

Block

# 5

**COMPARATIVE WORLD LITERATURE-II**

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May, 2018

© Indira Gandhi National Open University, 2018

ISBN-978-

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Printed and published on behalf of the Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi by Prof. Satyakam, Director, School of Humanities.

Cover Design by : ADA Graphic

Laser Typeset by : Tessa Media & Computers, C-206, A.F.E.-II, Okhla, New Delhi

Printed at :

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## **BLOCK INTRODUCTION**

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### **Comparative World Literature II**

Magical Realism is an important presence in contemporary world literature. By examining magical realist texts from different countries and cultures, this Block will show how it is possible to create a complex of comparative connections. Included in these texts are references to Eastern, African, and indigenous American mythological and expressive traditions as well as to European traditions and to works that depart self-consciously from European traditions. While Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is a unique work of fiction that blends folk stories, myths, and riddles steeped in the Yoruba oral tradition, Marquez's "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" is a quintessential magical realist narrative. By merging the realms of the real and the magical, it subverts both, the real world as well as beliefs of the magical. Nikolai Gogol's "The Nose" on the other hand is seen as sheer comedy, but there are magical realist aspects as well. It is also a satire that targets personal pretensions and pomposity.



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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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# UNIT 1 MAGICAL REALISM

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## Structure

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit we will attempt to familiarize you with the term ‘magical realism’. We begin with a history of the origin of the term, to show that it is not a genre that is merely confined to or characterizes Latin American writing. We will then differentiate this term from other kinds of experimental genres with which it is often confused. By the end of this unit you will be able to describe the major features and characteristics of this form of writing and have an overview of the important locations and writers of this genre.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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Magical realism — the term sounds like an oxymoron, doesn’t it? Magic and realism are irreconcilable terms; how can they possibly co-exist? Since the 1980s this term has been fashionable, but has also been disparaged by writers and critics alike. While publishers have been eager to put the term on the blurb of a novel as the best way to market it, especially if the author happens to be Asian or Latin American, authors and critics tend to shy away from the term as being too clichéd.

But there can be no denying the popularity and importance of this term. In 1980 John Barth, the American novelist, insisted that there could be no imaginary writer’s club that did not include Gabriel García Márquez (the most famous magical realist writer). Wendy B. Faris calls this statement by Barth “an homage from North to South, ... an important shift in literary relations, ... signaling a worldwide recognition of magical realism” (Zamora and Faris, 163).

While Márquez has become almost synonymous with magical realism, and perhaps rightly so, this unit will attempt to trace the origins and development of this literary mode, showing how it extends before, after and beyond Márquez.

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## 1.2 MAGICAL REALISM: “THE COMMINGLING OF THE IMPROBABLE AND THE MUNDANE”

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You may have seen the film *Stuart Little*, in which an anthropomorphic mouse named Stuart is adopted by a human family, the Littles, as a brother to their only son George. The incongruity of a mouse being adopted as a member of a human family is narrated matter-of-factly; we are always aware that Stuart is a mouse and yet he is treated as a normal family member and as a brother to their son. The entire film runs on this thread of suspended disbelief as the mouse struggles to adjust to his human family.

This is a good example, to start with, of a kind of narrative in which an improbable (or magical) event occurs in a mundane (or realistic) world and is recounted matter-of-factly. In other words, it is magical realism, or “the commingling of the improbable and the mundane”, as Salman Rushdie calls it in *Midnight’s Children*.

Today the term ‘magical realism’ is invariably associated with Márquez and Rushdie, but it certainly did not begin with them.

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## 1.3 HISTORY AND ORIGINS

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The terms ‘magic realism’ and ‘magical realism’ are often confused and used interchangeably by both critics and lay readers. ‘Magic realism’ has its origins in art and ‘magical realism’ refers specifically to a mode of fiction; as such they have different characteristics and influences.

The consensus among contemporary critics is that the term ‘magic realism’ has its origins in the German term *Magischer Realismus* coined by the German art critic Franz Roh (1890-1965) to refer to a new style of post-expressionist painting that emerged during the Weimar Republic. This painterly style was also called *Neue Sachlichkeit* (the New Objectivity). While Expressionist art was a depiction of the artist’s feelings and emotional reactions to the anxieties of the modern world, post-expressionist art was characterized by accurate detailing, smooth photograph-like clarity of picture, and representation of mystical, non-material aspects of reality. In Roh’s words: “magic realism is the mystery that does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it”(Zamora and Faris 19). The most important aspect of magic realist painting was that the mystery of the concrete object had to be caught realistically through painting.

Art historian Sergiusz Michalski in his study of art in the Weimar Republic states that it was a reflection of German society at that time— ‘torn between the demolition of their old world and uncertainty about the future, a desire for matter-of-factness was the growing focus of the nation’ (cited in Bowers 11).

### Activity 1

The image below depicts a well-known example of Expressionist painting by Edvard Munch, titled *The Scream* (1893).



And this is an example of Neue Sachlichkeit art by Otto Dix titled *The Seven Deadly Sins* (1933).



(Source of images: <http://www.theartstory.org>)

We'd like you to reflect on the differences in style of the two paintings in the light of the differences between expressionist and post-expressionist art outlined in the section above. Jot down your observations.

The influence of magic realist painting spread to France, Italy, Holland and even America. But it was the term 'magic realism' which was more influential than the paintings. The Italian writer Massimo Bontempelli (1878-1960) applied the term 'magic realism' to writings published in a bilingual magazine that he founded in 1926 called *900.Novecento*. He wanted magic realist writing to inspire the Italian nation and to make Italian culture international in outlook. In 1927 Roh's work was translated into Spanish and widely circulated among writers in Latin America such as Jorge Luis Borges.

However, a distinctly Latin American form of magic realism was initiated by Alejo Carpentier (1904-80) a French-Russian Cuban writer. Having immersed himself in European art and literature, he returned to Cuba with a deep desire to express the difference between the European and the Latin American context through art. He used the term 'marvellous realism' to describe 'the unique and extraordinary reality of Latin America', a reality that he saw not in the flora and fauna of Latin America but in its extraordinary racial and cultural mixture, an autonomous American consciousness serving as the basis for a literature faithful to the New World (cited in Bowers, 16). According to him, "Improbable juxtapositions and marvelous mixtures exist by virtue of Latin America's varied history, geography, demography and politics" (Zamora and Faris 79). Carpentier is credited with bringing magic realism to the continent of Latin America and his fiction is cited as an influence on Márquez whose work has come to epitomize Latin American writing.

### Activity 2

Write down what you have understood of the essential difference between 'magic realism' and 'marvellous realism'.

The term 'magical realism' emerged from the 1955 essay 'Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction' by the critic Angel Flores. Naming the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) as the first magical realist writer, Flores traces magical realism to European modernist, specifically Spanish, influences. He saw Latin American magical realism as descended from the 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes and the 20<sup>th</sup> century Czech-Austrian writer Franz Kafka.

Following the publication of Flores' essay, there was renewed interest in Carpentier's form of marvellous realism, and it is a mixture of these two influences that led to the boom in Latin American writing after the Cuban Revolution of 1959. This writing combines elements of both magic realism and marvellous realism, characterized by matter-of-fact depictions of magical events. It is this second wave of writing that is called magical realist writing, made famous by writers like Gabriel García Márquez, Isabel Allende and other Latin America writers. Thus while Márquez,

and earlier Carpentier, have come to represent magical realist writing, this form of writing is certainly not specifically Latin American as we have indicated in the above account of its history. It derives from 20<sup>th</sup> century European art and literature and the German art movement of magic realism. However, it is through the Latin American version that magical realism has become popular worldwide. We see it in India, Canada, Africa, the Caribbean, the United States and England.

At this point we'd like to stop and think about two works – Miguel de Cervantes' Spanish novel *Don Quixote* and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.

*Don Quixote*, as you probably know, is the story of a man who has read too many chivalric stories and sets out on a misguided endeavor to save chivalry. He imagines himself a knight and sets out to combat imagined evils. He sees windmills as giants, inns as castles, peasant women as damsels in distress to be rescued. His series of misadventures make for a rollicking story. But one must keep in mind that it is Quixote who is misguided and 'sees' things that don't exist. The book is usually read as a satire, a comedy, and therefore relies on the reader's awareness that what Quixote sees is not real. Similarly in *Gulliver's Travels*, the strange lands and sights that Gulliver narrates are seen by him alone. He *recounts* these to his listeners. There is no one in the narrative to back up his claims. *Gulliver's Travels* is commonly viewed as a satire on English society and thereby relies on the reader's awareness of the fact that these strange lands are very different from the reality of the reader's world.

### Activity 3

In the light of the discussion about magical realism above, do you think these two texts can be called magical realist? If yes, write down the features of these texts that would place them in this category.

## 1.4 MAGICAL REALISM AND OTHER EXPERIMENTAL GENRES

You are probably familiar with other literary modes such as surrealism, allegory and fantasy.

Do you think these are similar to magical realism? Let us find out.

Magical realism is a highly disputed term not only because of its complicated history but also because it seems to encroach on other genres and terms such as allegory, realism, surrealism, and the fantastic. Therefore in this section we shall try to distinguish it from these other forms.

Let's begin with the terms 'magic' and 'realism'.

### 1.4.1 Magic

In magic realist painting, 'magic' refers to the mystery of life. In magical realist writing, 'magic' refers to extraordinary occurrences, particularly anything spiritual or unaccountable by science, for example, ghosts, disappearances, miracles, extraordinary talents, strange atmosphere. Magical realism is a narrative mode whereby such magical occurrences are depicted in a realistic narrative.

### 1.4.2 Realism

Realism in art was first defined by Aristotle as mimesis— art as an imitation of life. The novel in particular has developed as a realistic form, an attempt to represent

life as Henry James called it. However, 20<sup>th</sup> century theories of realism in literature see it not as mimesis; realism is achieved not by imitation but by creation, through imagination, so that it is the reader who constructs reality out of the text, not the text reflecting the author's depiction of reality. As Catherine Belsey puts it, realism is plausible not because it reflects the world, but because it is constructed out of what is (discursively) familiar (67). It is this interpretation of realism that is relevant to magical realism which relies on the presentation of magical or imagined elements as if they were real. The narrative is constructed in such a way as to provide a realistic context to the magical events.

### 1.4.3 Surrealism

You must have heard of Salvador Dali or seen some of his famous paintings – such as this one below titled “The Persistence of Memory” with its depiction of melting clocks.



This painting is surreal because it attempts to portray an aspect of life that is psychological – memory – but does so through pictorial and therefore physical means. The landscape is familiar and recognizable – for instance one can clearly make out the clocks, yet they are malformed. Typical of surrealism is the depiction of familiar objects that are distorted or placed out of context to express a non-physical aspect of life. This suggests a similarity with magical realism which is the creation of a narrative in which magic is incorporated seamlessly into reality.

What, then, is the difference?

Surrealism, as you can see from Dali's painting, deals with the imagination and the mind, exploring the inner life or psychology of humans through art, whereas the magical in magical realism is rarely presented as a dream or a psychological experience. As Bowers puts it, “...the ordinariness of magical realism's magic relies on its accepted and unquestioned position in tangible and material reality” (12). Think again of the movie *Stuart Little* – a speaking human-like mouse is definitely magical but it is placed within the familiar fabric of family life and is shown to go through the same turmoil that a new entrant to a family might, except that its problems have also to do with being a mouse. But at no point is this incongruity questioned by any member of the family.

In addition, Surrealism is a clearly defined artistic movement with a manifesto written by the French writer and most famous literary surrealist André Breton in 1924, titled *The Surrealist Manifesto* in which he defines Surrealism as a means of reuniting conscious and unconscious realms of experience so completely that the world of dream and fantasy would be joined to the everyday rational world in “an absolute reality, a surreality.” Magical realism is not governed by any such definitional constraints. Its many variants have been discussed and nuanced by many critics but never ultimately defined.

The critic Amaryll Chanady makes an important distinction between the two, i.e., that the irrational in magical realism represents the primitive American mentalities while in Surrealism it corresponds to European superstitions. While magic realism is based on an ordered, even if irrational, perspective, Surrealism brings about artificial combinations. (Chanady 21).

#### 1.4.4 The Fantastic

Magical realism has also often been associated with the fantastic. Neil Cornwell's 1990 study *The Literary Fantastic: From Gothic to Postmodernism* examines Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* as examples of the genre of the fantastic. He assumes that the presence of the baby ghost in *Beloved* and of events such as magic spells in *Midnight's Children* are presented by the narrator as extraordinary events in a realist tale. However, a magical realistic interpretation sees these events as ordinary events presented by the narrator in a realistic narrative.

These differing interpretations highlight the subtlety of the distinction between these two terms. Look at the definition of the fantastic as given by the theorist and critic Tzvetan Todorov: "fantastic literature is a piece of narrative in which there is a constant faltering between belief and non-belief in the supernatural or extraordinary event" (35). The reader hesitates between natural and supernatural explanations for the events. And this, according to Chanady is the prime difference between magical realist and fantastic literature:

In contrast to the fantastic, the supernatural in magical realism does not disconcert the reader, and this is the fundamental difference between the two modes. The same phenomena that are portrayed as problematical by the author of a fantastic narrative are presented in a matter-of-fact manner by the magical realist. (Chanady 24)

#### Activity 4

How would you classify the *Harry Potter* novels —as fantastic, magical realist or surreal literature? Is there a realistic narrative in which magical events are embedded? Or does the narrative hinge entirely on magic? Does the narrative expect you to see the supernatural events as real or as magical?

Let us now consider another contentious work *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka. (You can read it online here: <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/k/kafka/franz/metamorphosis/>).

The story is about a travelling salesman Gregor Samsa who wakes up one morning to find himself transformed (metamorphosed) into a huge bug. The rest of the story is about the shock and disgust of his family, his struggles to cope with this new form, his deterioration, and finally his death. No explanation is given for this transformation.

The fact that Gregor does not seek an explanation for his transformation and that none is provided in the story suggests that this extraordinary event is narrated in a matter-of-fact narrative. However, as Bowers points out, the family is shocked by his condition and Gregor does not consider his condition to be normal. His tragic killing by his own family is proof of the rejection of his extraordinariness. Therefore this cannot be a magical realist narrative, which essentially makes the reader accept the improbable as real and acceptable.

Although Kafka is considered a primary influence on magical realist writers, he is not considered a magical realist writer himself. If anything, his works are often seen as allegoric.

### 1.4.5 Allegory

Allegory is another genre that is often confused with magical realism. An allegorical work is one that has at least two levels of meaning. At one level the narrative makes sense as a plot. At another, the plot has an alternative meaning (philosophically more profound than the plot) or reference to another simultaneous structure of ideas and events. Some well-known allegorical works are John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Young Goodman Brown*. C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* and Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* have sometimes been interpreted as allegories written in the fantastic mode. What do you think?

In allegorical writing the plot is less important than the alternative meaning. This is similar to a fable in which a story is told mainly for its moral, with the autonomy of the content of the narrative simply dismissed. This makes it difficult to incorporate allegory into magical realist writing where the reader is expected to accept the reality of the magical events. Allegory necessarily undermines the claim on realism of the narrative.

How would you distinguish science fiction from magical realism? Well, this is not an easy question to answer, especially if you think of a novel like Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* which straddles both these genres. But a useful way of thinking about this question is to see science fiction as an **imagined** world, an imagined future world based on current scientific knowledge. Its charm is ultimately that of imagining possible worlds or scenarios. Magic realism, on the other hand, posits magical events as real.

These distinctions are not without their problems. Most of Rushdie's novels, while widely acknowledged as magical realist are also seen as allegorical. For instance *Midnight's Children* is considered an allegory of Indian history. But this does not undermine the vivid interweaving of the magical and the real in the narrative. Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* is read as allegorical, magical realist and even as science fiction by some.

Ultimately it is often difficult to place texts in narrowly defined genres.

#### Activity 5

Based on the above discussion, try to define for yourself, magical realism in a nutshell.

## 1.5 FEATURES OF MAGICAL REALISM

Magical realism is fundamentally a narrative mode. The following are the essential features of this mode of narration as recognized and collated by Zamora and Faris in their monumental work *Magical Realism Theory History Community*

- 1) A magical realist text typically contains an element of magic, something that cannot be explained by the laws of the universe as we know them. These magical events really happen, are seen by one or more characters and cannot be explained in terms of cause and effect. Reactions to these events by ordinary people however are familiar and disturbing, thus serving as a critique of human nature.
- 2) Realism in these texts lies in the concrete descriptions of the natural or real world. Realistic detailing creates a fictional world that resembles the one we

live in. The magical events or beings are also invested with intense detailing thus subverting reality.

In many cases there is an idiosyncratic recreation of historical events – often alternative versions of official accounts, in the form of folk lore or mythical stories.

