Vardhaman Mahaveer Open University, Kota

Contents

American Literature (Optional)

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Block-Introduction

American literature refers to literature in English produced in what in now the United States of America. American writing began with the work of English adventures and colonists in the new world chiefly for the benefit of the readers in the mother country.

Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thorean stood at the centre of transcendentalism, a movement that made a deep impression upon their native land and upon Europe. Nathaniel Howthrone's novel *The Scarlet Letter* depicted the gloomy atmosphere of early puritanism. Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* employed a new kind of poetry and proclaimed the optimistic principles of American democracy. The outstanding example of genius overcoming any regionalism in scene can be found in many works of Mark Twain, most notably in his *Huckleberry Finn* Emily Dickinson terse, precise and enigmatic poems placed her immediately in the ranks of major American poets.

Robert Frost won universal recognition with his evocative and seemingly simply written verse. Ernest Hemingway is a writer of recognizable states in the world. Eugene O'Neill came to be widely considered the greatest of the dramatists the United States has produced. The social drama and the symbolic play were further developed by Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams.

This block aims at giving a fairly representative picture of the development of American literature in the genre of Drama, Poetry, Prose and Fiction.

UNIT-1

WHITMAN: A MAJOR AMERICAN POET

Structure

1.0 Objectives

Walt Whitman is a major American poet, and he has earned a place of distinction both at home and abroad. His poetry is now prescribed for study at the poet-graduate level in most of the Indian universities. Whitman is, "a double-layer" poet, and his poetry has many subtleties and complexities. The aim of the unit has been to focus attention on these subtleties and bring out his artistic excellence as well as "the rich and ripe philosophy" underlying. Such selected poems as are characteristic of his art have been studied in detail, and annotations, wherever considered necessary, have also been provided.

1.1 Introduction

A number of influences operated upon Whitman from childhood onwards, influences which went into the making of his genius, and which gave to it a particular shape and direction. First and foremost among such influences was the influence of his parents. His father was a free thinker with radical democratic convictions. His mother belonged to a family of Quakers, whose main teaching is that, "in each person there is an inner light, which it is his duty to heed." Whitman as a child was greatly influenced by his father's radical democratic ideas and his mother's Quakerism, and they left an indelible impression on his life and work. These influences went a long way towards making him a poet of democracy. A faith in the dignity of the individual and in equality and fraternity, is the very life-blood of his poetry.

To these childhood influences were soon added literary influences. As a boy, he was fond of Homer and Shakespeare, and he would study these authors for hours together lying on the sea-shore and listening to the sea-gulls and the sea-surfs.

Another major influence was the mystic transcendental philosophy of India, specially the *Bhagwat Gita*, and of Emerson. Emerson was a mystic, and his mysticism colours Whitman's own mysticism. "Emerson's oversoul filtered into Whitman's creative vision and hovered closely over the pages as he

wrote." It was Emerson's dream that some American poet should embody in his poetry the very spirit of his country, and Whitman's poetry is a fulfillment of that dream. He is the poet of democracy and the poet of science, and his *Leave of Grass* is the epic of modern America.

1.2 Whitman as an Innovator

Whitman wrote about *Leaves of Grass* "This is no book; who touches this, touches a man." Whitman was a great rebel. Even a poseur, he tried to act out certain kinds of poetic character which he thought would assist the proper appreciation of his poems, and one of the several roles he liked to act, was that of the free, hearty, healthy, American dough. He is the great optimistic affirmer of democratic hope of the New World of optimism and progress, with his eyes glancing all over the enormous American content, making tremendous lay with the picturesque piece names, north and south, east and west; projecting himself with great "thundering speech" all over the U.S.

Whitman's primary contribution as an innovator in literature was to offer new solutions to the problem posed by the relation what T.S.Eliot has called "tradition and the individual talent." The triumph of Whitman's poetic vision lies first in sympathizing the overtly antagonistic aspect of body and soul of personality.

Sexual energy and mysticism are the dominant themes in his poetry. The marriage of body and soul brings divine ecstasy. Their complete merger is essential for the attainment of transcental knowledge. "A kelson of creation is love." Whitman's is the first most articulate and open American voice which challenges the puritan tradition that held America captive till the end of the 19th Century. He boldly asserts-

"Copulation is no more than to me....." Sex is sacred in any other part of the self. It is but the quintessence of being-

"Yet all were lacking if sex were lacking." Thus whitman rescued poetry from puritans and pundits as Lawrence later rescued the novel from the crucified Jesus. In giving equal significance to both body and soul in relation to sex and mystical experience, he brought about a revolution in American poetry. Whitman was the first powerful celebrant of the upsurge of the masses. His impulses are close to modern times-particularly in his insistence upon the vital importance of sex in human relationship which is Freudian in its perceptions.

Whitman's use of symbolism in his poetry is a modern trend. Symbolism helps to illuminate poetry. Whitman's symbolic treatment has the remarkable effect of universalizing his themes. Whitman's symbolism was a native language of his poetry. The symbol of grass occurs frequently in his *Leaves* and gives the reader new ideas and opens out newer vistas of meaning. In *Song of Myself*, it is the flag of poet's disposition. "the handkerchief of the lord", "the produced babe of the vegetation," but above all, it is the symbol of democracy- "This is the grass....."

In *Song of the Open Road*, the road variously stands for a long-brown path, the infinite road of life, the metaphysical vision of the journey of the soul to its divine fulfillment. The basic metaphor in *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry* is flood tide that symbolizes the sea of life and of time. The ferry connotes cyclic movement in life. It suggests a process of going and returning. *Out of the Cradle* works through literary symbols. The cradle indicates the movement of the universe and sense of continuity following birth. The sea-waves whisper the mystery of death to the outsetting bard. The word 'death' is the missing clue. It is, in fact, a prelude to spiritual life. The most effective use of symbol is made in *Lilacs*. The symbols of lilacs, star and bird are constantly varied in application and combined both with each other and in various susidiary

symbols and ideas. The powerful western star! is Lincoln; the lilacs is love, a delicate coloured flower with heart-shaped leaves that connote fertility and the miracle of birth; the bird-song is symbolic of harmony and rhythm in life. In short, the symbols act as characters in Whitman's poem. They embody various fundamental issues of human existence. Whitman's use of symbols is central to the drama of becomingness. They explore and explain a vision of life.

Whitman's boldest innovation is his language experiment. Whitman showed himself to be one of the first to assail the barriers of form. *Song of myself* has astonishing variety and immediacy. The shifts of cadence, tone, language, the breathless excitement of the poet's words grip the reader. The style hooks you round the waist, compelling you to see where Whitman sees, feel as he feels, and soar with him as he moves at will through time and space. The flood of images and emotions sweeps the reader along, not in straight but in circular or spiral forces. He constantly shifts his stance and posture, one movement promising us "the origin of all poems, if you stop this day and night with me, "the next, warning us that "you shall not look through my says either." He keeps us constantly off-balanced, talking one moment about universal truths, and the next about the scent of arm pits. He dares at one moment to assault with abrupt rhythms and common place monosyllables, and the next to delight with exquisite music. By sacrificing rational forms of coherence, Whitman was releasing the mind from arbitrary order and pointing to new possibilities in literature.

Whitman understood that language was not an abstract construction made by the learned, but that it had arisen out of the work and needs, the joys and struggles and desires of long generation of humanity, and that it had its bases broad alone, close to the ground. When he started to develop his conviction that a perfect user of words uses things, he unconsciously dilated into the loose beats of his poetry; they exube the power and beauty from him-miracles from his hands-miracles from his mouth-things, words like chain-shot rocks, defiance, compulsion, houses, iron, locomotives, the oak, the pine, the keen eye, the hairy breast, the Texan ranger, the Boston truckman, the woman that arouses a man, the man that arouses a woman. Whitman could make words sing, dance, kiss, do anything that man or woman or the natural powers can do. Nevertheless, he proclaims all words are spiritual, nothing is more spiritual than words.

The pitfalls of such a bold language experiment are evident. Ezra Pound, at first, held that thirty well-written pages might be winnowed from *Leaves*, but many years later, he remarked that he could no longer find them. Eliot was dissatisfied with the free verse of Imagists, several of whom hailed Whitman as an ancestor. Emerson described Whitman's vocabulary as a remarkable picture of the *Bhagvad Gita* and the *New York Herald*. There is some truth in this remark. Whitman at his worst is unbelievably bad. "He flaunts his queer style, as a savage might flaunt a top-cat retrieved from somebody's dustbin," says Cunliffe. Whatever the directors might say, Whitman, at present, bestrides the verse of his century like a colosses. The gold is easy to find in the mud heaped up and shovelled mass of the *Leaves*. His rebellious rhythms have influenced modern poetry. True, it is difficult to find a poem in the *Leaves* which is 'one prefect chrysolite, 'yet no one can deny the title of vague poetry to *Out Of The Credle, Lilacs in the Door-Yard Bloom's* and *Passage to India*. Twentieth century poets have derided Whitman but have practised his innovations.

Lastly, a word may be said about Whitman's identity. "I am afoot with my vision", he wrote. The poet identifies himself with mankind-

"I am the man, I suffered, I was there."

D. Daiches thinks that Whitman's most valuable legacy in top modern literature is his use of the

sense of self-identity as a means of projecting oneself into the identity of others. For Whitman, what he sees becomes a part of it-

"There was a child that went forth."

In *The Slippers*, under the shadow of night, the poet imagines the people who are sleeping under the different roofs; and one by one he identifies himself with them in that special mode which was merely his invention. And this is how Whitman achieved a cosmic vision.

1.3 Whitman's Mysticism

Whitman's is a shilly-shally genius. He appears before us in many colours- as a visionary, as the spokesman of America, as a poet-prophet of democracy, as a transcendentalist, and, above all as a mystic. All these traits are curiously blended in him and find their expression ultimately in his mysticism.

Leaves is the biography of Whitman's soul. W.D.O'Conner found in *Leaves* a "sacredotal and prophetic character which makes it a sort of American Bible." Richard M.Bucke distinguished simple, self and cosmic as three levels of consciousness, and he placed in the last the prophet, the seer, and the mystic. He maintains that Gautama and Buddha, Jesus Christ, and Walt Whitman are the persons who reached the cosmic level of consciousness.

Only two persons exist in Whitman's poems. Even the second person lives at the loving mercy of the first. Thoughts, experiences and beliefs are all refused back to the self. Any external fact is viewed as an aspect of his subjectivity. He is not afraid of his power in such a situation. Rather he knows that others must be afraid of him so he seeks to calm their fears:

"Touch me, touch the palm of your hand to my body as I pass,

Be not afraid of my body."

The spirit, being alone, is the only reality which frightens others. But the mystic becomes his object. He takes upon himself the woes of the world:

"Agonies are one of my changes of garments.

I do not ask the wounded person how he feels,

I myself become the wounded person....."

Whitman feels oneness with the objects before him. He loses himself in their actions. His own self merges into the universal self. He is here and everywhere. His is an inspired soul. That is why, *Leaves* being the demonstration of his knowledge and feelings, is a work of inspired lyricism. And his intention to remain in common with the universe is really his communion with God since this world, too, is the outward manifestation of that ultimate reality with which he experiences oneness. In order to seek that ultimate truth, whatever it may be, Whitman, like Aristotle, directs his mind towards the wordly things. According to Roger Asselinean, "Habitually, the mind of the poet diffuses its own divinity over the void of the external world." Study the world in its minutest actions- this is the manifesto of his mysticism. This done, your soul is sublime. Being an American seeker after Truth, he lets his imagination go everywhere-in the remote places, in the far east, in the crowded cities,..... He wants to revoke, not only the objects before his eyes, but all the rest of the world, the 'infinity' of space and the 'amplitude' of time. Hence his cosmic vision of this sort:

"My ties and ballasts leave me, I travel- I said-

my elbows rest in see-gaps,

I skirt sierras, my palms cover continents.....

I fly those flights of a fluid and swallowing soul,

My course runs below the soundings of plummets....."

Whitman's mysticism lies in his projection of the film of the past and the future and of the present swinging in between them. This is his Divine Self:

"I know I have the best of time and space and was

never measured and never will be measured

I am an acme of things accomplished, and I am

encloser of things to be"

Whitman is 'Mr know all.'

He, being the spectator of the world of appearancees, is silent. This attitude sometimes makes him fashion Christ in his own image:

"We walk silent among disputes as assertions, but

reject not the disputes nor anything that is asserted."

He does not accept sorrow and disillusionment as the real features of existence. He believed in the evolutionary progress and perfection of the soul. To achieve this, one has to struggle. Therefore his,

"Call is the call of battle, I nourish active rebellion,

He going with me must go well armed."

This is evidently a realistic mysticism which accepts the facts of life and then seeks their transmutation. He was of the view that all selves are potentially divine.

Once he was asked by the readers to 'indicate the path between reality and their souls,' In the *Song of Myself*, he shows himself to be 'the poet of the Body' and also 'the poet of the Soul."

"The pleasures of heaven are with me and the

pains of hell are with me,

The first I graft and increase upon myself the

letter I translate into a new tongue."

This is a new kind of mysticism which assures the self and which wanders. He relates the body to the mystical experience. Here he presents a striking contrast with Browning. Browning sees the body through the soul whereas Whitman sees the soul through the body. In *Song of Myself*, he interfuses the body and the soul, not withstanding its sex imagery. Because of this interpenetration, he abases neither the body nor the soul. The soul holds the body captive and then the poet has a moment of illumination:

"And I know that the spirit of god is the brother of my own,

And that all the men ever born are also my brothers,

and the women my sisters and lovers....."

This intuitive knowledge springs spontaneously from the soul. It is transcendent, nor intellectual revelation; and it is ineffable. This mysticism is all pervasive in the *Leaves*. Hence we find the mystic swinging from one pole to the other, till they are firmly rooted in ecstasy. In this way, the mystic seeks to merge his identity in the Absolute which is All.

The mystic is conscious of the unity of the universe. His concept of union is vigorously emphasised in *Passage to India*. This soul is charged to go beyond the barriers of space and time:

"O soul thou pleasant me, I thee,

Sailing these seas or on the hills, or waking in the night,

Thoughts, silent thoughts, of Time and Space, and

Death, like water flowing....."

Its task is to realize the unity and oneness of the Absolute. He tries to name the nameless, the transcendent. In this endeavour, he finds metaphors, and each metaphor is found to be inadequate. He succeeds in communicating the experience of union with reality:

"Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,

At Nature and its wonders, Time and Space and,

.....

Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death,

And fillest, swellest full of the vastness of space.

The spiritual reality is eternal and infinite. Because of its limitlessness, it cannot be defined in terms.

