EUROPEAN FICTION IN TRANSLATION

ELECTIVE COURSE: (ENG3 E02)

III SEMESTER

MA ENGLISH

2019 Admission onwards

UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT

School of Distance Education

Calicut University- P.O,

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Study Material

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EUROPEAN FICTION IN TRANSLATION

Prepared by:

Sri. *Sandeep T.G,*
Assistant Professor, Dept. of English,
Sree Kerala Varma College, Thrissur.

. **Scrutinized by:**

Dr.Annapoorna Iyer,
Assistant Professor, Dept. of English,
Sri Vyasa NSS College, Wadakkanchery.

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DON QUIXOTE

Miguel de Cervantes

About the author:

Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, (1547-1616) is a Spanish novelist, playwright, and poet and the creator of the widely acclaimed work *Don Quixote*. He is a much celebrated figure not only in Spanish literature but in World Literature also. Born into impoverished circumstances, Miguel Cervantes was the fourth son in a family of seven children. His father, Rodrigo, was a surgeon, one of the salaried employees of the university of Alcala de Henares, the birthplace of Miguel, and he earned very little to feed his family. Little is known of Cervantes' early life, but it is doubtful if he received much formal education. Known for his bravery, he had an eventful youth as he became a soldier in 1570 and was badly wounded in the Battle of Lepanto. Captured by the Turks in 1575, Cervantes spent five years in prison and made several failed attempts to escape during his imprisonment before he was ransomed and returned home. In 1585, Cervantes published his first novel *La Galatea*, a pastoral romance that hardly could inspire any impact. After those less successful earlier efforts, Cervantes finally achieved literary success in his later years, publishing the first part of *Don Quixote* in 1605. The work received wider commendation later and has been translated, in full or in part, into more than 60 languages.

Cervantes was a great experimenter. He tried his hand in all the major literary genres save the epic. He was a notable short-story writer, and a few of those in his collection of *Novelas*

exemplares (1613; Exemplary Stories) attain a level close to that of *Don Quixote*, on a miniature scale. Despite its undisputed place in the literary canon, *Don Quixote* did not make Cervantes wealthy at the time, as in those days authors did not receive royalties for their works. However, he continued to write, setting to work on *The Labors of Persiles* and *Sigismunda*, though he would not complete it before his death on April 22, 1616, in Madrid. He was buried on the grounds of a convent there, in an unmarked grave.

He has been celebrated by critics as a writer of the first modern novel and the characters Don Quixote and Sancho Panza have influenced popular culture, paving way to their creative reintroduction in art, music and movies. Cervantes wanted to keep himself away from "vain and empty books of chivalry" and provide the readers with a merry, prudent and original one, that could offer them outright entertainment. It could be seen that with the publication of *Don Quixote* Cervantes has cast his lasting influence on writers of eminence across centuries.

Don Quixote looks backward to a tradition of chivalry romances, and it looks forward to the modern novel. Chivalry romances were a popular form of narrative in medieval and Renaissance culture. They usually follow heroic knights who embark on dangerous adventures in honor of the women they love. Cervantes both continues this tradition and satirizes it. Though Cervantes locates himself at the end of one tradition, others have located him as the beginning of another: many scholars consider *Don Quixote* to be the first modern novel. Several features earn the novel this title: its multiple perspectives, intertwining subplots, mixture of low and high styles, and self-commentary and self-awareness. *Don Quixote* has influenced a very wide range of writers – from comedic

writers like Laurence Sterne, to philosophically-inclined writers like Fyodor Dostoevky, Franz Kafka, and Jorge Luis Borges.

Summary:-

Don Quixote is a middle-aged gentleman from the region of La Mancha in central Spain. Obsessed with the chivalrous ideals touted in books he has read, he decides to take up his lance and sword to defend the helpless and destroy the wicked. After a first failed adventure, he sets out on a second one with a somewhat befuddled labourer named Sancho Panza, whom he has persuaded to accompany him as his faithful squire. In return for Sancho's services, Don Quixote promises to make Sancho the wealthy governor of an isle. On his horse, Rocinante, a barn nag, well past his prime, Don Quixote rides the roads of Spain in search of glory and grand adventure. He gives up food, shelter, and comfort, all in the name of a peasant woman, Dulcinea del Toboso, whom he envisions as a princess.

On his second expedition, Don Quixote becomes more of a bandit than a savior, stealing from and hurting baffled and justifiably angry citizens while acting out against what he perceives as threats to his knighthood or to the world. Don Quixote abandons a boy, leaving him in the hands of an evil farmer simply because the farmer swears an oath that he will not harm the boy. He steals a barber's basin that he believes to be the mythic Mambrino's helmet, and he becomes convinced of the healing powers of the Balsam of Fierabras, an elixir that makes him so ill that, by comparison, he later feels healed. Sancho stands by Don Quixote, often bearing the brunt of the punishments that arise from Don Quixote's behavior.

The story of Don Quixote's deeds includes the stories of those he meets on his journey. Don Quixote witnesses the funeral of a student who dies as a result of his love for a

disdainful lady turned shepherdess. He frees a wicked and devious galley slave, Gines de Pasamonte, and unwittingly reunites two bereaved couples, Cardenio and Lucinda, and Ferdinand and Dorothea. Torn apart by Ferdinand's treachery, the four lovers finally come together at an inn where Don Quixote sleeps, dreaming that he is battling a giant.

Along the way, the simple Sancho plays the straight man to Don Quixote, trying his best to correct his master's outlandish fantasies. Two of Don Quixote's friends, the priest and the barber, come to drag him home. Believing that he is under the force of an enchantment, he accompanies them, thus ending his second expedition and the First Part of the novel.

The Second Part of the novel begins with a passionate invective against a phony sequel of Don Quixote that was published in the interim between Cervantes's two parts. Everywhere Don Quixote goes, his reputation—gleaned by others from both the real and the false versions of the story—precedes him.

As the two embark on their journey, Sancho lies to Don Quixote, telling him that an evil enchanter has transformed Dulcinea into a peasant girl. Undoing this enchantment, in which even Sancho comes to believe, becomes Don Quixote's chief goal.

Don Quixote meets a Duke and Duchess who conspire to play tricks on him. They make a servant dress up as Merlin, for example, and tell Don Quixote that Dulcinea's enchantment—which they know to be a hoax—can be undone only if Sancho whips himself 3,300 times on his naked backside. Under the watch of the Duke and Duchess, Don Quixote and Sancho undertake several adventures. They set out on a flying wooden horse, hoping to slay a giant who has turned a princess

and her lover into metal figurines and bearded the princess's female servants.

During his stay with the Duke, Sancho becomes governor of a fictitious isle. He rules for ten days until he is wounded in an onslaught the Duke and Duchess sponsor for their entertainment. Sancho reasons that it is better to be a happy laborer than a miserable governor. A young maid at the Duchess's home falls in love with Don Quixote, but he remains a staunch worshipper of Dulcinea. Their never-consummated affair amuses the court to no end. Finally, Don Quixote sets out again on his journey, but his demise comes quickly. Shortly after his arrival in Barcelona, the Knight of the White Moon—actually an old friend in disguise—vanquishes him.

Cervantes relates the story of Don Quixote as a history, which he claims he has translated from a manuscript written by a Moor named Cide Hamete Benengeli. Cervantes becomes a party to his own fiction, even allowing Sancho and Don Quixote to modify their own histories and comment negatively upon the false history published in their names.

In the end, the beaten and battered Don Quixote forswears all the chivalric truths he followed so fervently and dies from a fever. With his death, knights-errant became extinct. Benengeli returns at the end of the novel to tell us that illustrating the demise of chivalry was his main purpose in writing the history of Don Quixote.

Analysis:-

In the first half of the novel, Quixote and Sancho seem like caricatures of idealism and realism. Philosophical idealism holds that reality is primarily a set of ideas, private mental constructs; political idealism holds that ideas can meaningfully

transform the human world. Philosophical realism holds that reality is primarily material, and that its qualities exist independently of human perception and interpretation. Quixote sees the world around him as a set of beliefs about honor, goodness, gallantry, and courage, and as an opportunity for social change on a large scale; Sancho sees a world filled with detail, with sounds, smells, and textures, and as an opportunity to eat well and sleep deeply. Quixote is tall and skinny, a stereotypical dreamer, while Sancho is squat and round, a bit of a glutton, a lover of earthly things. Quixote tries to fit the world into a set of predetermined rules, while Sancho faces each event on its own terms.

Cervantes himself states that he wrote Don Quixote in order to undermine the influence of those "vain and empty books of chivalry" as well as to provide some merry, original, and sometimes prudent material for his readers' entertainment. Whether or not the author truly believed the superficiality of his own purpose is immaterial; in fact, Cervantes did make a complete end to further publications of chivalric romances. Despite the harmful extravagances of these novels, this form of writing has one advantage over more truthful literary forms, Cervantes writes in the latter section of Part I, for chivalry "offers a wide and spacious meadow through which the pen may run without any hindrance." Perhaps Don Quixote owes his genesis to these notions of his author. But as Cervantes launches his idealistic and possessed hero on a career open to public contempt, the possibilities of a many-leveled, kaleidoscopic theme must have become apparent very early.

The richness and interest of Cervantes stems, then, not from the profuseness of character types, nor from the variety in his constant inventiveness, nor from the philosophical conclusions we may make from his material, but from an

emanation of life that lends vivacity and fascination and dynamism to every part of his huge narrative. This essential quality of Don Quixote, eluding more specific appellation, can roughly be called organic. A vital force animates each episode, and it gives even a bony horse and fat donkey memorable personalities.

In essence, Don Quixote shows us that the reality of existence consists in receiving all the impact of experience, which, transformed through the medium of a special awareness, is synthesized as part of the character. The prosaic Alonso Quixano, after an impact on his imagination from books of chivalry, transforms himself into the Knight of La Mancha. Reading of pastoral tales is the impact which causes Marcella to become a shepherdess, and Samson Carrasco receives his impetus from trying to conquer the madness of his rival once and for all. All these characters have changed their lives from internalizing essentially external influences. As Don Quixote and Sancho continue their journeys, they change and develop under the impact of each new episode. Having internalized one experience by their constant discourse they go on to face another, and once more retrench themselves under this new influence.

The emanation of life is seen whenever any character encounters experience. Dorothea, bathing her feet in a running brook, is a figure out of a pastoral tableau. As soon as she describes how Ferdinand wrought havoc on her normal rustic life, her intelligence awakens and she gains flesh and blood before our eyes. Under these new circumstances, she is able to play the exacting role of Princess Micomicona, although still ignorant as ever about things like geography. People like Don Diego de Miranda (the gentleman in the green coat), the priest at the duke's castle, and the niece Antonia Quixana are inured against external influences and remain static.

Chosen not alone for their comic attributes, episodes provide a testing ground to stimulate all areas of the personalities of Don Quixote, Sancho, and all others. Thus we see the virtuous wife Camilla put to a literal "test," and she quickly emerges as an accomplished adulteress. Whenever Sancho's loyalties are put to a test, on the other hand (his defense of his master at the priest's scolding, the instant when he is "fired" by Don Quixote, his constant desire to quit his squirehood when dissatisfied, for instance), he remains faithful. The whole sequence of the adventures with the duke and duchess provides a testing ground for the values Don Quixote holds dear as a knight-errant. His final test is when, with Samson's lance poised at his throat, he chooses rather to die than to give up the idea of Dulcinea's perfection.

In other words, Cervantes makes things happen in order to reveal latent possibilities. Even the weather is forced into service, for the one time it does rain, it is so the barber can don his basin to protect his new hat; hence the adventure of Mambrino's helmet. The vividness of the rocky wilderness of the Sierra Morena serves only to isolate the various scenes that take place there Don Quixote's penance, Cardenio's meeting with the curate and barber, Dorothea's story and it provides, as well, a safe refuge from the police force. The scorched July morning shows what a madman it takes to begin knight-errantry when it is so hot; the dusty road serves to obscure the two flocks of sheep which the hero thinks are armies; and a verdant meadow, the scene of Rosinante's frolic with the mares, provides the adventure of the Yanguesian carriers.

This utilitarian dynamism of every part of the novel is further maintained as episodes interweave with each other like motives in a symphony. Recurring with some variation, these themes are picked up again and again. Sancho, for instance,

never forgoes a chance to rue his blanketing; the disenchantment of Dulcinea haunts Don Quixote until his death. Altisidora never gives up her game of courting the knight. Alonso Quixano is always in the shadow of Don Quixote's mad career, and Sancho's wished-for island held out to him like a carrot to a mule finally becomes his prize. Tosilos reappears, Andrew reappears, Gines de Passamonte thrice returns to cross Don Quixote. The ideal of pastoral life weaves in and out of the novel in many variations: Marcella, the New Arcadians, Don Quixote's secondary fantasy. Nothing happens without repercussions, and characters or episodes are invariably picked up again.

The descriptive style is another source of Cervantes' dynamism. Terse, yet elegant, he sketches images that make illustrations in the book seem anticlimactic. Sancho, starved for some good food, is with his master at the goatherds' huts: "Sancho presently repaired to the attractive smell of goat's flesh which stood boiling in a kettle over the fire . . . . The goatherds took them off the fire, and spread some sheepskins on the ground and soon got their rustic feast ready; and cheerfully invited his master and him to partake of what they had." Introducing Marcella: "'Twas Marcella herself who appeared at the top of the rock, at the foot of which they were digging the grave; but so beautiful that fame seemed rather to have lessened than to have magnified her charms: Those who had never seen her before, gazed on her with silent wonder and delight; nay, those who used to see her every day seemed no less lost in admiration than the rest." The immortal tilt with the windmills occupies a mere forty or fifty lines: "'I tell thee they are giants and I am resolved to engage in a dreadful unequal combat against them all.' This said, he clapped spurs to Rosinante . . . . At the same time the wind was rising, the great sails began turning . . . . Well covered with his shield, with his lance at rest, he bore down upon the first mill that stood in his way, giving a

thrust at the wing which was whirling at such a speed that his lance was broken into bits and both horse and horseman went rolling over the plain, very much battered indeed."

The overall success of the book lies, therefore, in the vitality and organic development of the characters themselves. The descriptions are vivid, not merely for the prose style, but because they give physical fulfillment to the dynamic image of the personalities. Setting, which Cervantes rarely details, is unforgettably and briefly etched only if it is integral to the development of the corresponding episode. Thus, with a technique of subordinating every other literary ornament to animate and discover all parts of an active character, Cervantes has created a strong unity of episode, setting, dialogue, and characterization which lends this book its protean nature. It is as if the author, considering his creation a great darkness at first, sweeps across its surface beams of light in the form of incident, dialogue, description, background, until the entire configuration of human personality is revealed.

In parallel with this philosophical scenario, the novel engages with notions of literary realism. The novel as a whole mocks the absurdities, omissions, and general failures of realism in chivalry novels, because its premise is a character who tries to live in the world as though chivalry novels were perfectly realistic. Quixote's endless difficulties and humiliations can be traced to the failures of realism in chivalry tales. But though the narrator acknowledges that chivalry tales are unrealistic, he also makes fun of characters who believe that literature should be realistic exclusively. The priest, especially, is the target of this mockery. The priest's conversations with the canon and with the innkeeper show that any one person's attempt to define realism in literature will necessarily fail to be objective, and will instead reflect that person's private vision of the world. The narrator's

disdain for the priest's ideas of literary realism is also a rejection of philosophical realism. These realisms don't take into account the one consistent truth of the novel – the idea that the world is a collection of different perspectives.

Yet the narrator does not come out squarely on one side or the other; the world he creates is tangled, and gives no easy answers. Like public and private truth, realism and idealism must ultimately be integrated, until the difference between them almost disappears. Quixote and Sancho do not remain stereotypes, with distinct sets of qualities: they grow out of their stereotypes into more complete human beings.

Many critics maintain that the impulse that prompted Miguel de Cervantes (1547 – 1616) to begin his great novel was a satiric one: He desired to satirize chivalric romances. As the elderly Alonso Quixano the Good (if that is his name) pores over the pages of these books in his study, his "brain dries up" and he imagines himself to be the champion who will take up the vanished cause of knight errantry and wander the world righting wrongs, helping the helpless, defending the cause of justice, all for the greater glory of his lady Dulcinea del Toboso and his God.

As he leaves his village before dawn, clad in rusty armor and riding his broken-down nag, the mad knight becomes Don Quixote de la Mancha. His first foray is brief, and he is brought back home by friends from his native village. Despite the best efforts of his friends and relations, the mad old man embarks on a second journey, this time accompanied by a peasant from his village, Sancho Panza, who becomes the knight's squire. The Don insists on finding adventure everywhere, mistaking windmills for giants, flocks of sheep for attacking armies, and puppet shows for real life. His squire provides a voice of down-to-earth reason, but Quixote always insists that vile enchanters

have transformed the combatants to embarrass and humiliate him. Don Quixote insists on his vision of the ideal in the face of the cold facts of the world; Sancho Panza maintains his proverbial peasant wisdom in the face of his master's madness.

In their travels and adventures, they encounter life on the roads of Spain. Sometimes they are treated with respect— for example, by "the gentleman in green" who invites them to his home and listens to Quixote with genuine interest—but more often they are ridiculed, as when the Duke and Duchess bring the knight and squire to their estate only for the purpose of mocking them. Finally, a young scholar from Quixote's native village, Sampson Carrasco, defeats the old knight in battle and forces him to return to his home, where he dies peacefully, having renounced his mad visions and lunatic behavior.

Major characters:-

- Don Quixote

Alonso Quixana is an elderly gentleman who has read too many books of chivalry. He decides that he will become a knight-errant and enjoy his own adventures, winning fame and honor. His first sally into the world is aborted quickly. On the way home, intending to get money and clean shirts, Quixote is attacked and left for dead. A peasant sees Quixote and brings him home. The best efforts of Quixote's niece, housekeeper and friends (the barber and the priest) are to no avail. Quixote leaves for a second adventure, this time bringing a squire with him, a commoner named Sancho Panza. Quixote's delusions get him into serious trouble with the law and the church. He baffles strangers with his ability to alternate between states of lucid sanity and its exact opposite.

No single analysis of Don Quixote's character can adequately explain the split between his madness and his sanity. He remains a puzzle throughout the novel, a character with whom we may have difficulty identifying and sympathizing. We may see Don Quixote as coy and think that he really does know what is going on around him and that he merely chooses to ignore the world and the consequences of his disastrous actions. Several times in the novel, Cervantes validates this suspicion that Don Quixote may know more than he admits. Therefore, when Don Quixote suddenly declares himself sane at the end of the novel, we wonder at his ability to shake off his madness so quickly and ask whether he has at least partly feigned this madness. On the other hand, we can read Don Quixote's character as a warning that even the most intelligent and otherwise practically minded person can fall victim to his own foolishness. Furthermore, we may see Don Quixote's adventures as a warning that chivalry—or any other outmoded set of values—can both produce positive and negative outcomes. Given the social turmoil of the period in which Cervantes wrote, this latter reading is particularly appealing. Nonetheless, all of these readings of Don Quixote's character operate in the novel.

- Dulcinea del Toboso (Aldonza Lorenzo)

Aldonza Lorenzo is a common woman who lives in the town of Toboso. Don Quixote sees her here and decides to call her Dulcinea del Toboso. Dulcinea means "sweetness" and Don Quixote imagines Dulcinea to be his Lady. Quixote defends her honor, though she never appears in the novel.

- The priest-

One of Quixote's friends, the priest does not behave as one would expect, considering his ecclesiastical vocation. The priest

regulates the book-burning early in Book I, but he saves as many books as he can. The priest organizes the successful conspiracy to get Quixote back home to La Mancha. When Quixote is on the verge of being arrested by an officer of the Holy Brotherhood, the priest defends Quixote, attesting to the gentleman's insanity.

- Sancho Panza

Sancho is Don Quixote's squire, having left his wife and daughter at home in the hopes of becoming Governor of an island. A common peasant, Panza seeks fortune so that his daughter can marry a nobleman. Sancho has a lot of common sense but he consistently defers to his master and assents to dangerous schemes. As squire, Sancho becomes sincerely attached to Quixote and he looks out for the knight as well as he can. At the end of Book I, Sancho is saddened to see Quixote imprisoned in the cage. Sancho, alone, tries to convince Quixote that the cage is not an enchantment. Alone, Sancho is unable to sway Quixote's opinion.

Essay questions:-

1. Comment on the delightful fusion of reality and fantasy in *Don Quixote.*

2. Consider *Don Quixote* as a picaresque novel.

3. Illuminate some of the quixotic adventures as portrayed in the novel.

MADAME BOVARY

Gustave Flaubert

About the author:-

Gustave Flaubert was born December 12, 1821, in Rouen, France, and died May 8, 1880. He was the fourth child of a distinguished doctor who was the head of the hospital in that city. Gustave was a sensitive and quiet boy; he read a lot, and since the family lived in a house on the hospital grounds, he gained a knowledge of scientific techniques and ideas. He attended a secondary school in Rouen, and in 1841 was sent, against his will, to study law in Paris. In the capital he made new friends and moved in literary circles. His talent for writing was stimulated by these experiences.

In 1844, Flaubert became the victim of a serious nervous illness, which cannot be identified precisely, but which was probably related to epilepsy. For reasons of health he retired to the family's new home in Le Croisset, a suburb of Rouen. He gladly took this opportunity to give up law and most of his time was now spent at Le Croisset, where he lived quietly and devoted himself to writing and his studies.

Although Flaubert gained renown as a writer within his own lifetime, he was not financially successful (he made only 500 francs for the first five years' sales of Madame Bovary), and he was hurt by the enmity and misunderstanding of his critics and readers. At the height of public hostility, in 1857, he and the publisher of Madame Bovary were tried for an "outrage to public morals and religion." However, the case was finally acquitted.

Flaubert's works include Madame Bovary (1857); Salammbo (1862), a weighty historical novel about the war between Rome and Carthage; A Sentimental Education (1869), a novel dealing again with the theme of the frustrations of middle-class life and human aspirations; and The Temptation of St. Anthony (1874), a rich and evocative series of religious tableaux. In 1877, he published Three Tales, which contains the beautiful short stories, "A Simple Heart," "The Legend of St. Julian the Hospitaller," and "Herodias." These justly famous stories are masterpieces of short fiction and are among his finest and most moving works. Flaubert's play, The Candidate, failed after a few performances in 1874, and his last novel, Bouvard and Pecuchet, which was unfinished on his death, was published posthumously in 1881.

Flaubert was one of the most important European writers of the nineteenth century, and with him the French novel reached a high level of development. None of his later works, except the three short stories, ever equaled the artistic and technical quality of his first novel, and it is primarily on Madame Bovary that his reputation rests. Flaubert combined a feeling for the ideals of the Romantic era with the objective outlook and scientific principles of Realism to create a novel which has stood as a monument and example to writers ever since.

Summary

Madame Bovary opens during Charles Bovary's childhood. An outcast in his new school, Charles does not fit in, and he suffers ridicule. As he grows older, we learn that he is fairly dull and lacks talent in his chosen profession, medicine. Charles becomes a poor doctor who does not earn much respect from his peers. His mother remains very influential in his life decisions; she pushes him into medicine and persuades him to

marry a widow. The widow dies soon after the wedding, leaving Charles much less money than he expected.

Soon after his first wife's death, Charles falls in love with Emma, the daughter of one of his patients. After much time, Charles finally asks her father for Emma's hand in marriage. An elaborate ceremony takes place. After marrying, Charles and Emma move to Tostes, where Charles sets up his meager practice. Unfortunately, Emma soon finds herself disillusioned with her country life, having aspirations of greater romance and luxury. After Emma and Charles attend a ball thrown by a wealthy nobleman, she becomes obsessed with the idea of living a more elaborate and sophisticated existence. Eventually her obsession takes over, sending her into a depressive state. During this period of illness, Emma becomes pregnant and Charles decides to move to a new area with the hope of improving Emma's health and realizing a positive future for his family.

Charles establishes his new practice in Yonville. Homais, the town pharmacist, considers himself an expert on all subjects and greatly enjoys pontificating to excess. Emma and Charles also meet Leon, a law clerk bored with rural life. Emma finds many similarities between herself and Leon, foreshadowing their eventual affair. In Yonville Emma gives birth to a daughter, Berthe. She is disappointed not to have borne a son, and her sadness persists. During this time romantic feelings develop between Emma and Leon, but as soon as Emma becomes aware of his feelings, she develops a powerful sense of guilt. To counteract this overwhelming emotion, she devotes herself to acting as an excellent mother and wife. Observing Emma's efforts, Leon believes his love will forever be unrequited, so he leaves for Paris to study law. Upon his departure, Emma again falls into a state of severe depression.

Soon after Leon moves away, Emma and Charles attend an agricultural fair where Rodolphe, a wealthy neighbor, declares his love to Emma with the goal of simply seducing her. The two begin a passionate affair, and Emma is often careless with her behavior. However, Charles does not suspect anything, believing his wife loves him dearly, while truly she is disgusted by his lack of success and class. In an attempt to boost his professional reputation, Charles and Homais attempt an experimental surgery to treat the club-footed man Hippolyte. Emma encourages this project, believing it will lead to Charles's fame and therefore a more luxurious and extravagant life. But the treatment is disastrous and, sadly, another doctor must be brought in to amputate the leg. Wallowing in Charles's constant failures and mediocrity, Emma renews her passion for Rodolphe, even borrowing money to buy him extravagant gifts. Eventually, Emma suggests that she and Rodolphe begin a new life together, but Rodolphe only has only viewed Emma as a conquest and entertainment. Therefore, in a letter delivered on the scheduled day of their rendezvous, he refuses to elope and ends the relationship. Heartbroken after believing Rodolphe truly loved her, Emma falls into a terrible illness, barely escaping death.

In attempting to heal Emma's mysterious illness and pay off her debts, Charles falls into financial trouble. Despite the expense, he takes Emma to an opera in Rouen, a nearby city, believing the trip will enliven her spirits. While in Rouen, Emma and Charles happen to run into Leon. The old romantic feelings between Emma and Leon are quickly rekindled and emboldened in the aftermath of her experience with Rodolphe, so Emma soon begins an affair with Leon. Under the guise of taking piano lessons, Emma repeatedly travels to Rouen to meet Leon. Meanwhile, she falls deeply indebted to the moneylender L'heureux and grows careless in her adulterous behavior to the

point where she is almost discovered many times.