- 3) The weaving together of magical events in a realistic narrative creates the impression that the magic grows out of the real. Wonders are recounted in a matter of fact manner and accepted in the way that a child would, thus achieving a kind of defamiliarization.
- 4) Contradictory understandings of events are presented to the reader. With any magical event one is not sure whether to interpret it as hallucination, magic, or as allegory.
- 5) This is a narrative mode suited to exploring and transgressing boundaries whether political, ontological, geographical or generic. Mind and body, spirit and matter, life and death, real and imaginary, self and other, male and female, fact and fiction, ordinary and magical: these are boundaries that are erased, transgressed, blurred or refashioned.
- 6) The result is the merging or fusion of irreconcilable worlds or realms – the world of the ordinary or the mundane and the world of the magical suggesting a plurality of worlds.
- 7) Magical realist texts typically question received ideas about time, space and identity mainly due to their non-linearity of the narrative, oral story-telling style, reliance on myths, and folktales. Events in the novels also mirror such aspects, for instance people who live beyond the normal life span, or rains that continue for years together.
- 8) Some aspects of the narrative style that magical realism shares with postmodernism include metafictional dimensions, verbal magic, metaphors that are literalized or textualized, intertextuality, repetition and mirroring of events and characters, and a carnivalesque spirit in the extravagance of language, characters, and events.
- 9) Ultimately these texts are concerned with the nature of reality and its representation. They resist and subvert basic assumptions of post-enlightenment rationalism and literary realism.
- 10) Magic in these texts is also a means of resisting monologic political and cultural structures in their erasure of boundaries and therefore very useful to writers in postcolonial cultures and to women. Hallucinatory scenes and events, fantastic /phantasmagoric characters are used to indict political and cultural orders. History is narrated not as chronicle but through clairvoyance. Existing power structures are not privileged and therefore subverted.
- 11) Finally magical realism is Jungian rather than Freudian in its magic – reflecting collective relatedness rather than individual dreams or memories or visions.

#### Activity 6

Examine the above features in either Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* or Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Make a note of as many aspects that you can find in the text.

In the next unit we will be discussing these features in two short stories. You can compare your efforts in this activity with the discussion in that unit.

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## 1.6 LOCATIONS AND IMPORTANT WRITERS

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Magical realism, as we have been saying, is a narrative mode; it is also a way of thinking – about reality. Therefore it cannot really be confined to any one geographical location. However, it is also true that certain countries have become associated with producing magical realist literature.

Much of magical realism has come from postcolonial countries battling against the influence of their former colonial rulers. It is also a common narrative mode for fiction written from the perspective of the marginalized – those on the periphery of political power, indigenous people under a covert colonial system or women. It tells the tales of those on the margins of political power and influential society.

### Latin America

Latin America is an important location for magical realist writing as the Nobel Prize winning Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez has come to epitomize magical realist writing.

Latin America has a postcolonial relationship with Europe, particularly Spain, and until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, occupied a marginalized position with relation to European perception, knowledge and culture. The emergence of an internationally recognized literary tradition in Latin America, known as the 'boom' of the 1960s and 70s, is considered an outcome of the break away from the European tradition, and a desire to find a new means of literary expression through novelistic and narrative experimentation. Thus although there are many national traditions in the Spanish-speaking Americas, it *is* appropriate to talk of a Latin American tradition as well.

The Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier was the first to distinguish between European and Latin American magical realism, and he makes this point in the prologue to his most famous magical realist novel *The Kingdom of this World* (1949). This novel, set in Haiti against the background of a slave rebellion that took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, incorporates many elements of African American culture, particularly voodoo. For Carpentier the racial mixture of cultures is at the heart of the spirit of Latin America, and it is this which makes magical realism an apt mode of cultural expression.

The magical realist writing of Guatemalan writer Miguel Angel Asturias (1899—1974) incorporates Mayan mythology and the history of the colonial oppression of the indigenous people of Guatemala. His *Men of Maize* is a prime example.

The Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges' (1899-1986) writing is acknowledged to be influential on magical realist, and in fact all Latin American writers of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. He is best known for meta-fictional works that challenge notions of what a book and a reader are.

Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez's most famous novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is considered the turning point in the new novel away from an emphasis on experimentation to fiction that is politically and socially motivated, dealing with folklore and the common people, but also incorporating experimental techniques. Marquez's fiction not only celebrates the diversity of Latin America, but also conveys the confusion and violence of Latin American politics. His narrative

style is that of his grandmother's oral storytelling tradition. Reality for him is the myths, beliefs, legends of the common people, their everyday life.

His most famous work *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is set in the fictional rural town of Macondo, one that recurs in many of his novels. There are several sources of magic realism in the novel:

- i) mythic time: people living beyond their usual life span;
- ii) gossip and superstition: for instance the fear that children will be born with pigs' tails as punishment for incest;
- iii) the magic of everyday life: when the people of the town see ice for the first time

In typical magical realist style, seemingly magical events are presented as realistic to the reader by being embedded seamlessly in a realistic narrative. For example, here is a description in the novel of a priest who can levitate after drinking chocolate:

'...he wiped his lips with a handkerchief that he drew from his sleeve extended his arms and closed his eyes. Thereupon Father Nicanor rose six inches above the level of the ground. (Marquez 85)

His fiction also includes historical tragedies such as civil wars, the rule of a dictator, or army brutalities. In such narratives, magical realism as an instrument that destabilizes reality is used to show how truth is manipulated by the powerful.

The Chilean writer Isabel Allende is the first woman Latin American writer to be recognized outside the continent. Her most famous novel *The House of Spirits* is structured as a family saga, following the stories of three generations of women and their peasant or working-class lovers set against the background of police brutality under a dictatorship. The magical realist aspect revolves largely around ghosts; for instance, the clairvoyant Clara who communicates with the dead and returns as a ghost to influence the next generation of women. The main narrative strand is the diaries of Clara narrated by her granddaughter Alba. Alba is a revolutionary intensely involved in the resistance against police brutality, but it is through the diaries and their magical tales that the sense of continuity between generations is maintained.

### **The English-speaking countries**

Magical realist literature in the English language began in Canada, West Africa and the US but now spans many countries notably India, West Africa, South Africa, the Caribbean, Canada, the United States and England. The British-Indian writer Salman Rushdie is perhaps the best known magical realist writer in English. He cites Márquez, the German writer Günter Grass and the Russian novelist Mikhail Bulgakov as his influences.

Since magical realist writing in English appeared later than the forms in Latin America and Europe, it straddles the surrealist tradition of magic realism as it appeared in Europe and the mythic tradition of magical realism as it appeared in Latin America. The distinguishing feature of the magical realist literature from these countries is its political nature, either because these are postcolonial nations or because the writers are located outside dominant power and cultural centres. In countries such as West Africa, India, South Africa and the Caribbean, it is opposition to British colonialism that unites these writers. Magical realism has become, in the hands of these writers, a postcolonial strategy. Writers belonging to oppressed

populations in America, such as Native American, African American and Chicanos, have also adopted this mode as a strategy against the dominant American culture.

Multiple cultural perspectives and the expression of views that oppose the dominant Anglo-American culture is a feature of magical realist literature in the English speaking countries. Michael Ondaatje, Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh – all three are writers with a mixed cosmopolitan background. Ondaatje is of a mixed Srilankan race and emigrated to Canada. His stories are set in Sri Lanka. Rushdie is British-Indian and Ghosh shuttles between India and the US. According to KumKum Sangari, magical realism with its inherent mixture of opposing perspectives is well suited for a cosmopolitan, postcolonial, middle-class emigrant writer like Rushdie or Ghosh.

West African writers such as Ben Okri and Amos Tutuola, while using the western novel form and themes such as colonialism, also incorporate local mythologies, folklore and beliefs into their writing. Let us take the example of Okri's *The Famished Road*. The novel features an *abiku* child—in West African or Yoruba mythology a child attached to the spirit and the living world who dies and is born again only to die and return. The novel narrates the child's struggles with forces from the worlds of the living and the dead. Now, is this a magical realist novel? Can the mythological aspect be considered magical? If the reader belongs to the same community where such magical happenings are seen as real and not magical at all, then she will fail to see the magical realist element of the novel.

In the United States, women with a cross-cultural background use magical realism with a political agenda. Toni Morrison uses African American oral culture and West African mythology in her stories. Her novels *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved*, and *Jazz*, all have magical realist elements such as ghosts, women with supernatural powers and men that can fly. For such writers magical realism serves as a means to reflect the complex and paradoxical cross cultural influences they experience. Maxine Hong Kingston's novels articulate a Chinese American communal memory and Leslie Marmon Silko incorporates Native American and Native Mexican mythology and beliefs into the Anglo American text. The British writer Angela Carter is known for her feminist magical realist texts. Her most famous work *Nights at the Circus* is the story of a girl who sprouts wings and becomes a famous trapeze artist.

In conclusion it is pertinent to note here an important and influential European magical realist writer, Günter Grass. His novel *The Tin Drum* presents a distorted perspective of the Nazi regime in a magical realist form narrated matter-of-factly by a boy. Like Márquez's novel, this one shows how reality is distorted by political violence.

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## 1.7 LET US SUM UP

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Magic realism is a term used to describe art forms, particularly painting, reaching for a new clarity of reality, whereas marvelous realism refers to a concept representing the mixture of differing worldviews and approaches to reality. Magical realism is an important presence in contemporary world literature. In looking at magical realist texts from different countries and cultures, it is possible to create a complex of comparative connections. Included in these texts are references to Eastern, African, and indigenous American mythological and expressive traditions as well as to European traditions and to works that depart self-consciously from European traditions. In their comprehensive survey of the genre Zamora and Faris feel that

the history of this form suggests that it is “less a trend than a tradition, an evolving mode or genre that has had its waxing and waning over the centuries and is now experiencing one more period of ascendancy”(5).

Magical realism is different from other genres although it is difficult to place certain works in water-tight compartments. But the essential defining feature of magical realism is that not only must the narrator propose real and magical happenings in a matter-of-fact manner in a recognizably realistic setting, but the magical things must be accepted as part of material reality, whether seen or unseen. They cannot be the imaginings of one mind for the purpose of exploring the mind, imagining our futures or for making a moral point. (Bowers 37).

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## 1.8 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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- 1) Describe the main features of magical realism.
- 2) Trace the similarities between magical realism and the other genres discussed in this unit.
- 3) Do you think novels/stories that have been written in the magical realism mode are only for children? Discuss with suitable references.
- 4) Do you find features of magical realism in folk tales? Illustrate.
- 5) Choose any book of your choice and pick up the qualities of magical realism that you find there. Explain why you think they are so.

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## 1.9 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READING

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## UNIT 2 GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ, A VERY OLD MAN WITH ENORMOUS WINGS; NIKOLAI GOGOL, THE NOSE

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### Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 “A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings”
  - 2.2.1 The Magical...
  - 2.2.2 And the Real
  - 2.2.3 Blurring Boundaries
  - 2.2.4 Satire
- 2.3 “The Nose”
  - 2.3.1 The Realistic Narrative
  - 2.3.2 The Magical Aspect
  - 2.3.3 The Narrative Voice
  - 2.3.4 Satire
- 2.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.5 Unit End Questions
- 2.6 References and Suggested Reading

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### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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We will be applying the insights on magical realism gained from the previous unit for the analysis of these two short stories. The aim is illustrate the theoretical aspects of magical realism outlined in the previous unit, to provide a sample of the fiction of this genre and to acquaint you with its analysis and interpretation. The application of concepts and ideas to stories will help you to do the same and see for yourself how theories can be utilized in practical ways.

We are also attaching the texts of the story as an annexure with this unit. So do read the stories before you begin your study of this unit. (The paragraphs have been numbered for ease of reference.)

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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We will be discussing two short stories in this unit, “The Nose” by Nikolai Gogol and “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings” by Gabriel García Márquez.



**Gabriel García Márquez** (1927-2014) was born in a small village in Colombia near the Caribbean coast. He was raised by his maternal grandparents, and drew much of his literary inspiration from his grandmother’s storytelling. His grandparents’ home was also the inspiration for the fictional town of Macondo which recurs in many of his stories. After attending college and law school, he had a successful career as

a journalist but continued to pursue his interest in writing fiction. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982.

Márquez's work has come to epitomize magical realism and has been the inspiration for many writers the world over, most prominently Salman Rushdie. Therefore we have chosen one of his short stories as an illustration for this genre. "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" is included in his first published collection of short stories *Leaf Storm* (1955).

(Image courtesy: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabriel\\_Garc%C3%ADa\\_M%C3%A1rquez](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabriel_Garc%C3%ADa_M%C3%A1rquez))



**Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol** (1809 -1852) was a Russian dramatist, novelist and short story writer of Ukrainian descent. After school he went to live in St. Petersburg to pursue his dream of becoming a writer. He travelled extensively in Europe and ultimately settled down in Rome. Considered one of the prominent Russian realist writers, he is also one of the masters of the short story, along with Pushkin, Hoffman, Poe and Hawthorne, and a brilliant satirist who lampooned Russian imperialism. Of all his works, "The Nose" has consistently defied all attempts at interpretation. Viewed variously as grotesque, comic, or satiric

"The Nose" is in fact also considered a precursor to magical realism and can very well be analyzed under this genre, which is why we have included it for your study.

(Image courtesy: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikolai\\_Gogol](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikolai_Gogol))

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## 2.2 "A VERY OLD MAN WITH ENORMOUS WINGS"

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We hope you have read the story and enjoyed it too! The plot revolves around a couple, Pelayo and Elisenda, who find, one rainy day, an old man with wings washed up from the sea into their courtyard. Alarmed at first, they enlist the help of neighbours to deal with this strange, winged man. They all decide that he must be an angel, because of his wings, and so call the local priest. The priest is unable to tell them anything definitive and instead writes to Rome for an answer. Meanwhile, the couple prosper by charging money from the people thronging to see the angel, but since he shows no expected 'angelic' behavior, people soon lose interest in him and after some time the old man flies away.

### 2.2.1 THE MAGICAL ...

Magical events embedded in a realistic, matter-of-fact narrative: this, as we told you in the previous unit, is the defining feature of magical realism. Magic, or something that cannot be explained by normal, universal laws, is the signaling feature of a magical realist text. What, then, is or are the magical events or characters in this story? Obviously, of course, the winged old man. But this is not the only magic in the story. Acting almost as a foil to this magical creature, is the other supernatural being in the story, the woman who had supposedly turned into a spider.

### Activity 1

Locate and examine the descriptions of the two magical creatures in the story—the old man with wings and the woman who had turned into a spider. Jot down the differences in their description. Why do you think they are described differently?

Here are two paragraphs from the story, describing each of these characters – the winged old man and the spider woman. (The paragraph numbers indicated here refer to the ones in the text provided with this unit.)

- a) ... a very old man, lying face down in the mud, who, in spite of his tremendous efforts, couldn't get up, impeded by his enormous wings. (para 1)

He was dressed like a ragpicker. There were only a few faded hairs left on his bald skull and very few teeth in his mouth, and his pitiful condition of a drenched great-grandfather took away any sense of grandeur he might have had. His huge buzzard wings, dirty and half-plucked, were forever entangled in the mud. They looked at him so long and so closely that Pelayo and Elisenda very soon overcame their surprise and in the end found him familiar. (para 2)

- b) She was a frightful tarantula the size of a ram and with the head of a sad maiden. What was most heartrending, however, was not her outlandish shape but the sincere affliction with which she recounted the details of her misfortune. While still practically a child she had sneaked out of her parents' house to go to a dance, and while she was coming back through the woods after having danced all night without permission, a fearful thunderclap rent the sky in two and through the crack came the lightning bolt of brimstone that changed her into a spider. (para 10)

From the description, it is evident that the only thing magical about the old man is his wings. Otherwise the description of him is mundane, sordid and uninspiring. He just seems like a shipwrecked old man from some foreign land. The spider-woman on the hand seems really outlandish, exotic and amazing. The people of the town quickly tire of the old man because he does not respond to them and because there doesn't seem to be anything supernatural about him.

And so the narrator says "A spectacle like that, [the spider woman] full of so much human truth and with such a fearful lesson, was bound to defeat without even trying that of a haughty angel who scarcely deigned to look at mortals." (para 10)

In describing the old man ordinarily and the spider woman extraordinarily, Marquez is perhaps saying something here about magic itself. About what we consider magical. In spite of his wings, the old man is too close to reality to seem magical. It is a narrative sleight-of-hand that this magical being is made to seem real, especially when compared to the spider woman, who is part of a circus and is described much too ludicrously to be considered real. Inserting the spider woman in the narrative therefore aids in making the magic of an old, winged man seem real. This illustrates what we told you in the previous unit — the way in which the narrative is constructed provides a realistic context to the magical events. Let us examine this realistic context in some more detail.