I see something of God each hour of the twenty

four and each moment then,

In the faces of men and women I see God,

and in my own face in the glass."

This self realization is his transcended mysticism. Charged with his mysticism, the *Leaves* elude us and the poet often 'escapes from us' He wants the reader not to be satisfied by merely reading the poems:

When you read these I that was visible am become invisible,

Now it is you compact, visible, realizing my poems seeking me."

Like a true mystic, he directs us to experience.

1.4 Whitman: The Poet Prophet of Democracy

Middleton Murry tells us that the best line of approach towards a complete understanding of Whitman's work is to regard him as the poet prophet of Democracy. Canby calls him a Jeffersonial Democrat, an idealist, a violent patriot, a humanitarian, an reformer, an ardent defender of progress, and 'a

fighter for democracy who knows that democracy has to be fought for.' Wordsworth's concept of democracy as expounded in his *The Prelude* remains merely a dream of a visionary. Even Shelleys view of democracy remains merely an abstract idea. But Whitman's ideal of democracy is not merely a dream. His *Democratic Vistas* was a sort of modern *Bible* for the English liberals of 1906. This *Vistas* is surely a permanent statement not only of the idea of liberal democracy, but of its fundamental principles which, if it violates, it ceases to be. Democracy for Whitman meant a community in which he felt oneness with the entire humanity. Thus he was a spiritual democrat who saw in true democracy, possibilities of universal peace, toleration and brotherhood. Therefore no one is to be excluded from God's grace- the kingdom of Heaven- on the basis of man-made discrimination.

The common man was the true and authentic representative of humanity, that is, he is 'the illustratative everyone,' 'the divine overage.' or to use the words of James Joyce, he is "Here comes Everyone.' Thus Whitman is not an aspirant of any kind of privilege-

"I speak the pass-word primeval, I give the sign of democracy,

By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their

counterpart of on the same terms."

For Whitman, America symbolized for Democracy and Democracy symbolized for America. Naturally, the poetry about the one is the poetry about the other. It is obvious that the poet prophet of democracy was the National poet of America. He declared that he will 'report all heroism from an American point of view.' He says-

"In the faces of men and women I see God and in my own face in the glass."

Whitman's emphatic assertions that he was writing about democratic America are very often misconstrued. There was nothing narrowly national in his conception of these states. He follows Goethe's poetical axiom that the universal is the particular and the particular in Whitman's poetry is democracy; and all over the world, democrats, in Whitman's peculiar and profound sense of the word, that is those who believe that a self governing society of free and responsible individuals offers the only way of corporate progress towards the good. And they have no difficulty in regarding Whitman's America as the city of their own soul. Whitman thought of democracy as the order of nature; it was infact universal law.

In Whitman, democracy is not confined to the narrow limits of political democracy. In him, it means liberty. In his preface to *The Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth remarks, "The poet is a man speaking to man." Whitman seems to have the same conviction. He believed that the age of kings and queens and feudal lords was gone. The new heroes were the common people of ordinary professions. Whitman believes in the dignity of the common man. There is no superman- all are superman, the representative of the human being who is the basic standard of all humanity. Like the great sages, the poet in Whitman felt that there is a divine spark in everyone. He says- "The man's body is sacred and the woman's body is sacred,

No matter who it is, it is sacred- is it the meanest one in the labourer's gang?

and

"If anything is sacred, human body is sacred."

In his poetry, he glorifies every human being. In spite of the low morals, poor health and bad manners, he stubbornly trusted in the fundamental and essential goodness of everyone.

In 1867, Whitman experienced the failure of democracy. He said, "Our New World Democracy, despite its materialistic development is, so far, an almost complete failure in its social aspects." Whitman's concept of democracy was a condition of perpetual evolution and amelioration, not mere political democracy. Neither the ingenious theories propounded by the renowned philosophers and historians nor the great libraries of the world provide us any substantial clue to the cyclic progress of civilization. This is to be found where democracy prevails. In the preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman comes out as an uncompromising apostle of equality and fraternity. For him, the sole criterion of judging a work of art was how much it contributed to the cause of humanity. With the innate faith in democratic principles and equality of all men in the American society, whose representative he claimed to be, Whitman took up the self-appointed task of singing for all men and women. His *Song of Myself* does not celebrate merely Whitman's own self but sings about the self of every other human being. He says-

"I celebrate myself, and sing myself,

And what I shall assume you shall assume,

For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you."

In *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry* he remarks-

"Nor is it you alone who know what it is to be evil,

I am he who knew what it was to be evil,....."

Nevertheless, he found no real evil in the world.

He says-

"And there is no object- so soft but it makes a hub for the wheel'd universe."

The excessive feeling of democracy consequently leads to contradictions in Whitman. He admits-

"Do I contradict my self?

Very well then I contradict myself,

I am large, I contain multitudes."

Leaves of Grass being an epic of democracy, is America itself. We realize that 'simple separate person' is the hero of this epic of democracy. And the hero embodies the spirit of expansion. In *Song of the Open Road,* Whitman looks forward to the expansion of America and this expansion is one with the rest of the world. Whitman was not merely a visionary of democracy but a practical democrat. He was not a propagandist but a poet singing about the ideal of democracy and he thinks basically of human dignity and human right. His ideal was to establish a world order based on brotherhood, comradeship and equality. He founded democracy on spirituality. That is why Middleton Murry is of the view that the foundation of Whitman's democracy is in religion. Not only that his themes and ideas are democratic but his verse itself is so. He makes a clean departure from the traditional devices of prosody. The simplest language is used in order to be comprehensible to the generality of readers.

Thus, this democratic view of poetry is his theory of poetry and what it ought to be. He does not agree with the earlier poets and critics that the poets are extraordinary men. He does not talk of subtle and complicated experiences. In thought as well as in execution, Whitman remains essentially a poet of democracy. Whitman, his poetry, his subject matter, his style- all are democracy!

1.5 Whitman's Attitude Towards Sex

Frankness, outspokenness on the primal facts of life must be welcomed in literature. All the great masters- Shakespeare, Dante, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy- have dealt openly and fearlessly with the elemental passions. So far from regretting Whitman claimed right to equal freedom when speaking of the primal facts of the procreation. When speaking of sun-rise, sun-setting and the primal fact of death, every clean-minded man and woman should rejoice in the poet's attitude. Whitman's belief in the glorification of the separate personalities of man and woman subsequently led to his exultation in the potentialities of a healthy sexual life.

Whitman is the poet of the Body and the poet of the Soul. He sees the Soul through the body whereas Browning sees the body through the soul Whitman certainly realized the truth in the saying of Thoreau- "For him to whom sex is impure, there are no flowers in nature" At the same time, one cannot help feeling the truth in Stevenson's remark that Whitman 'loses our sympathy in the character of a poet by attracting too much attention- that of a Bull in a China shop." Whitman's treatment of passion is not immoral, it is simply like Nature itself unmoral. What shall we say then about his 'sex cycle,' 'Children of Adam'

"Sex contains all, bodies, souls,

Meanings, proofs, purities, delicacies, results, promulgation

Songs, commands, health, pride, the maternal mystery the seminal milk,

.....

All the governments, judges, gods, follow'd persons of the earth,

These are contain'd in sex as parts of itself and justifications of itself."

Whitman's treatment of sex shows his strength and weakness as a literary artist. Here is an example of the sublimity of thought idealistically expressed-

"The drops I distil upon you shall grow fierce and athletic girls,

new artists, musicians, and singers,

The babies I begot upon you are to beget babes in their turn,

I shall demand perfect men, and women out of my love spendings,

.....

I shall look for loving crops from the birth life, death, immorality,

I plant so lovingly now."

Homosexual inclination is apparent in the following-

"You would wish long and long to be with him.....

You and he might touch each other."

Nevertheless, his glorification of the fair sex is no less touching-

"Be not ashamed women, Your privlege enloses the rest and is the exist of the,

You are the gates of the body, and you are the gates of the soul."

and

"See the bent head and arms folded over the breast, the female?

and

"Have you sucked the nipples of the breast of the mother of many children."

Whitman rightly observes "A man's body is sacred,

And a woman's body is sacred."

True but the sacredness is not displayed by making out a tedious inventory of the various parts of the body. Says Whitman in effect- "The sexual life is to be gloried in, not to be treated as if it were something shameful." Obviously Whitman's treatment of sex is not that of a physiologist but of a poet. Again true; but is there not a danger of missing the glory by discouraging noisely on the various physiological manifestations? Sex is not the more wonderful for being appraised by the big drum, Compton Rickett is of the view that "The inherent beauty and sanctity of sex lies surely in its superb unconsciousness; it is a matter for two human beings drawn towards one another by an indefinable world-old attraction; scream about it, caper over it, and you begin to make it ridiculous, for you make it self conscious."

Animalism merely as a scientific fact serves naught to the poet, unless he can show also what is as undeniable as the bare fact- its poetry, its coarseness, and its mystery go together. It is Browning's 'rapture' and the mystery which Whitman misses in many of his songs of sex. In spite of this, here is another Whitman who finds that-

"There is something in staying close to men and women

and looking on them.....

.....

All things please the soul, but these please the soul well."

Whitman thought of the physical relationship between man and woman blessed with divine grace. Whitman by discarding all the barriers between man and woman and being a poet of uninhibited love, voiced the deepest urges of the body in highly suggestive symbols and images. Treatment of healthy animal passions may be objected to in Whitman. But all we ask is for him to do so as a poet, not as a mere physiologist. Burroughs remarks "he could not make it pleasing a sweet morsel to be rolled under the tongue; that would have been levity and sin, as in Byron and other poets.....he would sooner be bestial than Byronic, he would sooner shock by his frankness than inflame by his suggestion." Shelley is transcendental; Byron elemental; Tennyseon sentimental; Rossetti looks at the soul through the body, Browing regards the body through the soul. But abundant variety in the treatment is not missing. To Byron, love is fierce whereas to Whitman, it is elemental passion. Rickett has beautifully printed put "In his sex poems, there are great and fine ideas, moments of inspiration, flashes of beauty, combined with much that is trivial and tiresome.

1.6 *Leaves Of Grass*: The National Epic of America

Leave of Grass, according to James E. Miller, is the embodiment of the American reality and ideal, its superb fulfilment of all the genine requirements of the national epic. In the preface to the first

edition of *Leaves*, Whitman says, "The Americas of all nations upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature, the United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem..... America awaits gigantic and generous treatment worthy of it." Though Whitman does not use the term, it is clear throughout the preface the he believed his book to have the basic nature and the general scope of the traditional national epic. The old world, Whitman points out, has had the poems of myths, fictions feudalism, conquest, caste, dynastic wars, and splendid exceptional characters of the old world epics, the new world epic will portray simply-man in the centre of all, and object of all, stands the human being, towards whose heroic and spiritual evolution, poems and everything, directly or indirectly tend, old world or new.

In the very beginning, Whitman uses the construction- "I sing", characteristic of the epic in introducing the themes- "One's self I sing", "the Female equally with-Male- I sing," "The Modern Man I sing." The muse too is mentioned- "Not physiognomy alone nor brain alone is worthy for the muse, I say the Form complete is worthier far" but it is not until the second poem "As I pondered in silence" that the Muse is invoked, addressed and reassured as Poet considered his work, he is visited by the old world Muse-

"A Phantom arose before me with distrustful as poet

Terrible in beauty, age and power,

The genius of poets of old lands,....."

This Muse is sceptical, for all the past epics countenanced by the "haughty shade" as their subject the themes of war, the fortunes of battle, the making of perfect soldiers. The poet welcomes the challenge and assures the old Muse that he, too, sings of "war, and a longer and greater one than anyone." In the poet's war, the field is the world, the battle for life and death for the Body and for the the eternal soul. The central point of this key "Inscriptions" poem is that the poets's book qualifies as an epic, even under the old world definition.

There are aften instances in *Leaves* in which Whitman calls attention to the epic nature of his book-

"Solitary singing in the west, I strike

up for a New World."

His poems are to constitute "a programme chant for Americans." The poet advises-

"Take my Leaves America, take them,

South and take them North,

Make welcome for the, everywhere for

They are your own off-spring."

In *Song of Exposition*, the form is epic, even though the tone is comic-

"Come Muse migrate from Greece and Ionia,

Cross out please those immenselly overpaid accounts,"

It is thus clear from both external and internal evidence that Whitman thought of his work in epic terms. For the hero of his epic, Whitman created the archetypal personality for the New World- "the Modern Man" of "One's self I sing," a man both individual and the mass. The hero, unlike the hero of the

past epic, discovers heroic quality not in superhuman characteristics but in the self-hood common to every man. Every man in America, according to Whitman, is potentially an epic hero, if he is sufficiently aware of the potentiality of his selfhood.

Whitman next engages himself in the usual trial of strength in a great and crucial war on which the national destiny depends. *Drum Taps* demonstrates the triumph of the American epic hero "En-masse." If the Civil War proved the heroic quality on an epic scale of America's children democracy's ability to produce individuality of epic propositions. *Drum Taps* gives way to memories of president Lincoln. But the traits of this epic hero are not different from but similar to the traits of soldier's "en-masse." He is the "powerful fallen Western star," he is the captain of the ship whose loss is universally mourned; he is the dear commander of the soldiers; but he is, above all, the departing comrade who possessed an infinite capacity for love.

In the latter part of *Leaves*, the mythological background of the epic hero of New World is competed as he is related to the resistless gravitation of spiritual law." Even the Gods in the New World epic are conceived in democratic terms. At the climatic point in *Passage to India*, the poet explains: surrounded copest, frontest God, yieldest, the aim attained- As fill'd with friendship, love complete, the Elder brother found- The younger melts in fondness in his arms." God is the "final" comrade, the perfect embodiment of those ideal traits, earlier invested in the New World epic hero. The relationship to God in not the relationship of the ideal brotherhood, the perfect comradeship.

The epic poets of the past- Homer, Virgil, Dante and Milton- reflected their own times in order to become epic spokesmen of science, democracy and religion. His spirit corresponds to his country's spirit- he incarnates its geography and natural life and rivers and lakes. The American landscape seems to have gone deep into Whitman's soul-

"I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,

Those of mechanic, each one singing his as it,

Should be blithe and strong,

The carpenter singing his as he measures his

plank or beam,.....

Each singing what belongs to him or her and

to none else,

Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs."