Soon Emma grows bored with Leon because he is afraid to take risks to show his love for her. Emma grows increasingly demanding; meanwhile, her debts mount. L'heureux soon orders the seizure of Emma's property, and terrified that Charles will discover her secrets, Emma grows frantic. She appeals to anyone she can think of for loans, including Leon, the town's businessmen, and even Rodolphe. Upon her offer of prostitution, Rodolphe refuses to help her and Emma grows truly mortified. Aware of the impending revelations of dishonest behavior, Emma sees no option but to remove herself from the world. She commits suicide by eating arsenic, dying an agonizing and painful death.

At first, Charles idealizes the memory of his wife. But he eventually discovers her letters and keepsakes from Rodolphe and Leon, and finally he confronts the truth of her infidelity. Having grown into an antisocial hermit, Charles dies alone in his garden of an apparent heart attack. Berthe, now an orphan, is sent to work in a cotton mill.

CHARACTERS:-

- Emma Bovary

In Emma Bovary, Flaubert uses irony to criticize romanticism and to investigate the relation of beauty to corruption and of fate to free will. Emma embarks directly down a path to moral and financial ruin over the course of the novel. She is very beautiful, as we can tell by the way several men fall in love with her, but she is morally corrupt and unable to accept and appreciate the realities of her life. Since her girlhood in a convent, she has read romantic novels that feed her discontent with her ordinary life. She dreams of the purest, most impossible forms of love and

wealth, ignoring whatever beauty is present in the world around her. Flaubert once said, “Madame Bovary is me,” and many scholars believe that he was referring to a weakness he shared with his character for romance, sentimental flights of fancy, and melancholy. Flaubert, however, approaches romanticism with self-conscious irony, pointing out its flaws even as he is tempted by it. Emma, on the other hand, never recognizes that her desires are unreasonable. She rails emotionally against the society that, from her perspective, makes them impossible for her to achieve.

Emma’s failure is not completely her own. Her character demonstrates the many ways in which circumstance—rather than free will—determined the position of women in the nineteenth century. If Emma were as rich as her lover, Rodolphe, for instance, she would be free to indulge the lifestyle she imagines. Flaubert suggests at times that her dissatisfaction with the bourgeois society she lives in is justified. For example, the author includes details that seem to ridicule Homais’s pompous speech making or Charles’s boorish table manners. These details indicate that Emma’s plight is emblematic of the difficulties of any sensitive person trapped among the French bourgeoisie. But Emma’s inability to accept her situation and her attempt to escape it through adultery and deception constitute moral errors. These mistakes bring about her ruin and, in the process, cause harm to innocent people around her. For example, though dim-witted and unable to recognize his wife’s true character, Charles loves Emma, and she deceives him. Similarly, little Berthe is but an innocent child in need of her mother’s care and love, but Emma is cold to her, and Berthe ends up working in a cotton mill because of Emma’s selfish spending and suicide, and because of Charles’s resulting death.

We can see that Emma’s role as a woman may have an even greater effect on the course of her life than her social status

does. Emma is frequently portrayed as the object of a man's gaze: her husband's, Rodolphe's, Leon's, Justin's—even Flaubert's, since the whole novel is essentially a description of how he sees Emma. Moreover, Emma's only power over the men in her life is sexual. Near the end of her life, when she searches desperately for money, she has to ask men for it, and the only thing she can use to persuade them to give it to her is sex. Emma's prostitution is the result of her self-destructive spending, but the fact that, as a woman, she has no other means of finding money is a result of the misogynistic society in which she lives.

- Charles Bovary

Charles represents both the society and the personal characteristics that Emma detests. He is incompetent, stupid, and unimaginative. In one of the novel's most revelatory moments, Charles looks into Emma's eyes and sees not her soul but rather his own image, reflected in miniature. Charles's perception of his own reflection is not narcissistic but merely a simple, direct sensation, unmediated by romantic notions. The moment demonstrates his inability to imagine an idealized version of the world or find mystic qualities in the world's physical aspects. Instead, he views life literally and never imbues what he sees with romantic import. Thus it is the physical aspects of Emma that delight Charles. When the narrative focuses on his point of view, we see every detail of her dress, her skin, and her hair. When it comes to her aspirations and depressions, however, Charles is at a loss. He nods and smiles dumbly as Emma conducts the same sorts of conversations with him that she does with her dog. Charles is too stupid to manage his money well or to see through Emma's obvious lies, and he is a frighteningly incompetent doctor. In one scene, as he goes to repair Rouault's leg, we learn that he is

trying desperately to “call to mind all the fractures he [knows].” His operation on Hippolyte’s clubfoot, while it is not his idea, is a complete failure. Charles is more than merely incompetent, however. He is physically repulsive, though it’s hard to tell from Flaubert’s descriptions whether he is actually an ugly man or whether he appears disgusting only through Emma’s eyes.

Despite his unimaginative nature, Charles is one of the novel’s most moral and sincere characters. He truly loves Emma, forgiving her even when he finally recognizes her infidelities. He does everything he can to save her when she is ill, and he gives her the benefit of the doubt whenever her lies seem to fail her. Literal-minded, humble, free of temptations, and without aspirations, Charles is Emma’s opposite. While she possesses some beauty, sensitivity, and intelligence despite her moral corruption, Charles remains good-hearted despite his boorishness and stupidity.

- Monsieur Homais

Although Homais is not central to the plot of Madame Bovary, he is an absolutely essential part of its atmosphere. He is a pompous speechmaker, endlessly rattling on about medical techniques and theories that he really knows nothing about. His presence serves, in part, to heighten our sense of Emma’s frustration with her life. Flaubert relates Homais’s speeches in full, forcing us to read them just as Emma is forced to listen to them. Homais is also an extremely selfish man. When the Bovarys first arrive in Yonville, we learn that he is only befriending Charles because he wants Charles to turn a blind eye to his disreputable medical practices.

In the last sentence of the book, Homais receives the Legion of Honor, a medal he has always dreamed of attaining, after Emma and Charles are both dead. Meanwhile, Charles—

who loved his wife as deeply as he was capable—and Emma—who yearned to live an exceptional life—are both punished. By rewarding Homais, Flaubert does not advocate his kind of life. Instead, he shows us a realistic portrayal of one of the most disappointing aspects of the world—that the mediocre and the selfish often fare better than either those who live passionately and try to be exceptional or those who live humbly and treat others with kind generosity.

- **THEMES**:-

Madame Bovary is a study of human stupidity and the "romantic malady," the despair and unhappiness faced by those who are unwilling or unable to resolve the conflicts between their dreams and idealized aspirations and the real world; in modern terms, one might say it is a study of a neurosis. Furthermore, it examines middle-class conventions and the myth of progress, exposing weaknesses and hypocrisies, and it deals with the inability of the different characters to communicate with each other. In all of these aspects, this novel is as pertinent today as when it was written. The costumes and settings may change, but people do not, and human problems remain the same. As a matter of fact, some critics have pointed out the close relationship between Emma Bovary and the heroine of Sinclair Lewis' Main Street, for provincial life is the same everywhere, and these two women, despite their differences, are afflicted by many similar problems and frustrations.

Flaubert's characters are all ordinary people and are very much like ourselves and our neighbors. Nothing about them is romanticized or exalted, so that it is possible for the reader to see himself in a new and harsher light, and he cannot avoid sympathetic identification with them. The people of Madame Bovary are limited intellectually and culturally; they are

sometimes sincere and well-intentioned, sometimes petty and vulgar, sometimes pathetic and confused, and sometimes unaware of the most obvious things or unable to take the most obvious action. They are so true to life that there are readers who resent the novel because they resent the uncomplimentary view that they are forced to take of themselves.

Emma Bovary's hope that her baby will be a man because "a woman is always hampered" is just one of the many instances in the novel in which Flaubert demonstrates an intimate understanding of the plight of women in his time. We see throughout Madame Bovary how Emma's male companions possess the power to change her life for better or worse—a power that she herself lacks. Even Charles contributes to Emma's powerlessness. His laziness prevents him from becoming a good doctor, and his incompetence prevents him from advancing into a higher social stratum that might satisfy Emma's yearnings. As a result, Emma is stuck in a country town without much money. Rodolphe, who possesses the financial power to whisk Emma away from her life, abandons her, and, as a woman, she is incapable of fleeing on her own. Leon at first seems similar to Emma. Both are discontented with country life, and both dream of bigger and better things. But because Leon is a man, he has the power to actually fulfill his dream of moving to the city, whereas Emma must stay in Yonville, shackled to a husband and child.

Ultimately, however, the novel's moral structure requires that Emma assume responsibility for her own actions. She can't blame everything on the men around her. She freely chooses to be unfaithful to Charles, and her infidelities wound him fatally in the end. On the other hand, in Emma's situation, the only two choices she has are to take lovers or to remain faithful in a dull marriage. Once she has married Charles, the

choice to commit adultery is Emma's only means of exercising power over her own destiny. While men have access to wealth and property, the only currency Emma possesses to influence others is her body, a form of capital she can trade only in secret with the price of shame and the added expense of deception. When she pleads desperately for money to pay her debts, men offer the money in return for sexual favors. Eventually, she tries to win back Rodolphe as a lover if he will pay her debts. Even her final act of suicide is made possible by a transaction funded with her physical charms, which are dispensed toward Justin, who allows Emma access to the cupboard where the arsenic is kept. Even to take her own life, she must resort to sexual power, using Justin's love for her to convince him to do what she wants.

Emma's disappointments stem in great part from her dissatisfaction with the world of the French bourgeoisie. She aspires to have taste that is more refined and sophisticated than that of her class. This frustration reflects a rising social and historical trend of the last half of the nineteenth century. At the time Flaubert was writing, the word "bourgeois" referred to the middle class: people who lacked the independent wealth and ancestry of the nobility, but whose professions did not require them to perform physical labor to earn their living. Their tastes were characterized as gaudily materialistic. They indulged themselves as their means allowed, but without discrimination. The mediocrity of the bourgeoisie was frustrating to -Flaubert, and he used Emma Bovary's disgust with her class as a way of conveying his own hatred for the middle class. Madame Bovary shows how ridiculous, stifling, and potentially harmful the attitudes and trappings of the bourgeoisie can be. In the pharmacist Homais's long-winded, know-it-all speeches, Flaubert mocks the bourgeois class's pretensions to knowledge and learning and its faith in the power of technologies that it doesn't completely understand. But Homais is not just funny; he

is also dangerous. When he urges Charles to try a new medical procedure on Hippolyte, the patient acquires gangrene and then loses his leg. Homais does even greater damage when he attempts to treat Emma for her poisoning. He tries to show off by analyzing the poison and coming up with an antidote. Later, a doctor will tell him that he should have simply stuck a finger down Emma's throat to save her life.

Essay questions:-

1. Describe the character of Charles Bovary.

2. "Emma's disappointments stem in great part from her dissatisfaction with the French bourgeoisie"- comment.

3. Trace out the trajectory of Emma's moral deterioration.

ANNA KARENINA

Leo Tolstoy

About the author:-

Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy was a Russian writer who primarily wrote novels and short stories. Later in life, he also wrote plays and essays. His two most famous works, the novels *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, are acknowledged as two of the greatest novels of all time and a pinnacle of realist fiction. Many consider Tolstoy to have been one of the world's greatest novelists. Tolstoy is equally known for his complicated and paradoxical persona and for his extreme moralistic and ascetic views, which he adopted after a moral crisis and spiritual awakening in the 1870s, after which he also became noted as a moral thinker and social reformer.

His literal interpretation of the ethical teachings of Jesus, centering on the Sermon on the Mount, caused him in later life to become a fervent Christian anarchist and anarcho-pacifist. His ideas on nonviolent resistance, expressed in such works as *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, were to have a profound impact on such pivotal twentieth-century figures as Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Summary:-

Anna Karenina, considered by many critics to be Tolstoy's finest achievement, is one of the most important novels of the nineteenth century. Tolstoy imbues the simple tale of a love affair with rich portraits of Russian high society, politics, and religion.

As the book opens, Prince Stephen Oblonsky, known as

Stiva, is arguing with his wife, Dolly: he has had an affair with their children's governess, and she is threatening to leave him. He is happy that his sister, Anna Karenina, will be coming the next day to visit and smooth things over between himself and Dolly. Anna is married to a distinguished official in St. Petersburg, and moves in the highest circles of Russian Society with the reputation of a charming woman.

That same day, Oblonsky runs into his friend Constantine Levin, who has just arrived from his country estate. Levin is in town to see Oblonsky's sister-in-law, Kitty Shcherbatskaya, for Levin is rather smitten with the eighteen-year-old girl. Oblonsky suggests a meeting with Levin later that evening at the park where Kitty ice-skates.

Levin goes to the park. He skates with Kitty and flirts with her boldly, but she sends him mixed signals. At dinner with Oblonsky that night, Levin learns that he has a rival for Kitty's affections: Count Alexis Kirilovich Vronsky. And indeed, when Levin proposes to Kitty, she rejects him in the hopes that Vronsky will make his proposal soon.

When Oblonsky goes to the railway station to meet Anna the next morning, he runs into Vronsky, who is waiting for his mother to get off the same train. It turns out that Anna and Vronsky's mother were seatmates in the same compartment, and his mother is quite taken with Anna. So is Vronsky, at once, charmed by Anna's spirit and vitality. Before they leave the station, a railroad guard is run over and killed by a passing train. At the urging of Anna, Vronsky leaves 200 roubles for the guard's widow.

Anna ably convinces Dolly not to leave Oblonsky. At a ball the next night, Kitty notices that Vronsky is distracted and inattentive to her. The source of this inattention becomes clear when she watches Vronsky waltz with Anna. The two of them

are completely smitten, and Kitty's heart is shattered. She realizes that her hopes are shot; Vronsky never wanted to marry her.

Levin goes to see his elder brother Nicholas, who is sickly and lives in depraved conditions. Disgusted with the entire trip, Levin leaves Moscow. Anna leaves the same day as Levin, on the train for St. Petersburg. During a brief stop, Vronsky emerges on the platform and tells her that he is in love with her and will follow her to St. Petersburg. Anna claims that this is impossible and tries to resume her life, but she is constantly displeased with everything.

Kitty Shcherbatskaya's heartache manifests itself in physical symptoms. Her family decides to take her to a spa in Germany to recover. Upon her return to St. Petersburg, Anna begins circulating more frequently in the circles where she is sure to meet Vronsky. Anna tells herself that she simply enjoys the attention, but soon she admits to herself that his feelings constitute the whole passion of her present existence. Their behavior quickly escalates into the realm of the Socially Unacceptable. Karenin is a man vitally concerned with external appearances, and it is for this reason that he confronts Anna. She disregards his concern, and the couple swiftly withdraws from each other. Vronsky and Anna consummate their love and Anna says, "Everything is finished. I have nothing but you now. Remember that."

Meanwhile, Levin prepares his estate for the arrival of spring. Unlike many estate owners, Levin delights in doing heavy labor on his estate. Oblonsky comes to visit his estate to sell one of his forests to a local dealer named Ryabinin at a serious loss. Before he leaves, Oblonsky tells Levin that Kitty is ill and that Vronsky has left Moscow in pursuit of Anna.

In Petersburg, Vronsky and Anna's affair is rapidly becoming common knowledge. Petersburg Society is waiting eagerly for Anna's downfall, and Vronsky's family is becoming concerned that this affair is distracting him from progressing in his career. In the midst of all this concern, Vronsky is preparing to ride in a horse race. Right before the race, Vronsky visits Anna. She tells him that she is pregnant. Vronsky then hurries to the race. Anna and her husband both attend the race, but sit separately in the stands. Vronsky's horse falls and breaks her back, though he himself is unhurt.

At the race, Karenin watches as Anna reacts physically when Vronsky falls. He confronts her about her affair, with more strength this time. Anna confesses her feelings for Vronsky and says that she hates Karenin. Karenin demands that she observe "external conditions of propriety" until he can protect himself, presumably through a divorce.

At the German spa, Kitty makes the acquaintance of Varenka, a pious young woman. Kitty tries to imitate her sense of deep spirituality and tries to be charitable like the girl. She fails to achieve the same type of understanding with the less fortunate as Varenka has, but comes to a greater understanding of herself by the time she leaves the spa. Meanwhile, Dolly and the children move to their country estate to save money while Oblonsky is in St. Petersburg. Levin visits them, and Dolly suggests that he propose to Kitty again. The suggestion embarrasses Levin. But when he glimpses Kitty a few days later, he realizes that he still loves her.

Karenin decides that the only option is to force Anna to break off relations with Vronsky and stay with him. Outwardly at least, this will preserve the status quo. The same morning, Vronsky receives a visit from his friend Serpukhovskoy, who offers him the chance to jump-start his career by leaving the

regiment; Vronsky refuses because it will take him away from Anna.

Levin attempts to avoid thoughts of Kitty, who is staying with Dolly less than twenty miles away. He develops a "theory" of economic labor that involves cooperative labor and ownership. He attempts to implement this theory on his farm, but the peasants respond with far less enthusiasm than Levin does. At the end of September, Levin receives a surprise visit from his consumptive brother Nicholas. Nicholas is emaciated and obviously very sick; his death is imminent. After Nicholas leaves, Levin sinks into moroseness. He begins seeing death everywhere and is depressed about his own soul.

The Karenins are living together in a state of tension. Anna continues to see Vronsky outside the house. One night, the two men meet each other as Vronsky rushes in to see Anna. This is the first night Vronsky notes that Anna's jealous fits make her less attractive to him. Anna tells him of a nightmare she had concerning a dirty old peasant. Vronsky had the same nightmare and was horrified. Karenin confronts Anna again. Faced with her implacable resolve, he tells her that he intends to begin divorce proceedings.

During a dinner party at the Oblonskys', Levin and Kitty reunite and find a new interest in each other. Kitty hints that she would accept if Levin were to propose to her again. This he does, and they begin planning their marriage.

Anna lies close to death after giving birth to Vronsky's daughter. Vronsky is in an outer room, weeping. Seeing Anna in her agitated state stirs Karenin to forgiveness. Weeping freely, he forgives both her and Vronsky in a state of great joy and happiness. Karenin shames Vronsky by saying that no

matter how the two of them humiliate him, Karenin will not leave Anna. Devastated by Karenin's nobility, Vronsky goes home and attempts suicide by shooting himself with a revolver. The bullet misses his heart, and he recuperates with the help of his sister-in-law. As she recovers, Anna remains awed by her husband's generous feelings, but she still feels stifled. Oblonsky, sensing the torture of the situation, visits Karenin and encourages him to begin divorce proceedings again. In an emotional moment, Karenin agrees. Upon hearing this news, Vronsky immediately abandons his military duties and rushes to the Karenins' house. But though Anna is elated to see him, she will not accept Karenin's offer of a divorce.

Levin and Kitty have a wonderful marriage despite Levin's concern about his agnosticism. The conversations of the other guests about the failed marriages they are in or that they know of add a sober note to the proceedings.

Anna and Vronsky leave Russia and travel in Italy. Vronsky has a new interest in painting and has begun a portrait of Anna. He abandons this interest when he meets a famous painter named Mikhailov. Mikhailov's superior dedication to the craft, along with his superior portrait of Anna, do a great deal to undermine Vronsky's confidence. They decide to return to Russia.

Levin is disillusioned that his marriage seems to consist of petty quarrels that he had once laughed at in other married couples. Things do not begin to go smoothly until Levin receives news that his brother, Nicholas, is on the verge of death in Moscow. Kitty goes along and takes care of the dying man with great care and tenderness. Levin gains a new appreciation for her. Kitty announces her pregnancy soon after Nicholas dies.

Karenin suffers under the humiliations of public opinion and a stagnated career. His only friend is Countess Lydia Ivanovna, who encourages him to join her in her brand of emotional Christianity. When they return to St. Petersburg, Anna and Vronsky are greeted with the unfortunate news that they have been outcast from high society, especially Anna. Still, Anna tests this by attending the opera. Anna creates a scene and is insulted by members of society. Anna blames him for her social position, making it necessary for him to soothe her with constant assurance of his love. They move to his country estate.

Many people visit the Levins at their estate that summer. Varenka and Koznyshev have a brief romance that ends when Koznyshev is too shy to propose. Oblonsky arrives with Vasenka Veslovsky, a handsome young playboy, who proceeds to flirt inappropriately with Kitty. Levin, who already feels insecure about his relationship to Kitty, fears adultery and throws Veslovsky out.

One day, Dolly goes to visit Anna at Vronsky's country estate. Though at first she is impressed by the luxury Anna and Vronsky live in, and of Anna's vitality, she soon becomes uncomfortable. They have had to consort with lower classes of people and are surrounded by hangers-on. Plus, Anna is in decline: she refuses to accept Karenin's offer of a divorce, she cares little for her daughter, takes morphine in order to sleep, and uses birth control for fear that Vronsky will lose interest in her if she becomes pregnant again.

Anna is increasingly paranoid and dependent on Vronsky. When he attends elections in Moscow and stays one day later than planned, she tricks him into returning. Vronsky feels increasingly stifled by her demands. At last she agrees to write Karenin for a divorce and the couple moves to Moscow.

The Levins are also in Moscow, awaiting the birth of their first child. Levin is uncomfortable in the city but does the best he can. Under Oblonsky's influence, Levin not only makes peace with Vronsky but also agrees to visit Anna, whom he has never met. Levin is completely charmed by Anna. When he returns home, Kitty is furious that he went to see Anna and can see the change in him. He stays up late comforting Kitty and assuring her of his love. Meanwhile, Anna's hold over Vronsky is crumbling; they typically greet each other with hostility. She has not heard from Karenin about her request for a divorce, and this makes their relations still more tense. That night, Kitty goes into labor. The birth takes 22 hours and Levin prays for the first time in years. When his son is born, Levin experiences a feeling of profound joy and happiness.

Oblonsky visits Karenin to press him about divorcing Anna. Karenin reacts with great emotion and claims that his Christianity will not allow him to do such a thing. Meanwhile, relations between Anna and Vronsky continue to sour. Anna grows more jealous, and Vronsky goes colder and more distant. Vronsky spends more time out of the house, and his mother encourages him to marry the young Princess Sorokin. They quarrel that night and then again the next morning; Vronsky leaves in disgust. Anna takes a dose of morphia and writes Vronsky a note begging his forgiveness and pleading with him to return at once. Then, despairing, she goes to visit Dolly.

The next several chapters take place mostly in Anna's head. She goes to see Dolly, but Kitty is there. The two sisters react to Anna awkwardly, and they have little to talk about. She leaves and returns home, where she finds everything and everyone repulsive. Desperate to see Vronsky, she leaves for the Nizhny train station. On the way to the train station, Anna is in a terrifying mental state. To her, everything is despicable and

the world is full of ugliness, misery and hate. Overwhelmed, she gets off the train after one stop. She runs into Vronsky's coachman, who gives her a cold note from Vronsky. Insane with misery, she wanders along the platform. Suddenly, she remembers the porter who died the first day she met Vronsky, and decides what she must do. She descends onto the tracks and waits for the oncoming train. She dies begging God for forgiveness, and her last vision is of the peasant from her dream.

Two years later, there was a great movement of Russian sympathy towards the Slavic peoples ruled by the Serbs. When Levin's half-brother Koznyshev goes to the train station to head to Levin's country estate, there are several groups of men who are volunteering to fight with the Slavs. One of those volunteers is Vronsky. The volunteer movement is Vronsky's only hope; he has been a wreck since Anna's death. The fight has given him something to be interested in. Alexis Karenin has taken Vronsky's daughter, and Vronsky is unable to get her back. Vronsky has aged many years and acts as though he is living in a mental prison.

The Levins' home is a portrait of domesticity and happy, effective labor. Levin is tortured by religious doubts and spiritual strivings, and these matters are so clearly troubling to him that even Kitty has begun to question what is going on in her husband's head. Levin's basic question, as he puts it, is this: "If I don't accept the answers given by Christianity to the questions of my life, what answers do I accept?" He wonders about his moment of prayer during Kitty's labor and constantly questions and tortures himself about his doubts. At times it becomes so bad that he wishes to kill himself. He attempts to distract himself with his family and farm duties, and in this he is moderately successful.

He experiences an epiphany in a conversation with a peasant named Theodore. He realizes that he has already been living for God. By appreciating his family and his workers, and dedicating himself to the well-being of others around him, he is behaving the way God wishes him to. He is reinforced in this belief when a tremendous thunderstorm strikes and he rushes to look for Kitty and the baby in the woods. While he hunts for them, lightning strikes a tree in front of him. The tree is scorched and tumbles in front of him. When he finds them a moment later, unhurt, he is overcome with relief. The experience renews his belief in God. Later that night, Levin reflects once more on the nature of his questions, and decides that his belief in God belongs to him alone, and that he has no right to remark on others' relationships with the Lord. Kitty comes in and asks him what he is thinking about, but he demurs to talk to her about it. It is a personal matter, he realizes, one that may not affect his life on the exterior but that will make all the difference to his inner peace.

Part 1

A crisis develops in the Oblonsky household when Dolly finds out about her husband's affair. Stiva's sister, Anna Karenina, arrives to reconcile the couple and dissuades Dolly from getting a divorce. Konstantin Levin, Stiva's friend, arrives in Moscow to propose to the eighteen year old Kitty Shtcherbatsky. She refuses him, for she loves Count Vronsky, a dashing army officer who has no intentions of marrying.

Meeting the lovely Madame Karenina, Vronsky falls in love and begins to pursue her. He and Anna are so involved with each other at the grand ball that Kitty's hopes for Vronsky are shattered. Anna, followed by Vronsky, returns to her husband and son in St. Petersburg, while the disappointed Levin returns to his country estate.

Part 2

Kitty falls ill after her humiliating rejection by Vronsky. At the German spa where she takes a rest cure she tries to deny her womanly nature by becoming a religious do-gooder. Realizing the hypocrisy of this new calling, Kitty returns to Russia cured of her depression and ready to accept her ultimate wifehood.

Consummating her union with Vronsky, Anna steps into a new life with much foreboding for the future. By the time she confesses her adultery to the suspecting Karenin, she is already pregnant with Vronsky's child.

Part 3

Devoting himself to farming, Levin tries to find life meaningful without marriage. He expends his energies in devising a cooperative landholding system with his peasants to make the best use of the land. Seeing his brother Nicolai hopelessly ill with tuberculosis, he realizes he has been working to avoid facing the problem of death. He also realizes he will always love Kitty.