### 2.2.2 AND THE REAL

Other than the winged man and the spider woman do you find anything else magical in the story? Does it seem like a fairytale or a fantasy? These two creatures are

embedded in a narrative of ordinary life— an ordinary couple, their normal daily life, their neighbours, a typical town and its people. The winged man is inserted unobtrusively in this realistic narrative. Look at the way the story begins:

On the third day of rain they had killed so many crabs inside the house that Pelayo had to cross his drenched courtyard and throw them into the sea, because the newborn child had a temperature all night and they thought it was due to the stench. The world had been sad since Tuesday. Sea and sky were a single ash-gray thing and the sands of the beach, which on March nights glimmered like powdered light, had become a stew of mud and rotten shellfish. The light was so weak at noon that when Pelayo was coming back to the house after throwing away the crabs, it was hard for him to see what it was that was moving and groaning in the rear of the courtyard. He had to go very close to see that it was an old man, a very old man, lying face down in the mud, who, in spite of his tremendous efforts, couldn't get up, impeded by his enormous wings. (para 1)

The detailed description of the rain, the sea, the drenched courtyard, the crabs, the couple's sick child ...all of this serves as scaffolding for the magical element—the old man with wings— who is slipped in unobtrusively. An entire paragraph of relentless, minute detailing is built up as if to prepare us for the magical aspect described in just a short phrase at the end “impeded by his enormous wings” so that it seems seamlessly woven into the narrative and becomes part of the landscape described. It seems perfectly natural for a creature like that to be washed up from the sea on a rainy day...just like the crabs.

Furthermore, note the reaction of the people to this strange creature. They seem convinced that he is an angel because of his wings. And people come thronging from afar, either to look at him or in hopes of some miracles. But you cannot really doubt whether such people, who believe in outlandish creatures, can be real; the narrator does not allow it! Although they are convinced that he is an angel, their actual behavior towards him is incongruous, cruel even. They treat him like a circus animal, poking, prodding, teasing and throwing him all kinds of food - behaviour that is disturbingly familiar, all too real!

### Activity 2

Look at this sentence in the first paragraph, which describes the weather:

“The world had been sad since Tuesday.”

We have been saying that the entire paragraph is a realistic description. Write down how you think this sentence fits in.

The world being sad is a familiar enough metaphor for rain. We draw your attention to this sentence, because we'd like you to look at how the setting - the fictional world of the story - while realistic, also simultaneously prefigures the magical aspects. As we have just pointed out, the magical aspect, the winged old man, is inserted into a narrative so realistic that it seems to grow out of it. But take a closer look, especially at the descriptions of the setting and you will see how the stage is set for the magical—the “Sea and sky were a single ash-gray thing”... the sand “glimmered” and the light was so poor that Pelayo could hardly make out what was moving in his courtyard (the old man). The setting seems at once realistic and magical.

### 2.2.3 Blurring Boundaries

In fact the magical and the real are woven seamlessly into the narrative.

Apart from the winged old man, built into the narrative are constant references to beliefs about magic: like the neighbour who thinks angels are “a celestial conspiracy”, or the belief among the others that angels eat mothballs; or the physically deformed rubbing the old man’s feathers on themselves in hope of a cure. And there is mention of a whole host of other strange people who come to see the winged old man:

The most unfortunate invalids on earth came in search of health: a poor woman who since childhood has been counting her heartbeats and had run out of numbers; a Portuguese man who couldn’t sleep because the noise of the stars disturbed him; a sleepwalker who got up at night to undo the things he had done while awake; and many others with less serious ailments.” (para 7)

What do you make of these invalids described in the above paragraph? Do their ailments seem real?

By contrast look at the description of the old man. We are told he has wings. Everyone who comes to see him can clearly see his wings. So he must be a magical creature. But look at the way he is actually described, unglamorous and hardly supernatural:

He was dressed like a ragpicker. There were only a few faded hairs left on his bald skull and very few teeth in his mouth, and his pitiful condition of a drenched great-grandfather took away any sense of grandeur he might have had. His huge buzzard wings, dirty and half-plucked, were forever entangled in the mud.(para 2)

When compared to the unfortunate invalids above, he seems normal! What this achieves is a blurring of the real and the magical... a supernatural creature is described realistically and ordinary people seem strange by contrast. This blurring of boundaries between the real and the magical makes us uncertain about how to view events. The change in the lives of Pelayo and his wife—whether it is their child getting better or the change in their financial position—how is one to view them? As natural events or as caused by the angel?

What the narrative seems to suggest is that the old man is angelic not so much because of his wings, which seem quite ordinary, but because of his patience. As the narrator puts it, “His only supernatural virtue seemed to be patience. (para 8). In the face of the cruel sporting by the spectators, even when branded with a hot iron, he does not react. This angelic virtue of patience goes virtually unnoticed. Whereas all kinds of other “miracles” are attributed to him:

...the few miracles attributed to the angel showed a certain mental disorder, like the blind man who didn’t recover his sight but grew three new teeth, or the paralytic who didn’t get to walk but almost won the lottery, and the leper whose sores sprouted sunflowers. Those consolation miracles, which were more like mocking fun, had already ruined the angel’s reputation when the woman who had been changed into a spider finally crushed him completely. (para 10)

### Activity 3

Do you think Marquez is making an ironic statement about what people view as magical? While people who come to see the old man are convinced that he is an angel, their actual behavior towards him is incongruous. Ultimately, what do you think this story achieves by blurring the boundary between the real and the magical?

#### 2.2.4 Satire

Built into the narrative is a critique of the church, of religion, and its importance. As illustration, look at the following extract:

Alien to the impertinences of the world, he only lifted his antiquarian eyes and murmured something in his dialect when Father Gonzaga went into the chicken coop and said good morning to him in Latin. The parish priest had his first suspicion of an imposter when he saw that he did not understand the language of God or know how to greet His ministers. Then he noticed that seen close up he was much too human: he had an unbearable smell of the outdoors, the back side of his wings was strewn with parasites and his main feathers had been mistreated by terrestrial winds, and nothing about him measured up to the proud dignity of angels. (para 5)

### Activity 4

Read the following extract from the story. What does it tell you about the church and Father Gonzaga? What is the tone of the narrator here? Write down your impressions after reading the paragraph.

Father Gonzaga held back the crowd's frivolity with formulas of maidservant inspiration while awaiting the arrival of a final judgment on the nature of the captive. But the mail from Rome showed no sense of urgency. They spent their time finding out if the prisoner had a navel, if his dialect had any connection with Aramaic, how many times he could fit on the head of a pin, or whether he wasn't just a Norwegian with wings.

While Father Gonzaga warns against viewing the old man as an angel merely because of the wings, he is at the same time unable to give them a definite answer and instead needs to consult the entire hierarchy of clerics above him in the Church, for a verdict: bishop, primate, the Supreme Pontiff and the highest courts. And when you see the methods used by the Church to determine whether the old man was indeed an angel, it seems pretty evident that that hallowed institution seems no better than the ordinary folk when it comes to irrational beliefs!

Just as popular beliefs and stories about the magical are humorously contrasted with the strange yet realistic old man, the Church and its practices also come in for ridicule. The credulousness of ordinary people on the one hand, who are easily taken in by outlandish objects like the spider woman but fail to see anything remarkable in the winged man, and the pompousness and folly of the church, on the other hand – both are the targets of satire in Marquez's narrative.

One of the earliest magical realist stories by Marquez, this short story is also in many ways a defining one— playing up and problematizing the contrast between the real and the magical/ or human belief in the magical. There are of course several

other aspects that can be studied in the story. You can come up with your own interpretations as well.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*; Nikolai Gogol, *The Nose*

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## 2.3 “THE NOSE”

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Nikolai Gogol’s “The Nose” is a story that has always evoked mirth. It has also defied any attempts at fathoming a deeper meaning, coming across instead as sheer play or nonsense, comic art drawn out of nothing, like Lewis Carroll’s stories.

Set in St. Petersburg in imperial Russia, it tells the story of a St. Petersburg bureaucrat, Kovaloff, who wakes up one morning to find that his nose has disappeared. He later finds it going about town in a carriage dressed in the uniform of a state councilor, and refusing to even recognize him as its owner! He tries to lodge a police complaint and insert an advertisement about his missing nose but both parties refuse to oblige. His nose is soon found and brought back to him by a policeman, but he is unable to put it back; the doctor he calls for the purpose says it would be impossible. Finally one morning the nose is miraculously back on his face. No explanation is given as to why or how the nose had disappeared and then reappeared, or how it managed to walk around in uniform. However, this ludicrous event is lodged in a narrative that is realistic enough to make the event seem probable.

The story is usually interpreted as a satire on social climbers. Kovaloff is a typical specimen of imperial Russian officials, with an exaggerated sense of his own importance; he comes to St. Petersburg hoping to get a higher position and to marry a woman who would bring him a large dowry. So losing his nose is a catastrophe that amounts to loss of face for him, resulting in anxiety that he would not get the wife and position he desired. The nose becomes a gauge of self-esteem. Here is an extract from the story illustrating the narrator’s satirical description of Kovaloff:

We must remember that Kovaloff was a very sensitive man. He did not mind anything said against him as an individual, but he could not endure any reflection on his rank or social position. He even believed that in comedies one might allow attacks on junior officers, but never on their seniors.

The story has also been interpreted in terms of the castration complex (a term in psychoanalysis/Freudian theory that refers to the anxiety in males of loss of sexuality), the loss of the nose symbolizing fear of the loss of sexuality. “The Nose” is also remarkable for its ingeniously devised narration, primarily seen in its unreliable narrator. The narrative trails off at points; for instance at the end of the first section, the narrator says “But here the strange episode vanishes in mist, and what further happened is not known.” Even while giving sufficient details to make the story seem realistic, he deliberately undercuts its realism with narratorial comments that point out the improbability of the story.

As we said at the beginning of this unit, “The Nose” is also seen as a precursor to magical realism. This is essentially because a magical event — a man losing his nose and then getting it back— is inserted into an otherwise realistic narrative, a narrative that also provides contradictory understandings of the event.

In the sections that follow we will walk you through activities to identify the magical realist aspects in this story. Since we have already discussed another story in the first part of this unit, we are sure you will find this quite easy and enjoyable.

### 2.3.1 The Realistic Narrative

Although the idea that a man's nose could just disappear from his face one day seems ludicrous, Gogol inserts this idea in a narrative which is peppered with enough realistic detailing to suggest the probability of the event. For example, we are told the date when the nose disappeared, as well as the date it reappears on Kovaloff's face:

On the 25th March, 18—, a very strange occurrence took place in St Petersburg. (the disappearance).

This occurred on 7th April. On awaking, the Major looked by chance into a mirror and perceived a nose. He quickly put his hand to it; it was there beyond a doubt! (the reappearance).

Added to this, several characters also see Kovaloff without his nose...the official at the advertising house, the police superintendent, the doctor. So there is confirmation within the story of this event, making it seem an actual event witnessed by others.

### 2.3.2 The Magical Aspect

Read the following description of Kovaloff's nose going about town. Does the narration seem realistic or magical?

A carriage drew up at the entrance; the carriage door was opened, and a gentleman in uniform came out and hurried up the steps. How great was Kovaloff's terror and astonishment when he saw that it was his own nose! At this extraordinary sight, everything seemed to turn round with him. He felt as though he could hardly keep upright on his legs; but, though trembling all over as though with fever, he resolved to wait till the nose should return to the carriage. After about two minutes the nose actually came out again. It wore a gold-embroidered uniform with a stiff, high collar, trousers of chamois leather, and a sword hung at its side. The hat, adorned with a plume, showed that it held the rank of a state-councillor. It was obvious that it was paying "duty-calls." It looked round on both sides, called to the coachman "Drive on," and got into the carriage, which drove away.

Notice the detailed description of the uniform, the hat, the carriage and the order given to the coachman. It seems like the description of an official on "duty-calls". That the description is that of a nose is almost obscured in this mass of matter-of-fact detailing, a typical magical realist feature.

The narrative follows Kovaloff through the day as he rushes from the police to an advertising office to try and find his nose. His travails and anguish seem genuine and real. The only unrealistic detail in this narrative is the nose itself, which by being embedded in the narrative seems believable. In fact, if anything, it is the narrator's voice that undercuts this realism. We find the narrator intervening at several points in the story, to undercut the narrative and disrupt its realistic tone.

For example, read the following paragraph, after the nose has been returned to Kovaloff, but has not yet appeared on his nose.

Meanwhile the rumour of this extraordinary event had spread all over the city, and, as is generally the case, not without numerous additions. At that period there was a general disposition to believe in the miraculous; the public had recently been impressed by experiments in magnetism. The story of the

floating chairs in Koniouchennaia Street was still quite recent, and there was nothing astonishing in hearing soon afterwards that Major Kovaloff's nose was to be seen walking every day at three o'clock on the Neffsky Avenue.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*; Nikolai Gogol, *The Nose*

What follows is a narration of several rumours about the nose that floated about, which then puts in doubt veracity of the story itself, suggesting that it might just be a rumour after all!

#### Activity 5

Kovaloff's nose that disappears from his face and acquires a life of its own is of course the unnatural or magical aspect in this story. How is this inserted into the narrative and what is your reaction when you read about it?

### 2.3.3 The Narrative Voice

One of the remarkable features of this story is its unreliable narrator, although the narration is in the third person. An unreliable narrator (a term introduced by Wayne C. Booth) is commonly seen in first person narrations, where one of the characters is the narrator, but whose credibility is compromised in some way so that as readers we do not accept their version of events. Commonly unreliable narrators are either clowns (as in *Tristram Shandy*), picaros (as in *Moll Flanders*), seemingly mentally disturbed (as in Kafka's stories), naïve (as in *Huckleberry Finn*) or people who deliberately misrepresent events.

#### Activity 6

In this story, the third-person author/narrator intervenes at several points in the story drawing our attention to his story-telling. Identify such instances of the authorial voice in this story and say how it affects your perception of the story.

Although in third person narrations the authorial narrative voice is an omniscient presence, there are instances where the narrator addresses the reader *directly*, where the narrative voice is made explicit. You find such instances at the end of Section I,

Ivan Jakovlevitch grew pale. But here the strange episode vanishes in mist, and what further happened is not known.

And again in the last three paragraphs of Section II ending with the line "But here the course of events is again obscured by a veil."

And once more in all the four paragraphs of Section IV at the end of the story.

In all these the narrator directly comments on the veracity of the story he is narrating. While the story itself is embedded in a realistic narrative, these comments by the author seem like attempts to undercut or subvert this realism! And again, this is a common postmodernist metafictional device whereby the author deliberately, self-consciously and systematically draws attention to the work's status as an artifact. Here it is as if Gogol is distancing himself from his narration by suggesting that he is narrating something he has 'heard'.

#### Activity 7

In adopting this authorial voice, Gogol further complicates the magical realist atmosphere in the novel. Do you think this narrative stance undercuts the magic or the realism in the story? Or, does it problematize the very nature of both of these?

### 2.3.4 Satire

Like the earlier story in this unit, satire is easily discernible in this story. Gogol satirizes pretentiousness, vanity and artless social climbing through the story of Kovaloff and his nose.

Along with Kovaloff the characters in the story, the barber, the doctor, the advertising official, the police commissary, give us an interesting if comic-serious perspective on Russian society of the time. They seem to function as caricatures. But the protagonist of the story, the nose, is a caricature of a different level altogether! A caricature as you know is an exaggeration of a trait in order to expose its foolishness, commonly used in satires. In this story not only does Kovaloff's nose get a life of its own, it becomes superior to him, a state-councillor, whereas Kovaloff is only a municipal committee member. Kovaloff's vanity is, in a sense, symbolized in the nose.

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## 2.4 LET US SUM UP

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In both of the stories discussed in this unit you would have noticed how aspects of society, social institutions, and human behavior are parodied and ridiculed. And this is achieved through a blurring of the real and the magical allowing us to question accepted notions. Of course Marquez's story is a quintessential magical realist narrative, and is recognized as such, illustrating its essential features. By merging the realms of the real and the magical, it subverts both, the real world as well as beliefs of the magical.

Gogol's story on the other hand is seen as sheer comedy, but there are magical realist aspects as well. It is also a satire that targets personal pretensions and pomposity.

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## 2.5 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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- 1) The magical in a magical realist text is not just declared as magical by the narrator/author but is also seen as such by different characters. In this regard, show how the old man is viewed and described by different characters in this story. How do they help build the magical/realist aspects of the old man?
- 2) Comment on the ending of the story. Does it resolve the 'mystery' of the old man with wings? Explain.
- 3) How does Marquez problematize the idea of the magical in this story? Explain with adequate illustrations.
- 4) Identify the main characters in 'The Nose' and examine their portrayal. Do they seem like caricatures or well-developed characters? Explain.
- 5) Do you think the nose in this story has a symbolic value?
- 6) The narration proceeds through a series of conversations that Kovaloff has with other characters regarding his nose. Examine at least two of these conversations to show the effect these conversations have on (i) the way we perceive Kovaloff and (ii) the realistic element of the story.
- 7) What do you make of Father Gonzaga's reasons for deciding that the old man is not an angel – not knowing Latin and not greeting God's Minister (Father Gonzaga)? Do these seem like valid reasons for not considering him an angel?