He sings of the American ideal, the American dream. When Thoreau read the poems in the first edition of *Leaves* he explained, "on the whole, it sounds to me very brave an American." W.M.Rossetti described it as the poem of American nationality. He remarks, "Whitman brings a glowing mind into contact with his own mind and people and the flames from which it catches fire is Americanism." O Conner wrote, "Behold! In *Leaves of Grass*, the immense and absolute sun-rise, it is all our own. The nation is in it, it is distinctly and utterly an American. To understand Greece, study *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; study *Leaves of Grass* to understand America." Apparently, the note of Americanism runs through Leave like current through wire.

Thus *Leaves of Grass* has a just claim to America's national epic. It is a reflection of America's

character and of her soul and of her achievements and her aspirations. If Whitman's vision exceeded his achievement, the scope of his achievement was still sufficient to win him just claim to the title of America's epic poet.

1.7 Let Us Sum Up

In his book Whitman celebrates himself, and in celebrating himself he celebrates America also. In writing of himself, he writes of his age and of his country. This is so because his own personality, "tallies with the momentous spirit and facts of its immediate days, and of current America. Walt Whitman is the most revolutionary of poets. Even a cursory glance at his poetry shows that his is a new kind of poetry. Whitman was a revolutionary, who appeared on the American scene with the zeal of a born fighter to remove from their high pedestals the gods of the old world- aristocracy, tradition, superstition- and install in thier places the gods of the new world- democracy, science and common sence.

1.8 Review Questions

1. Walt Whitman is often considered to be a larger-than-life poet, writing expansive lines and embracing the whole of America as his inspiration. In *Song of Myself* , however, he writes, "I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journeywork of the stars." How does Whitman call attention to small objects in "Song of Myself"? Why do you think he called his life's work *Leaves of Grass*? What does "a leaf of grass" mean to Whitman? To you?
2. Write a note on the element of mysticism in Whitman's poetry.
3. Discuss Whitman's contribution as an innovator in literature.
4. Is correct to call Whitman a poet prophet of Democracy ? Discuss.
5. "Whitman is the poet of the Body and the poet of the Soul." Elaborate.
6. How does Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* fulfit the genuine requirments of the national epic ?

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UNIT-2

WHITMAN : SELECTED POEMS

Structure

2.0 Objectives

In continuation with the previous unit we propose to study some selected works of Walt Whitman to see how and why his *Leaves of Grass* ranks with the immortal classics of the world literature.

2.1 Introduction

Whitman's was a varied, many-sided personality. He is a poet who contains multitudes, it is not difficult to find in his masterpiece most diverse and conflicting philosophies and attitudes. He has been called the poet of the family and the home, as well as the poet of free love and unrestrained sexuality, and for this reason his poetry has been condemned as the, "poetry of barbarism." He has been called the poet of democracy and the poet of science. But he has also been called a great mystic and a great religious poet. That is why different people have reacted differently to his poetry. But today he is regarded not only as the greatest poet of America, but also as one of the greatest poets of the world. His *Leaves of Grass* now ranks with the immortal classics of world literature.

2.2 *Song of MyselfI*

2.2.1 Critical Summary

Walt Whitman is one of the most amazing, startling and perplexing creations of the modern American mind. He has a many-sided personality and is as slippery as an eel (fish). In life, he was a journey-man, printer, newspaper and, school teacher, small time politician, indolent bachelor, male nurse, mystic, crank, friend of mankind, loafer, principled bath-taker, sage, and above all, author of *Leaves of Grass*. He is a man of amazing diversity, a wildy paradoxical, yet somehow unitary man, lethargic, witty, stubborn and

possessed of a great poetic talent. Whitman is hard to pin down:

"Do I contradict myself?

Very well then, I contradict myself.

I am large, I contain multitudes."

Whitman's *Song of Myself* is the longest and the most important poem in *The Leaves*. It is a long poem in 52 clusters or groups of long lines closely related with each other. Though it is a collection of lyrics. It is epical in its value and significance. Its title implies that in it the poet would sing of himself. He would celebrate himself. But it is as much the song of America as of Walt Whitman. In singing of himself, Whitman sings of America herself. He gives us a panoramic view of the American scene as well as expresses those ideals and values which constitute Americanness. His identification with America and her masses is complete, and this makes the poem, *"The epic of America"*. the *song of America, The Bible of Democracy*, as well as a celebration of the poet's own self. It contains the gist of all that Whitman had to say, and which he kept on saying in different words and forms all through his life. *Song of Myself* is the key both to Whitman's art and his thought.

Song of Myself is a new kind of poem which shocked, puzzled, amused and amazed the average reader, but profoundly impressed a few discriminating scholars. This was so because unlike traditional narrative works, it does not possess a beginning, a middle, and an end. It seems incoherent, lacking progression and devoid of any rational scheme. Besides this, Whitman's many technical innovations- his use of *Verse Libre*, his compound words and coinages, and his use of unfamiliar foreign words- all came in the way of a proper appreciation of this epoch-making poem. However, critics are now agreed that the *Song* has a coherent structure, and that there is in it a progression, a logical development of thought, and not aimless wandering.

It has been variously interpreted. Emerson hailed it as a remarkable mixture of the *Bhagvadgita* and *New York Harald*, an extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom. James E. Miller looks upon it as a rich mine in which the reader may make exciting discoveries. He calls it 'the dramatic representation of an invested mystical experience." Miller divides *Song of Myself* into seven stages-

1.	Entry into the mystical statc	(1-5)
2.	Awakening of self;	(6-14)
3.	Purification of self	(15-32)
4.	Illumination of the dark night of soul	(33-37)
5.	Union (faith and Love)	(38-43)
6.	Union (perception)	(44-49)
7.	Emergence from the mystical state	(50-52)

According to Miller, Whitman reaches mystical consciousness through transfiguration of the senses. In *Song of Myself*, the self is not as in the traditional mystical senses, submerged but rather elaborated. The senses are not humbled but glorified. The high point of the first unit appears in section 5 of the song. In it the poet tells us of the union of his ego with the divine and then translates its implications for himself. The union is rendered in erotic terms:

"I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning"

The mystical union of the ego brings home to it the spiritual servitudes of 'peace and knowledge.'

Richard Chase describes the plot of *Song of Myself* as the gradual universalization of the self. Towards the end of the poem, we find an identification of the self not only with the nation and all mankind, but with the immortal and Divine 'the great comrade'- is affirmed.

The poem develops into a rhapsody celebrating the democratic life, the fertile creativity of the self and a universe in which death is overcome by a kind of maternal process of re-incarnation:

"Do you see my brothers and sisters?

It is not chaos or death- it is form,

Union, plan- it is eternal life-it is Happiness."

Richard Chase characterizes *Song of Myself* as the first truly modern poem. He says, "it repudiated the conventional, genteel and romantic poetry of Whitman's day and in doing so, made modern poetry possible. T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* has a close resemblance to Whitman's *Song of Myself*. It was Whitman who put real typists and clerks in his imaginary world. Ezra Pound made a pact with Whitman:

" I make a pact with you Walt Whitman-

.....

It was you that broke the new wood,

Now it is time for carving.

We have one sap and one. root-

Let there be commerce between us."

Song of Myself made sex a possible subjects for American life. In this respect, Whitman brought a great revolution, e.g. his beautiful idyllic scene in which the handsome and richly woman imagines herself to join the 'twenty eight young men bathe by shore." In such a passage as this, American life was moving towards the freedom that came more naturally to the Europeans:

Chase also refers to the Dionysian comedy or gaiety of *Song of Myself*. Whitman himself once remarked, "I pride my self on being a real humorist underneath everything else." Look at this presumptuous command:

"It is time to explain myself-

Let us stand up."

Richard Chase also finds mystic elements in *Song of Myself*, the comedy and pathos of the single separate person, Whitman is paradoxically, extremely civilized and extremely primitive: what, after all is the image of *Song of Myself* which he projects in it.

Whitman bestrides *Song of Myself* like a colossal. He is stout as a horse, affectionate, haughty, electrical, mystical, nude, fleshly, sensual, eating, drinking and breathing. He is an intellectual as well as a highly unorthodox poet. The first edition of *Leaves of Grass* produced sharp reactions. "I expected

Hell," Whitman wrote, "and I got it." "The New York Times rudely asked what it was, tumbling in drunken confusion through the pages. A London critic called it the expression of a beast. The use of sexual imagery was enough to sicken. Whitier conciled the book to fire after glacing through a few lines. Emerson hesitated to send a copy to Carlylye, but he remarked that the work had terrible eyes and buffalo's strength and was indisputably American.

The *Myself* of the song breaks down into many difficult 'selves', as the man himself wore different masks searching out true relationship with life and death, time and space, nature and the inhabitants of a democracy, sex and language.

Whitman is the poet of the body and the poet of the soul. He is the poet of sexuality and spirituality. He is the sexualist and the mystic. He can assume divinity and yet sing praise of sex:

"Copulation is no more rank to me than death is."

and he also sings:

"Divine am I inside and cut

And I make holy whatever I touched or touched from."

He is thus a physical mystic. He contradicts himself at every step. "My faith is the greatest of faiths and the last of faiths. I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise." He is Walt Whitman the cosmos, the observer of all, the animate or inanimate, maternal or immaternal, wickeness or goodness. He says he is going to tell us his mystery and then he says he cannot. He moves forward and retreats, expresses and conceives. He poses to be a great prophet or a great teacher and ironically enough he teaches that the teacher may be destroyed. He gives the reader a long rope and then snatches it:

"I teach straying from me, yet who can stray from me.'

Baffled and fascinated at once by the multiplicity of things and by god's plenty, and mystifies by the pull of opposites, he elected to sing of the warring elements that compose the great cosmic harmony.

On the back of the seemingly egotism there was the great modesty too, for though vain, Whitman assumed for each of his reader what he assumed. His faith in the common man is expressed in song after song of *Leaves*. In the *Inscription* poem, he utters the word democratic, the word en-masse. His chants are dedicated to the common reader. It is in far above nationality that he finds the central force of Democracy. For him, Democracy means oneness with the whole. Whitman also has an eye for the liberty, equality of the men of all nations. Truly says a critic about Whitman, 'What Homer had been to Greece, Virgil to Rome, Dante to Italy, Shakespeare to England, he was to be for America.'

Whitman looks at pageants of lifewives, old maids, drivers, the run-away slaves, the negroes with polished muscles- all these to the caresses of life are part of himself. They are akin to the grass that grows wherever the land is, the common air that bathes the globe. Therefore the self-dramatized by Whitman speaks for all this, sees himself in all people, and all life speaks for women as well as man, for evil as well as good. He trusts the 'en-masse.'

Therefore, through him, long dump voices of prisoners, slaves, the forbidden voices of sea and lust, speak at last. 'Walt', he says, 'you contain enough. Why do not you let it out?' Which he does, first feeling what he hears in the exciting worlds of his senses, then what he touches, both in intricate and sexual imagery. His robust soul symbolizes the soul of a new society. Nothing can stop its evolution. He will hook each man and woman around the waist and show them to the endless road onward which each must travel

for himself or herself. Having given his message, he will depart, bequeathing himself to grow again from the grass he loves:

"I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,

If you want me again look for me under your boot soles.

.....

I stop somewhere waiting for you."

Such is the personality of Walt Whitman in *Song of Myself*. He is Shakespeare's Ariel, he is the Kubla Khan of Coleridge-

"His flashing eyes, his floating hair!

Weave a circle round him thrice,

And close your eyes with holy-dread,

For he on honey-dew hath fed,

And drunk the milk of paradise."

Portayal of the entry into and emergence from the mystical state of consciousness from sec. 1 to 5 and 50 to 52 conforms to the popular concept of the behaviour of the mystic; his going into and coming out of the mystic trance. This portrayal represents what William James called the sporadic type of mystical experience in which the individual gains sudden fleeting insight and transcendent knowledge. But by the labour, the poet portrays and achieves the union with transcendent. The poet also portrays the five stages of the mystic way as following one another immediately in time whereas, in reality, the mystic might take years to reach his goal of union. Justification for this departure from reality is found in the requirement of work of art-*Song of Myself* is a poem not historical, philosophical or religious document. In these five sections, the single identity, both 'I' and 'you' has been expanded into universal significance, through the joy of living, through sex and through love.

In the opening section of the poem, the poet while in the passive and receptive state of learning and loafing observing a spear of grass sends forth what is to prove a significant invitation. "I leaf and invite my soul." In sec.5, the soul not only accosts the invitation but also consumnates a union with the poet. The intervening sections of the poem portray the poet's mental and physical preparation for this union, creeds and schools, second-hand knowledge, are to be held in obeyance, and the poet will permit to speak at every hazard. Nature without genial to the experience must be found in-

"I will go to the bank by the boad and

become undisguised and naked in order for

nature to speak with original energy,

man-made objects, houses, rooms, cloths

must be at least for a moment forsaken."

The nature of the knowledge to be gained through the experience is indicated when the poet invites the reader to stop this day and night with him and discover 'the origin of all poems, the good of the earth and the sun.' There are further hints in sec. 3 and 4 of the kind of knowledge, nature will bestow. At

the close of sec. 4, the poet both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at, portrays himself as withdrawn; withholding comment and judgement- prepared for the imminent union with his soul-

"I witness and wait".

For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you".....

These lines become the celebration of the universe and recognizes the poet's link with the whole cosmos.

2.2.2 Model Explanations

(i) I celebrate myself, and sing myself

And what I assume you shall assume,

For every atom belonging to me as good belings to you.

I loafe and invite my soul,

I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.

In this opening section of the *Song of Myself*, in the manner of the epic poets, the poet states his theme. He will sing of himself, and, as he finds complete identity between himself and others, in singing of himself he would also sing of others. He is confident that his beliefs and ideals are also the beliefs and ideals of others, and what belongs to him also belongs to others. Every particle, every element of which he is made, has also gone into the making of others. In other words, the poet derives his ego-centric self-confidence from the pantheistic faith that the inner essence of all one and indivisible.

(ii) Lack one lacks both, and the unseen is proved by the seen,

Till that becomes unseen and receives proof in its turn.

Showing the best and dividing it, from the worst, age vexes age,

Knowing the perfect fitness and equanimity of things,

while they discuss I am silent, and go bathe admire myself.

Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, and of any man hearty clean

Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none

shall be less familiar than the rest.

Man is both physical and spiritual. He has both a body a soul, and both are equally important. Both the body and the soul are equally clear and sweet. It is only through the body, 'the seen', that one realise the soul, the unseen. The body is the means through which one perceives the spiritual; the divine mystery can be understood only through the senses.

Therefore, the poet is proud of his body and celebrates it. His body is healthy and upright, stout and strong as that of a horse. It is 'electrical', extremely sensitive and alive, clean and sweet. Therefore, while others are talking (of the beginning and the end), the poet would go 'and bathe and admire his naked body. He praises every organ and attribute of himself and of all other men who are, "hearty and clean". Not a single organ of the human body is vile. The poet delights in a complete familiarity with every inch of

his body.