Vronsky's career ambitions rival his love, and as he has not chosen between them, he is still uncommitted to Anna. Having rejected her husband, but still unable to depend on Vronsky, Anna finds her situation desperate. Her life is in a state of suspension.

Part 4

Kitty and Levin are engaged to marry. Karenin, who has tried to maintain appearances of domestic 41ranquility, finally builds up enough anger to hire a divorce lawyer. Anna is confined to a daughter, but dangerously ill from puerperal fever. At her deathbed, Karenin forgives her and feels sanctified by this surge of humanity and Christian charity. At this sudden reversal of their roles Vronsky feels so humiliated he attempts suicide.

These incidents form the turning point of the novel. After Anna's recovery, the lovers go abroad and Anna refuses divorce (though Karenin agrees to it) for fear of giving up her son.

Part 5

Levin and Kitty, after some initial difficulties, adjust to being married. Nicolai's death affects Levin deeply, and he realizes that emotional commitment, not reason, enables one to overcome life's problems. As if to underscore his life-affirmation, they learn Kitty is pregnant.

After their honeymoon in Italy, Anna and Vronsky return to Petersburg. Violently affected from seeing her son again, Anna's love for Vronsky becomes more desperate now that she has no one else. Despite his objections, she boldly attends the theater as if to affirm her love before conventional society. Humiliated at the opera, she blames Vronsky for lacking sympathy with her suffering, while he is angry at her indiscretion. This keynotes the decline of their relationship, although it is temporarily restored as they go to live in the country.

Part 6

Among Levin's summer visitors is a socialite who pays so much attention to Kitty that Levin asks him to leave. Visiting Anna at Vronsky's estate, Dolly finds her own drab life preferable to the formal luxury and decadence of Anna's. Complaining that Vronsky is eager for independence, Anna tells Dolly she must rely on her beauty and her love to keep his interest. Vronsky feels especially burdened by the demands of Anna's love when she calls him home from a refreshing political convention.

Part 7

Kitty gives birth to a son. Karenin, under the influence of his fanatically devout friend, Countess Lydia Ivanovna, becomes

religious and uses his hypocritical faith as a crutch to overcome his humiliation and loneliness.

Anna, seeing the irreversible decline of her love affair, has no more will to live and commits suicide.

Part 8

Vronsky volunteered for service in the Russo-Turkish war. Tolstoy uses this part of the novel to express his pacifist principles. Levin discovers salvation" when he resolves to "live for his soul" rather than for selfish goals. He realizes the meaning of life consists in living according to the goodness inherent in every individual. Understanding death as part of a reality-oriented life, Levin is at peace with himself

THEMES:-

- Hypocrisy

This theme is first touched upon with the novel's epigraph: "Vengeance is mine, I shall repay." This epigraph is a warning to both Russian Society and to the reader that the only person allowed to judge is God. The rest of us, being imperfect, merely make ourselves into hypocrites when we judge someone else. Russian Society is full of hypocrites in this book. Indeed, the very corruption of this society is symbolized by the way socialites treat Anna after she elopes with Vronsky. Although most members of Russian Society (men and women included) conduct extra-marital affairs, they turn on Anna when it turns out that her affair goes deeper than mere carnal desire. Princess Betsy is an excellent example of hypocrisy in Russian Society.

- Jealousy

Anna Karenina features portraits of three relationships: Dolly and Oblonsky, Kitty and Levin, and Anna and Vronsky. In all three of these relationships, jealousy plays a role that affects the

success of the relationship. In general, the less jealous a couple are, the more successful they will be. Dolly is jealous when Oblonsky is unfaithful, but she represses this feeling for the good of their children and their home, and they stay together as a result. Levin and Kitty are jealous of each other at first, but as they grow into themselves and their relationship (and, in Levin's case, his relationship with God), their jealousy fades and their relationship strengthens. Finally, Anna's relationship with Vronsky is destroyed by her all-consuming jealousy.

- Faith

Faith is the overriding aspect of Levin's story. Tortured by existential doubts throughout most of the book, he experiences an epiphany at the end that shows him the reason for his existence. By learning to have faith in God, and following His rules, Levin experiences the joyful peace that is faith. Faith also saves his relationship with Kitty, because he learns that he must place his life in the hands of the Lord, and not look at Kitty to be his Savior.

- Fidelity

Like jealousy, fidelity is a concern of the three relationships highlighted in the novel. When a young man flirts with Kitty, Levin "already saw himself as a deceived husband, who was needed by his wife and her lover only in order to provide them with the comforts of life and with pleasures." Meanwhile, Dolly's trust in Oblonsky is shattered when she learns that he has been unfaithful. And, due to double standards of fidelity for men and women, Anna is punished the most of all for her infidelity. (Though, it must be said that Anna also abandoned her husband and son, thereby causing the most damage.) The importance of fidelity‹at least the fidelity of women‹is underlined throughout the novel.

- Family

The importance of the family, and of keeping the family intact, is one of the most important aspects of Anna Karenina. This includes the extended family as well‹for example, one of the reasons why the Shcherbatskaya daughters are presented as the epitome of virtuous women is that they care not just for their husbands but for their parents and for their husbands' families. (Kitty, for example, gains a great deal of Levin's esteem after she cares for his dying brother Nicholas.) And one of Anna's biggest concerns about getting a divorce from Karenin is that she will no longer have access to her beloved son.

- Marriage

Tolstoy presents portraits of marriage that are astonishing for their lack of romance. Although these women are princesses, baronesses and countesses, there are no fairy-tale endings in Anna Karenina. Instead, marriage is portrayed with all of its faults and problems, from jealousy to lack of passion to abandonment. Tolstoy does not advocate the ending of marriage as a social institution at all‹indeed, he believes it is the glue that holds societies together, but he is realistic about how it works. The only fully successful marriage in Anna Karenina is between Levin and Kitty, and it only becomes that way when they understand that a man and a woman occupy separate social roles, and that it is necessary for a couple to give each other space.

- Society

Russian High Society comes in for a beating in Anna Karenina. The hypocrisies and petty, small-minded beliefs of Society are painstakingly documented‹from their condemnation of Anna to their crusade to "save" the Slavs at the end of the book. But Tolstoy also offers an amazing portrayal of Society's rules and rituals: dinners, balls, parties, horse-riding and croquet games.

And social interaction is vital to the health of a relationship: one of the major reasons why Anna is so jealous of Vronsky is because he has the freedom to move in society, whereas she has been cast out from society.

- Progress

While Tolstoy was writing Anna Karenina, Russia was experiencing an influx of Western thought, politics, and technology. This was popularly known as “progress,” and many intellectuals in the novel, such as Koznyshev, applaud the changes that have gone on in Russia due to these Western influences. One of Tolstoy’s major projects in Anna Karenina is to question the “improvements” that are happening to Russia due to Western “progress.” The train, for example, a symbol of evil and death in Anna Karenina, came from the West. Virtually everything Koznyshev says is derided by another, more credible character, such as Levin or Dolly. Instead of regarding Western things as progress, Tolstoy champions the Russian land and Russian traditions.

- Carnal Desire

In Anna Karenina, carnal desire is a destructive force. Anna and Vronsky do not create but destroy‹Anna becomes sterile, Vronsky abandons his career, Karenin is ruined, and Seroyzha loses his mother‹all in the name of carnal desire. This is a reflection of Tolstoy’s Christian message.

- “The Land”

The Land takes on a spiritual aspect in this book. The scenes of Levin planting with his peasants are reverent in their sensuality. Throughout the book there are many questions about the land and the people who work it (peasants), all based on real political questions that Russia was asking itself at the time. Levin becomes very concerned with these issues and implements a

communal agricultural theory. Tolstoy believes strongly in the primacy of the land to Russian well-being; one of his major concerns about Western progress is that it seemed to focus on cities and abandon the land. Indeed, only the characters who regularly connect to the land by either living on it, as Levin does, or escaping the city often to be in the country, as Dolly does‹are fully sympathetic characters.

- The City

Urban centers are hotbeds of corruption and destruction. They are fashionable and seductive, but they lead to evil things. Russian Society is centered in St. Petersburg and Moscow; all the new ideas from Europe arrive in the cities first. As if to prove the corruption of these places, Levin always feels uncomfortable in cities, whereas Anna feels out of sorts away from them.

- Passion

Passion is distrusted in Anna Karenina because it can lead to destruction, as it does in Anna's case. But Anna's double, Levin, is also an extremely passionate individual, and his passion is championed because it leads him to the Lord. In general, passion itself is not a bad force, but it can be easily corrupted and lead to problems.

Essay questions:-

1. Illustrate why Anna is considered to be one of the complex characters in world literature.

2. Discuss the variety of themes that Tolstoy incorporates in *Anna Karenina*.

3. Comment on Tolstoy's art of characterization.

THE TRIAL

Franz Kafka

About the author:-

Franz Kafka (3 July 1883 – 3 June 1924) was a German-speaking Bohemian novelist and short-story writer, widely regarded as one of the major figures of 20th-century literature. His work fuses elements of realism and the fantastic. It typically features isolated protagonists facing bizarre or surrealistic predicaments and incomprehensible socio-bureaucratic powers. It has been interpreted as exploring themes of alienation, existential anxiety, guilt, and absurdity. His best known works include "Die Verwandlung" ("The Metamorphosis"), “Der Process" (The Trial), and Das Schloss (The Castle). The term Kafkaesque has entered the English language to describe situations like those found in his writing.

Kafka was born into a middle-class German-Jewish family in Prague, the capital of the Kingdom of Bohemia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, today the capital of the Czech Republic. He trained as a lawyer and after completing his legal education was employed full-time by an insurance company, forcing him to relegate writing to his spare time. Over the course of his life, Kafka wrote hundreds of letters to family and close friends, including his father, with whom he had a strained and formal relationship. He became engaged to several women but never married. He died in 1924 at the age of 40 from tuberculosis.

Few of Kafka's works were published during his lifetime: the story collections Betrachtung (Contemplation) and

Ein Landarzt (A Country Doctor), and individual stories (such as "Die Verwandlung") were published in literary magazines but received little public attention. In his will, Kafka instructed his executor and friend Max Brod to destroy his unfinished works, including his novels Der Process, Das Schloss and Der Verschollene (translated as both Amerika and The Man Who Disappeared), but Brod ignored these instructions. His work has influenced a vast range of writers, critics, artists, and philosophers during the 20th and 21st centuries.

Summary:-

The Trial, (German *Der Prozess*) novel by Kafka, originally published posthumously in 1925. One of Kafka's major works, and perhaps his most pessimistic, this surreal story of a young man who finds himself caught up in the mindless bureaucracy of the law has become synonymous with the anxieties and sense of alienation of the modern age and with an ordinary person's struggle against an unreasoning and unreasonable authority. It is often considered to be an imaginative anticipation of totalitarianism.

The narrative emerges from the book's opening sentence: "Somebody must have slandered Joseph K., for one morning, without having done anything wrong, he was arrested." It is K.'s 30th birthday, and a pair of guards have arrived at his boarding house to inform him that he is under arrest. He is shortly summoned before the inspector, who is in the bedroom of another tenant. The inspector does not know what the charges are but tells K. that he is free to continue living his life as usual. K. goes to the bank where he works and is later told that a series of hearings will be taking place on Sundays.

K. is not informed of the time that he is expected to appear, but he goes on Sunday morning to the address he was given, which

proves to be that of a large tenement building. Eventually a washerwoman directs him to a crowded meeting hall, where the examining magistrate scolds K. for being late. K. energetically protests his treatment and denounces the corruption of the system. As he is leaving, the magistrate tells him that he has damaged his case by declining to participate in the hearing. No further summonses arrive, so K. returns to the building the following Sunday morning only to be told by the washerwoman that court is not in session. Her husband is the court usher, and he offers to show K. the law court offices. While there K. begins to feel extremely fatigued, but after two officials help him outside, he immediately recovers.

A few days later, as he is leaving work, K. hears a sound coming from a storeroom, and inside it he finds the guards who arrested him being flogged because of his complaints about them to the magistrate. An uncle of K. 's later takes him to the defense lawyer Dr. Huld. Although Huld is in bed because of a heart condition, he is very interested in taking on K. as a client. The chief clerk of the court emerges from a dark corner of the room, and he and Huld discuss the case. Huld's caretaker, Leni, lures K. from the room and seduces him. She also tells him that he is being too stubborn and that he must confess his guilt. K.'s uncle is furious over his inattention to his case.

Weeks pass, during which K. finds it increasingly difficult to focus on work and also becomes increasingly dissatisfied with his lawyer's largely invisible work on his behalf. One day a bank client suggests that he seek help from the court painter, Titorelli. In light of K.'s innocence, Titorelli says that he can help K., though he reveals that, in his experience, no one has ever been acquitted. However, he believes that K. can obtain an ostensible acquittal, which is provisional and hence carries the risk that charges might be

reinstated, or an indefinite postponement, which requires regular filings and appearances. Either may prevent the case from reaching the sentencing phase.

When K. goes to fire Huld, he meets Block, a merchant who is another client of Huld's. Block's case has been going on for five years, and he has secretly engaged other lawyers and tried to represent himself. Huld exhibits his power over Block in an attempt to dissuade K. from dismissing him. Later at work, K. is asked to show an Italian client a local cathedral, but the client fails to arrive at the appointed time. A priest appears at a side pulpit and reveals that he is the prison chaplain. He informs K. that his case is going badly, as he is by now considered to be guilty. The chaplain then tells him a baffling parable.

On the eve of K.'s 31st birthday, two men in frock coats and top hats come to his home. He goes with them, and they hold his arms. Although it seems that they are going where K. leads them, they take him to an abandoned quarry and have him sit with his head on a stone. They pass a knife back and forth to each other, and then one of them pushes it into K.'s heart and twists it twice.

K. never discovered why he was arrested or what he was charged with, and he was never able to understand the principles governing the system of justice in which he found himself ensnared. In the end, he did not resist his inevitable execution.

The novel is an evocative account of K.'s helplessness in the face of a completely incomprehensible system. After Kafka's death from tuberculosis in 1924, the chapters were organized and the book published by his friend and literary executor, Max Brod, despite Kafka's request that Brod destroy the manuscript. The book was unfinished, and there has been debate as to whether the chapters were published in the correct

order. There were several stage and film adaptations of The Trial, including a 1962 movie directed by Orson Welles and starring Anthony Perkins and a 1993 version with a screenplay by Harold Pinter.

Kafka And Existentialism

Kafka's stories suggest meanings which are accessible only after several readings. If their endings, or lack of endings, seem to make sense at all, they will do so immediately and not in unequivocal language. The reason for this is that the stories offer a wide variety of possible meanings without confirming any particular one of them. This, in turn, is the result of Kafka's view which he shares with many twentieth-century writers — that his own self is a parcel of perennially interacting forces lacking a stable core; if he should attain an approximation of objectivity, this can come about only by describing the world in symbolic language and from a number of different vantage points. Thus a total view must inevitably remain inaccessible to him. Such a universe about which nothing can be said that cannot at the same time — and just as plausibly — be contradicted has a certain ironic quality about it — ironic in the sense that each possible viewpoint becomes relativized. Yet the overriding response one has is one of tragedy rather than irony as one watches Kafka's heroes trying to piece together the debris of their universe.

Kafka's world is essentially chaotic, and this is why it is impossible to derive a specific philosophical or religious code from it — even one acknowledging chaos and paradox as does much existential thought. Only the events themselves can reveal the basic absurdity of things. To reduce Kafka's symbols to their "real" meanings and to pigeonhole his world-view as some "ism" or other is to obscure his writing with just the kind of meaningless experience from which he liberated himself through his art.

Expressionism is one of the literary movements frequently mentioned in connection with Kafka, possibly because its vogue in literature coincided with Kafka's mature writing, between 1912 and his death in 1924. Of course, Kafka does have certain characteristics in common with expressionists, such as his criticism of the blindly scientific-technological world-view, for instance. However, if we consider what he thought of some of the leading expressionists of his day, he certainly cannot be associated with the movement: he repeatedly confessed that the works of the expressionists made him sad; of a series of illustrations by Kokoschka, one of the most distinguished representatives of the movement, Kafka said: "I don't understand. To me, it merely proves the painter's inner chaos." What he rejected in expressionism is the overstatement of feeling and the seeming lack of craftsmanship. While Kafka was perhaps not the great craftsman in the sense that Flaubert was, he admired this faculty in others. In terms of content, Kafka was highly skeptical and even inimical toward the expressionist demand for the "new man." This moralistic-didactic sledgehammer method repulsed him.

Kafka's relationship with existentialism is much more complex, mainly because the label "existentialist" by itself is rather meaningless. Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard all have a certain existentialist dimension in their writings, as do Camus, Sartre, Jaspers and Heidegger, with whose works the term existentialism has been more or less equated since World War II. These various people have rather little in common concerning their religious, philosophical, or political views, but they nevertheless share certain characteristic tenets present in Kafka.

Kafka certainly remained fascinated and overwhelmed by the major theme of all varieties of existentialist thinking, namely the

difficulty of responsible commitment in the face of an absurd universe. Deprived of all metaphysical guidelines, man is nevertheless obligated to act morally in a world where death renders everything meaningless. He alone must determine what constitutes a moral action although he can never foresee the consequences of his actions. As a result, he comes to regard his total freedom of choice as a curse. The guilt of existentialist heroes, as of Kafka's, lies in their failure to choose and to commit themselves in the face of too many possibilities — none of which appears more legitimate or worthwhile than any other one. Like Camus' Sisyphus, who is doomed to hauling a rock uphill only to watch it roll down the other side, they find themselves faced with the fate of trying to wring a measure of dignity for themselves in an absurd world. Unlike Sisyphus, however, Kafka's heroes remain drifters in the unlikely landscape they have helped create. Ulrich in Musil's The Man Without Quality and Mersault in Camus' The Stranger — these men are really contemporaries of Kafka's "heroes," drifters in a world devoid of metaphysical anchoring and suffering from the demons of absurdity and alienation. And in this sense, they are all modern-day relatives of that great hesitator Hamlet, the victim of his exaggerated consciousness and overly rigorous conscience.

The absurdity which Kafka portrays in his nightmarish stories was, to him, the quintessence of the whole human condition. The utter incompatibility of the "divine law" and the human law, and Kafka's inability to solve the discrepancy are the roots of the sense of estrangement from which his protagonists suffer. No matter how hard Kafka's heroes strive to come to terms with the universe, they are hopelessly caught, not only in a mechanism of their own contriving, but also in a network of accidents and incidents, the least of which may lead to the gravest consequences. Absurdity results in estrangement, and to

the extent that Kafka deals with this basic calamity, he deals with an eminently existentialist theme.

Kafka's protagonists are lonely because they are caught midway between a notion of good and evil, whose scope they cannot determine and whose contradiction they cannot resolve. Deprived of any common reference and impaled upon their own limited vision of "the law," they cease to be heard, much less understood, by the world around them. They are isolated to the point where meaningful communication fails them. When the typical Kafka hero, confronted with a question as to his identity, cannot give a clear-cut answer, Kafka does more than indicate difficulties of verbal expression: he says that his hero stands between two worlds — between a vanished one to which he once belonged and a present world to which he does not belong. This is consistent with Kafka's world, which consists not of clearly delineated opposites, but of an endless series of possibilities. These are never more than temporary expressions, never quite conveying what they really ought to convey — hence the temporary, fragmentary quality of Kafka's stories. In the sense that Kafka is aware of the limitations which language imposes upon him and tests the limits of literature, he is a "modern" writer. In the sense that he does not destroy the grammatical, syntactical, and semantic components of his texts, he remains traditional. Kafka has refrained from such destructive aspirations because he is interested in tracing the human reasoning process in great detail up to the point where it fails. He remains indebted to the empirical approach and is at his best when he depicts his protagonists desperately trying to comprehend the world by following the "normal" way.

Because they cannot make themselves heard, much less understood, Kafka's protagonists are involved in adventures which no one else knows about. The reader tends to have the

feeling that he is privy to the protagonist's fate and, therefore, finds it rather easy to identify with him. Since there is usually nobody else within the story to whom the protagonist can communicate his fate, he tends to reflect on his own problems over and over again. This solipsistic quality Kafka shares with many an existential writer, although existentialist terminology has come to refer to it as "self-realization."

Kafka was thoroughly familiar with the writings of Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, and it pays to ponder the similarities and differences between their respective views. The most obvious similarity between Kafka and Kierkegaard, their complex relationships with their respective fiancées and their failures to marry, also points up an essential difference between them. When Kafka talks of bachelorhood and a hermit's existence, he sees these as negative. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, was an enthusiastic bachelor who saw a divine commandment in his renunciation of women. For Kafka, bachelorhood was a symbol of alienation from communal happiness, and he thought of all individualism in this manner. This makes him a poor existentialist.

Unlike Kierkegaard, who mastered his anguish through a deliberate "leap into faith," leaving behind all intellectual speculation, Kafka and his heroes never succeed in conquering this basic anguish: Kafka remained bound by his powerful, probing intellect, trying to solve things rationally and empirically. Kafka does not conceive of the transcendental universe he seeks to describe in its paradoxical and noncommunicable terms; instead, he sets to describing it rationally and, therefore, inadequately. It is as if he were forced to explain something which he himself does not understand — nor is really supposed to understand. Kafka was not the type who could do the act of belief. Nor was he a man of flesh and

bones who could venture the decisive step toward action and the "totality of experience," as did Camus, for instance, who fought in the French Underground against the Nazi terror. Kafka never really went beyond accepting this world in a way that remains outside of any specific religion. He tended to oppose Kierkegaard's transcendental mysticism, although it might be too harsh to argue that he gave up all faith in the "indestructible nature" of the universe, as he called it. Perhaps this is what Kafka means when he says, "One cannot say that we are lacking faith. The simple fact in itself that we live is inexhaustible in its value of faith."

In the case of Dostoevsky, the parallels with Kafka include merciless consciousness and the rigorous conscience issuing from it. Just as characters in Dostoevsky's works live in rooms anonymous and unadorned, for example, so the walls of the hunger artist's cage, the animal's maze, and Gregor Samsa's bedroom are nothing but the narrow, inexorable, and perpetual prison walls of their respective consciences. The most tragic awakening in Kafka's stories is always that of consciousness and con-science. Kafka surpasses Dostoevsky in this respect because that which is represented as a dramatic relation — between, say, Raskolnikov and Porfiry in Crime and Punishment — becomes the desperate monologue of a soul in Kafka's pieces.

Kafka's philosophical basis, then, is an open system: it is one of human experiences about the world and not so much the particular Weltanschauung of a thinker. Kafka's protagonists confront a secularized deity whose only visible aspects are mysterious and anonymous. Yet despite being continually faced with the essential absurdity of all their experiences, these men nevertheless do not cease trying to puzzle them out. To this end, Kafka uses his writing as a code of the transcendental, a

language of the unknown. It is important to understand that this code is not an escape from reality, but the exact opposite — the instrument through which he seeks to comprehend the world in its totality — without ever being able to say to what extent he may have succeeded.

Analysis of *The Trial*

Certainly The Trial has many layers of meaning which not even the most "scientific" analysis can decode, be it psychoanalytically or, more recently, linguistically oriented. The probably inevitable result of the novel's multi-level makeup is that certain components are stressed while others are not. Yet it seems that, in spite of this danger, our view of K. will pretty much determine our interpretation.

Both the philosophical-theological and the autobiographical interpretations shed light on two important layers. If we view the Court only as a description of a corrupt bureaucratic system, or as a projection of Kafka's personal problems, K. winds up as the miserable victim whose story grants mankind absolutely no hope in a totally alienated world. The same is true if we take the parable, the novel's artistic focal point, and view it as the tribunal where K., elevated to an absolute level, is forced to vindicate himself as a representative of mankind without really knowing why or how.

If we look at K. as guilty, as a man who is part and parcel of this faulty world and whose aberrations result in severe, though logically consistent occurrences, then we must acknowledge a higher Law toward whose absolute standards K. is stumbling. Looking at The Trial this way makes it appear not only as a portrayal of human desperation, but also as one of Kafka's faith: not faith in the sense of salvation, or even orientation, to be sure, but faith in his eventual acceptance of his sinful life and its consequences.

In this interpretation, K. does not die as a result of his involved and absurd situation, but because he was already dead inwardly at his arrest. From the very outset of the story he does not love anybody or anything, does not aim for anything beyond his immediate physical needs, is insensitive and egotistical. His assets are limited to purely economic concerns to a point which keeps him from comprehending the nature of his own new situation. But his self-assurance and defiance against the bizarre authorities, which seem to amount to justified protest in the eyes of the reader — at this point still sympathetic to him — gradually disappear. The longer the trial lasts, the more K. becomes aware that the strange Court with all its bizarre and corrupt officials may have the right to investigate him after all. As the priest warns

K. during their discussion about the meaning of the parable, "It may be that you don't know the nature of the Court you are serving." It makes sense, therefore, to see the many scenes of K.'s trial as sequences of his evolving consciousness (and conscience; the two words are cognates). In this case, the final scene with all its horror represents the last consequence of guilt in the form of a nightmare. If we accept this view, then the confusing and contradictory aspects of the Court are also a reflection of K.'s inner condition.

It is important to understand that there are many levels of the Court, most of them tangible, corrupt, and dealing with K. in a most haphazard way. The highest level is, above all, elusive. The levels at which K. fights mirror the shortcomings of this life (his included, as said above) and are therefore in no position to pass judgment. The representatives of these levels become bogged down in unresolved and unresolvable issues and utter "diverse viewpoints" at best. Their ranks "mount endlessly so that not even the initiated can survey the hierarchy as a whole," and each level "actually knows less than the defense."

Even the "high judges" are "common" and, contrary to popular belief, sit only on "kitchen chairs." These officials represent the sensual unhampered forces of life itself. Their power is such that nobody can escape them. At the same time, and this makes for their paradoxical nature, they are forever caught up in reflecting and registering in a rather abstract realm removed from life. "They were often utterly at a loss; they did not have any right understanding of human relations."

Beyond these bungling levels of the Court, there is the highest seat of Law itself, absolute and inaccessible, yet weighing more and more heavily on K., who becomes increasingly aware of its existence and its relevance to his case. It marks that point of the endless legal pyramid where the notions of justice and inevitability come together, where the countless contradictions and errors of its organs are reconciled. It is the instance which K. becomes drawn to, of which he has an increasingly definite feeling that he has been summoned before it to justify his life. This is the Law he has to serve and which he has violated by being unaware of its existence.

