., Longman, 2004.

Khanna, Lee Cullen. "Beyond Omelas: Utopia and Gender." *Utopian Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1/2, 1991, pp. 48-58. *JSTOR*.https://www.jstor.org/stable/20719025

Knapp, Shoshana. "The Morality of Creation: Dostoevsky and William James in Le Guin's "Omelas".*The Journal of Narrative Technique*, vol. 15, no. 1 (1985), pp. 75-81. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/30225113.

Le Guin, Ursula K. "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas." Asia Society, 2 Mar. 2011,

http://sites.asiasociety.org/asia21summit/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/3.-Le-Guin-Ursula-The-Ones-Who-Walk-Away-From-Omelas.pdf.

— . *The Unreal and the Real: Selected Stories of Ursula K. Le Guin. Volume Two: Outer Space, Inner Lands*.Small Beer Press, 2012.

Moylon, Tom. *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*. Methuen, 1986.

Paris Review, The. "Ursula K. Le Guin." *The Art of Fiction*, vol. 221, no. 206, Fall 2013, https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6253/ursula-k-le-guin-the-art-of-fiction-no-221-ursula-k-le-guin.

Rochelle, Warren G. *Communities of the Heart: The Rhetoric of Myth in the Fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin*. Liverpool UP, 2001.

Roemer, Kenneth M. "The Talking Porcupine Liberates Utopia: Le Guin's "Omelas" as Pretext to the Dance." *Utopian Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1/2, 1991, pp. 6-18. *JSTOR*.https://www.jstor.org/stable/20719020.

Seed, David, ed. *A Companion to Science Fiction*.Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Senior, W.A. "Le Guin's "Omelas": Issues of Genre." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 15, no. 3 (59), Fall 2004, pp. 186-188. *JSTOR*.https://www.jstor.org/stable/43310242.

Suvin, Darko. *Defined by a Hollow: Essays on Utopia, Science Fiction and Political Epistemology*. Peter Lang, 2010.

— . *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*. Yale UP, 1979.

— . *Positions and Presuppositions in Science Fiction*.Macmillan, 1988.

Vieira, Fatima. "The Concept of Utopia." edited by Claeys, pp.3-27.

Wegner, Phillip E. "Utopia." edited by David Seed, pp. 79-94.