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## 2.6 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READING

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**A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings**  
**by Gabriel Garcia Marquez**  
**Translated by Gregory Rabassa**

- 1) On the third day of rain they had killed so many crabs inside the house that Pelayo had to cross his drenched courtyard and throw them into the sea, because the newborn child had a temperature all night and they thought it was due to the stench. The world had been sad since Tuesday. Sea and sky were a single ash-gray thing and the sands of the beach, which on March nights glimmered like powdered light, had become a stew of mud and rotten shellfish. The light was so weak at noon that when Pelayo was coming back to the house after throwing away the crabs, it was hard for him to see what it was that was moving and groaning in the rear of the courtyard. He had to go very close to see that it was an old man, a very old man, lying face down in the mud, who, in spite of his tremendous efforts, couldn't get up, impeded by his enormous wings.
- 2) Frightened by that nightmare, Pelayo ran to get Elisenda, his wife, who was putting compresses on the sick child, and he took her to the rear of the courtyard. They both looked at the fallen body with a mute stupor. He was dressed like a ragpicker. There were only a few faded hairs left on his bald skull and very few teeth in his mouth, and his pitiful condition of a drenched great-grandfather took away any sense of grandeur he might have had. His huge buzzard wings, dirty and half-plucked, were forever entangled in the mud. They looked at him so long and so closely that Pelayo and Elisenda very soon overcame their surprise and in the end found him familiar. Then they dared speak to him, and he answered in an incomprehensible dialect with a strong sailor's voice. That was how they skipped over the inconvenience of the wings and quite intelligently concluded that he was a lonely castaway from some foreign ship wrecked by the storm. And yet, they called in a neighbor woman who knew everything about life and death to see him, and all she needed was one look to show them their mistake.
- 3) "He's an angel," she told them. "He must have been coming for the child, but the poor fellow is so old that the rain knocked him down."
- 4) On the following day everyone knew that a flesh-and-blood angel was held captive in Pelayo's house. Against the judgment of the wise neighbor woman, for whom angels in those times were the fugitive survivors of a celestial conspiracy, they did not have the heart to club him to death. Pelayo watched over him all afternoon from the kitchen, armed with his bailiff's club, and before going to bed he dragged him out of the mud and locked him up with the hens in the wire chicken coop. In the middle of the night, when the rain stopped, Pelayo and Elisenda were still killing crabs. A short time afterward the child woke up without a fever and with a desire to eat. Then they felt magnanimous and decided to put the angel on a raft with fresh water and provisions for three days and leave him to his fate on the high seas. But when they went out into the courtyard with the first light of dawn, they found the whole neighborhood in front of the chicken coop having fun with the angel, without the slightest reverence, tossing him things to eat through the openings in the wire as if he weren't a supernatural creature but a circus animal.

- 5) Father Gonzaga arrived before seven o'clock, alarmed at the strange news. By that time onlookers less frivolous than those at dawn had already arrived and they were making all kinds of conjectures concerning the captive's future. The simplest among them thought that he should be named mayor of the world. Others of sterner mind felt that he should be promoted to the rank of five-star general in order to win all wars. Some visionaries hoped that he could be put to stud in order to implant the earth a race of winged wise men who could take charge of the universe. But Father Gonzaga, before becoming a priest, had been a robust woodcutter. Standing by the wire, he reviewed his catechism in an instant and asked them to open the door so that he could take a close look at that pitiful man who looked more like a huge decrepit hen among the fascinated chickens. He was lying in the corner drying his open wings in the sunlight among the fruit peels and breakfast leftovers that the early risers had thrown him. Alien to the impertinences of the world, he only lifted his antiquarian eyes and murmured something in his dialect when Father Gonzaga went into the chicken coop and said good morning to him in Latin. The parish priest had his first suspicion of an imposter when he saw that he did not understand the language of God or know how to greet His ministers. Then he noticed that seen close up he was much too human: he had an unbearable smell of the outdoors, the back side of his wings was strewn with parasites and his main feathers had been mistreated by terrestrial winds, and nothing about him measured up to the proud dignity of angels. Then he came out of the chicken coop and in a brief sermon warned the curious against the risks of being ingenuous. He reminded them that the devil had the bad habit of making use of carnival tricks in order to confuse the unwary. He argued that if wings were not the essential element in determining the difference between a hawk and an airplane, they were even less so in the recognition of angels. Nevertheless, he promised to write a letter to his bishop so that the latter would write his primate so that the latter would write to the Supreme Pontiff in order to get the final verdict from the highest courts.
- 6) His prudence fell on sterile hearts. The news of the captive angel spread with such rapidity that after a few hours the courtyard had the bustle of a marketplace and they had to call in troops with fixed bayonets to disperse the mob that was about to knock the house down. Elisenda, her spine all twisted from sweeping up so much marketplace trash, then got the idea of fencing in the yard and charging five cents admission to see the angel.
- 7) The curious came from far away. A traveling carnival arrived with a flying acrobat who buzzed over the crowd several times, but no one paid any attention to him because his wings were not those of an angel but, rather, those of a sidereal bat. The most unfortunate invalids on earth came in search of health: a poor woman who since childhood has been counting her heartbeats and had run out of numbers; a Portuguese man who couldn't sleep because the noise of the stars disturbed him; a sleepwalker who got up at night to undo the things he had done while awake; and many others with less serious ailments. In the midst of that shipwreck disorder that made the earth tremble, Pelayo and Elisenda were happy with fatigue, for in less than a week they had crammed their rooms with money and the line of pilgrims waiting their turn to enter still reached beyond the horizon.
- 8) The angel was the only one who took no part in his own act. He spent his time trying to get comfortable in his borrowed nest, befuddled by the hellish heat

of the oil lamps and sacramental candles that had been placed along the wire. At first they tried to make him eat some mothballs, which, according to the wisdom of the wise neighbor woman, were the food prescribed for angels. But he turned them down, just as he turned down the papal lunches that the penitents brought him, and they never found out whether it was because he was an angel or because he was an old man that in the end ate nothing but eggplant mush. His only supernatural virtue seemed to be patience. Especially during the first days, when the hens pecked at him, searching for the stellar parasites that proliferated in his wings, and the cripples pulled out feathers to touch their defective parts with, and even the most merciful threw stones at him, trying to get him to rise so they could see him standing. The only time they succeeded in arousing him was when they burned his side with an iron for branding steers, for he had been motionless for so many hours that they thought he was dead. He awoke with a start, ranting in his hermetic language and with tears in his eyes, and he flapped his wings a couple of times, which brought on a whirlwind of chicken dung and lunar dust and a gale of panic that did not seem to be of this world. Although many thought that his reaction had not been one of rage but of pain, from then on they were careful not to annoy him, because the majority understood that his passivity was not that of a hero taking his ease but that of a cataclysm in repose.

- 9) Father Gonzaga held back the crowd's frivolity with formulas of maidservant inspiration while awaiting the arrival of a final judgment on the nature of the captive. But the mail from Rome showed no sense of urgency. They spent their time finding out if the prisoner had a navel, if his dialect had any connection with Aramaic, how many times he could fit on the head of a pin, or whether he wasn't just a Norwegian with wings. Those meager letters might have come and gone until the end of time if a providential event had not put an end to the priest's tribulations.
- 10) It so happened that during those days, among so many other carnival attractions, there arrived in the town the traveling show of the woman who had been changed into a spider for having disobeyed her parents. The admission to see her was not only less than the admission to see the angel, but people were permitted to ask her all manner of questions about her absurd state and to examine her up and down so that no one would ever doubt the truth of her horror. She was a frightful tarantula the size of a ram and with the head of a sad maiden. What was most heartrending, however, was not her outlandish shape but the sincere affliction with which she recounted the details of her misfortune. While still practically a child she had sneaked out of her parents' house to go to a dance, and while she was coming back through the woods after having danced all night without permission, a fearful thunderclap rent the sky in two and through the crack came the lightning bolt of brimstone that changed her into a spider. Her only nourishment came from the meatballs that charitable souls chose to toss into her mouth. A spectacle like that, full of so much human truth and with such a fearful lesson, was bound to defeat without even trying that of a haughty angel who scarcely deigned to look at mortals. Besides, the few miracles attributed to the angel showed a certain mental disorder, like the blind man who didn't recover his sight but grew three new teeth, or the paralytic who didn't get to walk but almost won the lottery, and the leper whose sores sprouted sunflowers. Those consolation miracles, which were more like mocking fun, had already ruined the angel's reputation when the woman who had been changed into a spider finally crushed him completely. That was how Father Gonzaga was cured forever of his insomnia and Pelayo's

courtyard went back to being as empty as during the time it had rained for three days and crabs walked through the bedrooms.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*; Nikolai Gogol, *The Nose*

- 11) The owners of the house had no reason to lament. With the money they saved they built a two-story mansion with balconies and gardens and high netting so that crabs wouldn't get in during the winter, and with iron bars on the windows so that angels wouldn't get in. Pelayo also set up a rabbit warren close to town and gave up his job as a bailiff for good, and Elisenda bought some satin pumps with high heels and many dresses of iridescent silk, the kind worn on Sunday by the most desirable women in those times. The chicken coop was the only thing that didn't receive any attention. If they washed it down with creolin and burned tears of myrrh inside it every so often, it was not in homage to the angel but to drive away the dungheap stench that still hung everywhere like a ghost and was turning the new house into an old one. At first, when the child learned to walk, they were careful that he not get too close to the chicken coop. But then they began to lose their fears and got used to the smell, and before they child got his second teeth he'd gone inside the chicken coop to play, where the wires were falling apart. The angel was no less standoffish with him than with the other mortals, but he tolerated the most ingenious infamies with the patience of a dog who had no illusions. They both came down with the chicken pox at the same time. The doctor who took care of the child couldn't resist the temptation to listen to the angel's heart, and he found so much whistling in the heart and so many sounds in his kidneys that it seemed impossible for him to be alive. What surprised him most, however, was the logic of his wings. They seemed so natural on that completely human organism that he couldn't understand why other men didn't have them too.
- 12) When the child began school it had been some time since the sun and rain had caused the collapse of the chicken coop. The angel went dragging himself about here and there like a stray dying man. They would drive him out of the bedroom with a broom and a moment later find him in the kitchen. He seemed to be in so many places at the same time that they grew to think that he'd be duplicated, that he was reproducing himself all through the house, and the exasperated and unhinged Elisenda shouted that it was awful living in that hell full of angels. He could scarcely eat and his antiquarian eyes had also become so foggy that he went about bumping into posts. All he had left were the bare cannulae of his last feathers. Pelayo threw a blanket over him and extended him the charity of letting him sleep in the shed, and only then did they notice that he had a temperature at night, and was delirious with the tongue twisters of an old Norwegian. That was one of the few times they became alarmed, for they thought he was going to die and not even the wise neighbor woman had been able to tell them what to do with dead angels.
- 13) And yet he not only survived his worst winter, but seemed improved with the first sunny days. He remained motionless for several days in the farthest corner of the courtyard, where no one would see him, and at the beginning of December some large, stiff feathers began to grow on his wings, the feathers of a scarecrow, which looked more like another misfortune of decrepitude. But he must have known the reason for those changes, for he was quite careful that no one should notice them, that no one should hear the sea chanteys that he sometimes sang under the stars. One morning Elisenda was cutting some bunches of onions for lunch when a wind that seemed to come from the high seas blew into the kitchen. Then she went to the window and caught the angel in his first attempts at flight. They were so clumsy that his fingernails opened a furrow in the

vegetable patch and he was on the point of knocking the shed down with the ungainly flapping that slipped on the light and couldn't get a grip on the air. But he did manage to gain altitude. Elisenda let out a sigh of relief, for herself and for him, when she watched him pass over the last houses, holding himself up in some way with the risky flapping of a senile vulture. She kept watching him even when she was through cutting the onions and she kept on watching until it was no longer possible for her to see him, because then he was no longer an annoyance in her life but an imaginary dot on the horizon of the sea.

(Source: <http://www.ndsu.edu/pubweb/~cinichol/CreativeWriting/323/ Marquez ManwithWings.htm>)



**THE NOSE**  
—Nikolai Gogol

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, A  
Very Old Man with  
Enormous Wings; Nikolai  
Gogol, The Nose

I

1) On the 25th March, 18—, a very strange occurrence took place in St Petersburg. On the Ascension Avenue there lived a barber of the name of Ivan Jakovlevitch. He had lost his family name, and on his sign-board, on which was depicted the head of a gentleman with one cheek soaped, the only inscription to be read was, “Blood-letting done here.”

2) On this particular morning he awoke pretty early. Becoming aware of the smell of fresh-baked bread, he sat up a little in bed, and saw his wife, who had a special partiality for coffee, in the act of taking some fresh-baked bread out of the oven.

3) “To-day, PrasskovnaOssipovna,” he said, “I do not want any coffee; I should like a fresh loaf with onions.”

“The blockhead may eat bread only as far as I am concerned,” said his wife to herself; “then I shall have a chance of getting some coffee.” And she threw a loaf on the table.

4) For the sake of propriety, Ivan Jakovlevitch drew a coat over his shirt, sat down at the table, shook out some salt for himself, prepared two onions, assumed a serious expression, and began to cut the bread. After he had cut the loaf in two halves, he looked, and to his great astonishment saw something whitish sticking in it. He carefully poked round it with his knife, and felt it with his finger.

5) “Quite firmly fixed!” he murmured in his beard. “What can it be?” He put in his finger, and drew out—a nose!

6) Ivan Jakovlevitch at first let his hands fall from sheer astonishment; then he rubbed his eyes and began to feel it. A nose, an actual nose; and, moreover, it seemed to be the nose of an acquaintance! Alarm and terror were depicted in Ivan’s face; but these feelings were slight in comparison with the disgust which took possession of his wife.

7) “Whose nose have you cut off, you monster?” she screamed, her face red with anger. “You scoundrel! You tippler! I myself will report you to the police! Such a rascal! Many customers have told me that while you were shaving them, you held them so tight by the nose that they could hardly sit still.”

8) But Ivan Jakovlevitch was more dead than alive; he saw at once that this nose could belong to no other than to Kovaloff, a member of the Municipal Committee whom he shaved every Sunday and Wednesday.

9) “Stop, PrasskovnaOssipovna! I will wrap it in a piece of cloth and place it in the corner. There it may remain for the present; later on I will take it away.”

“No, not there! Shall I endure an amputated nose in my room? You understand nothing except how to strop a razor. You know nothing of the duties and obligations of a respectable man. You vagabond! You good-for-nothing! Am I to undertake all responsibility for you at the police-office? Ah, you soap-smearer! You blockhead! Take it away where you like, but don’t let it stay under my eyes!”

- 10) Ivan Jakovlevitch stood there flabbergasted. He thought and thought, and knew not what he thought.  
“The devil knows how that happened!” he said at last, scratching his head behind his ear. “Whether I came home drunk last night or not, I really don’t know; but in all probability this is a quite extraordinary occurrence, for a loaf is something baked and a nose is something different. I don’t understand the matter at all.” And Ivan Jakovlevitch was silent. The thought that the police might find him in unlawful possession of a nose and arrest him, robbed him of all presence of mind. Already he began to have visions of a red collar with silver braid and of a sword—and he trembled all over.
- 11) At last he finished dressing himself, and to the accompaniment of the emphatic exhortations of his spouse, he wrapped up the nose in a cloth and issued into the street.
- 12) He intended to lose it somewhere—either at somebody’s door, or in a public square, or in a narrow alley; but just then, in order to complete his bad luck, he was met by an acquaintance, who showered inquiries upon him. “Hullo, Ivan Jakovlevitch! Whom are you going to shave so early in the morning?” etc., so that he could find no suitable opportunity to do what he wanted. Later on he did let the nose drop, but a sentry bore down upon him with his halberd, and said, “Look out! You have let something drop!” and Ivan Jakovlevitch was obliged to pick it up and put it in his pocket.
- 13) A feeling of despair began to take possession of him; all the more as the streets became more thronged and the merchants began to open their shops. At last he resolved to go to the Isaac Bridge, where perhaps he might succeed in throwing it into the Neva.
- 14) But my conscience is a little uneasy that I have not yet given any detailed information about Ivan Jakovlevitch, an estimable man in many ways. Like every honest Russian tradesman, Ivan Jakovlevitch was a terrible drunkard, and although he shaved other people’s faces every day, his own was always unshaved. His coat (he never wore an overcoat) was quite mottled, i.e. it had been black, but become brownish-yellow; the collar was quite shiny, and instead of the three buttons, only the threads by which they had been fastened were to be seen.
- 15) Ivan Jakovlevitch was a great cynic, and when Kovaloff, the member of the Municipal Committee, said to him, as was his custom while being shaved, “Your hands always smell, Ivan Jakovlevitch!” the latter answered, “What do they smell of?” “I don’t know, my friend, but they smell very strong.” Ivan Jakovlevitch after taking a pinch of snuff would then, by way of reprisals, set to work to soap him on the cheek, the upper lip, behind the ears, on the chin, and everywhere.
- 16) This worthy man now stood on the Isaac Bridge. At first he looked round him, then he leant on the railings of the bridge, as though he wished to look down and see how many fish were swimming past, and secretly threw the nose, wrapped in a little piece of cloth, into the water. He felt as though a ton weight had been lifted off him, and laughed cheerfully. Instead, however, of going to shave any officials, he turned his steps to a building, the sign-board of which bore the legend “Teas served here,” in order to have a glass of punch, when suddenly he perceived at the other end of the bridge a police inspector of

imposing exterior, with long whiskers, three-cornered hat, and sword hanging at his side. He nearly fainted; but the police inspector beckoned to him with his hand and said, "Come here, my dear sir."