The indifferent and corrupt authorities "are merely sent out by the highest Court." They do not know their superiors. They stand clearly below this "highest Law." This is why the doorkeeper of the parable stands before the Law rather than in it.

Essay questions:-

1. Consider *The Trial* as Kafka's imaginative anticipation of totalitarianism.

2. "Joseph.K represents the sense of alienation of the modern age"- discuss.

3. Attempt a reading of *The Trial* as a multi-layered parable.

ZORBA THE GREEK

Nikos Kazantzakis

About the author:-

Kazantzakis is a Cretan author who is considered one of the most influential modern Greek writers in history. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature nine times, and his novels, plays, memoirs, and philosophical essays are widely read in literary circles. In addition, the movies based on his books have spread his influence all across the world.

Kazantzákis was born during the period of revolt of Crete against rule by the Ottoman Empire, and his family fled for a short time to the Greek island of Náxos. He studied law at the University of Athens (1902–06) and philosophy under Henri Bergson in Paris (1907–09). He then traveled widely in Spain, England, Russia, Egypt, Palestine, and Japan, settling before World War II on the island of Aegina. He served as a minister in the Greek government (1945) and worked for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris (1947–48). He then moved to Antibes, France.

Kazantzákis' works cover a vast range, including philosophic essays, travel books, tragedies, and translations into modern Greek of such classics as Dante's Divine Comedy and J.W. von Goethe's Faust. He produced lyric poetry and the epic Odíssa (1938; Odyssey), a 33,333-line sequel to the Homeric epic that expresses the full range of Kazantzákis' philosophy.

Kazantzákis is perhaps best known for his widely translated novels. They include *Zorba the Greek*, a portrayal of a passionate lover of life and poor-man's philosopher; *Freedom or Death*, a depiction of Cretan Greeks' struggle against their Ottoman overlords in the 19th century; *The Greek Passion*; and *The Last Temptation of Christ*, a revisionist psychological study of Jesus Christ. Published after his death was the autobiographical novel *Report to Greco*. Motion pictures based on his works include "He Who Must Die," from The Greek Passion, Zorba the Greek (1964), and The Last Temptation of Christ (1988).

The story of *Zorba the Greek* centers around two main characters: Zorba, an adventurous and exuberant 65-year-old, and an unnamed narrator, a young Greek intellectual who has grown bored of his bookish life and has decided to start a new journey with Zorba. The pair travel to Crete to develop a lignite mine in a small village of eccentric people. They come to form a deep friendship through their discussions about life and their experience of many strange and often challenging scenarios. Nikos Kazantzakis weaves into the narrative many questions of the relationship between God and man, good versus evil, and the struggle of people to find their purpose in life. Through Zorba's rich and almost ineffable life of emotion, Kazantzakis beautifully explores what it means to be human.

Summary

Zorba the Greek tells the story of a Greek man, an unnamed narrator, who goes on a great journey of self-discovery and enlightenment with an older man named Alexis Zorba. The story begins in a café in Piraeus in the year 1916, sometime after the narrator's closest friend, Stavridakis, leaves him to rescue persecuted Greeks in the Caucasus. This is where the narrator

meets Zorba for the first time. The narrator has plans to reopen an abandoned lignite mine on the island of Crete, and Zorba suggests that he can come along, as he makes very good soup. The narrator agrees, as he finds Zorba odd and charming, and this is where the adventure begins.

The narrator reflects on how he wants to escape his bookworm lifestyle and move to a place where he can live and work amongst peasants. He and Zorba board the ship to Crete, as Zorba tells the narrator, now referred to as "boss," that he used to be a rebel fighter during the Cretan revolution, and how man is born blind and will die blind until he has seen the liberation of an entire people.

They dock and step off the ship into the village, and Zorba states that as long as they can find a widow, they'll be taken care of. When asking at a café where they could find lodging, they discover that a widow named Madame Hortense runs an inn in the village. They travel to the inn, where they ask for two rooms to stay the night. The narrator takes the next morning to travel alone around the village, seeing the sights, and reading Dante by the sea, until he is at last found by Zorba at midday. They return to Madame Hortense’s, where they are confronted by a village elder, Mavrandoni, who mentions that it is uncouth for them to stay at the hotel of a lady. He offers them a place to stay, but they refuse, and go on to enjoy lunch with Madame Hortense. They have a joyful and hearty lunch with Madame, and she tells the story of how at one time she controlled the four world powers with her beauty. The English, Russian, Italian, and French admirals, with their fabulous beards and scents, had been won over by Madame Hortense, and she convinced them not to bomb Crete. This prompts Zorba to begin calling her Bouboulina, who was a heroine of the war of independence. It is this night that Zorba takes her as his lover.

The next morning, Zorba and the narrator talk about women and love, and Zorba begins his work as foreman of the mine operation. The narrator is amazed by Zorba's spirit, and how he sees everything as though for the first time. He is older and well-traveled, and tells the narrator stories of the places he has been and the things he has seen. In the early stages of the mining operation, the narrator goes with Zorba to the mine, as he wants to speak to the workers and live and work amongst them. Zorba, however, advises against this, fearing that the narrator's socialist beliefs would result in him being taken advantage of by the workers. Later that day, the narrator makes a pledge to himself to let go of his metaphysical predisposition and try to live firmly in the real, physical world.

Zorba and the narrator engage in further conversation about life and religion, and of how the narrator wishes to open people's eyes to a better kind of world. He works manically that night on his Buddhist manuscript, imagining the better world that he spoke of in vivid detail. Zorba tells the narrator that he believes there to be three types of men: those that turn their food into fat and manure, those that turn their food into work and good humor, and those that try to turn their food into God. He says that he believes the narrator tries his best to turn his food into God, and becomes very frustrated when he fails. Zorba then tells the story of a Russian man he once knew, whom he communicated with through dancing. The narrator thinks of how he wishes he could wipe away all the traditional learning he had and attend Zorba's school to learn what he describes as "the great, the real alphabet!" He feels his life has been wasted, and wishes that he could be more like Zorba, who has found the real truth of life.

One morning, the narrator finally decides to pen a letter to his old friend Stavridakis, telling him how he is giving up his

bookworm life and embracing the world on Crete. He reminisces on the good times they had together, and admits that he loved Stavridakis very deeply. This letter relieves him of some ill will, and he decides to go with Zorba for a walk in the rain. They stop in the café, soaked to the bone, and this is the first sighting he has of the mesmerizing widow. Mavrandoni's son Pavli is deeply in love with the widow, saying at once that if she will not marry him, he will kill himself. They stop for a while to talk to Mimiko, the village simpleton, and Zorba insists that the narrator should sleep with the widow, as he believes it is the greatest sin to refuse to share a bed with a woman. The narrator nonetheless refuses, and they return to their beach encampment.

The next morning, the narrator accompanies Zorba and the workers to the mine, and he watches Zorba work for a while. At the miners' lunch break however, Zorba hears a strange sound and ushers all the workers out of the mine, after which the entire gallery collapses. The workmen eat with Zorba and the narrator, and one of the workers thanks Zorba for saving all of their lives.

The narrator continues his Buddhist writings in an effort to exorcise the beautiful widow from his mind, while Zorba continues to encourage him to go to her, even on Christmas Eve. They share Christmas Eve dinner with Madame Hortense. On the first day of the new year, the narrator awakens happily and sets along the path toward the village, where he runs into the widow. He stands at the gate to her garden for a while, looking and imagining going in to be with her. He sits down beneath a flowering almond tree, where he is finally found by Zorba after some time.

They go to Madame Hortense's for a New Year's feast. Bouboulina reminisces on her youth in the great cities of the world. Zorba is working on a plan to craft a pulley line which

would carry trees down the mountain at a gentle speed if placed along the right slope, but he must work quickly, as they are running out of money. After finally discovering the slope, Zorba announces that he must go to the town of Candia for three days to buy the supplies for his system, and the following morning he leaves for town.

The narrator receives a reply to his letter from Stavridakis, and he speaks of how his mission thus far has been a success, but if this is to be his last letter (implying his death), then he wishes the narrator to know that he loves him very dearly as well. Zorba has been gone for several days longer than he was meant to be, but the narrator receives a letter from him letting him know that everything is alright, and he has met a woman named Lola who he has been spending his time with. Later on, the narrator is approached by Bouboulina, who asks if there has been a letter from Zorba. The narrator, realizing that Bouboulina is very hurt, lies and tells her that the letter spoke only of her and how much Zorba misses her, and that when he returns he intends to marry her.

He walks back to the village with her, and they begin noticing a massive commotion occurring by the shore. He finds that Pavli, Mavrandoni's son, has killed himself because the widow did not wish to be with him. The villagers begin cursing the widow, taunting and demanding that someone kill her for the injustice. The narrator tries to defend her, asking how it is her fault that the boy is dead. Old Anagnosti contends that Pavli is better off, as life is nothing but suffering. Later that evening the narrator receives a basket of oranges from the widow, thanking him for standing up for her.

The narrator is overjoyed at the return of Zorba, as he stayed in Candia twelve days longer than he had intended. He has to break the news that he lied to Bouboulina about Zorba's

letter, and Zorba is unhappy, saying that it's cruel to play with a woman's heart that way. Some time later, they begin to make their way to a monastery to negotiate the price of purchasing the forest that belongs to the monks. On the way they meet an ex-monk named Zaharia, who agrees to lead them to the monastery to speak to the abbot. They stay overnight so they can speak to the abbot, and in the night a young man is shot and killed. This tragedy allows Zorba to negotiate a lower price for the forest, presumably to avoid the news spreading about the young monk's violent death. Zaharia decides that the demon inside of him wants to burn down the monastery, and the Archangel Michael has demanded that he do so.

When they return to the beach, they are met by Madame Hortense, who calls Zorba cruel for leaving her waiting for so long. Deciding to appease her, Zorba apologizes, and that night they become engaged. Zorba tells the narrator the story of how he fought in the war, and killed a priest who was a Bulgarian soldier.

On Easter, the narrator and Zorba are waiting at their beach encampment for Madame Hortense to arrive, as they have set up a special meal for her. Eventually a young messenger comes to inform them that she is ill. Zorba goes to visit, and comes back to tell the narrator that she has a cold. Zorba goes to the village to dance, and at that moment the narrator finally decides to go to the widow to sleep with her. Afterward, he feels revitalized and swims in the ocean.

The next day a messenger comes, saying that Bouboulina wishes to see Zorba. Zorba went to work on the cable delivery system, so the narrator decides to go and visit Bouboulina instead. She seems very ill, and the narrator tells Mimiko to send for a doctor straight away.

After leaving Dame Hortense's house, the narrator finds that there is a commotion occurring because the widow is at the church. The villagers think it is disgraceful that she would show her face at the church after all she has done to the village, and so they decide to kill her. Manolakas brandishes his knife and raises it above the widow, but is held off by Zorba, who appears suddenly to defend the woman. The narrator, Zorba, and the widow begin running away, but the widow is caught by Mavrandoni, who cuts her head off with his knife. The narrator and Zorba return to their beach in horror and grief.

Three or four days later, Zorba goes to visit Dame Hortense. Her condition is worsening. When he returns and the narrator asks how Bouboulina is, Zorba replies that nothing is wrong and that she is going to die. Zorba decides to go for a walk, presumably to grieve, and he encounters Manolakas, who wishes to fight Zorba for dishonoring him at the church. The narrator steps in, however, just before they fight, and brings them both back to the beach to be friends and reconcile their disagreements.

The next morning, the narrator and Zorba go to visit poor Bouboulina, and old Anagnosti says he is not sure if they will find her still alive. She dies that morning, as the villagers ransack her home and steal her things. Zorba takes her parrot with him, gently closes her eyes, and leaves. Zorba asks the narrator questions about God when they return to their beach, and he anguishes over the loss of Bouboulina. Zaharia comes to them, saying that he has burnt the monastery and is now free of the demon which lived inside of him. He leaves for the beach, and sometime later Zorba goes out to shave his face. He returns to the narrator with the news that Zaharia has died on the beach, his heart seeming to have simply stopped.

The day before May 1st is the great unveiling of the cable railway system. Many villagers are invited, including the

abbot. Just before the first tree is to be sent down the mountain, a group of monks run down the path carrying the Most Holy Virgin, as Zorba has tricked them into believing that the Holy Virgin of Revenge has killed Zaharia for burning the monastery. They load the first tree and send it down the mountain, and it sparks and burns up. This happens twice more, and on the fourth trunk, the entire system comes crashing down.

After this spectacular failure, the narrator finally agrees to let Zorba teach him how to dance. He thinks of how happy he is here, with Zorba, even in the wake of this disaster which will surely ruin their chances of making money. The next morning he is exorbitantly happy, and he runs up the mountain to relax. He receives a premonition though, that his great friend Stavridaki has died, and thus runs back down the mountain yelling his name. He realizes it is in vain that he is panicking, and so he calms down and realizes he is hungry and tired.

Their whole venture now over, it is time for Zorba and the narrator to separate. They are both emotional about this, but both too proud and ashamed to express it. Zorba says they must end their final night together quickly, as his father taught him. In the morning when the narrator wakes up, Zorba is gone. He receives a telegram alerting him of Stavridaki's death, and then he leaves Crete. Over the years he receives various postcards from Zorba, but he never sees him again. In the end, he writes of Zorba's incredible life and the experiences he shared with him. He later receives a letter from the schoolmaster of a German village, informing him that Zorba had died. Zorba asked the schoolmaster to inform the narrator that he had been left Zorba's santuri, one of his most prized possessions.

Characters:-

- Alexis Zorba

Alexis Zorba, the titular character, is the Greek personification of the spirit of life. He dances and plays the santuri, he indulges in sensual pleasures, and he has no qualms in his exuberant enjoyment of life. Originally from Macedonia, Zorba has traveled all over the world and accrued an array of rich experiences that have become the fodder for his constant storytelling. Now in his 60s, Zorba wrestles with issues of aging and the temporality of life throughout the book. Yet even as an older man, Zorba embodies the Dionysian passion for living as seen in his enthusiasm for wine, women, and hard work.

Initially Zorba is hired by the narrator to help manage a lignite mine project on the island of Crete, yet as the story unfolds, he becomes not just a business partner but also a confidante and intimate friend for the narrator. The presence of Zorba helps to shift the narrator's vision of life, encouraging him to shed his intellectual pursuits to embrace a more visceral way of being, one that is connected to the earth below rather than floating in the ethers above. Zorba is no fan of conceptualizing about God and the purpose of life; he would rather discover meaning directly through living it. His full spectrum of experiences—including fighting in wars and losing a child—has made him averse to the sort of detached philosophizing of the narrator. Even with their differences, Zorba still treats the narrator with an open heart and often encourages him to break out of his uptight ways, such as how he pushes the narrator to go after the widow.

Throughout the story, Zorba shows himself to be an agnostic, seeing the traditional image of God as the dispenser of judgment and righteousness as absurd in the face of the world's injustices.

Yet although he doubts the heavenly realm, Zorba is not painted as a man who is lacking morals or compassion for his fellow humans; this is most obvious in the way he scolds the narrator for playing a trick on Madame Hortense and agreeing to marry the old woman in order to not break her heart. It is also clear following the deaths of the widow and the Madame, when Zorba is profoundly touched by grief. Despite his renunciation of spiritual ideals, Zorba is not at all immune to falling deeply into issues of life and death; what differentiates him from the narrator is that he does not try to rationalize his emotions through mental concepts.

- The Narrator

The story of Zorba and the adventures on Crete is told by the narrator, who remains unnamed throughout the story. He serves as somewhat of a foil to the boisterous and confident Zorba. The narrator is a young man, a writer, and a student of spiritual literature, especially Buddhism. Trying to branch out and make a living for himself, he has initiated a coal mine project on Crete, for which he hires Zorba as the main architect. While Zorba works, the narrator has the time to enjoy the island landscape and get lost in his books.

Through his deep friendship with Zorba, the narrator is transformed; he comes to realize that his intellectual ways are not truly bringing him more happiness nor clarity but rather isolating him further in his own mind. For much of the story, the narrator is working on a lengthy manuscript about the life of the Buddha, until a moment of epiphany reveals to him the deadening quality of such idealistic philosophies; by advocating for transcendence of earthly life, the narrator feels that the human condition is being negated. Zorba teaches the narrator that life is meant to be lived with passion and courage; he most pivotally fulfills this guidance in his decision to sleep with the

widow, despite his fear and judgment of sexuality. By the end of the novel, however, it is not evident that the narrator has truly committed to this change of philosophy; after separating from Zorba, he returns to his scholarly pursuits, as if not knowing how else to occupy his days.

It could be said that the narrator constitutes less a fleshed out character and more of a narrative device for relating the trials and tribulations of Zorba. This is evident in how he is not given a name as well as in the way that he remains on the sidelines, staying passive, for many pivotal events of the story, such as in the brutal murder of the widow, the failure of the cable railway, and the chaotic scene of Madame Hortense's passing.

- Madame Hortense

Madame Hortense is an older woman who owns a hotel on Crete and who provides housing for Zorba and the narrator when they arrive. The Madame is a Frenchwoman with a slew of colorful experiences as a traveling cabaret singer and a mistress to many important men. Now in old age, she finds comfort mostly in reminiscing about her past. The character of Madame Hortense brings out many themes of death, as she is constantly talking about her fear of aging and the loss of the beauty that gave her a sense of identity. This clinging onto her youth is most obvious in her thick makeup and garish attire, as well as her romantic pursuit of Zorba as a husband. Zorba gives Madame the affectionate pet name of "Bouboulina."

We see, ultimately, how Madame Hortense's life as a courtesan has not brought her true happiness, but rather insecurity about her own worth beyond her status as a sex symbol. It is only the contagious spark of life within Zorba that ignites her own passion for living and allows her to die with a smile dancing on her lips.

- The Widow

Beautiful and pursued ravenously by all the men on the island, the widow is known as a heartbreaker, as she ends up rejecting each one. This rejection naturally leads to an animosity directed towards her; she is demonized after Pavli, a local man who was in love with her, takes his own life. With a push from Zorba, the narrator pursues the widow for a one-night stand. Soon after this, she is cruelly cornered by a mob of local men and killed by Mavrandoni. Though she drives many of the main events in the story, her character is left mostly undeveloped, remaining more as an archetype of seduction and reflecting the book's general view of women as faceless forces of temptation.

- Stavridaki

Stavridaki is an old friend of the narrator who we mostly meet through their exchange of letters. While the narrator is in Crete, Stavridaki is in the Russian Caucasus to help Greek refugees who are being persecuted. In this way, we are shown Stavridaki to be an idealistic and hardworking man who desires to do good in the world. At the same time, he struggles with a similar rigidity as does the narrator; despite their years of friendship, he still finds it hard to express his emotions and his appreciation for his friend. Stavridaki's comment to the narrator calling him a "bookworm" makes a great impact and is a driving force for the narrator to move to Crete and start a more grounded business venture.

- Father Zaharia

Zaharia is a monk that the narrator and Zorba meet at the mountainside monastery. He embodies the religious schism of good versus evil through his strange and humorous split personality. As Zaharia, he is a saintly devotee, but as his alter-

ego Joseph, he is a devilish and vengeful man who indulges in meat and alcohol. It is not until he burns down the monastery that he satiates his inner demon and can come back to some degree of sanity.

- Uncle Anagnosti

Anagnosti is a village elder who the narrator and Zorba spend some time with during their stay on Crete. He is a representation of the traditional, small town way of life that is equal parts charming and repulsive. He is not shy about his disdain for women nor his religious superstition. Through conversing with him, the narrator and Zorba come to understand the futility of trying to change people's minds.

- Mavrandoni

Mavrandoni is another village elder. His son, Pavli, takes his own life after having his heart broken by the widow. As a result, Mavrandoni takes revenge and murders the widow in a brutal way.

- Karayannis

Karayannis is a friend and former student of the narrator. He lives in northern Africa and has disowned his Greek identity. He writes a letter to the narrator urging him to visit him in Africa and to leave behind his intellectual ways.

- Mimiko

Mimiko is a young, single man who lives in the village and is regarded as the "village simpleton." He hangs around the widow and does many of her errands. He often serves as a messenger on the island, informing others of urgent situations.

Analysis

Zorba sees freedom in the visceral experiences of life: singing, dancing, and romance. For him, freedom is something beyond words; to construct a definition would be to remove himself from the present moment, the only place where it is possible to truly be free. This philosophy does serve him in the sense that he is far happier and more carefree than most of the other characters in the novel, especially the narrator. Yet there are also hints of an uncertainty that plagues Zorba in his more vulnerable moments; he fears his own death, for example, and tries to distract himself from the inevitability of his aging through constant love affairs with younger women. His rejection of all commitments to relationships and ideas allows him to enjoy, but does not necessarily leave him any more wise about the purpose of human life. This lack of knowledge can be viewed as liberating—or it can be seen as incompatible with a more lasting and fulfilling type of happiness.

The reader never discovers the name of the narrator, besides Zorba's affectionate pet name for him, "boss." It could be argued that this is a purposeful decision by Nikos Kazantzakis, especially as the book is titled after the name of the other main protagonist, Zorba. This choice illustrates, first of all, that the story is meant to elaborate on the wild life of this older man, and that the narrator is more the witness to the main act of Zorba.

Missing a name can also be a way for the author to drive home the sense of the narrator being cold and lacking in earthly identity. Throughout the book, he struggles to fully embrace his humanness, his place in real life as opposed to his imagined spiritual destiny of transcending and disappearing from the world.

Many readers will take notice of the derogatory view of women that is espoused by a majority of its characters. Neither Zorba nor the narrator, as well as the more peripheral figures in the village, are shy about their attitude that women are not only inferior to men, but pose a threat to the law and order of society. This is also evident more obviously in the scene where the widow is cornered and decapitated for her promiscuity. At this moment, the narrator and Zorba try to intervene and thus we can conclude that their sexism is not equivalent with the savage misogyny of certain members of the village; they still have a sense of moral outrage and compassion. Though it may be shocking to some, this vision of women is important in the story, as it not only portrays a very real phenomenon of sexism but it furthers the book's message of how fear and hatred can make even the most religious people act in very irrational ways.

The narrator notices, first of all, how this slipper is among the very few things left after her hotel has been ransacked by the greedy villagers. It is an object that has little financial value; it is more of a personal item that is imbued with emotional significance. The shoe is also bent into the shape of her foot, still possessing an imprint of the living Madame. This seemingly worthless slipper preserves the memory of its owner and the narrator contemplates how it is thus "more compassionate" than the humans who have shamelessly stolen her things as soon as she died. The narrator is at once moved by this emblem of the Madame's life and appalled by the crudeness of people.

The rich imagery of the Cretan landscape is a prominent feature of the story. There are frequent passages where the narrator walks through the village or sits by the sea, taking in the beauty of his surroundings; this helps him enter a meditative state. At one point, while taking a walk, the narrator

contemplates the turn of seasons, thinking about how this cycle formerly made him feel oppressed. Nature represents the constant of change that occurs in our lives, and as the narrator more and more embraces the philosophy lived by Zorba—that of visceral experience over intellectualism—he can appreciate the beauty of the temporal rather than constantly reaching for the promise of the eternal.

Essay questions:-

1. Explain the distinctive features of Zorba's character.

2. Comment on the bonding between the narrator and Zorba despite their contrasting natures.

3. "*Zorba the Greek* provides a different worldview- full of freedom and freewill"- explain.

THE TIN DRUM

Günter Grass

About the author:-

Günter Grass was born in 1927 in Danzig-Langfuhr of Polish-German parents. After military service and captivity by American forces 1944-46, he worked as a farm labourer and miner and studied art in Düsseldorf and Berlin. 1956-59 he made his living as a sculptor, graphic artist and writer in Paris, and subsequently Berlin. In 1955 Grass became a member of the socially critical Gruppe 47 (later described with great warmth in The Meeting at Telgte), his first poetry was published in 1956 and his first play produced in 1957. His major international breakthrough came in 1959 with his allegorical and wide-ranging picaresque novel The Tin Drum (filmed by Schlöndorff), a satirical panorama of German reality during the first half of this century, which, with Cat and Mouse and Dog Years, was to form what is called the Danzig Trilogy.

In the 1960s Grass became active in politics, participating in election campaigns on behalf of the Social Democrat party and Willy Brandt. He dealt with the responsibility of intellectuals in Local Anaesthetic, From the Diary of a Snail and in his "German tragedy" The Plebeians Rehearse the Uprising, and published political speeches and essays in which he advocated a Germany free from fanaticism and totalitarian ideologies. His childhood home, Danzig, and his broad and suggestive fabulations were to reappear in two successful novels criticising civilisation, The Flounder and The Rat, which reflect Grass's commitment to the peace movement

and the environmental movement. Vehement debate and criticism were aroused by his mammoth novel Ein weites Feld which is set in the DDR in the years of the collapse of communism and the fall of the Berlin wall. In My Century he presents the history of the past century from a personal point of view, year by year. As a graphic artist, Grass has often been responsible for the covers and illustrations for his own works.

Grass was President of the Akademie der Künste in Berlin 1983-86, active within the German Authors' Publishing Company and PEN. He has been awarded a large number of prizes, among them Preis der Gruppe 47 1958, "Le meilleur livre étranger" 1962, the Büchner Prize 1965, the Fontane Prize 1968, Premio Internazionale Mondello 1977, the Alexander-Majakowski Medal, Gdansk 1979, the Antonio Feltrinelli Prize 1982, Großer Literaturpreis der Bayerischen Akademie 1994. He has honorary doctorates from Kenyon College and the Universities of Harvard, Poznan and Gdansk.

Introduction:-

The Tin Drum, picaresque novel by Günter Grass, is a purported autobiography of a dwarf who lives through the birth and death of Nazi Germany, published in 1959 as *Die Blechtrommel*. The work's protagonist, Oskar Matzerath, narrates the novel from an asylum for the insane. He claims to have consciously stopped growing at the age of three in protest against adulthood; although intellectually normal, he has the stunted body of a dwarf. Oskar's voice is shrill enough to shatter glass, and his passion is banging on his tin drum, which has properties by which he draws forth memories from the past and complains about shortcomings in the present. Detached from people and events, he comments on the horrors, injustices, and eccentricities he observes. Oskar lives through the bizarre death of his mother and the equally unusual deaths of both of his

alleged fathers. Found guilty of a murder he did not commit, Oskar is incarcerated.