(iii) Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that pass all the

argument of the earth,

And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,

And know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own

And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and women by sisters

and lovers,

And that a kelson of the creation is love,

And limitless are leaves stiff or dropping in the fields,

And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,

And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein and poke-weed.

As a result of the mystical union with the divine his soul was suffused not only with peace, but also with knowledge and wisdom far greater than any earthly knowledge or bliss. It was then that the poet realised that both his body and soul are the creations of God and so both are equally sacred. He thus became a believer in democracy for he realised that all men are his brothers and all women are either his sisters on his beloved, for the father of all is one and the same, the Supreme. He understood that love is the very stay and support of the universe, and all created objects whether good or bad, significant or insignificant, lowly or great, are equally holy and valuable. Whitman's conception of democracy is spiritual and pantheistic.

(iv) Endless unfolding of words of ages!

And mine a word of the modern, the word En-Masse.

A word of the faith that never balks,

Here or henceforward it is all the same to me, I accept Time absolutely.

It alone is without flaw, it alone rounds and completes all,

That mystic baffling wonder alone completes all.

Words have been endlessly through the ages, but for the poet the most important word is the modern word En-Masse. It is important for him for it signifies democracy, the concept of equality and brotherhood of all. The poet has full faith in democracy, for democracy can never betray mankind. He believes in democracy now, and he will believe in it in the future also. Time is a mysterious, wonder-working power. It completes and perfects everything and so it will also complete and perfect democracy. Democracy would become flawless with the passing of time.

(v) I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contain'd

I stand and look at them long and long.

They do not sweat and whine about their conditions.

They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,

They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God.

Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of owning things,

Not one kneels to another, nor to his land that lived thousands of years ago,

Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth.

The poet expresses his love for the self-contained animals. He would like to spend some period of his life among them. He wants to live with animals because they are very placid, calm and satisfied. They are self-sufficient. He would like with them because they have self-sufficiency. Their life is very carefree. They are not burdened with cares. He stands amazed at the right of animals and looks at them for a long time. He observes the simplicity of their life. They don't have to sweat to earn a living nor do they pine at their condition. They are satisfied with their life. They don't remain sleepless or feel sorry for their sins. They commit no sins, and have no knowledge of evil. No evil, corruption and hatred are lodged in them. They lead a life on innocence, content and virtue. They do not make the poet sick by discussions relating to their duties towards God. They are satisfied, and they do not cringe or flatter the living, nor do they worship their heroes who may have been dead for thousands of years.

(vi) Before I was born out of my mother, generations guided me,

My embryo has never been torpid, nothing could overlay it.

For it the nebula cohered to an orb,

The long slow strata piled to rest it on,

Vast vegetables gave it sustenance,

Monstrous sauroids transported it in their mouths and deposited it with care.

All forces have been steadily employ'd to complete and delight me.

Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul.

Time is endless, and the life of the soul is endless. The soul is born again and again, and every birth adds to the richness and variety of the soul. Every life is an addition to the wisdom and experience of the soul, and thus the soul continues to rise higher and higher through the ages. One's soul at the present moment is the resultant of the experience it has passed through since the earliest times when there was chaos and the stars existed unformed as nebulae. Hence the poet sings ecstatically, "*Immense have been the preparation for me*," and "*All forces have been steadily employed to complete and delight me*." It is the victory-song of the poet celebrating the immensity and eternity of his own soul. It is a mystic truth and the poet has succeeded in giving it a highly charged poetic expression.

(vii) And as to you Death, and you bitter hug of mortality, it is idle to try to alarm me.

To his work without flinching the accoucheur comes,

I see the elder-hand pressing, receiving, supporting,

I recline by the sills of the exquisite flexible doors,

And mark the outlet, and mark the relief and escape.

And as to you Corpse I think you are good manure, but that does not offend me,

I smell the white roses sweet-scented and growing.

I reach to the leafy lips, I reach to the polish'd breasts of melons.

The poet is not afraid of Death. Others may shun its embrace, but he welcomes Death. This is so because he has realised the mystic truth that Death is not the end of life. Rather, it is a birth into eternal life. Death does not end anything; rather it marks a fresh beginning. The corpse grows out in the form of flowers and other vegetation growing on the grave, or it serves to fertilise the soil of soul out of which fruits and flowers grow. The soul does not die at all.

(viii) I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,

I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,

If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,

But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,

And filter and fibre your blood.

In the last lines of the poem, in a rare burst of humility, he tells his readers that he bequeathes himself to the dirt, from where he would grow in the form of grass which he loves. If they want him again, they should search for him, "under your boot-soles." The poet's mystical experience has taught him the lesson of humility. He had been launched in this journey by contemplating a blade of grass. They too can start on such a journey by contemplating like him a leaf of grass which he would like to become after his death. They may not understand the meaning of what he says, but if they follow his advice it would be good for their health i.e. it would be useful for them.

2.3 *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed*

2.3.1 Critical Summary

When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed, first published in 1865 in the *Drum-Taps*, is a long elegy in 16 sections on the death of Abraham Lincoln, the President of "America, who wages a Civil War for the freedom of the Negro slaves and saved his country form disintegration. The poet loved and admired him for his honesty, sympathy, courage and determination and so was intensely grieved at his assassination, in April 1865, soon after the American Civil War had ended. As in the convention elegy, in the present elegy also there is, first, an expression of personal grief, then a procession of mourners through whom the poet's grief is universalised, and then, finally, consolation is offered for the death of the beloved one.

The period of the civil war stands out as a distinctly marked stage in the inner spiritual progress of Walt Whitman as also in the development of his poetic genius. This was both a tragedy and a triumph for the American people. The tragedy as well as triumph culminated in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln-a tragic event theat stirred the very depths of the hearts of millions of men and women both in the north and in the south. It released an overpowering sense of sorrows and awe that cut across the barriers of political partisanship and deep rooted prejudices resulting from the differences in race and colour. The war had

come like a tonic to the lethargic Whitman and his whole being had been electrified. The assassination of Lincoln moved him deeply and he gave expression to his and the nation's dazed emotional state at this irreparable national loss in *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*. Whitman's own intense feelings of sorrow are revealed in the form of loud lamentations:

"O powerful western fallen star!

O shades of night- o moody, tearful night!

O great star disappear'd.....

The feelings expressed in this poem are exceedingly personal and exceedingly abstract. The death of the great person stirs the poet, not to a tragic sense of life but to its exquiste pathos. The idea of redemtion and eternal life is present but the mood is aesthetic and moral rather than religious as in Henry James's *The Wing of the Dove*.

When Lilacs is different from the conventional elegies like *Lycidas*. There is no society of Shepherds in Whitman's poem; there is no image of society at all except of the sketchist kind. On the one hand, there are brief, concrete images of separate house with their daily images, and little groups of the sombre citizens at the depots watching the coffin and, on the other hand, a generalized sense of the whole nation in mourning, Lincoln himself is absent from the poem, there being hardly a trace of either his personal or his personality until the very end of the poem, where Whitman speaks vaguely of "The sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and lands." The impersonality of *Lilacs* is all the more strongly brought home to us when Whitman writes:

"Here coffin, that slowly passes

I gave you my sprig of lilac"

We realise that not only has the poet thought directly of the man in the coffin but that he has moved immediately into the abstract and the universal for he adds:

"Nor for you, for one alone,

Blossoms and branches green to coffins all I bring,

For fresh as the morning, this would

I chant a song for you O sane and sacred death."

Whitman's unknowledgeable convention makes it impossible for him to conceive either the being or the value of the individual without conceiving him as an example of mankind in general. Instead of bestowing flowers upon Lincoln, the poet first bestows them on all the dead unequally and on death itself.

There is one individual in the poem, the poet himself. Whitman finds solace for his grief, unlike Milton in *Lycidas*, not by placing himself in a grieving society, but by withdrawing from the world, and, in effect, curing his grief by feeling the most powerful emotion of loneliness and the poem then recounts the poet's search for comrades whom he finds in the symbolic star, lilac and singing bird and finally in death itself. He walks hand in hand with his companions:

"Then with the knowledge of death as

walking one side of me,

And the thought of death close walking

the other side of me,

And I in the middle as with companions,

and as holding the hands of companions

I feld forth to the hiding receiving night

that talks not,....."

The poet of *Lilacs* does not place himself in any ostensible society neither does he very profoundly place himself in Nature. In contrast to Miltons tragic concept of Nature, Whitman's grasp upon Nature issues not in a vision of universal order or disorder, but either in the effective paths of somewhat theatrical symbols like the lilac and ceders and pines in the brooding lyric but abstract meditation upon death. In contrast with the feeling of immortality in Milton's great elegy, the feelings of immortality in *Lilacs* is extremely weak. There is no liberating promise of personal immortality to the dead man and at the end we find a beautiful but very sad reunion instead of the promise of "fresh fields and pastures new". The symbol of the lilac blooming, returning with spring recurs with its suggestion of resurrection, but this does not at all succeed in releasing the poet from the conviction that he has found the ultimate felicity of comradeship in the equalitarian democracy of death itself. Whitman extolls death for it is the ultimate democracy:

"Come lovely and soothing death,

Undulate round the world, serenely arriving,

arriving,

In the day, in the night, to all, to each,

Sooner or later delicate death."

Richard Chase is of the view that there is a premature old age in Whitman's poetry, as there was in the man himself. His elegies sound an unmistakable note of Virgilian weariness. There is a sterile Egyptian atmosphere of odours, perfumes, herbage, pine and cedar, to say nothing of outright lyric worship of death itself. The poem thus appears to Richard Chase as artificial.

Geoffrey Dutton raises objection to Chase's use of 'extraordinary word' artificiality for Whitman's poem which, Dutton thinks, is cunningly built of living symbols. The symbolism of *When Lilacs* is beautiful and profound in its significance. The fallen 'western star,' the 'the blooming lilac', the death's outlet song in pines and cedars, the pictures of active America for the walls of the burial place, the long black smoke train of Lincoln's funeral, train drifting over the daily usages of land-this symbolism is confident, expressive, controlled and beautiful. Dutton continues, 'Here the senses match the soul in their influence upon the poem. They are the introduction to the three symbols, lilac, star, and bird which in turn introduce death in terms of the natural cycle of individual mourning and of the mystic rapture. The three symbols which stand for the assassination of Lincoln (fallen star), rebirth and resurrection (lilac), the poet and power of poetry (bird) correspond to the sense symbols of sight, scent and hearing. Their development is musical. In the end, they are united with the poet:

".....and this for his dear sake,

Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my soul,

These is the fragrant pines and the cedars dusk and dim."

Lilacs stands amongst the greatest elegies of the world. Whitman spoke of Lincoln ad "the first great martyr of the chiefs of democracy" and in this elegy of surpassing beauty we hear echoes suggesting something of the tragic poignance of Hector's death, of the lyricism of *Lycidas* and of the melody of *In Memoriam*.

Thus, the movement of the poet from one symbol the another creates the dramatic tension of elegy. Symbols on which depends the effect of the poem, universalize the theme. Above all, the American variety of elegy looks like a lyric melodrama where the personal becomes impersonal and abstract. And its tensions and contradictions are those involved in the drama of life.

2.3.2 Model Explanations

(i) In the dooryard fronting an old farm-house near the white-wash'd palings,

Stands the lilac-bush tall-growing with heart-shaped leaves of rich green,

With many a pointed blossom rising delicate, with the perfume strong I love,

With every leaf a miracle- and from this bush in the dooryard,

With delicate-color'd blossoms and heart-shaped leaves of rich green,

A spring with its flower I break.

The poet wanted to offer something to the departed hero, and so he plucked a lilac spring with a flower from a lilac-bush growing in the dooryard of a farm-house. Thus the lilac hero became a symbol of love and sympathy. It also symbolises equality and brotherhood, for it grows everywhere and is easily available to all the section, introduces the hermit thrush, which, is the voice of spirituality or of the inner self of the poet. It is a shy and hidden bird, and the poet hears it singing, "in the swamp in secluded recesses." It sings all alone, "a song of the bleeding throat." It is "Death's outlet song of life," for if the thrush had not been allowed to sing, it would surely have died. The bird is the poet's 'dear brother'; there is the bond of silent sympathy between the two. Like the bird, the poet also sings his, "Death's outlet song of life," a song which comes out of his bleeding heart.

(ii) Sing on there in the swamp,

O singer bashful and tender, I hear your notes, I hear your call,

I hear, I come presently, I understand you,

But a moment I linger, for the lustrous star has detain'd me,

The star, my departing comrade, holds and detains me.

The poet listens to the song of the bird, but as yet he is unable to go to it. He still lingers, detained by the star, his "departing comrade." The grief of the poet is symbolised by the star, and the poet is still immersed in it. The hermit-thrush would explain to him the real meaning of Death, but as yet he does not heed its call.

(iii) With the holders holding my hand nearing the call of the bird,

Comrades mine and I in the midst, and their memory ever to keep, for the dead

I loved so well,

For the sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and lands-and this for his dear sake,

Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my soul,

Three in the fragrant pines and the cedars dusk and him.

The elegy ends on a note of serenity, reconciliation and acceptance. Lilac and star and bird twine with the chant of his soul. He would remember for ever, "the sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and lands," but he would also remember the wonderful tallying songs of the thrush. The section repeats the main symbols and images used earlier. "The structure of the poem is cyclic in nature moving from star to lilac to bird, and back to star again, to repeat the circle, but eventually settling with the hermit-thrush."

2.5 Let Us Sum Up

The mystic-journey in *Song of Myself* ends with a union with the divine, and this union can be achieved by all those who are sincere and honest in their quest for him. This is the final, farewell message of the poet. *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed* is a supreme example of a poignant elegy in which the emotions of the poem are embodied in a number of powerful symbols

2.6 Review Questions

1. Compare *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed* with *Lycidas* as elegies.
2. Discuss *Song of Myself* as a new kind of poem.
3. *Song of Myself* contains the gist of Whitman's thoughts. Discuss.

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UNIT-3

EMILY DICKINSON: HER PERSONALITY & WORKS

Structure

3.0 Objectives

In this unit we propose to study the life and personality, major themes and art of writing poetry of one of the major poets of American literature, Emily Dickinson.