- 17) Ivan Jakovlevitch, knowing how a gentleman should behave, took his hat off quickly, went towards the police inspector and said, "I hope you are in the best of health."

"Never mind my health. Tell me, my friend, why you were standing on the bridge."

"By heaven, gracious sir, I was on the way to my customers, and only looked down to see if the river was flowing quickly."

"That is a lie! You won't get out of it like that. Confess the truth."

"I am willing to shave Your Grace two or even three times a week gratis," answered Ivan Jakovlevitch.

"No, my friend, don't put yourself out! Three barbers are busy with me already, and reckon it a high honour that I let them show me their skill. Now then, out with it! What were you doing there?"

- 18) Ivan Jakovlevitch grew pale. But here the strange episode vanishes in mist, and what further happened is not known.

## II

- 1) Kovaloff, the member of the Municipal Committee, awoke fairly early that morning, and made a droning noise—"Brr! Brr!"—through his lips, as he always did, though he could not say why. He stretched himself, and told his valet to give him a little mirror which was on the table. He wished to look at the heat-boil which had appeared on his nose the previous evening; but to his great astonishment, he saw that instead of his nose he had a perfectly smooth vacancy in his face. Thoroughly alarmed, he ordered some water to be brought, and rubbed his eyes with a towel. Sure enough, he had no longer a nose! Then he sprang out of bed, and shook himself violently! No, no nose any more! He dressed himself and went at once to the police superintendent.
- 2) But before proceeding further, we must certainly give the reader some information about Kovaloff, so that he may know what sort of a man this member of the Municipal Committee really was. These committee-men, who obtain that title by means of certificates of learning, must not be compared with the committee-men appointed for the Caucasus district, who are of quite a different kind. The learned committee-man—but Russia is such a wonderful country that when one committee-man is spoken of all the others from Riga to Kamschatka refer it to themselves. The same is also true of all other titled officials. Kovaloff had been a Caucasian committee-man two years previously, and could not forget that he had occupied that position; but in order to enhance his own importance, he never called himself "committee-man" but "Major."
- 3) "Listen, my dear," he used to say when he met an old woman in the street who sold shirt-fronts; "go to my house in Sadovaia Street and ask 'Does Major Kovaloff live here?' Any child can tell you where it is."
- 4) Accordingly we will call him for the future Major Kovaloff. It was his custom to take a daily walk on the Neffsky Avenue. The collar of his shirt was always remarkably clean and stiff. He wore the same style of whiskers as those that

are worn by governors of districts, architects, and regimental doctors; in short, all those who have full red cheeks and play a good game of whist. These whiskers grow straight across the cheek towards the nose.

- 5) Major Kovaloff wore a number of seals, on some of which were engraved armorial bearings, and others the names of the days of the week. He had come to St Petersburg with the view of obtaining some position corresponding to his rank, if possible that of vice-governor of a province; but he was prepared to be content with that of a bailiff in some department or other. He was, moreover, not disinclined to marry, but only such a lady who could bring with her a dowry of two hundred thousand roubles. Accordingly, the reader can judge for himself what his sensations were when he found in his face, instead of a fairly symmetrical nose, a broad, flat vacancy.
- 6) To increase his misfortune, not a single droshky was to be seen in the street, and so he was obliged to proceed on foot. He wrapped himself up in his cloak, and held his handkerchief to his face as though his nose bled. "But perhaps it is all only my imagination; it is impossible that a nose should drop off in such a silly way," he thought, and stepped into a confectioner's shop in order to look into the mirror.
- 7) Fortunately no customer was in the shop; only small shop-boys were cleaning it out, and putting chairs and tables straight. Others with sleepy faces were carrying fresh cakes on trays, and yesterday's newspapers stained with coffee were still lying about. "Thank God no one is here!" he said to himself. "Now I can look at myself leisurely."
- 8) He stepped gingerly up to a mirror and looked. "What an infernal face!" he exclaimed, and spat with disgust. "If there were only something there instead of the nose, but there is absolutely nothing."
- 9) He bit his lips with vexation, left the confectioner's, and resolved, quite contrary to his habit, neither to look nor smile at anyone on the street. Suddenly he halted as if rooted to the spot before a door, where something extraordinary happened. A carriage drew up at the entrance; the carriage door was opened, and a gentleman in uniform came out and hurried up the steps. How great was Kovaloff's terror and astonishment when he saw that it was his own nose!
- 10) At this extraordinary sight, everything seemed to turn round with him. He felt as though he could hardly keep upright on his legs; but, though trembling all over as though with fever, he resolved to wait till the nose should return to the carriage. After about two minutes the nose actually came out again. It wore a gold-embroidered uniform with a stiff, high collar, trousers of chamois leather, and a sword hung at its side. The hat, adorned with a plume, showed that it held the rank of a state-councillor. It was obvious that it was paying "duty-calls." It looked round on both sides, called to the coachman "Drive on," and got into the carriage, which drove away.
- 11) Poor Kovaloff nearly lost his reason. He did not know what to think of this extraordinary procedure. And indeed how was it possible that the nose, which only yesterday he had on his face, and which could neither walk nor drive, should wear a uniform. He ran after the carriage, which fortunately had stopped a short way off before the Grand Bazar of Moscow. He hurried towards it and pressed through a crowd of beggar-women with their faces bound up, leaving only two openings for the eyes, over whom he had formerly so often made merry.

12) There were only a few people in front of the Bazar. Kovaloff was so agitated that he could decide on nothing, and looked for the nose everywhere. At last he saw it standing before a shop. It seemed half buried in its stiff collar, and was attentively inspecting the wares displayed.

13) “How can I get at it?” thought Kovaloff. “Everything—the uniform, the hat, and so on—show that it is a state-councillor. How the deuce has that happened?”

He began to cough discreetly near it, but the nose paid him not the least attention.

“Honourable sir,” said Kovaloff at last, plucking up courage, “honourable sir.”

“What do you want?” asked the nose, and turned round.

“It seems to me strange, most respected sir—you should know where you belong—and I find you all of a sudden—where? Judge yourself.”

“Pardon me, I do not understand what you are talking about. Explain yourself more distinctly.”

“How shall I make my meaning plainer to him?” Then plucking up fresh courage, he continued, “Naturally—besides I am a Major. You must admit it is not befitting that I should go about without a nose. An old apple-woman on the Ascension Bridge may carry on her business without one, but since I am on the look out for a post; besides in many houses I am acquainted with ladies of high position—Madame Tchektyriev, wife of a state-councillor, and many others. So you see—I do not know, honourable sir, what you——” (here the Major shrugged his shoulders). “Pardon me; if one regards the matter from the point of view of duty and honour—you will yourself understand——”

“I understand nothing,” answered the nose. “I repeat, please explain yourself more distinctly.”

“Honourable sir,” said Kovaloff with dignity, “I do not know how I am to understand your words. It seems to me the matter is as clear as possible. Or do you wish—but you are after all my own nose!”

The nose looked at the Major and wrinkled its forehead. “There you are wrong, respected sir; I am myself. Besides, there can be no close relations between us. To judge by the buttons of your uniform, you must be in quite a different department to mine.” So saying, the nose turned away.

14) Kovaloff was completely puzzled; he did not know what to do, and still less what to think. At this moment he heard the pleasant rustling of a lady’s dress, and there approached an elderly lady wearing a quantity of lace, and by her side her graceful daughter in a white dress which set off her slender figure to advantage, and wearing a light straw hat. Behind the ladies marched a tall lackey with long whiskers.

15) Kovaloff advanced a few steps, adjusted his cambric collar, arranged his seals which hung by a little gold chain, and with smiling face fixed his eyes on the graceful lady, who bowed lightly like a spring flower, and raised to her brow her little white hand with transparent fingers. He smiled still more when he spied under the brim of her hat her little round chin, and part of her cheek faintly tinted with rose-colour. But suddenly he sprang back as though he had been scorched. He remembered that he had nothing but an absolute blank in place of a nose, and tears started to his eyes. He turned round in order to tell the gentleman in uniform that he was only a state-councillor in appearance,

but really a scoundrel and a rascal, and nothing else but his own nose; but the nose was no longer there. He had had time to go, doubtless in order to continue his visits.

- 16) His disappearance plunged Kovaloff into despair. He went back and stood for a moment under a colonnade, looking round him on all sides in hope of perceiving the nose somewhere. He remembered very well that it wore a hat with a plume in it and a gold-embroidered uniform; but he had not noticed the shape of the cloak, nor the colour of the carriages and the horses, nor even whether a lackey stood behind it, and, if so, what sort of livery he wore. Moreover, so many carriages were passing that it would have been difficult to recognise one, and even if he had done so, there would have been no means of stopping it.
- 17) The day was fine and sunny. An immense crowd was passing to and fro in the Neffsky Avenue; a variegated stream of ladies flowed along the pavement. There was his acquaintance, the Privy Councillor, whom he was accustomed to style "General," especially when strangers were present. There was Iarygin, his intimate friend who always lost in the evenings at whist; and there another Major, who had obtained the rank of committee-man in the Caucasus, beckoned to him.
- 18) "Go to the deuce!" said Kovaloff sotto voce. "Hi! coachman, drive me straight to the superintendent of police." So saying, he got into a droshky and continued to shout all the time to the coachman "Drive hard!"
- 19) "Is the police superintendent at home?" he asked on entering the front hall.  
"No, sir," answered the porter, "he has just gone out."  
"Ah, just as I thought!"  
"Yes," continued the porter, "he has only just gone out; if you had been a moment earlier you would perhaps have caught him."  
Kovaloff, still holding his handkerchief to his face, re-entered the droshky and cried in a despairing voice "Drive on!"  
"Where?" asked the coachman.  
"Straight on!"  
"But how? There are cross-roads here. Shall I go to the right or the left?"
- 20) This question made Kovaloff reflect. In his situation it was necessary to have recourse to the police; not because the affair had anything to do with them directly but because they acted more promptly than other authorities. As for demanding any explanation from the department to which the nose claimed to belong, it would, he felt, be useless, for the answers of that gentleman showed that he regarded nothing as sacred, and he might just as likely have lied in this matter as in saying that he had never seen Kovaloff.
- 21) But just as he was about to order the coachman to drive to the police-station, the idea occurred to him that this rascally scoundrel who, at their first meeting, had behaved so disloyally towards him, might, profiting by the delay, quit the city secretly; and then all his searching would be in vain, or might last over a whole month. Finally, as though visited with a heavenly inspiration, he resolved to go directly to an advertisement office, and to advertise the loss of his nose, giving all its distinctive characteristics in detail, so that anyone who found it

might bring it at once to him, or at any rate inform him where it lived. Having decided on this course, he ordered the coachman to drive to the advertisement office, and all the way he continued to punch him in the back—"Quick, scoundrel! quick!"

- 22) "Yes, sir!" answered the coachman, lashing his shaggy horse with the reins.
- 23) At last they arrived, and Kovaloff, out of breath, rushed into a little room where a grey-haired official, in an old coat and with spectacles on his nose, sat at a table holding his pen between his teeth, counting a heap of copper coins.
- "Who takes in the advertisements here?" exclaimed Kovaloff.
- "At your service, sir," answered the grey-haired functionary, looking up and then fastening his eyes again on the heap of coins before him.
- "I wish to place an advertisement in your paper——"
- "Have the kindness to wait a minute," answered the official, putting down figures on paper with one hand, and with the other moving two balls on his calculating-frame.
- 24) A lackey, whose silver-laced coat showed that he served in one of the houses of the nobility, was standing by the table with a note in his hand, and speaking in a lively tone, by way of showing himself sociable. "Would you believe it, sir, this little dog is really not worth twenty-four kopecks, and for my own part I would not give a farthing for it; but the countess is quite gone upon it, and offers a hundred roubles' reward to anyone who finds it. To tell you the truth, the tastes of these people are very different from ours; they don't mind giving five hundred or a thousand roubles for a poodle or a pointer, provided it be a good one."
- 25) The official listened with a serious air while counting the number of letters contained in the note. At either side of the table stood a number of housekeepers, clerks and porters, carrying notes. The writer of one wished to sell a barouche, which had been brought from Paris in 1814 and had been very little used; others wanted to dispose of a strong droshky which wanted one spring, a spirited horse seventeen years old, and so on. The room where these people were collected was very small, and the air was very close; but Kovaloff was not affected by it, for he had covered his face with a handkerchief, and because his nose itself was heaven knew where.
- 26) "Sir, allow me to ask you—I am in a great hurry," he said at last impatiently.
- "In a moment! In a moment! Two roubles, twenty-four kopecks—one minute! One rouble, sixty-four kopecks!" said the grey-haired official, throwing their notes back to the housekeepers and porters. "What do you wish?" he said, turning to Kovaloff.
- 27) "I wish——" answered the latter, "I have just been swindled and cheated, and I cannot get hold of the perpetrator. I only want you to insert an advertisement to say that whoever brings this scoundrel to me will be well rewarded."
- "What is your name, please?"
- 28) "Why do you want my name? I have many lady friends—Madame Tchektyriev, wife of a state-councillor, Madame Podotchina, wife of a Colonel. Heaven

forbid that they should get to hear of it. You can simply write ‘committee-man,’ or, better, ‘Major.’”

“And the man who has run away is your serf.”

“Serf! If he was, it would not be such a great swindle! It is the nose which has absconded.”

“H’m! What a strange name. And this Mr Nose has stolen from you a considerable sum?”

“Mr Nose! Ah, you don’t understand me! It is my own nose which has gone, I don’t know where. The devil has played a trick on me.”

“How has it disappeared? I don’t understand.”

29) “I can’t tell you how, but the important point is that now it walks about the city itself a state-councillor. That is why I want you to advertise that whoever gets hold of it should bring it as soon as possible to me. Consider; how can I live without such a prominent part of my body? It is not as if it were merely a little toe; I would only have to put my foot in my boot and no one would notice its absence. Every Thursday I call on the wife of M. Tchektyriev, the state-councillor; Madame Podtochina, a Colonel’s wife who has a very pretty daughter, is one of my acquaintances; and what am I to do now? I cannot appear before them like this.”

30) The official compressed his lips and reflected. “No, I cannot insert an advertisement like that,” he said after a long pause.

“What! Why not?”

“Because it might compromise the paper. Suppose everyone could advertise that his nose was lost. People already say that all sorts of nonsense and lies are inserted.”

“But this is not nonsense! There is nothing of that sort in my case.”

31) “You think so? Listen a minute. Last week there was a case very like it. An official came, just as you have done, bringing an advertisement for the insertion of which he paid two roubles, sixty-three kopecks; and this advertisement simply announced the loss of a black-haired poodle. There did not seem to be anything out of the way in it, but it was really a satire; by the poodle was meant the cashier of some establishment or other.”

32) “But I am not talking of a poodle, but my own nose; i.e. almost myself.”

“No, I cannot insert your advertisement.”

“But my nose really has disappeared!”

“That is a matter for a doctor. There are said to be people who can provide you with any kind of nose you like. But I see that you are a witty man, and like to have your little joke.”

“But I swear to you on my word of honour. Look at my face yourself.”

“Why put yourself out?” continued the official, taking a pinch of snuff. “All the same, if you don’t mind,” he added with a touch of curiosity, “I should like to have a look at it.”

The committee-man removed the handkerchief from before his face.

- 33) “It certainly does look odd,” said the official. “It is perfectly flat like a freshly fried pancake. It is hardly credible.”
- 34) “Very well. Are you going to hesitate any more? You see it is impossible to refuse to advertise my loss. I shall be particularly obliged to you, and I shall be glad that this incident has procured me the pleasure of making your acquaintance.” The Major, we see, did not even shrink from a slight humiliation.
- 35) “It certainly is not difficult to advertise it,” replied the official; “but I don’t see what good it would do you. However, if you lay so much stress on it, you should apply to someone who has a skillful pen, so that he may describe it as a curious, natural freak, and publish the article in the Northern Bee” (here he took another pinch) “for the benefit of youthful readers” (he wiped his nose), “or simply as a matter worthy of arousing public curiosity.”
- 36) The committee-man felt completely discouraged. He let his eyes fall absent-mindedly on a daily paper in which theatrical performances were advertised. Reading there the name of an actress whom he knew to be pretty, he involuntarily smiled, and his hand sought his pocket to see if he had a blue ticket—for in Kovaloff’s opinion superior officers like himself should not take a lesser-priced seat; but the thought of his lost nose suddenly spoilt everything.
- 37) The official himself seemed touched at his difficult position. Desiring to console him, he tried to express his sympathy by a few polite words. “I much regret,” he said, “your extraordinary mishap. Will you not try a pinch of snuff? It clears the head, banishes depression, and is a good preventive against hæmorrhoids.”
- So saying, he reached his snuff-box out to Kovaloff, skillfully concealing at the same time the cover, which was adorned with the portrait of some lady or other.
- 38) This act, quite innocent in itself, exasperated Kovaloff. “I don’t understand what you find to joke about in the matter,” he exclaimed angrily. “Don’t you see that I lack precisely the essential feature for taking snuff? The devil take your snuff-box. I don’t want to look at snuff now, not even the best, certainly not your vile stuff!”
- 39) So saying, he left the advertisement office in a state of profound irritation, and went to the commissary of police. He arrived just as this dignitary was reclining on his couch, and saying to himself with a sigh of satisfaction, “Yes, I shall make a nice little sum out of that.” It might be expected, therefore, that the committee-man’s visit would be quite inopportune.
- 40) This police commissary was a great patron of all the arts and industries; but what he liked above everything else was a cheque. “It is a thing,” he used to say, “to which it is not easy to find an equivalent; it requires no food, it does not take up much room, it stays in one’s pocket, and if it falls, it is not broken.”
- 41) The commissary accorded Kovaloff a fairly frigid reception, saying that the afternoon was not the best time to come with a case, that nature required one to rest a little after eating (this showed the committee-man that the commissary was acquainted with the aphorisms of the ancient sages), and that respectable people did not have their noses stolen.