In this work Grass broke away from the style of earlier German novels about the war. Whereas those books tended to be realistic and uncomplicated indictments of Nazi atrocities, Grass's novel is complex, richly symbolic, and highly ironic. It starts by posing the reader with a problem: whether to trust a narrator who admits in the first sentence that he is an inmate of a mental hospital. This information immediately notifies the reader that not everything said or described in the book should be taken at face value. The narrator, it turns out, is a self-willed dwarf who has rejected the moral complexities of the adult world simply by refusing to grow. Grass fills his novel with equally fantastical events, but places them squarely in a realistic setting with identifiable historical occurrences. Similarly, the novel has long passages of strictly realistic prose, but also contains an entire chapter that mimics fairy stories and uses startling metaphoric language.

This mixture of styles has led critics to call the novel both modernist and postmodernist. It is also commonly considered absurdist—a style of writing that presents life as nonsensical, based on the notion that the human condition is ridiculously meaningless. The novel shows humans controlled by historical and natural forces, and it takes a wholly irreverent stance toward nearly every ideological system. Much of the story is satirical, making fun of grand ideas and empty posturing. Nevertheless, the strength of the novel comes from the fact that it is not purely satirical, not purely critical. Most of the characters are complex, and can show surprising moments of compassion and dignity. To add to its complexity, Grass has also made the novel historical, and it covers over a half century. The author adds many minute details about the life, ethnic

sectors, and architecture of Danzig prior to World War II. Just as the novel's narrator Oskar Matzerath says that banging on his drum is an exercise in memory, so is writing this novel an exercise in memory for Grass.

At the center of the novel is the remarkable Oskar, who, by his own admission, is a living set of contradictions, a figure both satanic and Christ-like, logical and childish, selfish and compassionate. The novel is not just his autobiography, but also his confession, and this constitutes its primary thematic power. Through his confession, Oskar reveals his small role in the atrocities of Nazi Germany and in so doing takes the first step toward "growing," both physically and morally. The Tin Drum became the first in Grass's "Danzig" trilogy, which also includes Cat and Mouse (1961) and Dog Years (1963).

This exuberant novel, written in a variety of styles, imaginatively distorts and exaggerates Grass’s personal experiences—the Polish-German dualism of Danzig, the creeping Nazification of average families, the attrition of the war years, the coming of the Russians, and the complacent atmosphere of West Germany’s postwar “economic miracle.”

Oskar Matzerath is an unreliable narrator, as his sanity, or insanity, never becomes clear. He tells the tale in first person, though he occasionally diverts to third person, sometimes within the same sentence. As an unreliable narrator, he may contradict himself within his autobiography, as with his varying accounts of, but not exclusively, the Defense of the Polish Post Office, his grandfather Koljaiczek's fate, his paternal status over Kurt, Maria's son, and many others. The novel is strongly political in nature, although it goes beyond a political novel in the writing's stylistic plurality. There are elements of allegory, myth and legend, placing it in the genre of magic realism. *The Tin Drum* has religious overtones, both Jewish and Christian. Oskar holds

conversations with both Jesus and Satan throughout the book. His gang members call him "Jesus", and he refers to himself as "Satan" later in the book.

Summary

- Book 1

The form of The Tin Drum is a story within a story. The frame tale introduces Oskar Matzerath, the writer of a memoir, who is incarcerated in a mental institution. He is dependent on Bruno Münsterberg, his keeper, for his supplies. Also, Oskar needs Bruno's attention as witness to his guilt. Oskar measures his sins in an autobiographical account, a picaresque series of events that begins two generations before his birth with his grandparents. Oskar's maternal grandmother, Anna Koljaiczek, a potato seller, shelters her prospective husband, Joseph—a stranger and an alleged arsonist—under her four skirts as he hides from the police. She finds herself pregnant, presumably as a result of this encounter, although an incestuous relationship with her brother leaves the baby's paternity in doubt. Agnes, Oskar's mother, is Anna's child; she does not know her father. Oskar's paternity is also unclear, as the pattern of incest follows into the next generation. His father could be the grocer Alfred Matzerath, Agnes's husband, or her first cousin, Jan Bronski, with whom she has a sexual liaison.

The memoir explores Oskar's birth and coming of age. From birth, Oskar has had an adult mentality. A "clairaudient" child, he is able to hear sounds beyond the normal range of the human ear. Witness to the rise of the Third Reich, Oskar, his family, and their social circle participate in the denial of a growing public violence against outsiders. As Oskar comes increasingly to understand the growing Nazi horror he begins to rebel against the family. At age three, he is given a tin drum and

soon thereafter vows to use the drum rather than to speak. He also decides to avoid adult life by a self-induced fall that halts his physical growth.

When his parents try to take away the tin drum, Oskar discovers that his angry shouts can shatter glass. He uses this questionable gift to manipulate his way through early childhood; it allows him to escape school and other responsibilities. His life is dictated by the need to keep replacing each worn-out tin drum with a new one. Oskar's drumming reveals his spirit and mood, while his glass shattering evolves as a series of increasingly conscious choices, in resistance to the status quo.

His mother, Agnes, carries on an affair with Jan Bronski, his uncle, who Oskar knows is one of his possible fathers. When Agnes becomes pregnant, she gorges on fish and rancid fish oil until she becomes fatally ill. In addition to this loss, Oskar's drum source, the toy store owner Markus, kills himself on Kristallnacht rather than allow himself to be taken away by the Nazis. His store is completely destroyed. Oskar's response is to take all the drums he can find and run back to Matzerath, who is found warming his hands over a bonfire of holy books in front of a burnt-out synagogue.

- Book 2

Book 2 begins after the start of Nazi attacks on Danzig's Jewish and Polish populations and covers Oskar's experiences during World War II. Matzerath doesn't replace Oskar's worn-out drum, so Oskar implores Jan for help. Helpless to repair the drum himself, Jan takes Oskar and the drum to the Polish Post Office, where a janitor can fix the drum. The problem is, Jan, the head postal clerk, has just tried to escape the post office, which is under attack by the Nazi Home Guard. Oskar ends up

pointing out Jan to the Home Guard when they break down the post office defenses, and Jan is arrested and shot along with the other survivors of the attack. Oskar's main concern is keeping his drum.

Matzerath hires a woman named Maria to mind the store and help take care of Oskar, who ends up having intercourse with her. Matzerath has sex with her soon afterward, and when she discovers she is pregnant, Matzerath marries her. Oskar is devastated and is sure that Kurt, the baby, is his. Oskar takes his sexual frustration to Frau Greff, the wife of the repressed homosexual greengrocer. Greff receives a court summons and, rather than be sent off to a camp because of his attraction to young boys, hangs himself.

Oskar then runs off with Bebra and Roswitha, two little people who have a circus-like show they put on for the soldiers at the front. He becomes friends with the performers and Corporal Lankes, who murders nuns and talks about encasing a live puppy in concrete when building a bunker. Oskar becomes Roswitha's lover until she is killed by an artillery shell. Oskar ends up joining a street gang called the Dusters and convinces them he is Jesus. They break into a church to try to get a statue of Jesus to perform a miracle with Oskar's tin drum. They are caught, however, and Oskar is brought back home by Maria and Matzerath after a court appearance.

When Danzig is taken by the Russians, Matzerath tries to hide his Nazi Party pin, but Oskar hands it back to him, open. Matzerath swallows it and chokes, and the Russians shoot and kill him. They rape Frau Greff but leave Maria alone, as she has Kurt with her. Oskar buries his drum with Matzerath at the funeral, is hit on the head by a rock thrown by his bratty son, Kurt, and begins to grow physically. A man named Herr Fajngold takes over Matzerath's store and lets Oskar's family

live in the basement. Fajngold asks Maria to marry him, but she refuses. Maria, Oskar, and Kurt leave in a boxcar for the Rhineland, where they will live with Maria's sister, Guste.

- Book 3

Kurt becomes a small businessman, selling flintstones. Maria sells synthetic honey on the black market. Oskar doesn't have a job and feels terrible, especially because Maria chides him for it. Oskar apprenticed himself to a gravestone cutter and helped the family financially. When the currency of Germany changes from Reichsmarks to German marks, Oskar leaves the stonecutter so he won't burden the man. Oskar then ends up posing nude for an art school with Ulla, the muse of his old friend Lankes, and makes a decent living. Maria is upset with him for doing this, and he decides he can't live with her and Kurt anymore.

He goes to live in a flat next to Sister Dorothea, a nurse with whom he becomes obsessed enough to break into her room and sift through her things when she is at work. Oskar meets Klepp, a slovenly neighbor, who feeds him, and ends up playing music with Oskar on a flute. Oskar tries to seduce Dorothea but can't perform. When she realizes who he is, she packs up and leaves her room. He is broken-hearted, but Klepp pulls him together, along with Scholle, a guitarist. They form a jazz band, playing at a club called The Onion Cellar, where people slice onions to cry for catharsis.

Oskar meets up with Lankes again and also finds Bebra, who becomes his concert promoter. Oskar makes a lot of money as a jazz musician, becomes famous, and buys Maria a deli. However, he can't get Dorothea off his mind. He rents a dog named Lux, who goes for walks with him and finds a severed finger in the field where Dorothea has been murdered by Beate,

a rival nurse. Oskar keeps the finger, wrapping it in a handkerchief. He then runs into a man named Vittlar, who is sitting in an apple tree, and they become friends. Oskar has his stonecutter friend cast the finger in plaster to make molds of it. Oskar also puts the finger in a jar and prays to it. He tries to convince a judge that he murdered Dorothea. Vittlar provides testimony and says that Oskar gave him the finger in the jar to take to the police. Oskar is convicted and put into the mental institution. He is likely to be released, but he is tormented by his memories and unsure what he will do when he gets out.

THEMES

- Individual Responsibility

The Tin Drum demonstrates that evil cannot be attributed to a single person or a single nation, and that ordinary people are capable of either good or evil at any particular moment. This theme is demonstrated in several ways, but mostly by analogy. Grass, through Oskar, rarely tells readers directly how to think about Germany's Nazi past. Instead, he uses characters and events that mirror historical events. Oskar regularly compares himself to both Jesus and Satan. He gets his philosophical inspiration from both Goethe, considered the father of German Enlightenment, and Rasputin, a charlatan monk who wormed his way into the court of Russia's last tsar. Oskar's "presumptive fathers" are Alfred, a decorated soldier who is basically a follower at heart, and Jan, a sickly coward who cannot even fire a gun. Grass creates these dualities as moral examples for the reader to compare to the historical examples scattered throughout the book. Similarly, Grass uses the novel to show that hanging blame for Germany's Nazi period on a few "notorious" men, and then pretending the German people were misled, is merely a way to deny that all Germans, perhaps even all Europeans, bear some responsibility for the atrocities of the

1930s and 1940s. To the German people, Grass seems to be saying that all humans have the seed of evil, not just the famous Nazis who were put on trial. All people committed shameful acts that they must confess. All share responsibility for what happened in the Nazi period.

- Guilt, Responsibility, and Blame

The single most central theme of this book is guilt—individual, not national. The idea of national guilt bypasses the personal responsibility that all Germans, according to Grass, share for causing World War II. Related to the idea of guilt are the issues of responsibility and blame. A revealing incident early in the novel shows how these three themes work together.

At three years old, Oskar decides not to grow. Rather than announce this intention and accept responsibility for the decision, Oskar instead stages an accident by falling down the cellar stairs and landing on his head; this ensures he will not be held accountable for his failure to grow. As a result of this incident, though, Oskar's father, Alfred, gets blamed by the rest of the family for leaving open the cellar door, though he in fact did not. This blame is repeatedly brought up whenever a family quarrel occurs. Thus, Alfred is wrongly blamed for the rest of his life for an act that Oskar in fact bears responsibility for. Oskar feels only a small amount of guilt for putting his father through this trouble, and never accepts responsibility for the trouble he causes his entire family. The incident exemplifies how, throughout the novel, the wrong person is blamed and forced to accept the guilt for the actions of another.

When the war comes, the issues of guilt and responsibility occur in relation to the deaths of Oskar's two "presumptive fathers." German soldiers arrest Jan after the siege of the Polish Post Office, to which Oskar got Jan to take him

against Jan's will. Oskar at first relates this as a simple, straightforward matter of Jan being on the losing side. However, later in the book Oskar admits that he was in part responsible for Jan's arrest because he implied to the Germans that Jan had kidnapped Oskar to use as a human shield. Thus, Oskar is partly to blame for Jan's execution. Guilt makes Oskar acknowledge his part in the execution after he at first hides it. Similarly, knowing full well that Alfred is trying to hide his Nazi badge from the Russian soldiers, Oskar finds it and gives it back to him. Alfred then tries to swallow the badge, but the pin gets caught in his mouth. The Russian soldiers, confused by Alfred's gestures, kill him. At first, Oskar seems to bear an inadvertent responsibility for Alfred's death, yet for a second time guilt prompts him to change his story and confess that he deliberately opened the pin before he returned the badge.

The issues of guilt, responsibility, and blame converge at the end of the novel when Oskar accepts the blame for a murder that he did not commit. This action helps him partly make up for the deaths he has caused. It contrasts Oskar favorably with the patrons of The Onion Cellar: "respectable" middle- and upper-class citizens who use artificial means to make themselves cry so they can pretend they have come to terms with their responsibility for the Nazi past. Oskar's trial and incarceration give him the opportunity to reflect on his past and to confess, to the best of his ability, his sins. Grass's partly Catholic background comes through in the idea that confession is necessary for atonement, no matter how painful the process may be.

- Nationalism and Political Movements

Grass distrusts blind loyalty to abstractions, and through Oskar's narrative, shows how mindlessly following abstractions can lead to trouble or, worse yet, to chaos. This is shown

symbolically in a scene in which Oskar uses his drum to divert a Nazi parade. Oskar begins drumming in 3/4 waltz time, an alternative rhythm to the linear 4/4 beat of the parade drums. He then notes that the rally goers are as content to march in 3/4 time as they are to march in 4/4, a symbolic indication that followers are likely to follow anything and rarely genuinely believe in a cause. The scene also likens nationalism—the belief that personal identity is tied to a specific ethnicity, region, or state—to a unifying rhythm or beat with the power to attract the masses in an almost subconscious, primal way.

Through Jan and Alfred, the novel shows how large-scale political movements destroy personal relationships. The two men remain friends for years, even while they knowingly share relations with the same woman. However, Agnes's death symbolically kills the idea of a harmonious central Europe. After her death, each man, Alfred especially, grows ever more deeply embroiled in national politics. By the time of Jan's death they have not seen each other for a year, isolated on their respective sides of Danzig—Polish and German.

Most importantly are the destructive effects of nationalism as reflected in the life of the drunken trumpeter Meyn. While Meyn is a happy drunk, he remains friendly and plays the trumpet "too beautifully for words." When Meyn joins the SA, the civilian troops of the Nazi regime, however, he becomes sober, but much less friendly. He loses his ability to play the trumpet beautifully and suddenly realizes his loneliness. He responds to his discontentment by brutally killing his four cats and then setting fire to the local synagogue. Adherence to an ideal makes Meyn inartistic, miserable, and violent.

- The Absurdity of War

The Tin Drum stands as one of the great mid-twentieth-century absurdist novels about war. Along with Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five and Joseph Heller's Catch-22, The Tin Drum treats war as anything but glorious. All three authors fought in World War II and drew on their experiences in writing these books. All three show that war is pointless; that it is as likely to bring out the worst in people as it is to bring out the best; that surviving it is more a result of accident than of valor; and that survivors are not necessarily winners.

A scene that truly highlights the absurdity of war in *The Tin Drum* occurs in the first three chapters of Book Two during the siege of the Polish Post Office. Jan, cowering and whimpering, attempts to stick his leg out of the window in hope that it will be shot and he can take refuge among the wounded. It concludes with a remarkable description of the explosion, in which the "bricks laughed themselves into splinters." Ultimately the scene underscores the meaninglessness of war and illustrates how people do strange, absurd things when confronted with war's powerful, yet nonsensical, drama. There is no glory, no honor, no victory in war; just lives and societies twisted or destroyed in the names of worthless abstractions.

Essay questions:-

1. Describe the employment of magic realism in *The Tin Drum.*

2. Explain the political backdrop in which *The Tin Drum* is written.

3. The character of Oskar Matzerath.

THE JOKE

Milan Kundera

About the author:-

Milan Kundera is a Czech and French writer of Czech origin who has lived in exile in France since 1975, where he became a naturalized French citizen in 1981. He was born on April 1st, 1929 in Brno, Bohemia, now Czechoslovakia.Brno, Palais Dietrich. His father, Ludvík Kundera (1891-1971), was a musicologist and rector at Brno University. Milan Kundera wrote his first poems during high school. After World War II, he worked as a tradesman and a jazz musician before beginning his studies.

After graduating in 1952, Kundera became assistant and later professor with the film faculty at Prague's Academy of Performing Arts, lecturing in world literature. During this time, he published poems, essays and stage plays and joined the editorial staff at the literary magazines "Literarni Noviny" and "Listy." Kundera joined the communist party in 1948 full of enthusiasm, as did so many intellectuals. In 1950, he got expelled from the party due to individualistic tendencies but rejoined from 1956 to 1970. Throughout the 50s, Kundera worked as a translator, essayist and author of stage plays and, in 1953, he published his first book. Although Kundera had published several poetry collections, he gained notoriety with the publication of a collection of short stories entitled "Laughable Loves", written between 1958 and 1968. His first novel, *The Joke* written in 1967, deals with Stalinism. After the Soviet invasion on the 21st of August, 1968, Kundera, as one of

the leading figures of the failed radical movement the "Prague Spring," lost his teaching position and his books were banned from libraries the country over. In 1970, his books were banned from publication. His second novel, *Life Is Elsewhere*, was published in Paris in 1973. In 1975, Kundera became guest professor at the University of Rennes in Bretagne, France. He was deprived of Czechoslovakian citizenship in 1979 in reaction to his *Book of Laughter and Forgetting.* The novels that followed were banned from publication in the CSSR. He gained his French citizenship in 1981. Since 1985, Kundera has given only written interviews, feeling himself often misquoted. In 1986, Kundera published his first work written in French, the essay "L'Art du Roman" (The Art of the Novel). In 1988, he published his first novel written in French, *Immortality*. In his 1994 essay "Testaments Trahis" (Testaments Betrayed), Kundera addressed adulterators, interpreters and translators by whom he felt his work was often mistreated. He allowed the translation of his works again in Germany while, in France, he personally oversaw the Czech transcription of all his works. Kundera's most recent novels include *Slowness*, published in 1994, and *Identity*, published in 1998. In 2000, Kundera published "La Ignorancia," up until now only published in Spanish. Publication in other languages is forthcoming. As he often makes clear, Kundera derives inspirations from the Renaissance and such writers as Boccacio, Rabelais, Sterne, Diderot, but also from the works of Musil, Gombrowicz, Broch, Kafka and Heidegger. Not only are Kundera's books classics of the 20th century, Kundera is among it's greatest novelists. Unlike many more public authors, Kundera prefers to disappear behind his books, anonymous in his own way. Kundera currently lives with his wife, Vera Hrabankova, in Paris. He is best known for works like *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, and *The Joke*. Kundera has written in both Czech and French. He revises the

French translations of all his books; these therefore are not considered translations but original works. Due to censorship by the Communist government of Czechoslovakia, his books were banned from his native country, and that remained the case until the downfall of this government in the Velvet Revolution of 1989.

The Joke--a Czech novel that measures up to Czechoslovakia's wonderfully human films--is 40- year-old Milan Kundera's first novel but far from his first work. His collection of poems, "Monologues," was practically the only book of love poetry published in Czechoslovakia during the Stalinist era, and his three volumes of short stories, "Ridiculous Loves," have been best sellers there for several years. The lyrical and narrative skill he demonstrates in these earlier works comes through clearly in his novel.

Analysis:-

Though by no means a symbolist work, *The Joke* works well on several levels. The characters are valid both in themselves and as types in contemporary Czechoslovak society; the plot stands comparisons with the plots of novels that concentrate on their heroes' inner worlds, yet almost as a bonus it provides a miniature social history of Czechoslovakia during the past 20 years; and finally, the meditations on guilt and possibilities for change and the concept of history that underlies the logic of the novel's events are unquestionably worthy of attention.

The year is 1965. Scientist Ludvik Jahn meets Helena, the wife of the man who had him expelled from school in the early 1950's. Bent on revenge, Ludvik carries through an elaborate seduction, only to discover that by giving his enemy a long-sought-for excuse to get rid of his wife, he has helped

rather than humiliated him. Helena, in the meantime, has fallen in love with Ludvik, and when he rejects her, she attempts suicide.

The book consists of four interwoven first-person narratives: Ludvik's, Helena's, and two others (that of a religious visionary in the process of losing his faith, and of Ludvik's peace-and-quiet- loving school friend, who sees his great love, folk art, distorted out of recognition by the regime); so we often have the same events and characters treated from several points of view. Each voice is stylistically and ideologically distinct; together, they make up a lucid and satisfying whole.

Much of the narrative consists of flashbacks. Ludvik, the main character, who had been an enthusiastic young Communist during the immediate post-war years, tells how the joke of the title-- a postcard (OPTIMISM IS THE OPIUM OF THE PEOPLE! THE HEALTHY ATMOSPHERE STINKS! LONG LIVE TROTSKY!) to a naïve girl he was trying to impress--leads to his expulsion from the party and university, army service among the politically undesirable and several years in the mines. Despite some raucous army experiences, the pageantry of an ancient folk rite, a spate of sexual encounters and the hilarious outcome of Helena's brief encounter with death, *The Joke* is basically a tragic work.

“It’s as if the Party was a human being . .to confide in at a time when I have nothing to say to anyone," the desperately lonely Helena confesses. She cannot stand the thought of having her life split in two--by admitting that the party (and thus her life over the past 20 years) was inhuman and thereby being forced to adopt a new set of values. In Helena, Kundera has set forth the main psychological blocks at work in the neo-Stalinist-mind.

It is much to Kundera's credit that he does not depict his hero, a dissident intellectual like himself, as a man with all the answers. Ludvik himself realizes he is doing everything possible to prevent time form healing his wounds, but hate has crowded out all other emotions from his life. His awareness of the inadequacy of this position reaches a crescendo in the last scene, when he sees his childhood friend in the throes of a heart attack. Ludvik identifies this illness which his friend may survive, but which will totally incapacitate him) with the fate of his generation. He comes to see that this generation--still in its thirties--has already had its say. But he does not find much solace in the younger generation, not at least in the two representatives he introduces toward the end of the novel. Their all-pervading interest in themselves he deems every bit as petty as his contemporaries' ideal of falling in love out of duty to the party.

This skepticism leads Ludvik to a more abstract interpretation of his situation. Since so many people were involved in the injustice of the 1950's (either doling it out or suffering the consequences), he concludes that one must blame history, not humans, for the crimes. The joke then no longer belongs to him; it is history's joke, and how can man escape history?

In an exchange of letters in The London Times Literary Supplement between an outraged Kundera and one of the translators, it has come to light that the editor went ahead with the cuts after two unsuccessful attempts to contact the author for his permission. Apparently the object was to make the novel read more easily; the missing chapter, for example, deals with the place of folk music in modern society.

Fortunately, *The Joke* retains its bite even with the omissions. It reveals a great deal about the background to

liberalization in Czechoslovakia, and--more important--it offers a genuinely humane look at inhumanity. *The Joke* is a work of sharp psychological perception and great literary finesse.

The Joke is Kundera's first novel and features four primary characters: Ludvik Jahn (the primary protagonist), Jaroslav, Helena, and Kostka. The novel does not contain a standard narrative and is best understood with respect to the plot lines concerning these four characters.

The majority of the book is rooted in Ludvik's two hapless "jokes." The first is in a postcard to his friend Marketa. Marketa is at a youth camp for young communists and, somewhat annoyed by the earnest tone in her letters, Ludvik, then a young student, sends her a postcard that says "Optimism is the opium of the people! A healthy atmosphere stinks of stupidity! Long live Trotsky!" Even though Ludvik is a member of the Communist Party, the Stalinist powers that be do not take kindly to his joke. His own friend reports him and, after being expelled from the university, he is compelled to penal servitude in mines. After all this—which takes place in the 1950s—Ludvik attempts to get his revenge by playing another "joke," this time on his erstwhile friend, Pavel. He does so by planning an affair with Pavel's wife, Helena. Unfortunately this joke, too, backfires since Pavel is only too happy to have someone who will take Helena off his hands.

The other characters also have their own "jokes" that shape the plot. Kostka, who serves as a foil to Ludvik, separates himself from the Communist Party because of his Christian faith. Kostka thinks that it is possible to reconcile Christian faith with Communism; however, in thinking this he strays very far indeed from the party line.

Jaroslav cares deeply about Moravian folk culture and is

very troubled by the Party's appropriation of it. His own wedding is described as a "showcase of traditional rituals and customs." Jaroslav wishes to revive a folk tradition called the Ride of the Kings; when he was young, he played the king. He learns, later, that his son has been chosen to be the king in the ritual, and this pleases him immensely. The joke is revealed when we learn that the king in the ceremony is not, in fact, his son. Neither his son nor his wife share his passion for folk culture, and they conspired so that Jaroslav's son could be away at a motorcycle race instead of at the outmoded ritual that his father cares about so passionately.

Set in Communist Czechoslovakia, *The Joke* relates the serious consequences of a frivolous message that a university student sends his girlfriend by postcard: “Optimism is the opium of the people! A healthy atmosphere stinks of stupidity! Long live Trotsky! Ludvik.” *The Joke* is divided into seven parts, with each part narrated in the first person by one of the main characters except for part seven, which is narrated alternately by three characters. The novel is composed of many jokes, which have strong effects on the characters. The story is told from the four viewpoints of Ludvik Jahn, Helena Zemánková, Kostka, and Jaroslav. Jaroslav's joke is the transition away from his coveted Moravian folk lifestyle and appreciation. Kostka, who has separated himself from the Communist Party due to his Christianity, serves as a counterpoint to Ludvik. Helena serves as Ludvik's victim and is satirical of the seriousness of party supporters. Ludvik demonstrates the shortcomings of the party and propels the plot in his search for revenge and redemption.