3.1 Introduction

We have in Jonson's edition of Emily Dickinson's poems as a complete record of the development of lyric talent as exists in literature. Scholars have busied themselves with the record; we know of the colour she names most frequently (purple) and what books she read (Shakespeare and the Bible well in the lead). We ourselves can discover, in the index to the three volumes, that her favorite subject was not death, as was wrongly supposed; for life, love, and the soul are also recurring subjects. But the greatest interest lies in her progress as a writer, and as a person. We see the young poetess moving away, by gradual degree, from her early addiction to graveyardism to an Emersonian belief in the largeness and harmony of Nature. Step by step, she advances into the terror and anguish of her destiny; she is frightened, but she holds fast and describes her fright. She is driven to the verge of insanity, but manages to remain the observer and recorder of her extremity. Nature is no longer a friend, but often a hostile presence. Nature is haunted house. And- a truth even more terrible- the inmost self can be haunted.

3.2 Emily Dickinson: A Biographical Sketch

Emily Dickinson was born on December 10, 1830, in a small hilly American town called Amherst. Her father Edward Dickinson was a lawyer and treasurer of Amherst college. He ruled his house like an

absolute monarch, rearing his children in a way as to make them perfect Christian citizens. Emily Dickinson was mostly educated at home. In 1854 she had a trip to Philadelphia where she met and is believed to have fallen in love with a married clergyman Charles Wadsworth. We cannot ascertain her emotional involvement with him but she did exchange letters with him. In 1861 Charles moved to San Francisco with his family and from that time on Miss Dickinson began to withdraw into her house and into herself. However with this withdrawl into the warmith of her emotional innerness came the beginning of her real poetic productivity.

Her father died in 1874 and her mother became paralysed a year later. This made her more and more secluded. She devotedly nursed her bed-ridden mother for seven years and the terrible sense of anguish that her father's death caused in her heart never left her. Her elder brother Austin understood better than any other member of the family. His wife Sue shared more of Emily's personal life and poetic hopes than any other single contemporary. Her younger sister, Lavinia, being aggressive and practical, protected Emily's privacy and fulfilled her social obligations. After Emily's death in 1886, a shocked Lavinia discovered the mass of hidden poems written by Emily. Although she little appreciated poetry yet she did feel that they were the work of a genius. She not only got them published but also saw them achieve popular success. During her own life time Emily published just seven poems and even these appeared anonymously. Her most important literary friendship was with T.W.Hagginson, the editor of 'Atlantic Monthly,' to whom she sent a few of her poems asking his opinion. However he never really understood her mind or her poetry and plainly advised her against publication. This and her own temperament made her decide not to seek the publication of her poems.

Dickinson life was perfectly devoid of outward event. She was a recluse by temperament and habit. This voluntary isolation was not due to any disappointment in life but it does seem that she lacked intellectual companionship. Although Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, Poe, Thoreun and Whitman were writing during her times yet there is hardly any mention of the literary events taking place in America during her times.

Although from 1861 to 1864 she wrote over 750 poems yet upto the end she remained a private poet, a poet whose work remained unpublished during her life time. She was never interested in the investment of her immortal spirit in a marketable product. She felt a deep resentment against publication which she called 'the auction of the mind of man.' Thus it is only since the 1920's that Emily Dickinson has come to be recognised as one of the America's major poets. In 1924 Mrs Martha Bianchi, Emily's niece, published '*The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*; Though this volume was by no means complete. In 1945 Mrs Mable Todd and her daughter, one of Emily's neighbors brought out 668 unpublished poems in 'Bolts of Melody.' However a complete and authoritative edition of Emily Dickinson's poems appeared in 1955 as '*The Poems of Emily Dickinson*' in three volumes by Thomas H. Johnson. These volumes contained all 1775 of her known poems, Their chronology and all their variants.

3.3 Characteristic Features of Dickinson's Poetry

3.3.1 The Theme of Love

Being a lyric poet, Dickinson aimed at achieving a true fusion of thought and feeling. There are nearly three hundred poems in which there are remarkably precise analyses of intense pleasure and intense pain.

Dickinson considered the subject of love from a philosophical view point. She almost equated love

with God. She seems to hold an unchristian concept that God, being a continually evolving entity, was dependent upon man's love for complete happiness. Love triumphs over both life and death to achieve an almost divine status. She realised in her maturity that love created the only harmony in the universe and that divine love surpassed Nature's beauty and human affection.

The majority of Dickinson's love poems handle openly the effects of passion upon a human soul. These poems reveal three principal motifs: the anticipation of the lover's future visit and possible marriage; the climacteric meeting of the lovers and their resulting separation; and finally the sublimation of the human passion in a celestial marriage as she becomes the bride of Christ.

The first group contains her most sentimental and derivative love poems. Some deal with erotic expectations while others deal with a longing for imagined visits. The poem *The Soul Selects her own Society*, expresses a feeling of ecstasy in the choice of the one whom she pledges a whole hearted and exclusive devotion. Although the chosen one is an earthly lover yet by talking of herself in terms of the 'Soul' the poetess attaches a higher, spiritual significance to her passion for the lover.

The largest among the love poems consists of those which deal with the actual meeting of the lovers. These poems are dominated by a haunting sense of anguish due to the possibility of separation and a realisation of the termination of love. These poems, too, consider the spiritual aspect of love rather than its human importance '*There came a Day at Summer*'s Full' treats such an experience from a religious stand point boldly assuming that the lovers' earthly renunciation will bring them heavenly bless. She insists that their temporary ecstasy and long separation will lead to a greater spiritual happiness. The loss is accepted because it must bring an eternal and perfect union.

Dickinson's most artistic love poems are those which deal with brides and marriages. In these poems the human lover remains shadowy and her vision of the lovers' heavenly marriage changes to an actual celestial union with God. Here she dramatically merges the sacred and profane aspects of human passion and transforms her desire for human marriage into a Bride- of Christ vision. In these poems the bride is viewed, first, as an actual woman being married, then as the bride of death, which allows her to enter the third stage as married to God in paradise. Thus we see that her force as a love poet is strongest when she imbues physical passion with religious feeling, like John Donne and other metaphysical poets, and when she grounds spiritual awe in sensation.

3.3.2 The Theme of Death

Dickinson's poetics insight into the nature of death is one of her unique contributions to American literature. She wrote nearly five hundred poems on the subject of death. She perceives death as one free agent, greater than Nature and second only to God. The fascinating and mysterious part of death is that it results not only in despair and terror but also in rest and peace. Dickinson gives us endless images of death- it comes as a cunning courtier stealthily wooing with a pretended charm; it commands a king, stings, like an insect, manoeuvers like a snake, visits like an old friend, kills ruthllesly like a hired assassin.

Because I could not Stop for Death is the finest of her poems concerning death. In her poems on the subject of death Dickinson closely examines the sensation of dying, the response of the outlookers, the terrible struggle of the body for life, the adjustments in a house after death, arranging the body for the funered, the church services, and even the thoughts of the dead person.

The poem *I Heard a Flybuzz When I Died* satirises the traditional view of death as a peaceful release from life's pressures and a glorious entry into immortality. There is no hope of immortality in *I Felt*

a Funeral in my Brain, too as it only depicts a despairing plunge into an eternal abyss.

Few American poets have analysed death with such variety and intensity as Dickinson. She never flinched from death's harsh reality nor ever ceased considering the various ways she might herself face this great adversary. Let us compare Emily's poem *Just Lost When I Was Saved* with Frost's *The Onset* both of which are on the theme of death.The two poems move in two very different directions while dealing with a common theme. Whereas Frost depicts the onset of death as something like a winter storm but soon takes to a proverbial assurance of "can spring remain behind," Dickinson refuses to take shelter behind any such proverbial "wisdom". Unlike Frost's poem, hers does not fall into the simplified form of "beginning in delight and ending in wisdom." On the contrary, it stays with the strange experience, tries to grapple with that strangeness, feels it slipping out of her hands, and ends hoping to have and know more of it the next time. Dickinson gives us only as much of life as she experiences, without any attempt at falsification through the contracts of custom, or beaten tracks of tradition. And it is here where her strength lies.

3.3.3 The Theme of Immortality

Death and life after death, constitute a dominant theme in Dickinson's poetry. It varies in tone from elegiac despair, or horror at bodily decay, to exalted and confident belief to resignation before an unsolvable mystery.

Immortality as a subject largely occupied her mind and overwhelmed her with its intensity. Although she was skeptic about the belief in immortality yet she knew that one of the strongest incentives to belief was the desperate desire of the heart not to be robbed by the grave. This need was the firmest proof for man to believe that the grave was a gateway to immortality. The tension between faith and doubt remained constant in her from an early age up to the time of her death.

Although some of her poems express her religious doubt, the majority accept God as a true personality whom she could love, hate, joke with and be irritated by. In a number of her religious poems she considers the relation of human love and earthly experience to life in paradise. She felt that even God himself was dependent on human love for complete happiness. In one of her poems she doubts if heaven will please her since only saints will be there *I Taste a Liquor never Brewed* describes through a drinking metaphor, the ecstasy that accompanies a revelation Dickinson almost always works best from real domestic experience. The well known poems *Because I could not stop for Death* is quite homely in metaphor. Death is a suitor taking a girl dressed as if for a wedding on a ride through the country; the carriage takes them to a house and empty centuries of eternity all shorter than the vital day of courtship. She believed that death was no more than a dialogue between the spirit and the dust wherever the spirit had the final word.

Thus in her poems on immortality, Dickinson reveals not only her religious depth and perceptive insight into spiritual reality but also her artistic ability in employing both scepticism and faith as a strategy to increase the dramatic tension of her poems.

3.4 Dickinson as a Mystic Poet

In the nineteenth century, we came upon a multiplication of poets whose spiritual perceptions were acute. Beyond the Metaphysical poets such as Vaughan and Herbert (who, in the seventeenth century, worked from a religious base) we think of Blake, of the young Wordworth; of Keats and Shelley; of Hopkins. In fact, the list can be extended into the twentieth century to include W.B.Yeats and T.S.Eliot. After going through the works of these poets one finds that the progress of the mystic towards illumination,

and of the poet towards the full depth and richness of his insight are much alike. Both work from the world of reality, towards the realm of essence; from the microcosm to the macrocosm. Both posses an intense and accurate sense of their surroundings. We cannot find anything vague or floating in their perception of reality; it is indeed as though they saw "through, not with, the eye." And they are filled with love for the beauty they perceive in the world of time "this remarkable world", as Emily Dickinson called it.

As for Death, both the mystic and the poet are neither fearful not morbid. Obviously, they would not be because they feel immortality behind it. They document life's fearful limitations from which they suffer, but they do not mix self-pity with account of their suffering (which they describe, like their joy, in close detail). They see the world in a grain of sand and Heaven in the wild flower. Also, now and again they bring eternity into focus, as it were, in a phrase of 'the atmost clarity'. In the work of Emily Dickinson, such moments of still and halted perception are very many. The slant of life on a winter day, the still brilliance of the summer noon, the sound of the wind before the rain- she speaks of these and such other phenomena of nature, attracting us to share the shock of insight, the slight dislocation of serial events, the sudden shift from the manifold into the one. In all of these poetic perceptions, of insightful illumination, Dickinson comes close to the experience of the mystic. Thus, what emerges common to both here is the purity of perception, the transcendence of the mundane, the child-like simplicity and innocence, the freshness of response to life, to experience wonder of it all.

Making comparisons between the life and circumstances of poets can often prove an unrewarding effort. But in certain cases, it can yield result highly useful for better understanding of both. In the case of Emily Dickinson, whose career for long was considered highly isolated, it seems interesting to make certain comparisons. One such comparison is between the lives, temperaments and works of Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson. Another equally rewarding comparisons can be made between William Blake and Emily Dickinson, although in this case the comparison is more restricted, confined only to one or two resemblances. Blake as a lyric poet, not as a prophet, seems to have been a model for Dickinson, who closely imitated the former's form in at least two poems. Both took over the simplest forms of the song and the hymn and turned this simplicity to their own uses and advantages. Both can be seen working straight from almost dictated inspiration. In fact, Blake had claimed that his poems were dictated to him intact and entire. However, on close examination of their now available manuscripts it becomes clear that both worked over their original drafts with meticulous care. In other words, the simplicity of their verses was actually achieved with great pains.

Another similarity between these two poets is that they had to struggle against server odds of life: Blake against poverty and misunderstanding, and Dickinson against a lack of true response in the traditionally stiffened society in which she was born and brought up. To both of them, limitation and boundary finally yielded power and originality they were quite outside the spirit of their times so that they were comparatively untouched by the vagaries of fashion; they both were able to wring from their solitary position sound working principles and just form.

As we read through the poetry of Emily Dickinson, we receive an added pleasure from the openness and inclusiveness of the work. All of her poems, including all sorts, have been preserved; no strict process of self editing has taken place, and we do not have to face the periods in which much has been suppressed. The failures and the successes both stand side by side: the poems expressing the poet's more childish and undeveloped characteristics and the poems upon which the sentimentality of her time left its mark are often followed or preceded by poems which define and express the very nearly indefinable and inexpressible. There is no professionalism, so to say, in the worst sense; and it is interesting to note that,

although she sought out Higginson's advice and named herself his 'scholar', she never altered a poem of hers according to any suggestion of his. In fact, at one time, she had perhaps been willing to be published, but, later, she decided to do without print.

The power to utter the unutterable- to hint of the unknowable- is the power of the seer, in Emily Dickinson equipped with the ironic intelligence and great courage of spirit. The stuff of her imagination is of this world there is nothing macabre (as in Poe) about her material, and there is very little of the laboured or artificial about her means (as in Eliot). If "she mastered life by rejecting it," she mastered that Nature concerning which she had such ambivalent feeling by adding herself to the sum of all things, in a Rilkean habit of praise. "She kept in touch with reality", someone has said of her, "by the clearest and the finest of sense- the senses of sight. Perhaps the great vitality of contact by vision is the essence, in part, of her originality." How precisely she renders the creatures of this earth! She presents them to us, not as symbols of this of that, but as themselves, as they are. And her lyrical notation is so prefect, so fine, and moves so closely in union with her mind, that she is conically striking out aphorisms, as is usual in mystical writing from Plotinus to Blake. And as her life goes on, everything becomes whittled down, evanescent. Her handwriting becomes a kind of fluid print; her poems become notation; all seems to be on the point of disappearing. And suddenly all disappears. As Richard Chase put it, "She was a visionary to whom truth came with exclusive finality (and) like her Puritan fornears she was severe, downright, uncompromising, visionary, factual, sardonic."