- 42) The last allusion was too direct. We must remember that Kovaloff was a very sensitive man. He did not mind anything said against him as an individual, but he could not endure any reflection on his rank or social position. He even believed that in comedies one might allow attacks on junior officers, but never on their seniors.
- 43) The commissary's reception of him hurt his feelings so much that he raised his head proudly, and said with dignity, "After such insulting expressions on your part, I have nothing more to say." And he left the place.
- 44) He reached his house quite wearied out. It was already growing dark. After all his fruitless search, his room seemed to him melancholy and even ugly. In the vestibule he saw his valet Ivan stretched on the leather couch and amusing himself by spitting at the ceiling, which he did very cleverly, hitting every time the same spot. His servant's equanimity enraged him; he struck him on the forehead with his hat, and said, "You good-for-nothing, you are always playing the fool!" Ivan rose quickly and hastened to take off his master's cloak.
- 45) Once in his room, the Major, tired and depressed, threw himself in an armchair and, after sighing a while, began to soliloquise:
- "In heaven's name, why should such a misfortune befall me? If I had lost an arm or a leg, it would be less insupportable; but a man without a nose! Devil take it!—what is he good for? He is only fit to be thrown out of the window. If it had been taken from me in war or in a duel, or if I had lost it by my own fault! But it has disappeared inexplicably. But no! it is impossible," he continued after reflecting a few moments, "it is incredible that a nose can disappear like that—quite incredible. I must be dreaming, or suffering from some hallucination; perhaps I swallowed, by mistake instead of water, the brandy with which I rub my chin after being shaved. That fool of an Ivan must have forgotten to take it away, and I must have swallowed it."
- 46) In order to find out whether he were really drunk, the Major pinched himself so hard that he unvoluntarily uttered a cry. The pain convinced him that he was quite wide awake. He walked slowly to the looking-glass and at first closed his eyes, hoping to see his nose suddenly in its proper place; but on opening them, he started back. "What a hideous sight!" he exclaimed.
- 47) It was really incomprehensible. One might easily lose a button, a silver spoon, a watch, or something similar; but a loss like this, and in one's own dwelling!
- 48) After considering all the circumstances, Major Kovaloff felt inclined to suppose that the cause of all his trouble should be laid at the door of Madame Podtochina, the Colonel's wife, who wished him to marry her daughter. He himself paid her court readily, but always avoided coming to the point. And when the lady one day told him point-blank that she wished him to marry her daughter, he gently drew back, declaring that he was still too young, and that he had to serve five years more before he would be forty-two. This must be the reason why the lady, in revenge, had resolved to bring him into disgrace, and had hired two sorceresses for that object. One thing was certain—his nose had not been cut off; no one had entered his room, and as for Ivan Jakovlevitch—he had been shaved by him on Wednesday, and during that day and the whole of Thursday his nose had been there, as he knew and well remembered. Moreover, if his nose had been cut off he would naturally have felt pain, and doubtless the wound would not have healed so quickly, nor would the surface

have been as flat as a pancake.

49) All kinds of plans passed through his head: should he bring a legal action against the wife of a superior officer, or should he go to her and charge her openly with her treachery?

50) His reflections were interrupted by a sudden light, which shone through all the chinks of the door, showing that Ivan had lit the wax-candles in the vestibule. Soon Ivan himself came in with the lights. Kovaloff quickly seized a handkerchief and covered the place where his nose had been the evening before, so that his blockhead of a servant might not gape with his mouth wide open when he saw his master's extraordinary appearance.

51) Scarcely had Ivan returned to the vestibule than a stranger's voice was heard there.

"Does Major Kovaloff live here?" it asked.

"Come in!" said the Major, rising rapidly and opening the door.

52) He saw a police official of pleasant appearance, with grey whiskers and fairly full cheeks—the same who at the commencement of this story was standing at the end of the Isaac Bridge. "You have lost your nose?" he asked.

"Exactly so."

"It has just been found."

"What—do you say?" stammered Major Kovaloff.

Joy had suddenly paralysed his tongue. He stared at the police commissary on whose cheeks and full lips fell the flickering light of the candle.

"How was it?" he asked at last.

53) "By a very singular chance. It has been arrested just as it was getting into a carriage for Riga. Its passport had been made out some time ago in the name of an official; and what is still more strange, I myself took it at first for a gentleman. Fortunately I had my glasses with me, and then I saw at once that it was a nose. I am shortsighted, you know, and as you stand before me I cannot distinguish your nose, your beard, or anything else. My mother-in-law can hardly see at all."

54) Kovaloff was beside himself with excitement. "Where is it? Where? I will hasten there at once."

"Don't put yourself out. Knowing that you need it, I have brought it with me. Another singular thing is that the principal culprit in the matter is a scoundrel of a barber living in the Ascension Avenue, who is now safely locked up. I had long suspected him of drunkenness and theft; only the day before yesterday he stole some buttons in a shop. Your nose is quite uninjured." So saying, the police commissary put his hand in his pocket and brought out the nose wrapped up in paper.

55) "Yes, yes, that is it!" exclaimed Kovaloff. "Will you not stay and drink a cup of tea with me?"

"I should like to very much, but I cannot. I must go at once to the House of Correction. The cost of living is very high nowadays. My mother-in-law lives

with me, and there are several children; the eldest is very hopeful and intelligent, but I have no means for their education.”

- 56) After the commissary’s departure, Kovaloff remained for some time plunged in a kind of vague reverie, and did not recover full consciousness for several moments, so great was the effect of this unexpected good news. He placed the recovered nose carefully in the palm of his hand, and examined it again with the greatest attention.

“Yes, this is it!” he said to himself. “Here is the heat-boil on the left side, which came out yesterday.” And he nearly laughed aloud with delight.

- 57) But nothing is permanent in this world. Joy in the second moment of its arrival is already less keen than in the first, is still fainter in the third, and finishes by coalescing with our normal mental state, just as the circles which the fall of a pebble forms on the surface of water, gradually die away. Kovaloff began to meditate, and saw that his difficulties were not yet over; his nose had been recovered, but it had to be joined on again in its proper place.

58. And suppose it could not? As he put this question to himself, Kovaloff grew pale. With a feeling of indescribable dread, he rushed towards his dressing-table, and stood before the mirror in order that he might not place his nose crookedly. His hands trembled.

- 59) Very carefully he placed it where it had been before. Horror! It did not remain there. He held it to his mouth and warmed it a little with his breath, and then placed it there again; but it would not hold.

- 60) “Hold on, you stupid!” he said.

But the nose seemed to be made of wood, and fell back on the table with a strange noise, as though it had been a cork. The Major’s face began to twitch feverishly. “Is it possible that it won’t stick?” he asked himself, full of alarm. But however often he tried, all his efforts were in vain.

- 61) He called Ivan, and sent him to fetch the doctor who occupied the finest flat in the mansion. This doctor was a man of imposing appearance, who had magnificent black whiskers and a healthy wife. He ate fresh apples every morning, and cleaned his teeth with extreme care, using five different tooth-brushes for three-quarters of an hour daily.

- 62) The doctor came immediately. After having asked the Major when this misfortune had happened, he raised his chin and gave him a fillip with his finger just where the nose had been, in such a way that the Major suddenly threw back his head and struck the wall with it. The doctor said that did not matter; then, making him turn his face to the right, he felt the vacant place and said “H’m!” then he made him turn it to the left and did the same; finally he again gave him a fillip with his finger, so that the Major started like a horse whose teeth are being examined. After this experiment, the doctor shook his head and said, “No, it cannot be done. Rather remain as you are, lest something worse happen. Certainly one could replace it at once, but I assure you the remedy would be worse than the disease.”

- 63) “All very fine, but how am I to go on without a nose?” answered Kovaloff. “There is nothing worse than that. How can I show myself with such a villainous appearance? I go into good society, and this evening I am invited to two parties.

I know several ladies, Madame Tchektyriev, the wife of a state-councillor, Madame Podtotchina—although after what she has done, I don't want to have anything to do with her except through the agency of the police. I beg you," continued Kovaloff in a supplicating tone, "find some way or other of replacing it; even if it is not quite firm, as long as it holds at all; I can keep it in place sometimes with my hand, whenever there is any risk. Besides, I do not even dance, so that it is not likely to be injured by any sudden movement. As to your fee, be in no anxiety about that; I can well afford it."

64) "Believe me," answered the doctor in a voice which was neither too high nor too low, but soft and almost magnetic, "I do not treat patients from love of gain. That would be contrary to my principles and to my art. It is true that I accept fees, but that is only not to hurt my patients' feelings by refusing them. I could certainly replace your nose, but I assure you on my word of honour, it would only make matters worse. Rather let Nature do her own work. Wash the place often with cold water, and I assure you that even without a nose, you will be just as well as if you had one. As to the nose itself, I advise you to have it preserved in a bottle of spirits, or, still better, of warm vinegar mixed with two spoonfuls of brandy, and then you can sell it at a good price. I would be willing to take it myself, provided you do not ask too much."

65) "No, no, I shall not sell it at any price. I would rather it were lost again."  
"Excuse me," said the doctor, taking his leave. "I hoped to be useful to you, but I can do nothing more; you are at any rate convinced of my good-will." So saying, the doctor left the room with a dignified air.

66) Kovaloff did not even notice his departure. Absorbed in a profound reverie, he only saw the edge of his snow-white cuffs emerging from the sleeves of his black coat.

67) The next day he resolved, before bringing a formal action, to write to the Colonel's wife and see whether she would not return to him, without further dispute, that of which she had deprived him.

68) The letter ran as follows:

"To Madame Alexandra Podtotchina,

"I hardly understand your method of action. Be sure that by adopting such a course you will gain nothing, and will certainly not succeed in making me marry your daughter. Believe me, the story of my nose has become well known; it is you and no one else who have taken the principal part in it. Its unexpected separation from the place which it occupied, its flight and its appearances sometimes in the disguise of an official, sometimes in proper person, are nothing but the consequence of unholy spells employed by you or by persons who, like you, are addicted to such honourable pursuits. On my part, I wish to inform you, that if the above-mentioned nose is not restored to-day to its proper place, I shall be obliged to have recourse to legal procedure.

"For the rest, with all respect, I have the honour to be your humble servant,

"PlatonKovaloff."

69) The reply was not long in coming, and was as follows:

"Major PlatonKovaloff,—

"Your letter has profoundly astonished me. I must confess that I had not expected such unjust reproaches on your part. I assure you that the official of

whom you speak has not been at my house, either disguised or in his proper person. It is true that Philippe Ivanovitch Potantchikoff has paid visits at my house, and though he has actually asked for my daughter's hand, and was a man of good breeding, respectable and intelligent, I never gave him any hope.

"Again, you say something about a nose. If you intend to imply by that that I wished to snub you, i.e. to meet you with a refusal, I am very astonished because, as you well know, I was quite of the opposite mind. If after this you wish to ask for my daughter's hand, I should be glad to gratify you, for such has also been the object of my most fervent desire, in the hope of the accomplishment of which, I remain, yours most sincerely,

"Alexandra Podtotchina."

- 70) "No," said Kovaloff, after having reperused the letter, "she is certainly not guilty. It is impossible. Such a letter could not be written by a criminal." The committee-man was experienced in such matters, for he had been often officially deputed to conduct criminal investigations while in the Caucasus. "But then how and by what trick of fate has the thing happened?" he said to himself with a gesture of discouragement. "The devil must be at the bottom of it."
- 71) Meanwhile the rumour of this extraordinary event had spread all over the city, and, as is generally the case, not without numerous additions. At that period there was a general disposition to believe in the miraculous; the public had recently been impressed by experiments in magnetism. The story of the floating chairs in Koniouchennaia Street was still quite recent, and there was nothing astonishing in hearing soon afterwards that Major Kovaloff's nose was to be seen walking every day at three o'clock on the Neffsky Avenue. The crowd of curious spectators which gathered there daily was enormous. On one occasion someone spread a report that the nose was in Junker's stores and immediately the place was besieged by such a crowd that the police had to interfere and establish order. A certain speculator with a grave, whiskered face, who sold cakes at a theatre door, had some strong wooden benches made which he placed before the window of the stores, and obligingly invited the public to stand on them and look in, at the modest charge of twenty-four kopecks. A veteran colonel, leaving his house earlier than usual expressly for the purpose, had the greatest difficulty in elbowing his way through the crowd, but to his great indignation he saw nothing in the store window but an ordinary flannel waistcoat and a coloured lithograph representing a young girl darning a stocking, while an elegant youth in a waistcoat with large lappels watched her from behind a tree. The picture had hung in the same place for more than ten years. The colonel went off, growling savagely to himself, "How can the fools let themselves be excited by such idiotic stories?"
- 72) Then another rumour got abroad, to the effect that the nose of Major Kovaloff was in the habit of walking not on the Neffsky Avenue but in the Tauris Gardens. Some students of the Academy of Surgery went there on purpose to see it. A high-born lady wrote to the keeper of the gardens asking him to show her children this rare phenomenon, and to give them some suitable instruction on the occasion.
- 73) All these incidents were eagerly collected by the town wits, who just then were very short of anecdotes adapted to amuse ladies. On the other hand, the minority of solid, sober people were very much displeased. One gentleman asserted with great indignation that he could not understand how in our enlightened age such absurdities could spread abroad, and he was astonished

that the Government did not direct their attention to the matter. This gentleman evidently belonged to the category of those people who wish the Government to interfere in everything, even in their daily quarrels with their wives.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*; Nikolai Gogol, *The Nose*

- 74) But here the course of events is again obscured by a veil.

### III

- 1) Strange events happen in this world, events which are sometimes entirely improbable. The same nose which had masqueraded as a state-councillor, and caused so much sensation in the town, was found one morning in its proper place, i.e. between the cheeks of Major Kovaloff, as if nothing had happened.
- 2) This occurred on 7th April. On awaking, the Major looked by chance into a mirror and perceived a nose. He quickly put his hand to it; it was there beyond a doubt!
- 3) "Oh!" exclaimed Kovaloff. For sheer joy he was on the point of performing a dance barefooted across his room, but the entrance of Ivan prevented him. He told him to bring water, and after washing himself, he looked again in the glass. The nose was there! Then he dried his face with a towel and looked again. Yes, there was no mistake about it!
- 4) "Look here, Ivan, it seems to me that I have a heat-boil on my nose," he said to his valet.

And he thought to himself at the same time, "That will be a nice business if Ivan says to me 'No, sir, not only is there no boil, but your nose itself is not there!'"

But Ivan answered, "There is nothing, sir; I can see no boil on your nose."

"Good! Good!" exclaimed the Major, and snapped his fingers with delight.

- 5) At this moment the barber, Ivan Jakovlevitch, put his head in at the door, but as timidly as a cat which has just been beaten for stealing lard.

"Tell me first, are your hands clean?" asked Kovaloff when he saw him.

"Yes, sir."

"You lie."

"I swear they are perfectly clean, sir."

"Very well; then come here."

Kovaloff seated himself. Jakovlevitch tied a napkin under his chin, and in the twinkling of an eye covered his beard and part of his cheeks with a copious creamy lather.

- 6) "There it is!" said the barber to himself, as he glanced at the nose. Then he bent his head a little and examined it from one side. "Yes, it actually is the nose—really, when one thinks——" he continued, pursuing his mental soliloquy and still looking at it. Then quite gently, with infinite precaution, he raised two fingers in the air in order to take hold of it by the extremity, as he was accustomed to do.
- "Now then, take care!" Kovaloff exclaimed.

- 7) Ivan Jakovlevitch let his arm fall and felt more embarrassed than he had ever done in his life. At last he began to pass the razor very lightly over the Major's chin, and although it was very difficult to shave him without using the olfactory organ as a point of support, he succeeded, however, by placing his wrinkled

thumb against the Major's lower jaw and cheek, thus overcoming all obstacles and bringing his task to a safe conclusion.