Written in 1965 Prague and first published in Czechoslovakia in 1967, the novel opens with Ludvik Jahn looking back on the joke that changed his life in the early 1950s. Ludvik was a dashing, witty, and popular student who supported

the Party. Like most of his friends, he was an enthusiastic supporter of the still-fresh Communist regime in post-World War II Czechoslovakia. In a playful mood, he writes a postcard to a girl in his class during their summer break. Since Ludvik believes she takes her enchantment with the new regime too seriously, having just sent him an enthusiastic letter about "optimistic young people filled through and through with the healthy spirit" of Marxism, he replies on the postcard, "Optimism is the opium of mankind! A healthy spirit stinks of stupidity! Long live Trotsky!" His colleagues and fellow young-party leaders did not see the humour in the sentiment expressed in the postcard. Ludvik finds himself expelled from the party and college and drafted to a part of the Czech military where alleged subversives form work brigades and spend the next few years working in mines.

Despite the interruption in his career, Ludvik has become a successful scientist. However, his treatment at the hands of his former friends has left him bitter and angry. An opportunity arises when he meets Helena, who is married to Pavel Zemanek, the friend who led the efforts to purge Ludvik from the party. Ludvik decides to seduce Helena as a means of exacting his revenge. In essence this is the second "joke" of the novel. Although the seduction is successful, things do not quite play out the way Ludvik expects (as was the case with his first joke), and he is left once more to sit and think bitter thoughts. Ultimately he decides that these sorts of jokes and their repercussions are not the fault of the humans who set them in motion, but are really just a matter of historic inevitability. Ultimately, then, one cannot blame forces that cannot be changed or altered.

Summary:-

The book is set around the time it was published, the mid

1960s. But to understand it you have to realise that its roots lie 15 years earlier, at the period of the 1948 Communist coup and its immediate aftermath.

- The fateful postcard

To be precise, the summer of 1951. Ludvik Jahn is one of the generation of young students caught up in the idealism generated by the Communist Party's seizure of power and he is still a staunch communist, but also an intellectual and wit and joker. In his circle of friends is a particularly po-faced and unimaginative woman student named Marketa. She never gets any of their gags or references, which tempts her friends to spin all kinds of jokes on her, for example the time they were all down the pub and Ludvik invents the notion that the hills of Bohemia are home to a shy and elusive race of trolls – which Marketa accepts with open mouth and wide eyes.

So when she goes away to summer labour duty, helping with the harvest, as all young zealous communists do, and when she sends him a series of letters each more po-faced and staunchly patriotic and communist than the last, Ludvik decides to pull her leg by scribbling a quick postcard with the sentiments most guaranteed to shock her, namely:

> Optimism is the opium of mankind!
>
> A healthy spirit stinks of stupidity!
>
> Long live Trotsky!

The card is intercepted on the way to Marketa's camp. The authorities call her in for questioning. Then Ludvik is called into a kangaroo court where he slowly realises that his quick jeu d'esprit is being interpreted in the most sinister way possible. How long have you been an agent for enemy powers, his

interrogators ask him. With horror he realises that merely making a joke, of any kind, is – to these people – an insult to the 100% earnest, patriotic, communist fervour required from the entire citizenry.

Things reach a peak of horror when he is hauled before a roomful of his peers at the university, fellow students and communist party members. Ludvik is briefly heartened when he learns the chair is to be his good friend Zemanek. However, Zemanek rises and gives a thrilling and brilliantly damning indictment of Ludvik, kicking off by quoting the prison diaries of a young communist, Julius Fucik, who was arrested, tortured and executed by the Nazis but who died knowing he gave his life for a noble cause. Having let that sink in among the tearful audience, Zemanek then comes to another text, and reads out Ludvik's postcard. At which point Ludvik realises he is lost. When it comes to a vote, 100% of the arms of his friends and colleagues stretch up to expel him from the university and from the communist party.

In those heady revolutionary times, Kundera explains, it was thought that human beings had a fixed inner essence and that that essence was either for the Party and with the Party, or it was against. Black or white. And a single slip, a chance remark, in a conversation or article or meeting – might suddenly reveal the terrible fact that you were not for the Party. And just that one slip revealed to all the party zealots, to the police and to all society who you really were. Just one slip of the tongue, and you were categorised and condemned for life as an enemy of the people. You would be fired from your job, unable to get a new one, all decent respectable people would shun you.

(Reading Kundera's bitter and extended explanation of how the young, clever, intellectual communist zealots of this day took a fierce delight in policing everyone's speech and

writing, and pouncing on the slightest example of unrevolutionary sentiments… the reader can't help reflecting that this is exactly the fierce, young university student zeal which drives modern political correctness.)

- In the mining camp

It was only the fact that Ludvik was a student that had exempted him from military service. Now he's kicked out of university, he is immediately conscripted straight into the army and, because of his misdemeanour, into a punishment battalion which works in the coal mines.

Once a month they all get a pass to go into town on a Saturday night and spend the money they've earned in the mine, getting pissed and shagging the local prostitutes. Ludvik describes this in some detail.

But then he also describes meeting a shy girl who is different from the rest and who he conceives something resembling true love for, a young woman named Lucie Sebetka. He can only meet her once a month, and comes to project all his sensitivity and soulfulness onto her, turning her into an image of frail purity.

But Ludvik is a complex person and sex is ever-present in his mind and it isn't long before he wants to possess her, and make her his. This sequence is written very convincingly, the way Ludvik's thoughts slowly morph from worshiping Lucie's purity to needing to possess it. Thus, on several successive dates – spread months apart – he tries to have sex with her, despite her refusing, clenching her legs together, pushing him off, and bursting into tears.

She had been abused earlier in her life and this explains her paradoxical behaviour: she loves Ludvik, she brings him flowers, she visits the camp and says hello to him through the wire mesh – in every way she is devoted to him; and yet on the two occasions where he manages to engineer meetings (at some risk – for the second one he manages to escape through a hole in the wire, and devise an elaborate set of arrangements whereby he borrows the bedroom of a civilian miner he's befriended down the mines for just one evening) she is OK kissing, and sort of OK taking her clothes off but… absolutely and completely refuses to go any further, driving Ludvik into paroxysms of frustration, and then into a fiery rage.

He eventually shouts at her to get out and throws her clothes at her. She dresses and leaves in tearful silence. Ludvik waits an appropriate period of time, goes back downstairs to find the friendly miner has got a few mates round and they're all a bit drunk, so he regales them with an entirely fictional account of what wonderful championship sex he's just had with his girlfriend, before riskily sneaking back into the camp, and going to bed in his miserable bunk.

He never sees Lucie again – on his next furlough he discovers she's simply left the dormitory she was sharing in with two other girls and left no forwarding address – but he never stops being haunted by her memory. His mother dies while he's doing his time and when it's finally over, he is so heart lost and forlorn, that he signs up for another three years of hard labour. The loss of Lucie – the stupid bungling lust of that one night – plunges him into years of 'hopelessness and emptiness' (p.104).

- The Revenge

It is fifteen years later. We are in the mind of plump, middle-

aged Helena. She is fed up with her husband Pavel and his philandering. She hates the petty bickering at work – she works in a government radio station. She resents all the fuss they made when she got some little hussy who she discovered was having an affair with a married man, sacked from her job. All her staff rounded on her, some even muttering 'hypocrite'. But what do they know about all the sacrifices she's made for the Party? And for her country? And for Truth and Justice?

She herself flirts with younger men but that is completely different. And anyway, now she has met the love of her life, a wonderful heartfelt passionate man named Ludvik. And he has invited her for a trip out of Prague, to a town in the country where there is an annual folk festival. She has combined business with pleasure, as she'll cover the festival for her radio station (accompanied by a loyal young puppy of a sound engineer named Jindra) but her real motivation for going is that Ludvik has told her he can't contain his passion any more and must have her. She is thrilled to her fingertips. She has brought her best underwear.

And so she proceeds to check into the hotel in this rural town and then to meet Ludvik. It is only half way through this passage, and half way through the book (on page 151) that we casually learn that her last name is Zemanek. Zemanek, the name of Ludvik's smooth-talking friend who was the first to betray him and led the meeting which had him expelled from university and the party, which ruined his life.

Now Ludvik is taking his revenge. Having eventually returned to Prague and found white collar work he is suited for, he one day meets Helena who comes to interview him for her radio programme and her surname makes him perk up. He does background checks and establishes she is the wife of his persecutor and contrives for them to have another meeting, at

which he uses all his wiles to seduce her. The seduction proceeds apace and is now due to reach its climax in his hometown, the setting of the annual folk festival.

And the heart of the novel (arguably) is this grand, staged, ceremonial act of sexual intercourse between the aggrieved Ludvik and his blissfully ignorant, plump adorer, Helena. She is initially reluctant but eventually strips, and this has the psychological effect of making her truly really completely accept the reality of the situation. Rather than hiding under a blanket and letting something unspeakable happen to her, she is made completely complicit, willing and responsible for the act of sex. But, as the process unfolded, Ludvik found himself more and more overcome with disgust and hatred. With the result that, once they are totally spent, Helena can't keep her arms off him, is all over him, kisses him all over his body, while Ludvik, thoroughly repulsed and now ashamed of himself, shrinks like a starfish at her touch, and only wants to get dressed and flee.

However, there is more to come. Namely that Ludvik makes the tactical error of asking Helena to tell him more about her husband. He does this for two reasons: a) he wants to hear more about their deep love, so he can savour the idea that he (Ludvik) has ravaged it, b) it will stop Helena pawing and fawning all over him.

What he hadn't at all anticipated was that Helena proceeds to tell him that her marriage to Zemanek is over. Zemanek doesn't like her. He has been having affairs. They have ceased living as man and wife. True they share the same house, but they have completely separate lives.

In a flash Ludvik's entire plan turns to ashes, crashes to the ground. It has all been for nothing. Worse, Helena now

enthusiastically tells Ludvik that now she can announce to Zemanek that she has a lover of her own, and he can go to hell with all his pretty dollybirds because she, Helena, has found the greatest, truest love of her life.

Appalled, Ludvik finally manages to make his excuses, plead another appointment and leave.

- Jaroslav and the Ride of the King

The book is so long and rich and complex because there are several other distinct threads to it. One of these is about Czech folk music. It turns out that the provincial town where this folk festival is taking place is also Ludvik's hometown. As a teenager he played clarinet in the town's folk ensembles and was deeply imbued with the folk tradition. He became very good friends with Jaroslav, a big gentle bear of a man, who emerged as a leader of the town's folk musicians and a one-man embodiment of the tradition.

Jaroslav's monologue allows Kundera to go into some detail about the Czech folk tradition, what it means, why it is special, and the impact the communist coup had on it. Surprisingly, this was positive. After all the Czechs were forced to copy the Stalinist model of communist culture – and this emphasised nationalist and folk traditions, while pouring scorn on the 'cosmopolitanism' of the international Modernist movement, then, a bit later, strongly criticised the new 'jazz' music coming in from the decadent West.

The communist government gave money to preserve folk traditions and to fund folk traditions like the one taking place on the fateful weekend when Ludvik and Helena are visiting his hometown. Jaroslav is not backward in expressing his contempt for Ludvik, who abandoned all this to go to the big

city, who turned his back on the true folk tradition to celebrate a foreign, imported ideology. Once best friends, they haven't met for many years, and Jaroslav in particular, harbours a deep grudge against his former band member.

Jaroslav describes in some detail the 'Ride of the King' which is the centrepiece of the festival, when a young boy is completely costumed and masked to re-enact the legend of the almost solitary ride of an exiled king in the Middle Ages. It is a great honour to be chosen to play the 'king' and Jaroslav is thrilled that his own son was selected by the committee to play the king.

Admittedly the ride itself, as witnessed through the eyes of both Jaroslav and Ludvik, is a rather shabby and tawdry affair. The authorities don't even close off the main street so the characters dressed in bright traditional costumes and riding horses, are continually dodging out of the way of cars, lorries and motorbikes. And the crowds are the smallest they've ever been. (At this point you realise this novel is set in the early 1960s, as radio-based rock and roll was just coming in, as the Beatles were first appearing – and the reader can make comparisons between this Czech novel lamenting the decay of traditional folk festivals, and similar books, describing similar sentiments, written in the West.)

Jaroslav puts a brave face on it all, decrying the horrible noisy modern world, insisting on the primacy and integrity of folk music and traditions and still beaming with pride that his son is riding on a horse through their town dressed as the King of the Ride.

Except he isn't. Later on in the book Jaroslav makes the shattering discovery that his son has bunked off, gone off on a motorbike with a mate to a roadside café to drink and listen to

rock'n'roll. And his wife knew all about it and helped cover it up, helped arrange the dressing up of a completely different boy, and then lied to Jaroslav!

No greater betrayal is conceivable. Stunned, the big man stands in their kitchen, while his wife faces their stove, continuing to fuss over the soup she's making while her husband's whole world collapses in ashes. Then, one by one he takes every plate on the dresser and hurls them at the floor. Then he smashes up each of the chairs round the table. Then he turns the table over and smashes it down on the pile of broken crockery. While his wife stands trembling at the cooker, crying into their soup. Then he leaves, dazed and confused, wandering through the streets, and beyond, out into the fields, out to the countryside and eventually sits down by the river which flows through the town, the Morava, then lies down, using the violin case he's brought with him as a pillow. Lies and stares at the clouds in the sky, completely forlorn.

- Kostka's story

Kostka's story comes toward the end of the novel, but it provides an important centre and touchstone. As you read it you realise that although Ludvik may be the central consciousness, he is powerfully counterbalanced by first Jaroslav and now Kostka.

Kostka was also of Ludvik and Jaroslav's generation, the 1948 generation. But Kostka was and is a devout Christian. (Christianity, Christian faith and Christian terminology crops up throughout Kundera's fiction. Readers [correctly] associate him with meditations on politics and communism, but Christian belief is also a substantial theme in his books.)

Kostka's inflexible religious belief meant that he, too, eventually found it impossible to stay in university, though he differed from Ludvik in voluntarily quitting and being assigned to a state farm as a technical adviser (p.184) where, being highly intelligent and hard working, he was soon devising more effective ways to grow crops. It was then that a rumour spread about a wild woman of the woods, stories circulated about milk pails being mysteriously emptied, food left out to cool disappearing. It wasn't long before the authorities tracked down the young woman to her shabby lair in a disused barn and brought her in for questioning.

It was Lucie, Ludvik's pure young woman. This is what happened to her after their tragically failed night of sex, after he threw her clothes at her and told her to clear out. She did. She left her job and the dormitory she shared, and travelled across the country sleeping rough, and ended up in a rural area, living off berries and food she could steal.

The authorities take pity on her and assign her to the communal farm. This is where she comes under the protection of Kostka. And very slowly we learn how she relaxes and opens up and tells him her story. She was abused, to be precise as a teenager she hung around with a gang of boys and on one pitiful occasion, they got drunk and gang raped her. Even the quietest, sweetest boy, the one she thought was her special friend. He was the most brutal, to show off to his mates that he was a real man.

That is more than enough explanation of why she couldn't give herself to Ludvik. It was precisely because what she needed wasn't sex, but protection. In her mind, she was forcing Ludvik to conform to the role of Lover and Protector. Having sex destroyed that image which is why she couldn't do it (over and above the sheer terror the act revived in her mind). And of course, in his mind she was pure and virginal, and he

had worked himself up into a young man's romantic state where he thought of her as especially his, and the act of love as a sacred blessing on the altar of her unsullied beauty.

In fact, we had been briefly introduced to Kostka right at the start of the novel because when he arrives back in his hometown for the festival and to deflower Helena, Ludvik looks up one of the few friends he can remember in the place, Kostka, who is now an eminent doctor at the local hospital. In an amiable but distant way, Kostka agrees to loan Ludvik his apartment for an afternoon (for the fatal act of sex). It is only later, when they meet up that evening, that they share a drink and Kostka ends up telling him about his life.

Now Kostka remembers another meeting, by chance, on a train, in 1956. Kostka had been forced to quit the collective farm because of political machinations and had ended up becoming a labourer. First they shared the irony that two young men, both so idealistic about their beliefs, had both been dumped on from a great height by… by… by what? By 'History' is the best they can come up with. By the impersonal forces of society working to a logic nobody really understands, certainly nobody can control. In fact Ludvik was so incensed by the unfairness of Kostka's fate that he moved heaven and earth and used all his old contacts to get Kostka admitted to the hospital where he still works.

This is why Ludvik looks Kostka up when he arrives back in his hometown in the book's 'present'. This is why Kostka agrees to lend him his flat for the deflowering of Helena. And this is why, later that night, when the two old friends share a drink, Kostka tells Ludvik about Lucie, without realising he knew her: about the gang rape, the flight. How she found one man she could trust, a miner in a god-forsaken mining town. But how he, too, turned out to be just like all the rest. How she had

turned up the collective farm all those years ago, how Kostka took her under his wing and how, despite himself, he too took advantage of her and began a sexual relationship with her – about which he now, older and wiser, feels cripplingly guilty.

Soon after this revelation, Kostka's section ends and we are returned to the mind of Ludvik, in the present, walking back from Kostka's flat late at night, and absolutely reeling. What? Everything he ever believed about Lucie, both during their ill-fated affair and for fifteen years since – turns out to be utterly, completely wrong (p.210).

- Back to Helena

But there are still more acts to go in this pitiful black farce. To Helena's own surprise no other than her suave philandering husband, Pavel Zemanek, turns up for the festival. He is now a super-smooth and successful university lecturer, adored by his students for his fashionably anti-establishment (i.e. anti-communist) views. And he's brought his latest student lover along, a long-legged beauty – Miss Broz – perfectly suited to Pavel's stylish sports car.

Helena takes advantage of her recent mad, passionate coupling with Ludvik, to tell Zemanek that she's met the love of her life, that she doesn't need him any more, and generally takes a superior position. She goes so far as telling Zemanek her marvellous lover's name, Ludvik Jahn, and is puzzled when he bursts out laughing. Oh they're old friends, he explains.

Helena recounts this all to Ludvik when they meet up the next morning, and it is all Ludvik can do to conceal his dismay. Just when he thought things couldn't get any worse. And then a few hours later, in the throng of the bloody festival, in among the crowds packing the streets to watch the Ride of the bloody

King, suddenly Zemanek emerges from the crowd, accompanied by his long-legged dollybird and Helena is introducing the two enemies, face to face for the first time in 15 years.

And, of course, whereas Ludvik is strangled by an inexpressible combination of rage and hatred, Zemanek is unbearably suave and cool, well dressed, well-heeled, hair well-coiffed, gorgeous student on his arm – unbearable! And doubly unbearable because he realises his revenge on Zemanek has not only failed, but epically, massively failed. Not only did he not ravish and desecrate the body of Zemanek's beloved wife – because Zemanek doesn't give a damn who his wife sleeps with – but Helena falling so deeply and publicly in love with him (Ludvik) has done Zemanek a big favour. For years Helena has been a burden round his neck – now at a stroke Ludvik has done him the favour of removing that burden!

Farce is laid over farce, bitter black joke on top of bitter black joke. As if all this wasn't bad enough, yet another layer is added to the cake of humiliation – because as Ludvik is forced to swallow his rage and join in the polite chit-chat going on between Helena and Zemanek and Miss Broz, he realises something from the latter's talk. As she witters on praising Zemanek for standing up to the authorities and bravely speaking out about this or that issue and generally becoming a hero to his students, Ludvik is subject to a really shattering revelation: the past doesn't matter any more.

As she talks on Ludvik realises that, for her and her generation, all that stuff about 1948 and purges and executions and party squabbles and ideological arguments: that's all ancient history – 'bizarre experiences from a dark and distant

age' (p.232) which is just of no interest to her and her generation, who want to party and have fun.

Not only has Ludvik failed utterly to wreak his revenge on his old antagonist – but the entire world which gave meaning to their antagonism, and therefore to his act of revenge, has ceased to exist. He has been hanging onto a past which doesn't exist anymore. It sinks in that the entire psychological, intellectual and emotional framework which has dominated his life for fifteen years… has evaporated in a puff of smoke. No one cares. No one is interested. It doesn't matter.

Alone again with Helena, Ludvik lets rip. He tells her he hates her. He tells her he only seduced and made love to her to get his own back on her husband, the man who sold him down the river when they were students. He says she repulses him. At first she refuses to accept it – she has just thrown away her entire life with Zemanek, the security of their house and marriage – for Ludvik and here he is spitting in her face. Eventually she wanders off, dazed, back to the village hall where she and her sound engineer, Jindra, have set up base to make their radio documentary. In a dazed voice, she says she has a headache and the engineer (still virtually a schoolboy, who has a puppy crush on Helena) says he has some headache tablets in her bag. She sends him out for a drink and then, rummaging in his bag, comes across several bottles full of headache pills. She takes two and then looks at herself in the mirror, at her tear-stained face, contemplating the complete and utter humiliation she has just undergone and the shattering of her entire life.

And, as she hears Jindra returning with a bottle from a nearby tavern, she hastily swallows down the entire contents of not one but all the bottles in the engineer's bag. She emerges back into the hall, thanks him for the drink and writes a note. It is a suicide note addressed to Ludvik. She pops it in an envelope

and scribbles Ludvik's name on it and asks Jindra to track Ludvik down and deliver it.

Now, Jindra has got wind of Helena and Ludvik's affair and was present when Zemanek and his student were introduced to them, so he knows Ludvik by sight. Reluctantly he goes off with the letter. The observant reader might notice that the story commences with a missive – a postcard – and is ending with another, something about misunderstood messages.

Jindra fairly quickly finds Ludvik in the beer garden of the most popular pub in town. He grudgingly hands over the letter. Now a message from an angry and upset Helena is about the last thing Ludvik wants to have to deal with and so, to delay matters, he invites Jindra to join him in a drink. He calls the waiter. He orders. The drinks arrive. They drink. They toast. The letter sits on the table unopened.

Eventually and very reluctantly Ludvik opens the envelope and reads the message. He leaps out of his chair and demands to know where Helena is now. The engineer describes the village hall they've borrowed and Ludvik sets out on a run, zigzagging through the crowds and avoiding the traffic.

He makes it to the hall, bursts in and it is empty. Down into the cellar he goes, amid the cobwebs and detritus, yelling Helena's name. No reply. They check every room on the ground floor, then realise there's an attic, and find a ladder and go up there, Ludvik convinced at any moment he'll see a mute body dangling from a rope. But no Helena – so another frenzied search reveals a door into a back garden, and they burst out into this quickly realising there is no body prone in the grass or hanging from the trees.

But there is a shed. Ludvik bounds over to it and beats

on the door, which is locked. 'Go away' they hear Helena's anguished voice, and Ludvik needs no bidding to kick open the door, smashing its flimsy lock to reveal…Helena squatting on a toilet in agony, angrily begging him to close the door. Those headache pills? They weren't headache pills. The puppyish engineer now sheepishly admits to both of them that he often gets constipated and so keeps a supply of laxatives ready to hand. Only he's embarrassed about people seeing them so he keeps them in old headache pill bottles.

Ludvik steps back, surveys the situation and closes the door on Helena's humiliation and stands lost, dazed, staggered. What… What is life about? What is the point? Could he be any more of an ironic plaything of Fate?

He walks away from the outside loo, from Helena and Jindra, back through the church hall, out into the hectic streets, along busy roads, across town to the outskirts, where the houses peter out, and on into fields, farmland, lanes and hedgerows and trees. Eventually he finds himself walking along beside the river Morava, and then makes out a figure lying down beside it. As he comes closer he is astonished to see it is his old friend and fellow musician, Jaroslav. He greets him and asks if he can sit down beside him. And so the two lost men, their lives and their illusions in tatters, sit out in the empty countryside contemplating the absurd meaningless of existence.

Essay questions:-

1. Explain the narrative strategy employed by Kundera in *The Joke*

2. The character of Ludvik

3. Discuss the significance of the title *The Joke*

SNOW

Orhan Pamuk

About the author:-

Orhan Pamuk was born in Istanbul in 1952 and grew up in a large family similar to those which he describes in his novels *Cevdet Bey* and *His Sons* and *The Black Book*, in the wealthy westernised district of Nisantasi. As he writes in his autobiographical book *Istanbul*, from his childhood until the age of 22 he devoted himself largely to painting and dreamed of becoming an artist. After graduating from the secular American Robert College in Istanbul, he studied architecture at Istanbul Technical University for three years, but abandoned the course when he gave up his ambition to become an architect and artist. He went on to graduate in journalism from Istanbul University, but never worked as a journalist. At the age of 23 Pamuk decided to become a novelist, and giving up everything else retreated into his flat and began to write. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2006.

Analysis:-

Snow was published in 2002 in Turkish under the name Kar and was later published (2004) in English by Faber and Faber, translated by Maureen Freely. The story, set in Turkey, confronts the modern social society and problems thereof, through the eyes of the young boy living there, named Ka.

The narrator of the story is seemingly a close friend of Ka, a person who knows what is happening and will happen to him, though it then switches back to the events happening in the

point of view of Ka. Nevertheless, the narrator comments on what happens, not only to Ka himself, but to how the social life is built up. It focuses heavily on a strange epidemic that passed through Turkey, where many young females committed suicide.

The features of a historical novel along with the detailed descriptions of the city Kars, its streets and buildings, bear the author's aim to show the authenticity, inevitability and significance of the past in the formation and history of the present. The novel is defined by the author as a political one, and deep insight into the political life of the country is endeavored.

The novel attempts to find out why the politics of the Kemalist period turned out to be destructive and sad for citizens and history, and the reason lies in ignoring and destroying the past of the country. The poor present, shown in the example of the city Kars, is indisputably inferior to the greatness of the past, thereby the present conflicts occur due to the lack of a worthy replacement in the present, even elementary respect for the past. Perhaps here is the inability of modern Turkish politics to accept certain pages of its past, and to come to an agreement and harmony in matters of history, religion, nationality and freedom in the present and future.

The difficulty of the social problems and conflicts are allegorically presented through the relationships between the characters. The love feelings of each of the characters stay unrequited. This kind of relationship is completely unacceptable in any respectable religion and society. Thus, political issues lie deeper than just the inabilities of the politicians, these issues lie in the people themselves.

Summary:-

Though most of the early part of the story is told in the third person from Ka's point of view, an omniscient narrator sometimes makes his presence known, posing as a friend of Ka's who is telling the story based on Ka's journals and correspondence. This narrator sometimes provides the reader with information before Ka knows it or foreshadows later events in the story. At times, the action seems somewhat dream-like. The story is set in the city of Kars which creates a sense of alienation for Ka as the city is unlike anywhere else in Turkey, due to its history as a Russian garrison town.