Looking back to all that has been said to describe Emily Dickinson's poetry, via her life and her town, her affections and affinities, we can conclude that though not a conventional mystic, she shared with the mystic the mystical experience of feeling the infinite in the finite, the unknowable in the known. To that extent, she can be called a mystic poet. But she does not share with the mystic any sort of insistence the latter is given to making on the existence of a definite God, or Supernatural Power, nor does she indulge in any aphoristic expressions to which the mystic is given. Even Blake takes to aphoristic idiom and dogmatically insists on the existence of a God- like, if not God, presence reflecting itself through the objects of nature, including the humans. Her strength as a poet lies, and that she shares with none, even Blake, in her utter honesty to depict reality in its stark nudity, without any sort of falsification inherent in customary expressions, or in aphoristic idiom.

3.5 Dickinson's Poetic Technique

Dickinson approached language as an explorer of new lands. She used words with a creator's licence, coining with a free hand, springing the rhythm and slanting the rhyme. When she sent some of her poems to Higginson for his opinion, she asked whether poetry was 'alive' and whether it 'breathed' she believed.

A word that breathes distinctly

Has not the power to die.

For her using words does not mean killing them but endowing them with life. In one of her letters she says:

A word is dead, when it is said

Some say-

I say it just begins to live

That day.

It is generally agreed that it was around 1860 that Emily Dickinson made the discovery of herself as a poet and began to develop a professional interest in poetic techniques. Although she did not put down her views on the art of poetry in any formal theoretical piece, her thoughts about poetry and the function of the poet can be gathered from her poems and letters. In this regard, she can be grouped with Shakespeare; for, like him, her writing techniques were self-taught. However, it is quite clear that she did not follow traditional theories, and developed instead her own along highly original lines. Although her proficiency in prose was no less, she thought in poetry rather than prose. By 1858, at ease with the way of life she had elected from the images and sensations that she wished to realize.

Although the writers of free verse have been acknowledging a debt of Emily Dickinson, she did not compose anything which today would be called *vers libre* (condensed verse, as distinguished from that which is metrical of rhymed). Her first attempt to do so was the poem *Victor Comes Late*, written in 1862. And that also became her last because it seems to have convinced her that such a form was not the medium which best transmitted nor moods and ideas. In fact, free verse is not the only way to gain liberty. She evidently felt that she needed rhyme and metre. To her contemporaries, and to most commentators of the time, her seemingly unpatterened verse appeared to be the work of an original but undisciplined artist. For comparison, Shakespeare again comes to mind; for, we know how he was for long considered an untutored genius. Actually, Emily Dickinson was creating a new medium of poetic expression.

In Dickinson's day, it was customary to use exact patterns and exact rhymes in English poetry, with concessions to a spare use of eye rhymes (such as *some-home)*. Her grounding in French and in classical literature, however elementary or imperfect, must have convinced her that English custom had no preemptive sanction. Hence she proceeded to enormously extend the range of variation within controlled limits by adding to the existing exact and eye-rhymes four types that poets writing in English had never used expertly enough to gain for them a general acceptance: identical rhymes *(move-remove)*, vowel rhymes (*see-buy*), imperfect rhymes [identical vowels followed by different consonants] (*thing-alone*). Dickinson selected these rhymes at will, singly or in combination, carrying her freedom to the utmost by feeling no compulsion to use one rhyming pattern in a poem any more than she left constrained to use single metric form. Thus in a poem of three quatrains the rhyme in the first stanza may be exact for the second and fourth lines, suspended in the second stanza for lines three and four, and conclude in the third stanza with imperfect rhymes for the first and fourth lines. The wheel horses of her stanzas are always the final lines, whether the poems written as a series of quatrains or as a combination of stanza patterns.

Within this structure, which she carved out for herself, she was seldom wayward, not did she have to be, for it gave her ample room for variety of mood, speed, and circuit. Examination of the intent of a poem usually reveals a motive for the variations. At times, it seems, Dickinson felt, as we do these days, that a poem was unskillfully realized, as she abandoned a great many such efforts in worksheets. Thus imperfectly realized poems were given a status which the poet never thought they deserved. The level of the poet's achievement is raised when such unfinished labours are not weighed in.

Emily Dickinson, like any poet having her kind of seriousness, must have been grouping for ways of expression that said things as she individually wished to say them. Some of what are generally turned her idiosyncrasies in language and grammar are considered obtrusive when sprinkled too freely. However, it is also true that more than anything else she cared for the precise communication of her thought and feeling, rather than the mechanical perfection of her verse. Her concept of language is allied to, though different from, that which prompted her to cultivate elliptical phrases as a way of paring words that complete

sentences grammatically but do not communicate. Of course on occasion she cut too deeply into the quick of her thought because she truncated her predication to the point where readers must perpetually group for meaning. But where her intent is realized, the attar becomes haunting and unforgettable. Besides, her elliptical phrases and broken sentences are effective means of making the language of her poetry highly dramatic. Here, Robert Browning comes to mind for parallel. We know how he brought out, through these very dramatic devices, the very soul of his character speaking the dramatic monologue. In the case of Dickinson, the poet herself is the speaker of the monologue, dramatizing herself equally effectively. John Donne provides, in this regard, another parallel to Emily Dickinson: he, too, made the language of poetry most dramatic. Shakespeare, of course, is the most dramatic of poets so for as the use of language is concerned.

3.6 Let Us Sum Up

Thus we see that Dickinson dealt with a number of themes in her poetry-Nature, love, pain and suffering, death and immorality God and Christ, poetry as an art and so on she was very scrupulous in the choice of words that suited her purpose most. She loosed traditional set meters to capture the easy codence of conversation and prose but never attempted *Vers Libre* nor abandoned rhyming devices. Her vivid imagery and pithy expression are due more to her personal experiences than to any literary tradition.

3.7 Review Questions

1. Discuss Emily Dickinson as a mystic poet.
2. Write a note on the significance of "solitude" in Dickinson's poetry.
3. Write a note on the themes of Love and Death in the poetry of Emily Dickinson.
4. Discuss Dickinson as a poet of "privacy". Use illustrations from the poems you have read.

3.8 Bibliography

1. Thomas H. Johnson, Emily Dickinson: An Interpretative Biography. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1955).
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3. Albert J. Gelpi, Emily Dickinson: The Mind of the Poet (New York, 1971)
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7. Richard B.Seawall (ed.), Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963)

UNIT-4

EMILY DICKINSON: SOME SELECTED POEMS -II

Structure

4.0 Objectives

The turns of fancy that marked Emily's poems were sharp and unpredictable, and yet they were singularly natural. Nothing was forced. Dickinson loved in a world of paradox, for, while her eye was microscopic, her imagination dwelt with mysteries and grandeurs. To juxtapose the great and the small, in unexpected ways, had been one of her prime amusements, and this had remained an essential note of her

style as a poet. The poems were fairy-like in their shimmer and lightness, they moved like bees upon a raft of air. And yet, one felt behind them an energy of mind and spirit that only the rarest poets have possessed. In this unit we shall analysis some of her representative poems.

4.1 Introduction

It is only since the 1920's that Emily Dickinson has come to be recognised as one of America's major poets. During her life-time those who knew of her at all believed her to be a shy, eccentric spinster living in a small New England town. Even when her poetry was first given to the world, posthumously, in 1890, it was regarded as the product of a minor talent, ornamented by an erratic ability in versification that sometimes showed sharp insights. Nearly three decades afterwards her reputation began to change to that of a major new voice of modern times. In 1924 Mrs Martha Bianchi, Emily's niece published *The complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, though this volume was by no means complete. In 1929 Mrs Bianchi, assisted by a collaborator, brought out further poems of Emily Dickinson, adding yet more poems to the collection in 1936. In 1945 Mrs Mable Todd, a neighbour of the Dickinson family, and her daughter, Millicent Todd Bingham, brought out 668 hitherto unpublished poems in a volumes called *Bolts of Melody*. For a decade there was a serious need for a complete and authoritative edition of Emily Dickinson's poem. This was finally supplied in 1955 by Thomas H. Johnson in *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* in three volumes. These volumes contained all 1775 of her known poems, their chronology, and all their variants. Subsequently Johnson published revised editions of the complete poems.

4.2 Success is Counted Sweetest

4.2.1 The Text

Success is counted sweetest

By those who ne'ver succeed.

To comprehend a nectar

Requires sorest need.

Not one of all purple Host

Who took the Flag today

Can tell the definition

So clear of Victory

As he defeated-dying-

On whose forbidden ear

The distant strains of triumph

Burst agonized and clear !

4.2.2 Critical Analysis

The poem is an expression of the idea of compensation, the idea that every evil confers some balancing good, that through bitterness we are able to appreciate the sweet, that "water is taught by

thirst". The defeated and dying soldier of this poem is compensated by a greater awareness of the meaning of victory than the victors themselves can have: he can comprehend the joy of success through its polar contrast to his despair.

The poetess is arguing the *superiority* of defeat over victory, of frustration over satisfaction, and of anguished comprehension over mere possession. The victors have only the victory, a victory which they cannot clearly define or fully enjoy. They have paid for their triump by a sacrifice of awareness; a material gain has cost them a spiritual loss. For the dying soldier, the case is reversed: defeat and death are attended by an increase of awareness, and material loss thus leads to spiritual gain. Emily Dickinson would think it a better bargain.

Dickinson realized that all experience were relative and determined by their context. Time changes pain; love reflects a person's mood; the eye creates beauty. This is a poem which, like several others by her, deals with the laws of compensation and the inter-relation of pleasure and pain, ecstasy and despair. She viewed both sides of an experience and, unhindered by dogma or traditional concepts, accepted life as it occurred. Unflinchingly she faced its misery and loneliness, even relishing its bitterness, since this too was an aspect of life. (Sometimes she claimed that anticipation surpassed attainment and that pain alone endured while happiness was denied. Yet she never ceased her struggle, nor allowed any facet of pain to escape her acute observation.

4.3 *I Heard A Fly Buzz When I Died*

4.3.1 The Text

I heard a Fly buzz- when I died-

The Stillness in the Romm

Was like the Stillness in the Air-

Between the Heaves of Storm-

The eyes around- had wrung them dry-

And Breaths were gathering firm

For that last Onset- when the king

Be witnessed- in the room-

I willed my Keepsakes- Signed away

What portion of me be

Assignable- and then it was

There interposed a Fly-

With Blue- uncertain stumbling Buzz-

Between the light- and me-

And then the Windows failed- and then

I could not see to see-

4.3.2 Critical Analysis

Once Emily Dickinson wrote a mock biographical sketch of death, 'Dust is the only Secret', nothing that death was the only one who remained unknown in his home town. In one of her poems, "Because I could not stop for death" she closely examined the sensations of the dying, the response of the onlookers, the terrible struggle of the body for life and in the present poem "I heard a fly buzz- when I died," is a display of final act of exinction of physical body. She has tried to express the sensations of the dying person, the physical experience as the soul leaves the body and has endeavoured to establish the contrasting inertness of the body with that of the still contending soul to know and to see death face to face. But, the interruption of the buzz of a fly deprives her of that final sensation. So, once again the mystery of death remains unsolved though the fascination for death is unquenchable in her mind. The traditional Christian belief that death leads to eternal happiness is undercut by the appearance of an insignificant distracting fly.

In the very fast line of the poem 'When I dies' and 'I heard a fly buzz' we notice as though some super technical computer were decoding the feelings of the last centaury struggle of soul against the powerful death. It is duly supplemented by stillness in the atmosphere. Here, too the intensity of sensation shows such calmness that is experienced before the coming of a strong storm, that is, before the tempest of all powerful death sweeps the soul away, it lies calm and quite in the already inner body. At such a juncutre 'the breaths were gathering firm' for the last struggle with the hope that the soul might see the death face ti face. Again, as per Christian belief, more and more people watch the grand finale of the departing soul, certainly with as assurance that it leaves for paradise. The final death struggle of soul and body is termed as an 'onset' as the onlooers expect to witness this sublime ceremony.

The obsession for confronting death keeps the soul alert through all the sense organs. But all the sensuary functions of body get paralysed gradually except the sight perception and that too is almost blurred. By all the worthless document, empty phrases, curious moments and corrupting body are abandoned. The soul has signed away all that which is assignable to death. But the only wish remains to see that death still cultivates a hope. The final acts of the grand dying person are presented with crisp derachment. Now, as the grand moment draws to the brink of extinction and the last hope of facing death seems at hand, unfortunately a fly interrupts. Though the buzz is insignificant, yet it is enough to prevent her soul from the view of sublime sensation and thirst and the fascination for the revelation of mystery prevails.

Like so much of life's experience the fly comes at the wrong time, a petty irritant which distracts from the magnificent approach of death. What the dying person fails to realise is that the fly signalizes death's presence. Its stumbling blue buzz, an apt synaesthetic image that conveys the confusion of the dying mind, imitates are pattern of life, where moments of beauty and confidence are juxtaposed with ugliness and uncertainly. The fly comes between the light and the radiance of immortality as well. The final line captures the desperate intensity of the person's struggle for life. Instead of the calm assurance of the earlier stanzas, the person now fails to recognize death's arrival and fights to prevent subjection. With failing windows of senses the final frustration burst out 'I could not see to see'. It is the last effort of self-control. One of the deepest ironies here is the soul's confidence that it still controls the body.

The fly in the poem, though a tiny creature against huge human body, displays hidden atomic power. It symbolizes life and death. The whole poem satirizes the traditional view of death as a peaceful release of life's pressure and a glorious entrance into immortality. Emily Dickinson sees only disappointment, a buzzing fly, and the terrible attempts of a soul to prolong life. So long the fly buzz is present the

senses live with it. As the fly disappears, senses too ebb with it and the speaker herself is transpoted to an ineffable other world. It forces us to see that while death may carry one essentially to the fly, still it is no less true that only through death can the fly be escaped. When the 'windows fail' the speaker has lost her 'keepsakes': her entitlements to life are signed off. But, beyond the fly and safely past the heaves of storm, she has attained calmness of senses; the restlessness extents.

4.4 *The Soul Selects Her Own Society*

4.4.1 The Text

The Soul selects her own Society-

Then- shuts the Dorr-

To her divine Majority-

Present no more-

Unmoved- she notes the Chariots- pausing

At her low Gate-

Unmoved- an Emperor be kneeling

Upon her Mat-

I've known her- from an ample nation-

Choose One-

Then-close the Values of her attention-

Like Stone-

4.4.2 Critical Analysis

The keynotes of this poem is the exclusiveness of friendship, the highly selective quality of affection. The opening lines portray the soul's careful survey of the 'ample nation' for suitable society. In much the same manner as God 'elects' or saves chosen saints, the privilege of friendship is conferred on a few, and ultimately only one person receives it. The image of the closed door conveys the utter finality of the poetess's choice and is later reflected by the archaic meaning of 'valves', the two leaves of a souble door. The next two lines are somewhat obscure, but one interpretation is that, after selecting the chosen friend, the soul dramatically denies all others as a symbol of her now matured life ('divine majority'). She has attained spiritual and emotional maturity and no longer needs to 'present' herself to the world. The second stanza contrasts this inner security with the attempts of emperors to win her affection. The image of values closing like stone emphasises her exclusiveness. The values not only expand the door image but they also indicate the soul's impervious control (because this image represents a mechanical connection that stops or allows the flow of emotions.) The poem ends harshly as the image of the impenetrable, unfeeling stone reflects the soul's attitude towards other claimant for her affections.