- 8) When the barber had finished, Kovaloff hastened to dress himself, took a droshky, and drove straight to the confectioner's. As he entered it, he ordered a cup of chocolate. He then stepped straight to the mirror; the nose was there!
- 9) He returned joyfully, and regarded with a satirical expression two officers who were in the shop, one of whom possessed a nose not much larger than a waistcoat button.
- 10) After that he went to the office of the department where he had applied for the post of vice-governor of a province or Government bailiff. As he passed through the hall of reception, he cast a glance at the mirror; the nose was there! Then he went to pay a visit to another committee-man, a very sarcastic personage, to whom he was accustomed to say in answer to his raillery, "Yes, I know, you are the funniest fellow in St Petersburg."
- 11) On the way he said to himself, "If the Major does not burst into laughter at the sight of me, that is a most certain sign that everything is in its accustomed place."

But the Major said nothing. "Very good!" thought Kovaloff.

- 12) As he returned, he met Madame Podtochina with her daughter. He accosted them, and they responded very graciously. The conversation lasted a long time, during which he took more than one pinch of snuff, saying to himself, "No, you haven't caught me yet, coquettes that you are! And as to the daughter, I shan't marry her at all."
- 13) After that, the Major resumed his walks on the Neffsky Avenue and his visits to the theatre as if nothing had happened. His nose also remained in its place as if it had never quitted it. From that time he was always to be seen smiling, in a good humour, and paying attentions to pretty girls.

#### IV

- 1) Such was the occurrence which took place in the northern capital of our vast empire. On considering the account carefully we see that there is a good deal which looks improbable about it. Not to speak of the strange disappearance of the nose, and its appearance in different places under the disguise of a councillor of state, how was it that Kovaloff did not understand that one cannot decently advertise for a lost nose? I do not mean to say that he would have had to pay too much for the advertisement—that is a mere trifle, and I am not one of those who attach too much importance to money; but to advertise in such a case is not proper nor befitting.
- 2) Another difficulty is—how was the nose found in the baked loaf, and how did Ivan Jakovlevitch himself—no, I don't understand it at all!
- 3) But the most incomprehensible thing of all is, how authors can choose such subjects for their stories. That really surpasses my understanding. In the first place, no advantage results from it for the country; and in the second place, no harm results either.
- 4) All the same, when one reflects well, there really is something in the matter. Whatever may be said to the contrary, such cases do occur—rarely, it is true, but now and then actually.

(Source: <http://www.online-literature.com/gogol/the-nose/1/>)

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## UNIT 3 AMOS TUTUOLA: *THE PALM-WINE DRINKARD*

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### Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Amos Tutuola, The Author of *the Palm-wine Drinkard*
- 3.3 *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*: Content
- 3.4 Major Characters
- 3.5 Narrative
- 3.6 Language
- 3.7 Comparative Perspectives
- 3.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.9 Unit End Questions
- 3.10 References and Suggested Reading

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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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By the time you reach the end of this Unit, you would:

- Understand the significance of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and its importance in English Writing in Africa;
- Get an insight into the life and works of Amos Tutuola, the author of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*;
- Be familiar with its narrative structure;
- Come face to face with the major characters;
- Be in a position to appreciate the use of English in the novel; and
- Look at some texts that offer scope for comparison.

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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“This is a brief, thronged, grisly and bewitching story, or series of stories, written in young English by a West African, about the journey of an expert and devoted palm-wine drinkard through a nightmare of indescribable adventures, all simply and carefully described in the spirit-bristling bush.” Thus begins Dylan Thomas’s review of the Nigerian writer Amos Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, which appeared in *The Observer* on 6 July 1952. The positive tone and recognition from such a distinguished writer as Dylan Thomas (Dylan Thomas is considered one of the most important poets of the 20th century) gave *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* the much-needed initial thrust and the novel soon became famous. First published in 1952, it holds a prominent place in the history of African literature written in English and is often claimed as the first work of print literature about Africa by a Black African.

Amos Tutuola’s novel came out much before Chinua Achebe’s acclaimed *Things Fall Apart*, and by virtue of being almost the first English novel to come out of Africa, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* also initiated debates about the form and content

of African literature. Tutuola's unique prose style and use of Yoruba oral tradition was praised by Western critics and literary figures. Its translation into many European languages made it a phenomenon throughout the continent and the 'exoticism' that the European readers read in this novel is no less responsible for this reception. But, in Tutuola's native Nigeria, the responses were sharp and criticism severe. Tutuola's use of "pidgin" English came under scrutiny, his abundant use of myths and stories was criticised as foregrounding superstition, and his central character who claimed to drink "palm-wine from morning till night," led some Nigerian intellectuals to worry that the book fed into European stereotypes of backward and indolent Africans, thus presenting an unfavorable image of Nigeria. Later, of course, Nigerian writers like Chinua Achebe welcomed the novel as one of their own and encouraged readers to take another look at the novel and see its merits. It has been slightly more than sixty years since *The Palm-wine Drinkard* was first published and even now it continues to be a rich text for analyses by students of African and post-colonial literatures.

#### Activity 1

From your reading of this Introduction, put down 5 things that characterize *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*.

### 3.2 AMOS TUTUOLA, THE AUTHOR OF *THE PALM-WINE DRINKARD*

Amos Tutuola was born in Abeokuta, a large town in Western Nigeria. His father, Charles Tutuola, was a cocoa farmer. The earliest folk stories that Tutuola heard were from his Yoruba-speaking mother, Esther Aina. When Tutuola was about 7 years' old, one of his father's cousins took him to live as a servant with F.O. Monu, an Ibeman. Instead of paying Tutuola money, he sent the young boy to the Salvation Army primary school. He attended Lagos High School for a year, and worked as a live-in houseboy for a government clerk in order to ensure his tuition at the school. When his father died in December 1938, Tutuola had to end his studies. He tried his luck as a farmer, but his crop failed and he moved to Lagos in 1940.

During World War II Tutuola worked for the Royal Air Forces as a coppersmith, and after he was demobilized and found himself without a job, he took a number of odd jobs, including selling bread, and messengering for the Nigerian Department of Labour. This work left him with plenty of free time, which he spent writing stories in English rather than in Yoruba, his mother tongue. His first long narrative, 'The Wild Hunter in the Bush of the Ghosts', influenced by D.O. Fagunwa's *Ogboju ode ninu igboirunmale*, was bought by Focal Press, an English publisher of photography books.

One day in 1950, Tutuola read an advertisement in a local paper listing the publications of the United Society for Christian Literature. This sparked off an idea and he decided to send his latest story to this organization. The story was *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and his Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Deads' Town*, which he had written in two days a couple of years earlier. He spent three months enlarging the story, then drafted a final copy in ink and sent it to the United Society for Christian Literature. They replied that they did not publish novels, but they would try to help Tutuola find a publisher. The Society sent the manuscript to Faber and Faber on February 20, 1951, and Faber and Faber published *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* on May 2, 1952. Grove Press brought out an American edition the following year,

and by 1955 the book was available in French, Italian, German and Serbo-Croatian translations.

Amos Tutuola: *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*

Within two years, Amos Tutuola wrote *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954), an underworld odyssey, in which an eight-year-old boy, abandoned during a slave raid, flees into the bush, “a place of ghosts and spirits.” He went on to write *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle* in 1955, in which the protagonist is a girl and *The Brave African Huntress* in 1958, about a heroic woman rescuing her four brothers. Both books continued the theme of the quest. He also wrote *Feather Woman of the Jungle* (1962), *Ajaiyi and his Inherited Poverty* (1967), and has published several short stories in literary journals.

Throughout many of his most productive years Tutuola worked as a storekeeper for the Nigerian Broadcasting Company. In 1957 he was transferred to Ibadan, Western Nigeria, where he started to adapt the work to the stage. Tutuola became also one of the founders of Mbari Club, the writers’ and publishers’ organization in Ibadan. He was a research fellow at the University of Ife in 1979 and then an associate of the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa. In the late 1980s Tutuola moved back to Ibadan. He died on June 8, 1997.

### Activity 2

Make a list of the other novels/books written by Amos Tutuola

## 3.3 THE PALM-WINE DRINKARD: CONTENT

The novel is about a young man, the son of a rich man, the first child in the family of eight children who started drinking palm-wine at the age of ten and becomes so addicted to it that he cannot imagine life without it. He consumes it in such large quantities that it becomes like water to him. He is called ‘the palm-wine drinkard’ and by no other name throughout the novel.

The father, being a rich man, having noticed that his son was only good at drinking palm-wine, gets an expert palm-wine tapster to tap palm-wine for him both in the morning and in the evenings and there is a surplus which attracts a lot of friends to him. But unfortunately, his father dies, and subsequently, the palm-wine tapster also falls unexpectedly from a very tall palm-tree while tapping for the day and dies instantly because there is nobody around to help him when he falls. This happens barely six months after his father’s death. The drinkard feels very bad and now there is no more supply of palm-wine which makes his friends desert him as well. He tries to find a solution to his problem but he cannot get a skilful and expert tapster to replace his dead tapster. When he sees that there is no more palm-wine to drink and he cannot cope without it, he decides to journey to the Deads’ Town to bring back his dead palm-wine tapster, not considering the problems and challenges he might encounter on his way.

This is how this unusual novel starts, steeped in Yoruba story-telling traditions but sprinkled with modern-day references, crowded with strange monsters and improbable events told with perfect sincerity, and entrenched with psychologically charged imagery. This tale violates dozens of grammatical rules and novelistic conventions yet provides in abundance the one indispensable quality of literature – magic!

His journey, often marked by nightmarish encounters with strange creatures, takes the form of episodic adventures that gradually move him further from home. At the

outset of his journey, the drinkard meets an old man who says he would tell him where his tapster was if he brought Death to him. But although the drinkard, who is also a god and a juju man manages to capture Death and bring him to the old man's house, the old man reneges on his promise.

The drinkard sets out again and after five months reaches another town. The head of the town asks him to find his daughter who has been captured by a "complete gentleman," in reality a skull which has hired parts of the body – limbs, skin and flesh – so as to look beautiful on market day. The drinkard tracks down the daughter whom he finds seated on a bull-frog with a cowrie tied to her neck which screams each time somebody tries to untie it. The drinkard learns the cowrie's secret and frees the woman. In gratitude, her father gives her hand in marriage to the drinkard. After three years, an aggressive half-bodied baby is born from his wife's thumb and the parents are saved from their violent child only when Drum, Song and Dance take him away with them.

The drinkard proceeds with his wife towards the Dead's Town, spending time on "Wraith-Island" in the company of beautiful creatures where men walk backwards, and then to "Unreturnable-Heaven's Town" where both are tortured, their heads shaved with broken bottles. They burn down the town and, once recuperated, "sell their death" and "lend their fear." They are then taken into the care of "Faithful-mother" who lives in a white tree. After a year and two weeks, they are told to continue their journey, return to the bush and soon find themselves in "Red Town" where everything and everybody is red. The drinkard fights with Red-fish and Red-bird and kills them. Red Town is destroyed and the people of Red Town move to a new town where the populace is no longer red. "Invisible-pawn" or "Give and Take" helps the drinkard to establish relationships with the townspeople, but when "Invisible-pawn" steals all their crops, the townspeople send an army against the drinkard and "Invisible-pawn" slaughters all the townspeople, leaving the drinkard and his wife on their own.

The drinkard and his wife continue on their way to Dead's Town. They help the king of a town whose son has been murdered, to identify the killer and by way of recompense the king tells them where Dead's Town is. Ten years after the protagonist started his journey, he and his wife finally reach "Deads' Town." During this journey, he travels by land, by water, and by air, and changes his appearance as demanded by the occasion, either to observe unnoticed or to escape. Accordingly, we see him become a lizard, change into a small bird 'like a sparrow,' a big bird like 'an aeroplane,' and on one occasion, he incredibly transforms himself into a canoe, so that his wife could paddle and cross the river.

As "alives," the drinkard and his wife can only enter Dead's Town at night, but once there, they locate the drinkard's favourite tapster. The dead tapster cannot return to the land of the "alives," but he gives his former master a wish-fulfilling egg.

Taking their leave of his favourite tapster, the drinkard and his wife leave Dead's Town and following encounters with a bag full of terrible creatures and a "hungry-creature" that swallows everything within its grasp, including the two travellers, the drinkard and his wife enter "mixed-town" where the drinkard is asked to sit in judgement on two difficult cases, one involving a man in debt and a debt collector and the other a man with three wives. They escape from "mixed-town" before the judgements are passed, become involved in a non-stop dance with creatures of the "Unknown mountain" from whom they escape with the help of a juju, the drinkard transformed as a pebble and his wife as a wooden doll.

When the drinkard and his wife return home, they discover that their people are starving. Heaven and Land had had a bitter quarrel and Heaven has refused to send rain to land. The drinkard is able to avert the great famine through the use of the magic egg. However, the crowds that this magical act brings to his house are keeping him awake and the grumpy saviour decides he's done enough work.

Unfortunately, the egg breaks, and the very same egg that had been producing food starts producing whips and everyone including kings, old people, young people, princes and princesses, etc., are beaten mercilessly by the whips. The famine continues and there is the need for a sacrifice to appease heaven for rain and fertility. The sacrifice means that Land has accepted Heaven as superior. After the sacrifice for appeasement is made to Heaven, the famine ceases and it starts raining heavily. The servant who carried the sacrifice to heaven could not get home before the rains fell and so, he gets drenched and dies because nobody in the village was ready to accept him into their house.

“But when for three months the rain had been falling regularly, there was no famine again.”

*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is indisputably Tutuola's most accomplished work. The achievement here lies in the skillful welding of several tales from the oral tradition into one extended folktale, subordinating all of them to his main theme.

### Activity 3

Write a few sentences each about any of the 5 places visited by the drinkard and his wife during their journey

## 3.4 MAJOR CHARACTERS

### The Palm-wine Drinkard

The Palm-Wine Drinkard, the oldest of eight children, and the son of the richest man in a town in Nigeria, loves drinking palm-wine from early childhood and his father gives him a palm-tree farm, employs an expert palm-wine tapster, and assigns him the job of drinking palm-wine. One day, the palm-wine tapster falls from a palm-tree and dies, and no proper replacement for him could be found. The drinkard is in despair and decides to go the Deads' Town and bring back the tapster.

The drinkard takes his native juju, and other jujus with him on this journey, and often uses them to transform himself or his wife into an animal or an object. He is very brave, faces the dangerous, unknown bush, fights beasts and monsters and spirits. The drinkard often acts as a trickster, sneaking around hidden in animal form, so he can overhear his enemies' plans.

The drinkard as a character helps us to understand that life is a journey and everyone is bound to travel in search of one thing or the other, irrespective of the challenges we might face in the course of the journey.

### The Palm-wine Drinkard's Wife

She is not given a specific name. She is referred to as a beautiful lady and a wife to the palm-wine drinkard. She is the daughter of the head of a town; is a petty trader, who had refused to get married despite her father's entreaties because she wanted to marry a perfect gentleman, and a handsome man. This gets her into trouble as it finally lands her in the hole of the skull family. The drinkard rescues her and her

father gives her hand in marriage to him. She stays by her husband all through the journey that is full of difficult challenges. She has the gift to foresee the future and she speaks in riddles and proverbs and her prophecies come true too.

### **Zurrjir**

This is the child who came out from the thumb of the drinkard's wife which had swollen like a buoy. Though not initially deformed, he is born abnormally. More importantly, he is a prodigy: he speaks immediately, is familiar with all the people at home "as if he had known them" and has superhuman strength. Finally, he has an enormous, indeed insatiable appetite, making him a particular threat to the survival of the parents. In addition, his name "Zurrjir" means a son who would change himself into another thing very soon. His voice is loud and terrifying, like the sound made when "somebody strikes an anvil with a steel hammer." The drinkard tries to kill this child by burning him. He believes he has succeeded and leaves to find his tapster. But his wife wants to return for a "gold trinket." Her greed for this unnecessary item makes them return home, only to find Zurrjir again, now returned as a "half-bodied baby."

This child is linked with death in several ways. When they refuse to obey him, he stops their breathing. He whistles (i.e., he produces an inarticulate, artificial sound). When carrying the child, the narrator and his wife are chased away from homes and villages, as if they were sacrificial carriers. Ultimately, they are able to escape from Zurrjir only through "Drum, Song and Dance." Specifically, drum, song, and dance perform for five days, then lead Zurrjir into their "premises" of "mud."

### **Palm-wine Tapster (Baity)**

He is an expert palm-wine tapster who the drinkard's father employed to tap palm-wine for his son. The tapster used to tap one hundred and fifty kegs of palm-wine every morning, which would be consumed before evening by the drinkard and after that the tapster would go and tap another 75 kegs in the evening which would have been drunk before dawn. But unfortunately, the tapster falls from a tall palm-tree and dies. The drinkard could no longer get his palm-wine in the desired quantities as before because the other tapsters hired to do the job were just not as efficient. The death of the tapster also resulted in all the drinkard's friends abandoning him. The tapster's death starts off the drinkard's journey to Dead's Town to bring the tapster back to the land of the living and in the process changes the drinkard from being a layabout to a responsible person.