Ka is a poet, who returns to Turkey after 12 years of political exile in Germany. He has several motives, first, as a journalist, to investigate a spate of suicides but also in the hope of meeting a woman he used to know. Heavy snow cuts off the town for about three days during which time Ka is in conversation with a former communist, a secularist, a fascist nationalist, a possible Islamic extremist, Islamic moderates, young Kurds, the military, the Secret Service, the police and in particular, an actor-revolutionary. In the midst of this, love and passion are to be found. Temporarily closed off from the world, a farcical coup is staged and linked melodramatically to a stage play. The main discussion concerns the interface of secularism and belief but there are references to all of Turkey's twentieth century history.

Ka reunites with a woman named İpek, whom he once had feelings for, whose father runs the hotel he is staying in. Ipek is divorced from Muhtar, partly due to Muhtar's newfound interest in political Islam. In a café, Ka and Ipek witness the shooting of the local Director of the Institute of Education by a Muslim extremist from out of town. The shooter blames the director for the death of a young woman named Teslime,

claiming she killed herself because of the director's ban on head-scarves in school. After the incident, Ka visits Muhtar, who tells him about his experience of finding Islam, which relates to a blizzard and meeting a charismatic sheikh named Saadettin Efendi. The police pick up Ka and Muhtar as part of their investigation of the Director's murder. Ka is questioned and Muhtar is beaten.

Though he has suffered from writer's block for a number of years, Ka suddenly feels inspired and composes a poem called "Snow", which describes a mystic experience. Other poems follow. At İpek's suggestion, Ka goes to see Sheikh Saadettin and confesses that he associates religion with a backwardness that he does not want himself or Turkey to fall into. But he feels a sense of comfort with the sheikh and begins to accept his new poems as gifts from God.

Ka is impressed by Necip, a student at the religious high school, who, like many of the young Muslims at the school, is quite taken by Kadife. The narrator lets the reader know that Necip will die soon. Growing tensions between secularists and Islamists explode during a televised event at the National Theater. A secular group puts on a classic play condemning head scarves; during the play, a number of soldiers take positions on stage. The leader of the theater group receives a messenger and announces the death of the Director of the Institute of Education. Immediately after this, the soldiers on stage start firing at the audience. Necip is among those killed. The police and military establish martial law, and Ka is taken in for questioning because he has been seen with Islamists. He is shattered to find Necip's body in the morgue and identifies him as the one who led him to Blue.

Ka is taken to meet Sunay Zaim, an actor whose group put on the play at the National Theater and who is now

orchestrating the round-ups and investigations of suspicious persons. Zaim is a staunch Turkish Republican, who has played political leaders such as Robespierre, Napoleon and Lenin, but whose dream of playing Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, was frustrated. As the snow has made the roads and railroads impassable, no outside authorities are able to intervene in the coup. The isolation of Kars, and Zaim's's old friendship with the officer in charge of the local garrison, enabled him to become a revolutionary dictator in real life as well as on the stage, for at least a few days — his act being simultaneously a coup d'état and a coup de théâtre.

At this point, the narrator, who identifies himself as a novelist named Orhan, flashes forward four years and reveals that Ka spent the last years of his life obsessing over İpek and writing unsent letters to her before being murdered in Frankfurt. The narrator will play a much larger role in the story in the later chapters of the novel. We are clearly meant to identify the narrator with Orhan Pamuk himself, as he later names The Black Book as one of his works, as well as The Museum of Innocence, which he would publish in 2008.

Turgut Bey attends a meeting at which representatives from the various factions opposed to the coup, including Islamists, leftists, and Kurds, attempt to produce a coherent statement to the European press denouncing the action. After Blue is arrested and held by the nationalists, Ka negotiates a deal with Sunay Zaim that will result in Blue's release, as long as Kadife agrees to play a role in Zaim's production of Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy and removes her head-scarf on live television during the show. Both Kadife and Blue agree.

After a scene in which Ka is seen confused and tormented by feelings of pain and jealousy, the narrative describing events from his point of view abruptly breaks off.

The narrator explains that Ka had left behind a detailed account of his acts and feelings while in Kars, but that there was no reference to his last hours in the city, and it is left to his friend Orhan to try to reconstruct these by following in Ka's footsteps, visiting the places where he had been and meeting the people he had met.

Ka's actions immediately after leaving the theater remain a mystery which is never completely untangled. Orhan is, however, able to establish that Ka was later taken by the military to the train station, where he was put on the first train scheduled to leave once the railroad reopened. Ka complied, but sent soldiers to retrieve İpek for him. However, just as İpek said her farewells to her father, news arrived that Blue and Hande were shot. İpek was shattered and blamed Ka for leading the police to Blue's hideout. Instead of going to Ka, she and her father went to the theater to see Kadife.

In the end it is disclosed that a new group of Islamic militants was formed by younger followers of Blue who had been forced into exile in Germany and based themselves in Berlin, vowing to take revenge for the death of their admired leader. It is assumed that one of them assassinated Ka and took away the only extant copy of the poems he had written, the poems themselves are lost.

One of the main themes in Orhan Pamuk's novel Snow is the universality of death. We might be more specific and discuss suicide. Why is Ka (Kerim) in Kars? He's looking into why a succession of girls have killed themselves. That brings us to another theme: modernity (or secularism) versus religion. Why are the girls killing themselves? Is it because they're being

pressured to remove their headscarves during class? This element links to the tension between adhering to religious traditions and going along with more "modern" customs. One last theme you could discuss is the power and influence of the media. Remember, Ka is looking into the deaths because he's been asked to do so by a newspaper. Media also plays a role when soldiers begin shooting at the audience during a live event on TV. You might want to think about the connection between media and violence.

THEMES

- National identity

Modern Turkish society is destabilized in its religious, cultural, historical and political context. In his novel Snow Orhan Pamuk tries to rise the theme of Turkish national identity and the national character looking back on the history, which, in his opinion, goes back not only to the ancient Turkic nomadic culture, but also to the cultural synthesis of the Ottoman era, which is a complex symbiosis of elements of the Byzantine, Christian and Arab-Persian Muslim civilizations. Turkish literature of the second part of the 19th century reveals absurdity of the thoughtless imitation of the West, which had led to the loss of national identity, but it is Pamuk’s prose where it gets a new embodiment, which shows how deep the true flaws are hidden. Turks cannot find compromise between themselves, to tell nothing of their relationship with the Europeans. Ka visits the city of Kars as a person who knows little of the citizens’ matters, but even if he had not visited Kars, all the dreadful events would have taken place anyway, as the events disclose showdowns between the locals. Only finding true national identity would bring peace.

- Suicides

The city of Kars happened to dismally witness the suicide epidemic among teenage girls. The young girls have not been allowed to enter universities and other educational institutions with a headscarf on, “symbol of political Islam”, which had been a part of their culture, faith and life in general. This explanation was comfortable to believe, but the problem was much deeper. Ka came to Kars to investigate the events, and write about it in the Western newspaper. Ka never accomplished this goal, but some investigation he had done, and was shocked and frightened by the fact that “these girls had killed themselves abruptly, without ritual or warning, in the midst of their everyday routines”. The parents did not notice anything that would disturb or warn them, which makes these deaths even more depressing. For these girls a suicide was the only way to freedom and purity. In the end of the novel, Kadife says that women kill themselves out of pride, with the only purpose – to show how proud they are. Along with the elevated beliefs of newly born feminism, the author tries to show infidelity in the society, as suicide is the greatest sin, and a truly faithful person would never commit one.

- Patriotism and religion

Patriotism in Turkey comes along with religion, and it is as contradictory as the religious movements. Conversations between the characters, who claim themselves to be true believers, demonstrate superficiality, misunderstanding and prejudice of the relationship between the believers themselves. And since they cannot come to the mutual understanding of their religion, their patriotic ideas would be miscomprehended as

well. The author tries to make clear and to explain these things. Blind faith is shown as a possible mistake and misinterpretation of the motives of behavior of different types of people, atheists and believers. As believers perceive and love all people as equal and wish everyone peace and good. The motives of Kadife and her refusal to wear a headscarf, the theme of the girls' suicides, as an allusion to atheism in society, indicates the modern foundations of society.

Essay questions:-

1. Discuss how *Snow* provides insight into the political life of Turkey.

2. Modernity versus religion as a theme in *Snow.*

3. Illustrate the character of Ka.

BLINDNESS

Jose Saramago

About the author:-

José Saramago, (born November 16, 1922, Azinhaga, Portugal—died June 18, 2010, Lanzarote, Canary Islands, Spain), is a noted Portuguese novelist and man of letters who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1998. The son of rural labourers, Saramago grew up in great poverty in Lisbon. After holding a series of jobs as mechanic and metalworker, Saramago began working in a Lisbon publishing firm and eventually became a journalist and translator. He joined the Portuguese Communist Party in 1969, published several volumes of poems, and served as editor of a Lisbon newspaper in 1974–75 during the cultural thaw that followed the overthrow of the dictatorship of António Salazar. An anticommunist backlash followed in which Saramago lost his position, and in his 50s he began writing the novels that would eventually establish his international reputation.

One of Saramago's most important novels is *Memorial do convento* (1982; *Memoirs of the Convent*; Eng. trans. Baltasar and Blimunda). With 18th-century Portugal (during the Inquisition) as a backdrop, it chronicles the efforts of a handicapped war veteran and his lover to flee their situation by using a flying machine powered by human will. Saramago alternates this allegorical fantasy with grimly realistic descriptions of the construction of the Mafra Convent by thousands of labourers pressed into service by King John V. Another ambitious novel, *O ano da morte de Ricardo Reis* (1984; *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*), juxtaposes the

romantic involvements of its narrator, a poet-physician who returns to Portugal at the start of the Salazar dictatorship, with long dialogues that examine human nature as revealed in Portuguese history and culture.

- Historical Context of Blindness

Saramago famously names no characters, places, or time periods in *Blindness*, which is intended as a universal allegory for human experience, capable of taking place anywhere, at any time. However, Blindness is still undeniably rooted in the history of 20th-century fascism and authoritarianism—and especially the specific political history of Portugal. During most of Saramago's life, from the 1930s to the 1970s, Portugal was ruled by a right-wing dictatorship called the Estado Novo (or "New State"), led by the economist António Salazar. During this period, the government essentially ignored public interest and operated as a corporation.

As an atheist and communist living under this oppressive government, Saramago's suspicion of centralized political power explains why the Government in Blindness exercises its powers cruelly and arbitrarily. The novel's Government and soldiers essentially abandon the blind patients and start treating them as a problem to be solved rather than humans whom it is responsible for defending. This reflects the idea that authoritarianism and fascism recast citizens as threats to social order, dehumanizing their opponents to justify violence against them—the soldiers and thugs in the novel are both self-interested groups who use their power to exploit and abuse anyone who threatens them. It is no coincidence that the starvation, slaughter, and dehumanization that Saramago's protagonists suffer inside the mental hospital reflect the widespread violence, fascist regimes, and genocide that Saramago lived through in the 20th century.

From the first to the last page of the novel, the issue of sightlessness comes up repeatedly. Ultimately, Saramago addresses two types of blindness in the novel—physical blindness and metaphorical blindness. Physical blindness and the complications of going suddenly blind drive the action of the novel. On one level, the importance of physical sight (or the lack thereof) demonstrates how ingrained visual perception is to society. The ways in which people move and live in the world are predicated on sight. On another level, losing physical sight reveals the innate ableism of society. Nothing about modern life in Blindness is adaptive. The blind lose their autonomy as soon as they lose their sight. Without eyesight, people become helpless, and that enables Saramago to explore how the world grinds to a halt as the apocalypse rolls on.

However, blindness carries significant metaphorical meaning, too. Saramago argues that literal blindness is the physical manifestation of the metaphorical blindness endemic to modern social systems. The prioritizing of individual needs and the value placed on perceived truth creates a society of deeply selfish people. Consider the car thief: He steals the blind man's car for no other reason than that he wants to. The narrator explains, "It was only when he got close to the blind man's home that the idea came to him quite naturally" (16), and he does not feel guilty afterward, assuming that a blind man would no longer find use in a vehicle.

Summary:-

At an intersection in front of a traffic light, a driver remains stopped after the light turns green, which annoys the other drivers. The man yells out that he has suddenly gone blind: his entire field of vision is a sea of whiteness. After another driver helps the blind man back to his apartment, the blind man knocks over a vase and cuts himself trying to pick up the pieces,

then passes out on the couch until the blind man's wife comes home and helps him clean up. It turns out that the person who drove the blind man home was a thief—he stole their car, so the blind man and his wife took a taxi to the eye doctor. The doctor is baffled: there's seemingly nothing wrong with the blind man's eyes, and his condition is unprecedented. The only option, the doctor admits, is to "wait and see."

After the blind man's appointment, the car-thief also suddenly goes blind, as does the doctor later that night. One of the doctor's patients, a young woman wearing dark glasses for an eye infection, works as a prostitute and goes blind while having sex with a man at a hotel. Two different police officers escort the car-thief and the girl with the dark glasses back to their respective homes. Meanwhile, the doctor realizes that the blindness is highly contagious and he tells the doctor's wife about his condition. The doctor then calls the Ministry of Health, which sets up a quarantine and sends an ambulance for the doctor. His wife insists on joining him—although she can still see, after boarding her husband's ambulance, she pretends that she has just gone blind as well.

The Ministry of Health's quarantine zone is set up in an abandoned psychiatric hospital guarded by armed soldiers. The doctor and his wife arrive first, followed by the first man who went blind, the man who stole his car, the girl with dark glasses, and a young boy with a squint who saw the eye doctor the previous day. The Government announces a long list of draconian rules that the internees must follow to protect the rest of the population from "the white sickness." The concerned patients choose the doctor as their leader, but he refuses, worrying that future arrivals will reject his authority. Meanwhile, the car-thief and the first blind man get into a fight, and then nature calls: the little boy has to go to the bathroom,

and so everyone lines up behind the doctor's wife, who promises to lead them there despite having not told anyone that she can still see. The car-thief starts groping the girl with the glasses, who indignantly kicks him in the leg with her high heels. This leaves him with a nasty, bloody wound, which the doctor's wife bandages as best she can.

In the morning, the doctor's wife worries that she will have to care for everyone else. More patients arrive, including the first blind man's wife and various minor characters who have briefly interacted with the protagonists (like the taxi-driver who drove the first blind man and his wife to the doctor). The car-thief's wound is badly infected, and the doctor and his wife beg the soldiers for medicine, but they refuse. Another huge crowd of patients enters the hospital after lunch, and that night the desperately ill car-thief crawls out of the hospital to beg the soldiers for medicine. But he startles the soldier on duty, who shoots him dead, and the sergeant orders the blind internees to retrieve and bury the car-thief's body. The blind internees manage to get a shovel from the soldiers and bury the car-thief's corpse in a shallow grave. But when the soldiers enter the hospital to drop off the internees' dinner, they come face-to-face with a group of hungry, blind internees waiting in the hall. Terrified, the soldiers massacre them indiscriminately, leaving nine dead. The doctor leads his ward in burying half of the dead, but the internees living in the ward next door refuse to bury the other half. Meanwhile, in the hospital's filthy bathroom, the doctor breaks down when he realizes that he is "becoming an animal."

The internees begin losing all sense of time and routine. The soldiers decide to leave the food outside the hospital rather than entering, but the blind get lost while they search for it. A bloodthirsty soldier nearly murders a terrified blind man, but the

new sergeant on duty stops him. On this day, several hundred new internees move into the hospital and fight for beds. Some are forced to sleep in the hallways, and others are frightened to come across the pile of corpses in the hospital's courtyard. Soon after this, the narrator notes that the hospital is now full and that the internees finally have enough food. One of the newcomers is another patient of the doctor's, an old man with a black eyepatch who tells the others about the sad state of the city: the Government has failed to control the epidemic, and an escalating series of catastrophes followed. Much of the city is blind, public services are collapsing, and the city is littered with abandoned cars. The narrator suggests that the patients are better off in the hospital, where they "pass the time" by remembering what they last saw before going blind.

In its crowded state, the hospital has become unimaginably filthy, a result of broken plumbing and people's inability to see who is defecating where. To address the situation, the doctor's wife considers revealing that she can see—but before she can, a band of armed thugs starts controlling all the food and demanding that everyone else give up their valuables in exchange for rations. The group from the doctor's ward reluctantly complies, but the thugs give them so little food that they begin to starve. The doctor's wife realizes she alone can stop the thugs, so she secretly surveys their ward at night. While the internees grow more and more desperate, the thugs start demand "more money and valuables" and then start systematically raping the women.

Overcome by anxiety, the women from the doctor's ward wait their turn to be assaulted. In a moment of weakness, the doctor and the girl with the dark glasses have sex—the doctor's wife witnesses this, but she comforts them rather than objecting. The girl and the old man with the eyepatch also begin

a romantic relationship. One night, the thugs call over the ward's seven women and violently rape them for several hours, leaving them battered and traumatized beyond words—one of them dies moments after the attack ends, and the doctor's wife washes her corpse to "purify" it. Soon, the doctor's wife realizes that she has no choice but to act. A few nights later, she grabs a pair of scissors she has been hiding and follows another group of women into the thugs' ward, where she stabs the leader in the throat, killing him and causing a frantic struggle. After escaping with the women, she struggles to process what she has done.

After the leader's death, the thugs lose their grip on power, but they keep their stockpile of food. New food stops arriving, and without assistance from the soldiers, some of the starving internees decide that they were better off under the thugs' rule. The internees try and fail to attack the thieves, who have blocked the entrance to their ward with several beds. The doctor's wife desperately reveals that she can see, and then an unnamed woman decides to take matters into her own hands: she sets fire to the beds in the thugs' doorway, and the whole ward burns down with the thugs inside. The entire hospital ends up catching fire, and the patients run outside, only to find that the soldiers are gone—in fact, the whole city is eerily silent and dark. Disoriented and confused, the internees spend the night next to the burning hospital, hoping in vain that the soldiers will return with food.

In the morning, the blind internees are free but lost and starving. The doctor's wife guides a small group—herself and her husband, the girl with the glasses, the man with the eyepatch, the first blind man and his wife, and the boy with the squint—into town, where blind people are taking shelter in shops. One of them explains that the entire country is now blind and that people spend their days scavenging for food. The doctor's wife

goes looking for food and finds a supermarket, which is full of people but empty of food. Luckily, she discovers a basement storeroom and fills several bags with food. On her way out, she decides not to inform the blind scavengers about it, and then she gets lost and breaks down crying. Then, a stray dog rescues the doctor's wife by licking up her tears and showing her to "a great map" that leads her home. This "dog of tears" joins her adopted family.

Now well-fed and well-dressed, the group goes to the girl's old apartment, which is nearby. Her parents are gone, but her downstairs neighbor, an elderly blind woman, has managed to stay and survive by eating whatever she finds in the backyard, including raw chickens and rabbits. This woman has keys to the girl's apartment and opens it for the group in exchange for some of their food. The group spends the night there, but the next afternoon they move to the doctor and his wife's apartment, which is exactly as they left it. Here, "the seven pilgrims" make themselves at home: the doctor's wife helps them clean up, and during a rainstorm in the morning, the women bathe themselves and wash everybody's clothes on the balcony. Later that day, the doctor's wife leads the first blind man and his wife to their old apartment, where a blind writer is now living. Although he cannot read his own work, the writer continues working so as to not lose himself.

The doctor, his wife, and the girl with the glasses then visit the doctor's office, which has been ransacked, and then return to the girl's apartment to again check for her parents. They pass a speaker preaching to a crowd about the apocalypse, and when they arrive, they find the old woman laying dead outside, clutching the girl's keys. The doctor's wife buries the old woman, and then the girl leaves a lock of her hair on her front door knob, in case her parents return. Back at the doctor

and his wife's apartment, the doctor's wife reads the rest of the group a story, and the girl with the glasses and the old man with the eyepatch reaffirm their love for each other.

Later on, the doctor and his wife visit the supermarket in search of food. Accompanied by the dog of tears, they pass another preacher speaking to a blind crowd, this time about law and government. In the supermarket's basement storeroom, the doctor's wife is horrified to find a pile of dead bodies and realizes that after she left the last time, the blind scavengers rushed downstairs, fell, and accidentally got locked inside. Feeling nauseated and overwhelmed with guilt, the doctor's wife follows her husband across the street into a crowded church, where she passes out. When the doctor's wife regains consciousness, she realizes that the eyes in all the images in the church are covered with paint or strips of cloth, and she and the doctor debate what this symbolizes. When the blind worshippers around them hear this, they riot and run out of the church, and the doctor and his wife take some of the food they leave behind.

Back in their apartment, the doctor's wife reads a book to the group. As she reads, the first blind man suddenly regains his sight, and the entire group begins rejoicing. By the next morning, all of them can see again, and the city is full of people celebrating on the streets. The doctor proclaims that all humans are "Blind people who can see, but do not see."

THEMES

- Response to Crisis

Albert Camus wrote The Plague about a deadly disease that causes survivors to question how they are to go on when so many around them have died. Similarly, Saramago was inspired to write Blindness by an initial hypothetical question: What

would happen if a highly contagious, debilitating, and non-lethal disease struck a community? Saramago examines how people might react if a non-lethal disease disabled everyone to the point that the basic social system and support services in their way of life were no longer functioning. Choosing blindness as his disability, he paints the bleakest possible picture of the social devastation that would result. The point may be to remind people that struggle is a part of the human condition, and sometimes extreme difficulties can arise which test beliefs about oneself and one's society. Thus beside the hypothetical question Saramago attempts to answer, there are important questions the text presents to readers: What would people do in a crisis? Are people sufficiently prepared to handle a crisis? Are people sufficiently committed to their personal values to know for sure that they would react ethically and with courage? Blindness serves as a reminder to each individual to establish ethical foundations for the times when they are needed the most. There is also a cautionary reminder here: During a crisis people do what they must to survive; even the unthinkable is possible. This reminder may give readers heightened compassion for disabled others and for whole communities that are fragmented by a widespread disaster, for example, the ravages of a communicable disease or war.

- Worst and Best in Human Nature

In this depiction of how people may react in a community exposed to a highly contagious and disabling disease, Saramago includes examples of the worst and the best behavior under stress. An early example of the worst is with the seemingly kind man who assists the first blind man but who then turns around and steals the blind man's car.

- The fragility of society

One of the most predominant themes in Blindness is the fragility of society. This is to say that the interpersonal web of interactions in which we live on a daily basis is actually quite tenuous, even though it seems stable. It is so fragile, in fact, that the absence of one faculty, sight in this case, can cause the whole thing to unravel. In the novel, this consequence can be seen on two levels.

First, the interpersonal web of interactions unravels. People suddenly become unable to interact as they did before and this precipitates a change for the worse. Take for example the treatment of blind internees by the soldiers who are ostensibly there to guard them. On several occasions they are killed almost indiscriminately as is the case with the killing of the car thief who is trying to ask for medicine for his infected leg. An attachment of soldiers also massacres a group of blind coming to claim their food. The language used to describe the blind in these scenes is inhuman and the soldiers react to them as if they were not humans, but rather animals or monsters of some kind. The first step of this societal unraveling is the exclusion of the blind from the category of human. This is not the only example -- the blind treat each other in ways that would be unheard of in a sighted context. To take just two examples, the complete decay of the familial unit, as is exemplified by the boy with the squint who is forever separated from his mother. He cannot be the only child in this position and represents the decay of the kinship unity that is often considered the minimum unity of society. We can also look at the minimum criteria of health and sanitation that are disregarded in the wards as soon as it becomes untenable or difficult to maintain these standards.

Secondly, the larger scale of infrastructure of society breaks down, such as transportation networks, government and

media. These are the infrastructural elements on which the web of interpersonal relationships depends to live in a modernized society, but all fall apart as soon as sight is lost. In terms of traffic, it is easy to see that as soon as everyone is struck blind it become increasingly dangerous to drive or even to be near cars. The government and financial systems also become more and more unstable, but mostly in terms of a pervasive crisis of confidence. After the government has changed strategy several times and begins patently lying to the people, it becomes clear that hope in them is entirely ill-placed. The runs on the banks also reveal the general crisis in confidence that occurs in a world obviously tipping over the edge.

- Human nature

Blindness presents a relatively pessimistic view of human nature although there are some points of optimism. Human nature is presented as being no different, fundamentally, from animal nature – self-serving and ultimately geared towards mere survival. Its main point of divergence is the fact that humans can think of more complicated structures of exploitation. Things that we normally consider to be signs of human dignity are jettisoned first. Elementary things such as hygiene and care for our family are made obsolete. In the example of hygiene, it first becomes logistically difficult – one simply cannot find the lavatory on time. Then, it becomes a matter of knowing that no one can see you transgress these societal norms and thus cannot reprimand you. The same happens with the care of others. At first it is a matter of not being logistically able to find them, then comes the realization that they may be a burden to your personal survival. These examples argue for a human nature that needs the corrective of societal pressure to contain its "natural" state; raw human nature is essentially animal nature.

Human nature in Blindness is, in fact, worse than animal nature. Take, for example, the scheme that the ward of hoodlums comes up with wherein they have the right to rape the women of the other wards in exchange for food. While the sexual interactions of animals are certainly different than ours, we would be hard pressed to find an animal group that functioned with this degree of calculated exploitation. Moreover, this situation cannot be solved by communication, but only by the murder of the leader of that group but the complete extermination of the rest of the ward.

All of this pessimism, though, is counterbalanced by the shows of solidarity of the group. This can be seen mainly through the actions of the doctor's wife and the girl with the dark glasses. The girl with the dark glasses volunteers to give up her own rations of food to give to the little boy and promises to leave the group out of love for the old man. The doctor's wife serves as mother for the entire group, she feeds them and clothes them and, when necessary, defends them with force. This last thing, though, could be construed as the actions of someone who has not been initialized yet, because she retains her sight.

- Gender relations

One of the sub themes of Blindness is the modification of gender roles. This can be seen both in the trading of women for food in the quarantine as well as the roles of the doctor and his wife in the group.

One of the most striking occurrences in the novel is the trading of women for food that occurs in the quarantine. This is, in a lot of ways, the climax (or the nadir) of society. This is the event that signals that everything has broken down. Interestingly enough, the efficiency of the food delivery is partially commended here, cautioning about the dehumanizing effects of

sacrificing personal well-being for an efficient social configuration. This system, however, is doubly efficient because it results not only in the distribution of food in an orderly way, but it also concentrates the suffering in one group, the women of the quarantine. It is this mode of social configuration that the doctor's wife is able to shift by murdering the man with the gun. In many ways, the rule by rape policy of the man with the gun is based on the assumption that women are always weaker than men. This assumption is based, however, on a certain set of faculties, faculties that are different in the situation of the blind.