It is possible that this poem (written in 1862) has some relation to her choice of a life of solitude made about this time, preferring her own small circle and closing the door on the general world, as the opening lines suggest. But 'the select society' of the first stanza seems specifically limited to the chosen

'one' of the third stanza. It is also possible to identify this 'one' as the muse rather than a lover. In the poems of this seem to have taken place almost simultaneously: withdrawal into solitude, and dedication both to poetry and to the image of a loved one. A surface reading of this poem seems to make the affair simply one of the heart. The central stanza supports this view, for 'the pausing chariots' and 'kneeling emperor' certainly suggest future suitors being rejected because of the chosen 'one' rather than the temptations of society that might distract her from her art. On the other hand, this 'one' may be God, as suggested by the fact that her choice is possible only at spiritual maturity ('divine majority"). Finally, there is the hint of a nunnery ('rush mat') where she waits for God alone, the king of heaven surely taking precedence over mere mortal emperors.

4.5 *I Taste A Liquor Never Brewed*

4.5.1 The Text

I taste a liquor never brewed-

From Tankards scooped in Pearl-

Not all the Vats upon the Rhine

Yield such an Alcohol !

Inebriate of Air-an-I

And Debauchee of Dew-

Relling-thro endless summer days-

From inns of Molten Blue-

When "Landlords" turn the drunken Bee

Out of the Foxglove's door-

When Butterflies-renounce their "drums"-

I shall but drink the more !

Till Seraphs swing their snowy Hats-

And Saints- to windows run-

To see the little Tippler

Leaning against the- Sun-

4.5.2 Critical Analysis

This is an early poem in which, drunk with the joy of living, Dickinson writes of a liquor the like of which is not to be found in 'all the vats upon the Rhine", a "liquor never brewed from tankards scooped in pearl."

Dickinson may here be writing a parody of Emerson's transcendental rendering of poetic inspiration in his poem called Bacchus. Which begins thus:

Bring me wine, but wine which never grew

In the belly of the grape.....

Having discarded the false, she proceeds to eulogies the true liquor in soaring imagery: "Inebriate of air am I..... Emerson described the true vines as nourished by the 'dews of heaven'. All Nature participates in Dickinson's bacchanal:

When landlords turn the drunken bee

Out of the foxglove renounce their "drams"-

I shall but drink the more !

At this point the poems diverge widely. Nature is brought into Emerson's relvel too but in a very different way. Emerson's wine is the Nature, breaks through convention, annihilates time and space, and recovers his lost heaven. Dickinson declines to participate in any such inebriate visions. Her beery spree lands her in heaven too but in a different condition. She continues to drink 'till seraphs swing through their snowy hates and saints to windows run, to see the little tippler leaning against the sun.

The parallels with Emerson's poem are striking. The close echoes of its language up to a suggest a conscious parody of its doctrines. At any rate, neither here nor elsewhere, is there any evidence that she accepted the mystical basis of Emerson's transcendental aesthetic: that the poet can absorb the spirit that energizes Nature, and so achieve a merger with the over-soul. Parody or not, this is simply a humorous fable of the poet's inspiration, drunk with the joy of life and elevated into a very sensuous heaven.

4.6 *I Felt A Funeral in My Brain*

4.6.1 The Text

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,

And Mourners to and fro

Kept treading- treading- till it seemed

That Sense was breaking through-

And when they all were seated,

Ans Service, like a Drum-

Kept beating- beatingi till I thought

My mind was going numb-

And then I heard them lift a Box

A creak across my soul

With those same Boots of Lead, again,

Then Space- began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,

And Being, but an ear,

And I, and Silence, some strange Race

Wrecked, solitary, here-

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,

And dropped down, and down-

And hit a World, at every plunge,

And Finished knowing- then-

4.6.2 Critical Analysis

"I felt a Funeral in my Brain" is rather disturbing portrayal of death. It contains a detailed account of a complete funeral as felt through the ebbing sensations of a dead person. The poem borders on the morbid in portraying the terrible struggle that the separation of the body from the soul produces. There is no hope of immortality in this poem, only a despairing plunge into an eternal abyss. Still the funeral service is not merely exploited for sensational effects: it has an allegorical significance. The physical death symbolises spiritual decease and perhaps a momentary insight into the nature of infinity. The opening stanza sets the tone of the poem. The scene begins with the mourners walking past the exposed body before the actual funeral service begins. The atmosphere is oppressive, and incessant treading of feet seems physically to torment the brain. In the next stanza the mourners are seated, and the funeral begins. The formality of the ceremony penetrates the soul like throbbing drums to induce a drugged wearness. In the third stanza, bolts of lead trample across her soul as the coffin is closed and carried to the church. "Ten space-began to toll" and the bells sounding in the background temporarily thrust her into infinity. The tension increases as the body is carried to the grave. The bells obliterace all other sensation, casting the soul upon eternity itself, but without hope of resurrection. Reeling under these continual blows, the soul experiences complete disintegration with the tumbling of the casket into the grave. The words "finished knowing" complete the lose of conscious control as the soul moves into the irrational unknows, into an indifferent universe.

4.7 *Because I Could Not Stop For Death*

4.7.1 The Text

Because I could not stop for Death-

He kindly stopped for me-

The Carriage held but just Ourselves-

And Immortality.

We slowly drove- He knew no haste

And I had put away

My labour and my leisure too,

For His Civility-

We passed the School, where Children strove

At Recess- in the Ring-

We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain-

We passed the Setting Sun-

Or rather- he passed Us-

The Dews drew quivering and chill-

For only Gossamer, my Gown-

My Tippet- only Tulle-

We paused before a House that seemed

A Swelling of the Ground-

The Roof was scarcely visible-

The Cornice- in the Ground-

Since then-'tis Centuries- and yet

Feels shorter than Day

I first surmised the Horses's Heads

Were towards Eternity-

4.7.2 Critical Analysis

Because I Could Not Stop for Death is one of the best of those poems in which Emily Dickinson over death by accepting it, calmly as befits a lady receiving the attention of a gentleman. The poem is simple, almost common place, yet the mystery that pervades it is inexhaustible. There is, within this mystery, a sense of reconciliation. The poem assume a superlative achievement in which Death becomes one of the great characters of literature. The poetess visualises Death as a person whom she knew and trusted to the extent of a lover. The lover is gentle who stops for her, takes her in his carriage and drives slowly. He is not in hurry and his partner immortality sits silently. This situation creats mystery; how Death is going to treat with her and where he is taking her to; what role is to be played by immortality. It is the last ride together? Or, does the presence of immortality promise eternity? Whatever it is, the poetess gives in without struggle to the wishes of Death for he is too civil to resist.

The journey presents two aspects. The wordily aspect relates the journey of the bearse of the dead person to the grave, while the spiritual meaning leads to the though of journey towards eternity. As it begins gracefully and gravely all wordily sights pass by, the early childhood, school days of joy and play, the ripened state of human being (fields of gazing grain) and finally the setting sun. Here is the sense of time relation to the wordily life comes to an end, as they (Death, Immortality and She) pass the cycle of the day. Then she feels, as though the sun passed by her. That means, she is out of time now. A queer sense of being a bride enters her mind. This is certainly not a description of conventional burial clothes. It is intead a bridal dress, but of very special kind. Gossamer gown and tippet of tully make her feel that she is properly dressed for a heavenly marriage. Gradually it is revealed that Death is not the true bridegroom but a substitute who is escorting her on this curiously premature wedding journey to the heavenly alter where she

hopes to be married to some heavenly body, may be God himself.

Before the journey ends the carriage stops at a house. Here she realises that her dream of heavenly bridal chamber was false. It is the graveyard of physical world. However, when the carriage arrives at the threshold of the house of Death it reaches the spatial limits of mortality. Though she is out of the bounds to time she has yet to feel the cold and damp grave. Her bridal dress (gossamer gown and tippet of tully) are not sufficient to protect her from cold. As the dews descend quivering and chill, she projects her awareness of what it will be likely to come to rest in the cold damp ground. The identification of her new 'house' with a grave is achieved by the use of only two details: a 'roof' that is 'scarcely visible' and a 'cornice', the moulding around the coffin's lid, that is 'in the ground'. But this horror of tomb gradually disappears as the hope for immortality shows signs of further journey. It seemed as though it were a short sojourn in the grave. Her destination is yet far away, for the horses' heads were towards eternity. At the end she limits herself to a single one, 'the horses' heads recalled in a flash of memory bring to mind, 'the carriage' of the opening stanza occupied by Death and Immortality. Finally, she says 'since then-' tis centuries' in an unexpected phrase for the transition from time to eternity.

The poem exhibits an idea of death-in-life. Only by civilizing death and by familiarizing herself, with it can it be brought within the scheme of what is tolerable and credible. The tone is tenderly ironic, the atmosphere tinged with sorrow for life and concern for the amallness of the human soul that must face relentless death. It is poised as a perfecter poem in English language. The rhythm charges with movement, the pattern of suspended action in the poem. Every image is precise and, moreover, not merely beautiful, but fused with the central idea. The content of death in the poem eludes explicit definition. He is a gentleman taking a lady out for a drive. But there is restraint that prevents the poetess from carrying this notion so far as to render it ridiculous and incredible. Love being a symbol interchangeable with death is not without horrifying mystry. She has presented a typical Christian theme that seeks hope for eternity, but it shows her final irresolution, without making any final statement about it. On the surface this poem seems like just another version of a procession to the grave, but here it is also a metaphor that can be probed for deeper levels of meaning, spiritual journeys of a very different sort.

The mortal being and death are inseparably related. Emily handles the effect of death's unexpected visit upon a mortal with a different view in this poem. Throught, death is seen from various perspectives: as a welcome relief from life tensions; as a force which heightens one's satisfaction with life; as a lover gently carrying one to hidden pleasures (eternity); as a cynical caller who keeps his secrets intentions unexposed and finally as a solemn guide leading one to the threshold of immortality. The dramatic emphasis placed upon the word 'Eternity' highlights the separation between man's limited earthly existence and the expanse of infinity. It promises the ascendence of the soul into a new state of happy existence.

4.8 Let Us Sum Up

Thus we see that Emily Dickinson shows an unusual skill in recording vivid sense impressions as is evident in the poems selected in this unit a large number of her poems deal with pain, its nature, its stages, its effect upon the human soul etc. These poems dealing with misery, anguish and despair throw much light on the nature of Dickinson's own mind and soul. One of her unique contributions to American literature is her poetic treatment of the themes of death and immortality. The range of her poetic treatment of death varies from a philosophical examination of death's relation with love to a grim consideration of its physical processes. She regarded death as the great unknown and never ceased to ponder over its fascination and

mystry. In *I Heard a Fly buzz- When I died* we see the contest between the expectation of death and its realistic occurrence. *I Felt a Funeral in my Brain* borders on the morbid in portraying the terrible struggle that the separation of the body from the soul brings about. The emphasis on dying sensations and failing powers suggests death dreadful isolation. In *Because I could not Stop for Death* is seen from various angles and her views on death and immortality are rendered with an artistic perfection. Besides she has written some great poems on miscellaneous themes. *Success is counted sweetest deals with the law of compensation*. In *I Taste a Liquor never Brewed* we get richly sensuouns pictures. The intensity of her love lyrics can be illustrated by one of her passionate poems *The Soul Selects her own Society* in which she most probably speaks of the one lover. She had chosen and to whom she expresses her dedication in terms of unwavering finality.

4.9 Review Questions

1. Write a brief analysis of the poem which appeals to you must in Emily Dickinson's works.
2. Bring out the salient characteristics of the poetry of Emily Dickinson, illustrating them from the poems you have read.
3. What elements of mysticism do you find in Emily Dickinson's poetry.
4. How far does Emily Dickinson appear in her poetry as a believes in immortality?
5. In the basic of the poems you have read what impressions of Emily Dickinson's personality as a woman and as an artist would you form?

4.10 Bibliography

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UNIT-5

ROBERT FROST: THE POET & HIS WORK (I)

Unit Structure

5.0 Objectives

The chief objective of this unit is to acquaint you with one of the representative poets of American Poetry so that you learn to appreciate themes, style, tone and temper of American Poetry. You are being introduced to an American poet, Robert Frost, who is, in the true English spirit acclaimed world wide for his ennobling thoughts and exquisite simplicity of style. You will have a clear vision of the British and the American Poetry. Moreover, you will have a fair idea of the different aspects of his poetic genius. You being the students of the Open University self-learning system, this Unit is expected to rouse your interest further in the studies of American Poetry.

5.1 Introduction

The students of language and literature are well aware that it is an interesting area of studies of human life. Literature portrays life as it is lived or has been lived and as it ought to be lived. Literature is a faithful and true representation and record of life. It is the mirror of life in simple and concise parlance. It captures the spirit of times.It familiarizes us with the language, idiom and metaphor of the time too. So we have a clear insight into the social, literary, political, economic trends of the time and the age in which it had been produced. Here we shall confine ourselves to the understanding of one of the highly representative voices in American poetry, who has "miles to go" before he sleeps".

5.2 About the Author & the Age

Robert Frost is the most honoured of all the American poets, not because he was popular but because he was eminent. A farmer of New England, born on March 26,1874 in San Francisco in California, Frost lost his father at ten and had to return to New England with which he is closely associated. His grandfather was his main support in those days for his education and daily needs. However, his rebellious nature regarded these doles as humiliating. Also he couldn't stay within the confines of his college discipline at Dartmouth College. Being independent and self-respecting, as usually such natures are, Frost accepted odd jobs like that of a bobbin boy in a mill and even a worker in a shoe factory. He was a newspaper reporter and a school teacher also in a village. After his marriage in 1895, he studied at Harvard College for two years from 1897 to 1898. Thereafter, he fulfilled his family responsibilities by farming but also continued writing poetry.