When the drinkard meets his long-lost tapster at last, he tells the tapster that he has been on his journey for ten years and that he would be most grateful if the tapster would follow him back to his town. But the tapster says he cannot come with him to the world of the living "because a dead man could not live with alives." The dead palm-wine tapster, instead, gives him a magic egg which produces exactly what it is asked to produce. The dead tapster also shows the drinkard the shortest way to return to his town. It is with the help of this egg that the drinkard feeds the people of his town who have been starving due to the severe famine in the land.

Towards the end we get to know that the palm-wine tapster has a name, Baity. A point worth noting is that all characters in the novel are named according to their traits, but it is only the tapster who has a name whose meaning is not given.

#### **Activity 4**

Write down your thoughts about the way in which these different characters add to the story

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### 3.5 NARRATIVE

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When we read *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, we feel it reads like a picaresque novel that we, as students of English literature, are familiar with, like *Tom Jones* or *Joseph Andrews*. The episodes in the novel might appear unconnected or inserted just to showcase the various skills of the protagonist under various difficult circumstances. *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* also reads like a ‘quest’ narrative, where the protagonist sets out on a journey in quest of something important and suffers hardships before accomplishing his/her mission. This would make *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* similar to Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* or Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. A careful reading, however, reveals that though *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* has narrative elements of both the ‘picaresque’ and the ‘quest,’ it is neither wholly. It is an African tale told with a lot of energy, containing Yoruba folk stories and myths, and influenced by the oral narrative style.

The narrative of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* contains two frames. The main frame (or the outer frame) or the major narrative is the journey the drinkard undertakes to locate his dead palm-wine tapster. This is what he sets out to do. Now, when he starts his journey, he does not know how to proceed and where to go, and once he sets out from his village, he keeps asking for directions. This lack of knowledge puts him in situations where he has to use his wits or native wisdom or various jujus as a kind of barter to gain further information in order to reach his initial goal. It is here that we see a number of minor narratives that expand the framework of the novel. These minor narratives cumulatively form the inner frame of the novel. Some of these minor narratives involve episodes with the Complete Gentleman, the Wraith Island, the Journey to the Unreturnable Heavens Town, the Faithful Mother in the White Tree, the Red People in the Red Town, the Invisible Pawn, the Wise King, the episode in the Hungry Creature’s stomach, the Mountain Creatures in the Unknown Mountain, and others.

Are these just individual episodes? A nuanced reading tells us that most of these episodes appear wherever they are in the narrative with a clear intention. We see that these minor episodes have a role to play. Their role is to postpone the central quest, that is, the search for the tapster, and to bring about a transformation in the drinkard. The postponement takes place on account of the time required by the drinkard to solve various issues and face new circumstances in every episode. Therefore, this postponement is important because the time spent in between helps to bring about the desired changes in the drinkard’s personality. For instance, The Complete Gentleman episode early on the novel not only tells us how the drinkard skilfully outwits The Skull, but very quietly gets him married off to the girl he rescues, thus giving him a partner for his journey and for life. He spends three years in his in-laws’ town after he marries their daughter which helps to change him from a lazy to a hardworking man. In terms of character development, we see two forward movements taking place here. He now learns what it means to be caring and responsible towards another person, who is now a part of his life. When the drinkard and his wife are rendered penniless after wilfully abandoning the half-bodied child, he successfully runs a ferry business along with his wife for one month and is able to earn a lot of profit.

In the Wraith Island episode, the drinkard becomes a farmer and plants many kinds of crops—a task which he had never performed while in his native town. In the ‘Give and Take’ episode, the drinkard learns that there is a price to pay when someone offers easy solutions and loses the friendship of the villagers by befriending the

Invisible Pawn. Whereas the Invisible Pawn extracts a terrible return for favours that he granted the drinkard, the Faithful Mother in the White Tree cheerfully gives without expecting anything in return unlike people generally who give and expect something in return. The gun and ammunitions that he receives as gifts from the Faithful Mother help him to defeat the Red People in the Red Town.

Therefore, though appearing unconnected, each episode adds one more layer to the character of the drinkard, one more learning experience, and in some cases, a lesson or gift/s acquired that would prove useful at the next stop in the journey. Finally, the drinkard comes out of these minor episodes and reaches the end of the narrative of the main frame. By the time the drinkard reaches the Deads' Town to meet his dead palm-wine tapster, he is wiser, responsible, and more mature and not just another person who is skilful with his use of jujus. Though he is distraught that his dead palm-wine tapster is unable to return with him to his village, he accepts the reality of the situation, takes the gift given by the tapster and returns home. There is a great degree of transformation in the drinkard that one sees by the end of the narrative.

#### Activity 5

Jot down your impressions of how the outer and inner frames of the novel flow one into the other.

### 3.6 LANGUAGE

In his introduction to *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Michael Thelwell suggests that Tutuola employs "... an English whose vocabulary is bent and twisted into the service of a different language's nuances." Dylan Thomas called Tutuola's prose "Young English" and enthusiastically endorsed the text, but Nigerian critics considered it "broken English" that merely reinforced the concept of the primitive African. While reading the novel, we slowly get accustomed to the prose, and it becomes clear that Tutuola's English is neither 'young English' nor 'broken English,' but rather a Yoruba-English that operates with a rhythm and logic of its own.

Eustace Palmer analyses the language used by Tutuola and says that Tutuola is an accomplished linguistic craftsman who deliberately chooses to use this kind of language for perfectly admirable reasons. But, Tutuola does not consciously set out to create a 'sensible compromise' nor does he deliberately distort the language. Tutuola is not stubbornly incorrect because he could not possibly be correct. He writes as he does because his education did not proceed beyond the elementary stage. So, when he is forced to write in a language that is not his own and which is inadequate to accommodate his insights, he will bend it to suit his own purposes. But at the same time, it would be instructive to see what happens to the English language at the hands of Tutuola in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. Eustace Palmer takes a detailed look at Tutuola's treatment of clauses and sentence construction, and grammar. Let us take a look at some examples of Tutuola's clauses in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*:

As I was waiting for him to bring the palm-wine, when I saw that he did not return in time, because he was not keeping me long like that before, then I called two of my friends to accompany me to the farm.(PWD p. 8)

But immediately he heard from me that I had brought Death and when he saw him on my head, he was greatly terrified and raised alarm that he thought nobody could go and bring Death from his house, then he told me to carry

him (Death) back to his house at once, and he (old man) hastily went back to his room and started to close all his doors and windows, but before he could close two or three of his windows, I threw down Death before his door and at the same time that I threw him down, the net cut into pieces and Death found his way out. (*PWD* p. 15)

As we entered the bush, when we had travelled for about 2 miles inside the bush, then we began to notice that there were many trees without withered leaves, dried sticks and refuse on the ground of this bush as was usual in other bushes; (*PWD* p. 51)

These extracts reveal that Tutuola was unable to combine clauses together and to properly subordinate them to the main clause. In the second extract, we see an example of Tutuola's habit of piling up clauses thereby constructing long and clumsy sentences. The first and third extracts show that Tutuola relies on temporal clauses without reason when another main clause would have been more appropriate. In many places, Tutuola reduces the use of main clauses to a minimum, putting almost everything into subordinate clauses whether appropriate or inappropriate. The extract that follows gives us an example of an incomplete sentence construction in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*:

As we were going on in this bush, we saw a pond and we branched there, then we started to drink the water from it, but as the water dried away at our presence and also as we were thirsty all the time, and there we saw that there was not a single living creature. (*PWD* p. 52)

Tutuola often seems unaware that a sentence is not just a conglomeration of clauses, but needs a main clause to be complete. But it is Tutuola's grammar that catches one's attention very quickly:

- 1) They saw me lied down (*PWD* 11)
- 2) But I lied down there awoke (*PWD* 14)
- 3) We saw a male child came out (*PWD* 51)
- 4) But when I rose up my head and looked at the top of them . . . (*PWD* 52)

Tutuola is also uncertain about the use of past tenses. We often find expressions like "I was seriously sat down" (*PWD* 8) and "I saw the lady sat" (*PWD* 26).

Tutuola's English appears poor and this is partly due to his ignorance of the complicated rules of English syntax and partly to interference from Yoruba, his native tongue. Tutuola's English is a language of the speaking voice, telling a tale in a particular situation, exaggerating, elaborating, repeating, explaining, and inevitably making numerous errors; but all these add to the vigor and color of the tale.

#### Activity 6

Dylan Thomas calls Tutuola's prose 'Young English.' What do you think he means by that term?

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### 3.7 COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

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*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*

The theme of 'quest' and 'journey' that we see in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* would make any discerning reader inevitably compare the novel with classic 'quest' narratives like Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* or Dante's *Divine Comedy*. This comparison has its validity mainly because we are familiar with those acclaimed books. Bernth Lindfors backs the comparison with Bunyan saying that Tutuola was definitely influenced by *The Pilgrim's Progress* and that Tutuola had admitted in a letter to Lindfors that he had read *The Pilgrim's Progress* just two years before the *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* was written. Like *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* takes the form of a quest, where the drinkard journeys through supernatural realms and encounters many marvels and monsters before finding what he seeks and some of the adventures are almost identical to those that Christian experiences on his way to the Celestial City. Lindfors compares these two books and says that the episode in which Death shows the drinkard the bones of his former victims appears to be modelled on Christian's meeting with the giant of Doubting Castle. Lindfors says that a number of towns the drinkard visits bear a distinct resemblance to Vanity Fair and Tutuola's monsters often seem to belong to the same sub-species as Bunyan's Appolyon. But unlike Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is not a religious allegory. *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is influenced far more by Yoruba oral tradition than by the Bible. At the most, Tutuola might have learned how to put together an extended quest tale from Bunyan, but in substance and spirit, Tutuola remained a quintessential African storyteller.

#### *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*

The numerous ways in which *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* resonates can be seen when the novel is compared with other African novels. Saradashree Choudhury looks at elements of folklore like myths, legends, stories, and riddles in both these novels to see how they are employed to reflect the changing social and cultural scenario.

Choudhury feels that, in a society heading towards literacy, Amos Tutuola, by using folklore, plays the role of an artist committed towards preservation of cultural values. Ben Okri, writing on the threshold of the twenty first century, on the other hand, is found to employ folklore to analyse the fate of Nigeria as a nation and to present a critique of contemporary socio-political reality.

From among the many points of comparison, we shall look at how modern-day technological concepts are dealt with in these two novels, and how they become part of their respective mythic worlds. Tutuola makes abundant references to modern gadgets. The drinkard's son, the half-bodied baby, for instance, speaks with the voice of a 'telephone'. Again, in another episode when it becomes difficult for the couple to travel on the road on account of the havoc created by gangs of highwaymen, and in the bush as well because of unaccountable boa constrictors and dangerous spirits, the drinkard transforms himself into a 'big bird like an aeroplane' and flies away with his wife. In the White tree with the faithful mother, they get treated in a hospital of the wounds inflicted by the creatures of the Unreturnable Heaven's town.

A similar kind of pull towards artefacts of western culture is seen in Okri too. In Tutuola's novel, the characters are shown to be fairly familiar with their use, but Okri makes his characters bask in their novelty. In the celebration of Azaro's return, Jeremiah, the photographer is able to draw the attention of the revellers to his camera. They abandon singing and dancing (traditional form of entertainment) to pose for a photograph. That the camera is a new entry in the life of the ghetto is more strongly emphasized when the spirits in the room too display their curiosity.

Later the camera is regarded as a “magic instrument” that makes things real. Again, the first impact of the megaphone on the ghetto dwellers is very vividly described, “the crack of an iron ruler shot through my head and ended between my eyes. The room swayed. The crackling voice outside spoke from an elevated stationary position.”

*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and Ngugi wa Thiong’ o’s *Matigari*

*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is compared with Ngugi wa Thiong’ o’s *Matigari*, another African novel, by Lingaraja Gandhi. For Gandhi, the indigenous story-telling tradition that these two novels adopt sets the tone for comparison. While *Matigari* is the first novel in the Gikuyu language, based on a Gikuyu oral tale, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is rooted in Yoruba oral tradition. Both *Matigari* and *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* are true African stories based on the local with a universal appeal. Both are ‘quest’ narratives and are based around the eponymous heroes’ search. Another notable feature common to both stories is the cyclical pattern, a structure most commonly found in ‘quest’ narratives. Gandhi foregrounds the concept of space, boundary, and border in the two novels and considers them significant enough to warrant a comparison. *Matigari* is an allegory of the political situation in Kenya. The question of land and the transgression of it by the people, who have no claim to it, is at the heart of the novel. The protagonist Matigari, a Mau-Mau, a freedom fighter, is a searcher and seeker, like the drinkard. He returns from the mountains after burying his weapons, symbolically renouncing violence. When he returns to reclaim his home and land, he finds that both are now occupied by the settler’s stooge and finds that his people – children, women, workers – are rendered space-less and realizes the need to prepare them for a second struggle, to set right the wrongs. As Matigari embarks upon a journey in search of truth and justice, he is arrested, jailed, and sent to a mental asylum. Matigari then escapes from jail and the mental asylum and roams the country organizing the masses. He becomes a kind of hero to the people. A close reading of *Matigari* tells us that occupying someone’s space and thus rendering the original inhabitant place-less is the worst evil of colonialism.

In *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the same issues are dealt with in an apolitical manner. As the drinkard travels across the bush and visits many towns and villages and bizarre inhabitants, he discovers that each land and culture is marked by its boundary and has its margin. The drinkard begins to learn that each bush-province is marked by a boundary, and transgression of territory is impossible, however powerful the creatures in the improbable world of his voyage. He also learns that it is by respecting the laws governing jurisdiction that one can think of a sound social order. The drinkard starts off as a non-stop guzzler of palm-wine and by the time he returns home after the search, he has changed. With the help of the magic egg that was gifted by the dead tapster, he alleviates the suffering of his people and exhorts them to return to work and engage themselves in farming. So, from a life of enslavement to drink to a life of deliverance, the drinkard traverses a long journey, and returns home as a kind of folk hero.

#### Activity 7

What effect do you think the use of modern technology in a folk-tale has on the reader?

### 3.8 LET US SUM UP

Amos Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is a unique work of fiction that blends folk stories, myths, and riddles steeped in the Yoruba oral tradition, set in a kind of

timeless zone, where modern technological gadgets make their presence felt without hindering the flow of the story.

*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* was the first English novel by an African writer and therefore, set the tone for the debate on what constitutes African literature. It received positive reviews in the western world, but in Nigeria, Tutuola's homeland, the novel was criticized for portraying Africa as a land of the indolent and Africans as uneducated.

The way in which *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is narrated makes it look like a familiar 'quest' tale, but on closer reading, we realise that the novel operates on two frames, the inner frame embedded inside the larger outer frame. It is while travelling in the inner frame, through the African bush, through forests, villages, and towns, that the drinkard undergoes a transformation from being an idle palm-wine guzzler to an industrious and responsible man of society and emerges back into the outer frame.

The language used by Tutuola has been described variously as Young English and Broken English, but a balanced view would be that it is Yoruba-infused English. It is an English used inventively by a writer who just had elementary schooling. Therefore, Tutuolan English has dodgy grammar, piled up clauses, incomplete sentences, and other such language issues. These do not take away from the brilliant story-telling and vivid descriptions, and the overall effect is magical.

Though a one-of-a-kind novel, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is infused with themes that resonate across the African landscape and find their way into African literature. As a result, strands like the use of folk elements, the quest and journey metaphor, references to western technology, community, land and space, episodic narrative, etc., are found in other African novels too and can be used for comparative study usefully.

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### 3.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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- 1) What kind of critical reception did *The Palm Wine Drinkard* get? What made Western critics praise *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*?
- 2) How did *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* come about? Why did *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* receive sharp criticism in Nigeria?
- 3) What do you understand by the term '*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is a rich text'?
- 4) Apart from being an expert in drinking palm-wine, what other characteristics do you notice in the drinkard?
- 5) What lessons are we expected to learn from the drinkard's character?
- 6) What are the different ways in which the tapster's death affect the drinkard?
- 7) What role do the minor episodes play in the narrative of the novel?
- 8) In what ways does the drinkard's character undergo change through this journey?
- 9) How would you describe the outer frame of the novel?
- 10) What do you find in the inner frame of the novel's narrative?
- 11) How is *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* different from or similar to the picaresque novel?
- 12) To what other forms of narrative pattern could you compare *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* with?

- 13) According to Eustace Palmer, why does Tutuola write in the way he does?
- 14) What problems does Tutuola have with clauses?
- 15) From the examples cited of Tutuola's use of grammar, what do you think are the departures from the norm?
- 16) How effective do you think is the comparison of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* with *The Pilgrim's Progress*?
- 17) How is *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* compared with Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*?
- 18) How is 'land and territory' used as a tool of comparison between Ngugi's *Matigari* and *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*?
- 19) Identify and analyse any piece of creative writing in your language or English that uses language in the way it is used by Tutuola in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*.
- 20) Apart from the novels referred to in the 'Comparative Perspectives' section, please identify and analyse any other novel or literary work that could be usefully compared with *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*.

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