- Blindness

Blindness is also, in many ways, a meditation on the many different kinds of blindness. The doctor says at the end of the book that he doesn't believe that they never went blind: they were just as blind before. This is to say that it took their physical blindness to let them see their more pernicious forms of blindness.

One kind of blindness that predates the "white sickness" is fighting, or disagreeing. The doctor points out as much at one point in the quarantine, "fighting has always been a kind of blindness." The doctor is also the biggest proponent of organization, he tries to organize the people in the quarantine and it is he who dismisses the blind speech-givers for not talking about organization. Ultimately it will be an organization that keeps them from becoming animals. Organizing, however, requires seeing, not just sight but understanding another person's position. The white sickness just makes visible this inability or lack of desire to see another person's point of view.

Another kind of blindness made visible by the "white sickness" is the blindness to the fragility of society and the

benefits of civilization. Those stricken by the white sickness are essentially thrown into a completely savage situation. They are, in many ways, worse off than animals because they do not know how to cope with this situation that is completely new to them. In this situation, any piece of civilization is a luxury to them and takes on a completely new importance. Take for example, the washing of the body of the rape victim who dies in the quarantine. The women wash her body and their own to distinguish themselves from animals. A glass of water also takes on a profound importance for these people who find themselves in a situation with absolutely no potable water. Their blindness makes them able to see what a miracle these small things are.

- Memory and History

A central question through Blindness is: What will become of the human race? Is it possible to speak of humanity if there is no memory or no history?

One of the central ways in which this issue comes up is with regards to the writer who is living in the house of the first blind man. He tells the doctor's wife that he has been writing even if no one can read it. We are led to believe that he is doing this not only to communicate who he is to others, but also to make sure that he does not forget who he is. This is why he tells the doctor's wife not to lose herself, he does not want her to forget who she is. When the first blind man asks him his name, he says that it doesn't matter; since no one will ever read anything he wrote, he may as well not exist. This also brings up the question of the future. Is it possible to have a future without a past? Better said, would anyone do anything if they didn't think that anyone would remember it? We can see the immediate effect that this has on morality in the quarantine. People begin by violating relatively low-level social norms such as defecating on the ground, until they are violating high-level norms such as rape-prohibition and

murder. It would be doubtful that these things would be perpetrated if there was someone who saw and who remembered. In the case of the man with the gun in the quarantine, it turns out that someone was watching and he pays the price for his transgression.

- The soul

There are several debates in the novel as to the nature of the soul. The doctor regards the eyes to be the place most likely to house the soul, and thus going blind is akin to losing one's soul. The old man with the eye patch seems to regard the mind as more important whereas the girl with the dark glasses asserts that the soul, by its very nature cannot be named.

The doctor says on several occasions that the eyes are the most probable residence of the soul, if such a thing exists. Thus, for the doctor, the loss of sight is the equivalent of damnation. This is supported by the many references to the similarity of the world of the blind to Dante's inferno. The smell of the quarantine and the smell of the supermarket store room filled with dead bodies are particularly potent. The doctor's belief is also clearly supported by the abysmal situation that the world is thrown into, a situation for which there seems to be no recourse, when they lose their sight. How long would they remain recognizable as human at all if they continue on this course?

The old man with the eye patch thinks that there is no such thing as a soul, only a mind. This mind, of course, is altered by blindness, but not in any drastic way. Thus, humanity is basically unchanged by blindness. The main change from the old man's point of view is that people now do not need a veil of civilization to hide their nature. While the inability to see is a big problem, the bigger and maybe more fundamental problem

is that people do not need to be responsible for their actions, since no one can see. Thus, for the old man, blindness does not alter the soul or the mind, just sets it free with horrible results.

The girl with the dark glasses has a different take on the problem of the soul. The girl with the dark glasses has an obstinate belief in the humanity of human beings. Nothing we can do or say can take this away. Small moments of humanity in the plot support her point of view; the solidarity of the group of women in the quarantine and the old woman who honors her promise until the end.

- Disease

An important theme in blindness is the nature of disease. The "white sickness" is a different kind of disease in that it disables the infected without killing them. This is partially why it is so rampant; in most epidemic situations, the diseased die off and eliminate themselves as possible sources of contamination. This unique situation poses several problems for the way that we normally view disease.

The first question that the "white sickness" brings to mind is the adequacy of our definition of disease. Usually we think of disease as being something which inflicts pain, discomfort or death. Pain or discomfort, though, is usually what drives one to the doctor in the first place. In the case of the "white sickness," there is no pain. The infected are not even truly "blind" in the traditional sense, since they can see a cloud of whiteness around them. We can see, then, that our definition of disease would not be adequate to describe the phenomenon of the white sickness. It is also to be noted that disease is most often thought of as being a deviation from the normal. The question then arises, though, as to what happens when the normal shifts so radically. Usually this situation is avoided,

since the deceased eventually die. In this case of the "white sickness," though, this does not happen, meaning that blind essentially becomes the new normal, which accounts for the isolation of the doctor's wife.

Another problem raised by the "white sickness" is the effectiveness of our technology in the face of a disease which cripples our ability to use that technology. This is seen in the novel, when the great medical minds are called upon to discuss the disease and they are, in turn, struck blind. The uselessness of the doctor's instruments also makes clear the contingency of our technology. These technologies that we rely upon are useless without someone to be able or know how to utilize them -- a fact that we forget until it is too late.

Essay questions:-

1. Comment on the significance of the title *Blindness.*

2. Explain the use of symbolism in *Blindness.*

3. "*Blindness* demonstrates the presence of morality in a damaged society, and the lack thereof, and the consequences that result from right and wrong"- elucidate.

IF ON A WINTER'S NIGHT A TRAVELLER

Italo Calvino

About the author:-

Italo Calvino was one of Italy's most celebrated writers who is known to blend fantasy, comedy and fable to give an illuminated depiction of modern life and in turn giving a new dimension to novel writing. Some of Calvino's most widely read and acclaimed works include *Our Ancestors trilogy* (1952–1959), *the Cosmicomics collection of short stories* (1965), *Invisible Cities* (1972) and *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1979). At the time of Calvino's death, his literary work topped amongst the most translated works of a contemporary Italian writer. He was associated with the Neorealism school of literature.

Italo Calvino was born on October 15, 1923 in Cuba. Both his parents were botanists who returned to their native Italy soon after the birth of Calvino. Calvino grew up playing on his parent's farm in San Remo while his father taught at the University of Turin. The influences of the lush greenery, vegetation and flora Calvino grew up in are often reflected in his writings. Calvino entered the University of Turin to study science after completing preparatory school but dropped out to join the Italian army during the German occupation of Italy. For two years, Calvino fought German as well as Italian fascists. He went back to the university in 1945 when the war ended. However, he did not continue studying science and entered the Faculty of Letters instead. He began writing a collection of stories based on his experiences during the war. The stories eventually formed into his much appreciated novel, *The Path to*

the Nest of Spiders (1947). His friends, particularly Natalia Ginzburg and Cesare Pavese encouraged Calvino to write another novel and also requested him to join Einaudi, their publishing house. Calvino accepted the offer and became associated with the publishing house for the rest of his life.

During the 1950s Calvino produced quite a few noteworthy works on various subject matters and stories set in remote times with a flavor of comedy and fantasy. Some of these include *The Cloven Viscount* (1952), *The Nonexistent Knight* (1959) and *The Baron in the Trees* (1957). By the mid 1950s, Calvino spent most of his time in Rome which was at the time the political and literary hub for Italians. Tired of writing for Communist publications and disturbed by the Hungarian Revolt of 1956, Calvino resigned from the Communist Party. He had lost interest and belief in politics.

In 1956, Calvino published *Italian Folktales*. The collection of 200 authentic folktales from all regions and dialects of Italy brought Calvino immense international recognition establishing him as a significant literary figure. He moved to Paris in the early 1960s where he published *The Watcher* in 1963. In 1964, Calvino married Chichita Singer, an Argentinian woman. Some more publications to follow after his marriage included *Cosmicomics* (1968), *Invisible Cities* (1972), *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* (1973) and *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1979).

Calvino returned to Rome with his family in 1980 where they lived at their country house at Pineta RoccaMare. He finished writing *Mr. Palomar* in 1983. When Calvino visited the United States in 1975, he was given an honorary membership of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. In 1984, Mount Holyoke College awarded an honorary degree to Calvino. Italian Folktales was included in the American Library

Association's Notable Booklist in 1980. Italo Calvino died from cerebral hemorrhage on September 19, 1985 at the age of 61 in Sienna.

If on a Winter's Night a Traveller, avant-garde novel, published in 1979 as *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*. Using shifting structures, a succession of tales, and different points of view, the book probes the nature of change, coincidence, and chance and the interdependence of fiction and reality. It examines living and reading as interchangeable metaphors for each other. Also investigated are the expectations of the reader, the intentions of the author, and the tension between the two.

The novel *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* is comprised of twelve numbered "frame story" chapters and ten named story-within-a-story chapters. Most of the numbered chapters are narrated in the second-person point of view, meaning it is told as if "you" were the protagonist. Some of the stories-within-a-story are also metaliterary, but many of them are told in more traditional first- and third-person point of view.

Summary:-

The frame story begins with "you," the reader, going to the store to buy Italo Calvino's new book, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. The reader obtains the book and begins to read. The story is about a man in a train station who is on a mission to exchange a suitcase with someone. The reader soon finds that the book was incorrectly bound so that the same signature, or group of pages, is repeated over and over. The reader returns to the bookshop to exchange the book and finds that the book he was reading was not by Calvino at all. He gets what he thinks is a full copy of the book he was reading, called *Outside the town of Malbork*. He also meets another reader named Ludmilla, who

was given a copy of Calvino's book with the same problem. They exchange phone numbers.

When the reader begins reading *Outside the town of Malbork,* he finds it is not the same story he was reading before. It is about a boy living in a place called Kudgiwa, trading places with another boy so that they can learn different trades. The character feels great consternation at being replaced and jealousy at the thought that the other boy could strike up a relationship with a girl he likes. This book turns out to have another binding error; the book has many blank pages and abruptly switches stories just as it is getting interesting.

The reader looks up where the story takes place and finds out the towns in the story are from a country called Cimmeria. He calls Ludmilla and tells her they should meet, and she suggests they meet with a professor named Professor Uzzi-Tuzii who is an expert on Cimmerian literature. When the reader arrives at the university, he is directed to Professor Uzzi-Tuzii's office by a young man named Irnerio. Ludmilla is not there, so Professor Uzzi-Tuzii lectures the reader on Cimmerian language and literature; then he begins reading a story he thinks is the same one the reader was reading. This story, *Leaning from the steep slope,* has the same names of places and people but is an entirely different story. In the story, a paranoid man living at a hotel becomes involved in a plot to free a prisoner.

When Professor Uzzi-Tuzii stops reading, the reader realizes that Ludmilla has appeared. Her sister, Lotaria, also visits the office of the professor and invites the reader and Ludmilla to a seminar. They attend, and the story read in the seminar is again completely different from the others. In this story, named *Without fear of wind or vertigo*, a man becomes friends with another young man and a young woman during a war. They eventually join in a three-person sexual relationship. Then,

during a session of lovemaking, the main character finds a government document calling for him to be killed. The story breaks off, and the students in Lotaria's seminar begin to analyze it through certain academic lenses. The reader and Ludmilla are more concerned with finishing the story, so they leave together to talk at a cafe. They decide that the reader will go to the publishing house to clarify what the problem is.

At the publishing house, the reader meets a man named Mr. Cavedagna. The man tells him that the trouble has stemmed from a scheming translator named Ermes Marana. Mr. Cavedagna gives the reader the manuscript of a new book called *Looks down in the gathering shadow.* In this book, a man and woman try to get rid of the body of a dead man without being found out. When the reader reaches the end of the manuscript he's been given, he wants to read more, but Mr. Cavedagna says that the rest has been misplaced. He lets the reader read a series of confusing letters from the translator, Ermes Marana, which span his travels around the globe interacting with secret literary organizations. When the reader leaves the publishing house, Mr. Cavedagna lets him take a manuscript of a story called *In a network of lines that enlace.*

The reader arrives at the cafe to meet Ludmilla again and begins to read *In a network of lines that enlace.* The text centers on a man who, while on a run, desperately wants to answer a phone that he hears ringing inside a house. When he does answer the phone, he finds out that one of his university students is going to be murdered if he doesn't stop it. He is able to stop the murder, but the student is not grateful. The reader is interrupted by a call from Ludmilla asking to meet at her house instead. The reader goes to her house and snoops around, judging her character based on her apartment's contents. Irnerio arrives at the apartment, and his casual manner makes the reader jealous

about his relationship with Ludmilla. Irnerio shows the reader a typewriter and reveals that Marana was once involved with Ludmilla. Ludmilla arrives and Irnerio leaves. Ludmilla and the reader have sex. When they are lying in bed together afterwards, the reader begins to tell her about the manuscript he took from the publishing house. When he goes to the other room to retrieve it, he finds that Irnerio has taken it, but there is another book that looks almost identical.

The reader begins to read this book, which is called *In a network of lines that intersect.* In this book, a man obsessed with mirrors becomes so concerned about being targeted that he arranges for multiple versions of everything in his life, including cars, businesses, his mistress, and himself (using body doubles). He tries to organize a fake kidnapping to foil a real kidnapping he thinks will take place, but he is successfully kidnapped. Instead of returning to the frame story after this novel excerpt, the narrative turns to the journal of Silas Flannery, a writer of popular novels. He has a bad case of writer's block and spends much of his time every day looking out the window at a woman reading. Throughout this chapter, it becomes clear that the woman is Ludmilla, and both she and Lotaria appear in Flannery's life to discuss their views on literature. Flannery also meets a group of scouts who think aliens are trying to communicate through Flannery. Flannery is also involved with Marana, who tells him about fake translations of Flannery's works in Japan. At the end of the chapter, Flannery meets the reader and gives him a translation of a Japanese book, lying that it is the same book he was reading previously.

The Japanese story, *On the carpet of leaves illuminated by the moon,* tells the story of a young man who becomes sexually involved with the wife and daughter of his boss. The reader reads this book while on an airplane and upon arriving at his

destination, a country called Ataguitania, the book is taken from him. The reader is taken on a confusing journey with a woman who changes names and identities repeatedly. He and the woman, who may in fact by Ludmilla's sister Lotaria, eventually have sex in a room where the book *Around an empty grave* is being printed. After having sex, the reader begins to read the story. In the story, a young man seeks to find his mother and learn about his father's past. He finds out that his father impregnated an Indian woman before dueling with and killing her brother. Just before the narrator himself seems about to enter a duel to the death, the story is cut off.

The reader is taken to a jail run by undercover revolutionaries and soon after is sent on a mission to liaise with the Director General of the State Police Archives of Ircania about the banned books in Ataguitania and Ircania. They discuss book-banning, Marana's translations, and a book called *What story down there awaits its end?,* which is supposedly the same story as *Around an empty grave* but set in Ircania. The reader meets a man to receive the book *What story down there awaits its end?* but is only able to get part of the book before the man is ambushed. The story describes a man who walks the streets of a city making people and buildings disappear. When he is confronted by men who thank him for making everything disappear, he tries to get everything to come back and realizes that he can't. He sees the woman he loves in the distance and runs to her as the blank plane around him cracks apart.

The reader returns from his travels and tries to check full versions of the stories he's been reading out of the library. While he waits for the librarians to find the books, he gets into a conversation with a group of men about the different ways they enjoy reading books. The librarians tell him that all of the books he has requested are unavailable.

The narrative skips suddenly to the reader and Ludmilla in bed together, reading and preparing to sleep. Ludmilla tells him to put his book away and the reader responds that he is almost done with Calvino's book.

- **Characters:-**

You, the Reader

Due to its modernist structure and meta-narrative plot, the reader is Calvino's main character. He does not try to employ a universal reader, however, as the novel needs at least a semi-specific viewpoint, so the 'you' here refers to a middle-aged, single man who is a fairly enthusiastic reader and is drawn to pretty, mysterious women. This may be a criticism of the assumed readership of novels at this time, as women in novels were often treated as sex objects for the appetites of this 'average' reader, rather than individual protagonists whose perspectives could be related to by the reader.

The reader is also "the sort of person who, on principle, no longer expects anything of anything" (4), suggesting a certain level of disappointment or disenchantment with his life. The only risk he takes is getting invested in books. This characterization sets up the reader to be taken out of his comfort zone later, but it also gives the actual reader normal, safe expectations for a normally structured plot (with a clear beginning, middle, and end) that will be subverted. The character of the reader puts the actual reader at ease with its conventional viewpoint (that of a middle-aged man) and safe expectations so that they are in a position to be shocked by the novel's modernism and re-evaluate how they read books. The reader embodies the expected conventions of literature.

Ludmilla

Ludmilla is treated as an object in the novel, similar to the books the reader has started: he wants to possess both of them because they are always just out of reach. Ludmilla is constantly enigmatic, but the items in her apartment create an idea of an "extroverted, clear-sighted woman, sensual and methodical" (143). Ludmilla, or the Second Reader, clearly sees the world in a different way from the Reader. This is shown through her approach to books. Contrary to the Reader's practical expectations for clear plotlines and interesting characters, Ludmilla has complicated and sometimes contradictory expectations for the books she reads to have a specific mix of reality and fantasy. She is highly averse to thinking about the process by which books are created because she wants books to be organic and full of magic. This is why she refuses to accompany the Reader to the publishing house, and why she is interested in the author Silas Flannery. Ludmilla is certainly more open-minded in her reading than her sister, Lotaria, against whom the text juxtaposes her.

Lotaria

Lotaria is Ludmilla's sister, an academic who is far more socially aggressive towards others, as well as more politically motivated. She approaches books in an analytical manner, looking for their themes and counting their use of words in order to force them into her personal theories. As opposed to Ludmilla's open-mindedness, she reads with an agenda and finds the aforementioned openness escapist and low-brow. This character's viewpoint clearly represents a habit in academia that Calvino dislikes, because the character herself is so unlikeable.

Ermes Marana

Ermes is the duplicitous translator whose false translations and counterfeit books create the numerous interrupted readings that make up *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. Despite initially seeming like an opportunist simply out to make money through posing as a translator, it is revealed that he has founded a group called the Organization of Apocryphal Power that produces counterfeit books worldwide. The character's aim is to subvert the idea of any truth or meaning in literature. Everything Marana does is supposed to undermine the joy of reading and create chaos and uncertainty, so he serves as the novel's most obvious antagonist.

Silas Flannery

Silas is an aging author who considers himself to be a sell-out, as he has been using a successful formula for writing best-selling detective books for years and allowing brands to advertise themselves in those books for money. This shameless superficiality only brings him misery, conveying Calvino's message about the importance of artistic integrity.

In his diary, Silas writes about his longing to do something more with his writing; rather than selling thousands of copies, he longs to become a conduit to the forces of the outside world. He later meets a group of young boys who assert that extraterrestrials are using him to channel secret messages, and he realizes that he would never be aware of becoming a conduit even if it actually happened. He could never enjoy his ideal writing situation even if it became reality.

Professor Uzzi-Tuzii

The Professor is an eccentric academic who admits to the lack

of appeal of his department, the fictitious Department of Bothno-Ugaric Languages and Literatures. He surrounds himself with books in his cramped office and seems to have an enthusiasm for literature, but he gets too caught up in pointless small details (for example, the long debate he has with another Professor about an author's nationality).

Mr. Cavedagna

Mr. Cavedagna is an employee at a publishing house who is made to take on the most difficult and tedious work. He must work to clean up the messes made by the translator Ermes Marana. He has a sense of nostalgia for his childhood, when he read books with total innocence in his small village. He wishes to return to that mindset when he retires.

Irnerio

The Reader meets Irnerio in the university hall, while looking for Ludmilla, and is immediately jealous of him for his presumed relationship with Ludmilla. This jealousy is intensified when the Reader finds that Irnerio seems quite at home in Ludmilla's apartment. The primary feature of this character is symbolic. He has trained his brain to stop recognizing groups of letters as words, and instead turns books into artworks, neglecting their original purpose to make new meaning out of them. Like Ermes Marana, Calvino uses this character to challenge assumptions about the sanctity of books.

Dr. Marne, Chief Gorin, Madame Marne

Characters in the story-within-a-story *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. Dr. Marne and Chief Gorin are the two men on whom the people at the cafe take bets. Madame Marne is the former wife of Dr. Marne, who owns a shop in town. The

narrator of the story becomes interested in her and strikes up conversation, causing him to be noticed by Dr. Marne and the other patrons of the cafe.

Gritzvi, Ponko, Brigd, Zwida, Mr. Kauderer, Bronko, Aunt Ugurd

Characters from the story-within-a-story *Outside the town of Malbork*. Gritzvi and Ponko are two boys who are switching homes to learn other trades. Brigd and Zwida are their respective love interests. Mr. Kauderer is the father of Ponko. Bronko and Aunt Ugurd are relatives of Gritzvi. Some of Griztvi's other relatives are also mentioned in the story, but are not referenced by name.

Miss Zwida, Mr. Kauderer

Characters in the story-within-a-story *Leaning from the steep slope*. Miss Zwida is the narrator's love interest, a woman who likes to sketch and seems to be hatching a plan to break a prisoner out of prison. Mr. Kauderer is a mysterious figure who gives the narrator the task of checking on meteorological devices in an observatory.

Valerian, Irina Piperin, Alex Zinnober

Characters in the story-within-a-story *Without fear of wind or vertigo*. Valerian, Irina, and Alex are close friends and lovers. Alex and Valerian are old friends, and Irina is introduced to Valerian through Alex, who helped her during a case of vertigo. All three regularly have sex together. During a particular instance of intercourse, Alex sneaks out of the bed and discovers that Valerian has orders for Alex to be killed for treason.

Jojo, Bernadette, Ruedi the Swiss, Mademoiselle Sibylle, Madame Tatarescu/Vlada

Characters in the story-within-a-story *Looks down in the gathering shadow*. Ruedi the Swiss is the main character, on the run from his past. He has participated in the murder of a man named Jojo, and, with the help of Bernadette, he is attempting to dispose of the body without being found out. Mademoiselle Sibylle and Madame Tatarescu/Vlada are revealed, near the end of the story, to be his estranged daughter and wife.

Marjorie Stubbs

Character in the story-within-a-story *In a network of lines that enlace*. The narrator, Marjorie's professor, saves Marjorie from being killed in a purposeful house fire. Instead of being thankful, Marjorie calls the professor a bastard.

Lorna, Elfrida

Characters in the story-within-a-story *In a network of lines that intersect*. The narrator of the story, who is a paranoid man obsessed with mirrors, has an affair with Lorna behind the back of his wife Elfrida. At the end of the story, Elfrida arranges for her husband to be kidnapped and taken to a mirrored room where Lorna is bound and gagged.

Mr. Okeda, Makiko, Madame Miyagi

Characters in the story-within-a-story *On the carpet of leaves illuminated by the moon*. The narrator is a young man who lives with and works for Mr. Okeda, a prominent intellectual. The narrator becomes sexually involved with Mr. Okeda's daughter, Makiko, and his wife, Madame Miyagi.

Nacho, Don Anastasio Zamora, Anacleta Higueras, Amaranta Higueras, Faustino Higueras, Doña Jazmina Alvarado, Jacinta Alvarado

Characters in the story-within-a-story *Around an empty grave*. Nacho is the son of Don Anastasio Zamora, a man who left the town of Oquedal after killing Faustino Higueras in a duel. Nacho does not know who his mother is, but it seems to be either Anacleta Higueras, sister of Faustino Higueras, or Doña Jazmina Alvarado, an upper-class woman. Nacho romantically pursues Amaranta Higueras and Jacinta Alvarado, the daughters of Anacleta and Jazmina respectively, in an attempt to force one woman to reveal that she is his mother.

Corinna/Gertrude/Ingrid/Alfonsina/Sheila

A woman of many names whom the Reader meets in Ataguitania. She uses so many names because she is a double-agent, pretending to be part of the police force while actually being a revolutionary. The Reader suspects she could actually be Lotaria, but this is never made clear. Once the Reader discovers her many names, she is referred to with different groupings of them such as "Sheila-Ingrid-Corinna" (218) and "Lotaria-Corinna-Sheila" (219).

Arkadian Porphyrich

Director General of the State Police Archives of Ircania. The Reader is sent by Ataguitanian High Command to meet with Arkadian Porphyrich and discuss banned books.

Franziska

The only named character in the story-within-a-story *What story down there awaits its end?* She is the friend and

perhaps romantic interest of the narrator, a man who dislikes most of society and can (or at least imagines he can) make things disappear with his mind.

As a Postmodern novel:

Postmodernism was a Western, mid-20th-century philosophical movement. Postmodernism takes its name from following and reacting to modernism, the main philosophy in the West from the 16th to early 20th century. Modernism stemmed from the Enlightenment and advancement in science and technology. As such, modernism and modernist literature are based upon beliefs in the importance of science, rationality, ethics, and optimism. In contrast, postmodernism, which developed as a prominent philosophy in the aftermath of World War II, is much more cynical. Postmodernist thinkers generally believe that there is no universal truth or deeper meaning to life. Rather than advocate for science and rationality, postmodernists put forth the view that all things are irrational.

Postmodern literature often uses satire, unreliable narrators, metafiction, and fragmented style to challenge the reader's beliefs about life and literature. Authors writing during the era following World War II did not necessarily self-identify as postmodern, but the values of postmodernism and reactivity to modernism can be seen spanning many of the genres that emerged during the post-war period, including Theatre of the Absurd and Magical Realism. Famous authors who have been categorized as postmodern include Samuel Beckett, Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez, Kurt Vonnegut, Michel Foucault, and *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*'s own Italo Calvino.

The fragmented style (jumping back and forth between the frame story and stories-within-a-story), the innovative and

jarring narrative style, the use of metafiction, pastiche (aka the copying or satire of various literary genres with the stories-within-a-story), and the paranoia of the narrators of many of the stories-within-a-story etc. are some of the aspects that mark *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* as a postmodernist novel.

Essay questions:-

1. Consider *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* as a postmodern novel.

2. Comment on the structure and narrative strategy of *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*.

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