Son of the soil, closer to the earth, Frost was deeply influenced and his poetry shaped in content and style by his engagement in farming and husbandry. Frost had four children to maintain then. But he couldn't make proper provision for their upkeep by living on the farm. So he had to make alternative arrangements. He took to teaching and taught at the Pinkerton Academy and the New Hampshire State Normal School. Frost didn't look back after that and he held many prestigious teaching positions all his life. Frost sold his farm in 1912 and came to England with his family. He stayed there for about two years till the outbreak of the First Great War in 1914. It was during this brief period that Frost climbed the ladder of his poetic fame and academic and official distinctions. He came in contact with many English and American poets and even made Edward Thomas a great poet. His earlier publication – *A Boy's Will* in 1913 didn't bring him fame. But it was the publication of *North of Boston* in 1914 that set in his recognition as a poet of eminence. Then followed his *Mountain Interval* in 1916 and his *New Hampshire* in 1923. Frost never looked back after his stay in England and his return to America.

In the last forty years of his life, Frost was most active in his creativity. He was decorated with Pulitzer Prize four times, in 1924, 1931, 1937 and 1937. He was awarded more than twenty degrees, including from Oxford and from Cambridge. The result was that he was sought after and was honoured with other prizes, distinctions and appointments. He was granted fellowships too. This was the most rewarding period of his life when he was reciting his poems to a large august audience, delivering lectures on poetry and was holding academic positions in the universities. To top it all, he appeared before the TV viewers all over the world when President John F. Kennedy's inauguration took place on historic Jan. 20, 1961. Then he recited *The Gift Outright* in his clear New England accent and bewitched all. Frost is a world-sung poet. Who can forget his most lyrical, symbolic and memorable immense and intense closing lines of *Stopping by Woods On A Snowy Evening*-

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep,

But I have promises to keep

And miles to go before I sleep

And miles to go before I sleep."

These lines have entranced the readers, may not be lovers of poetry, everywhere and awakened and inspired them to their duty and obligation to life. It may be particularly mentioned that the first Prime Minister of India, Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru, was so inspired by these lines that they were always written, in his own hand and signed, on his table. These lines are an eternal inspiration to all *karmayogis*- men of

action.

His other works are- *West-Running Brook* (1928), *A Further Range* (1936), *A Witness Tree* (1942) and *Steeple Bush* (1947). His two short prefatory essays sum up his conception of poetry-*The Constant Symbol* and *The Figure a Poem Makes*.

5.3 The Poetic Genius of Frost

A famous English poet, Robert Graves, has paid a glowing tribute to Frost as a poet and has also summed up the range of his genius. In his highly adulatory assessment or evaluation of Frost, he says, "The truth is that Frost was the first American who could be honestly reckoned a master poet by world standards…….Frost has won the title fairly, not by turning his back on ancient European tradition, nor by imitating its successes, but by developing it in a way that at least matches the American climate and the American language." This evaluation affirms Americanness and American language in the poetry of Frost and that has clearly established and stamped the authentic distinction of American poetry and American English. Here we shall discuss Frost's conception of poetry, his lyricism, his treatment of nature, his philosophy and his modernity. We shall also discuss the poems critically and the important lines for explanation. It may be specially noted that the poetry of Frost makes an interesting study of the Character and spirit of New England. It also gives us a deep insight into the complexities of life. The simplicity and spontaneity of the style are deceptive, though Frost dwells on the facts of life. How these facts turn poetic idiom, a metaphor in the hands of Frost, is a surprise. Frost once said, "I might be called a synechdochist; for I prefer the synechdoche in poetry- that figure of speech in which we use a part for the whole." Sometimes we feel that Frost puts on the mask in poetry whatever be the emotion, situation or thought; he is free from pretensions and has the basic honesty which is the main strength of his originality. C. Day Lewis, in his introduction to Robert Frost, says, "Mr Robert Graves has declared that, of twentieth century poets, the best influences for younger writers were Thomas Hardy and Robert Frost. I think this is true, certainly in respect of Frost."

Robert Frost was so shy and painfully sensitive a person that even success embarrassed him. During his life he won four Pulitzer Prizes for poetry- the only person ever to achieve this honour.In 1916, he was elected to membership in the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and in 1930 to memebership in the American Academy.

Inspite of being strongly conservative in his political reviews, he participated in the inauguration ceremonies for President John F. Kennedy. It was indeed a milestone in his career because for the first time in the history of the nation a poet had been so honoured.

In 1961, he visited, Isrel, Athens, London; Frost was awarded the Congrassional Medal at the White House on March 26,1962, by President Kennedy on the occasion of his eighty-eighth birthday. In the same year, he visited the U.S.S.R. on a 'goodwill mission' for the U.S. Department of State.

Frost's entire work, in short, in deeply rooted in American life and idiom. He is 'native to the grain' and yet original. While other American poets-Wallace Stevens and Wiiliam Carlos William- adopted the style which are unmistakably their own to be modern, Frost chose 'the old way to be new'. His poetry which 'is momentary stay against confusion' and a 'clarification of life' makes him to use John Ciardi's words, "OUR BEST".

5.4 Frost's Conception of Poetry

Frost's remarked, "I am an unprincipled schemer; writing poetry is all that matters.' Like Keats he prefers to write without being hampered by restrictions of a preconceived theory. He believes that a true poetry cannot be forced into the matrix of a set theory yet he cherishes after-beliefs which form the central aesthetics of his poetry and make him as 'unprincipled schemer' and 'a furtive worker.' In his interviews, talks and prose- writings, Frost has emphasized his rare aesthetics consisting of components of both the fundamental theories prevalent in English poetry: 'Art for pleasure's sake' and 'Art for wisdom's sake.' His personal experiences gave him a mysterious feel for poetry and he choose the 'old way to be new' in an age in which his contemporaries were desperately trying 'new ways to be new.'

Frost's wide study of the classics-Homer, Virgil and Shakespeare gave him the conviction that the unrestrained griefs and grievances of life could never be the subjects of poetry. According to Frost, poetry emerges out of a tenderly felt idea which creates an emotional turmoil that mounts to find an expression, a shape, a form. Frost has pinned down the poetic precess in his own original metaphor.

'A poem begins with a lump in the throat; a home-sickness or a love-sickness. It is a reaching out toward expression; an effort to find fulfillment. A complete poem is one where an emotion has found its thought and the thought had found the words..... My definition of poetry (if I were forced to give one) would be this: words that have becomed deeds.'

The feeling of 'lump in the throat,' of emotional uneasiness, makes a poem an organic unfoldment of a personal dicovery or an intimate revelation. It ascertains that Frost has not written consciously on fixed ideas or attitudes. He writes because in a particular mood the poetic impulse compels him to do so. These moments of 'poetic madness' to use Forst's words, are the terrific strain. He finds a striking analogy between the course of a true poem and a true love. Each begins as an impulse, a disturbing excitement to which the individual surrenders himself.

Frost never set out to write a thesis or a treatise on his conception or theory of poetry as Wordsworth, Yeats, Eliot or Pound have done. His infrequent remarks and his two short prefatory essays- *The Constant Symbo*l and *The Figure a Poem Makes* give to us a fair idea of his conception of poetry. Some critics see them as miscellanies full of wise saws and modern instances. In *The Constant Symbol*, Frost says, "There are many other things I have found myself saying about poetry, but the chiefest of these is that it is a metaphor, saying one thing and meaning another, saying one thing in terms of another, the pleasure of ulteriority. Poetry is simply made of metaphor…….Every poem is a new metaphor inside or it is nothing. There is a sense in which all poems are the same old metaphor always." This use of metaphor has been amplified by Lawrence Thompson by giving a prose –meaning of the most famous poem *Stopping By Woods* which undoubtedly is a meditative dramatic lyric. The critic feels that this is a drama in miniature with lighting, setting and actors and properties complete. The reader is awakened to the different layers of meaning with great clarity.

In another significant utterance, Frost regards poetry as "a momentary stay against confusion." In this suggestive remark, Frost perhaps means that a poet captures a particular moment with his words in the confusion of everyday observations, impressions and thoughts. This gives shape and weight to the poem. This critical idiom is best explained when we read his poem *West Running Brook*. Frost firmly believed that poetry is an artistic combination of impulse and art. Who can deny that? True of all poetry indeed! Also it was his conviction that ideas are indispensable to poetry.

The poet's thoughts may give poetic expression to ideas in their own way. He further held the view that poetry had a dramatic character. Frost practised this belief consciously or unconsciously in his poetry. He said at some point, "The height of poetry is in dramatic give and take. Drama is the key-stone of poetry." Even Sidney Cox endorses this view of Frost. After reading Frost's poetry, we are fully convinced that his theory of poetry is inseparable from his poetry.

The initial impression of Frost's poetry is that it is simple and direct but a careful study gradually reveals that the simplicity is deseptive. It is actually the 'indirection' and 'irony' that is skillfully concealed behind the homely details, familiar local features of scence and character with their dry, laconic temper and speech, the complex and univarsal meaning. Talking about indirects, which makes him very much a part of the modern poetic tradition, Frost states:

> "Poetry provides the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another. people say, 'Why don't you say what you mean"? We never do that, do we, being all of us too much poets. We like it in parables and in hints and indirection- whether from differences or some other instinct."

Frost calls himself 'antivocabularian' and chooses those simple often monosyllabic words that can create earth images. Not only that, he actually unendingly takes words from their contextual background and 'unmakes' them before 'remaking' them again. Thus, he aptly, exercises his concept of poetry as "A renewal of words." It is his aesthetics that make Frost "a notable craftman" and conscious artist of his time.

5.5 Frost's Treatment of Nature

Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of poets to whom the lable "poet of nature" may be reasonably applied: firsty, the ingenious lovers of nature for whom the phenomenon of nature is exceedingly beautiful and they are delighted to report these observations in verse; secondly, the poets for whom the external nature has a philosophically serious significance and they bring out its ethical and metaphysical dimension in their work. Frost's poems occasionally suggest that he loves nature for its own sake, for example, "*The Pasture*", "*A Nature Note*" or "*A Young Birech*" but a close examination of his work shows that his view of nature possesses a deep ethical and metaphysical dimension, for instance, consider the poems like *Into Own*, *West-Running Brook* and *Directive*. And it becomes needless to explain that Frost as a poet of nature belongs to the Emersonian, Wordswothian- Tennysonian tradition though he never succumbs to their influences. Not only that, he diverges skillfully from the tradition and adopts it to his own special purpose.

As usual, Frost does not make any explict statements on the theory of nature or on man's relationship with nature. Frost shows a distrust of the unnatural. Consider the poems like. *A Brook in the City, To a Moth Seen in Winter, Mending Wall, The Code* and *A Star in the Stone Boat, There are Roughly Zones* etc. As the logical sonsistensy demands, he does not believe that getting permanently in tune with nature would lead to a successfull living though there are some poems in which such adjustment appear, for example take *Blue Barries, Brown's Descent* ans *The Ax-Helve*. It proves that Frost shies away from a merely theoretical consistency and nature to him is a fairly protean term; its meaning changes from poem to poem.

Frost was a New England farmer. His affinity with Nature can be easily understood and felt. His love of Nature in all her beauty and fancy, mood and memory, loveliness and loneliness, simplicity and

spectrum, elasticity and ecstasy, have some special fascination for the reader. That all determined and designated his philosophy of Nature. It is also true that Frost found no didactic meaning in it like Wordsworth but his affinity with Nature was loaded with symbolism in direct relation to human life and activity. Frost is undoubtedly a poet of Nature, what if some learned critics deny him this status! May be Wordsworth experienced some sublimity and had some elevating and transcending feeling in the company of Nature.

Frost also experienced this in a different manner. Prof. A. Alvarez says about Frost, "He is not a nature poet; his work has none of that personal interpretative weight. He is a country poet, whose business is to live with nature rather than through it." This shows that Frost's work has not been properly evaluated from this point of view. Hence the prejudices of the scholars. Even Robert Langbaum feels that in spite of the vividness in nature poetry of Frost, it is an attempt to escape from the centre of the pre-occupations of time.

Still we cannot deny that Frost is our best Nature poet since Wordsworth. There is tenderness, delicacy, serenity and sensitivity in Frost's treatment of nature. Neither transcendentalism nor wilderness but vividness and effectiveness of nature Frost has attempted as an unforgettable experience. He has a wonderful descriptive power of nature, be it a snowy evening woods or bending birches left and right, a valley mist or a west running brook or the scene of apple-picking. Aural and visual images of nature are an added strength of Frost's treatment of nature. Wordsworth, a high-priest of Nature, and Frost have some marked similarities as poets of Nature and with a marked difference. In this respect, C. Day Lewis has observed, "Detachment, for him as for Wordsworth, is a necessary condition of the creative power." Some poems of Frost are "emotions recollected in tranquility" and some are "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". Frost never makes us feel that Nature is the living presence of the Divine as Wordsworth does. Frost never sees Nature as explaining the unintelligible mysteries of Nature. Frost is a poet of Nature but he finds no didacticism in nature. He finds symbolic meaning in nature related to everyday human life in all its pragmatism but no didacticism.

In 1952, Frost in his television interview said, “I guess I am not a nature poet, I have only written two poems without human-being in them.” His remark compels that reader to explore into another dimension- his pastoral mode- which has often been hinted by many of Frost’s critics and is fully worked out by J.F.Lynen in his book, *The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost*. Obviously the two kinds of poetry- nature and pastoral- differs. “In pastoral the subject is a special society, or, more generally, a way of life, nature is merely, the setting within which we see this. The pastoralist does not write about nature; he uses nature is his scene, and it is important only in that it defines the swain’s point of view. Neverthless, Frost’s nature poetry is closely related to his pastoralism.” The pastoral design of his poetry became clearly of Frost’s many years before he produced pastorals. In one of the poems *Bucolic*, he exhibits almost identical desires and impulses which are noticed in Theocritus.

Before analysing in detail the pastoral structure of Frost’s poems, it is essential to denote the term ‘pastoralism’ seriously. A pastoral comes to life when the poet writes about rural life, its rustic scenery and humble folk to contrast it with the great outer world of the powerful, the wealthy, and the sophisticated. In short, it is the recognition of a contrast, implicit or expressed, between pastoral life and some more complex type of civilization that constitutes the main element of the pastoral. Frost’s concept to pastoral gives unity to the diverse components of his poetry and reveals at the same time that he, as a pastoral poet, stands outside the conventional form of this genre. He does not idealize the rural life and keeps the two worlds in equilibrium. Frost knows that with the decay of Arcadian myth and the advent of modern science a new attitude toward rural life is essential so that it becomes representative of human life in general. This

is what adds a remarkable depth of reference to his poetry. Instead of eulogizing the unhappy shephered and the fair shepherdess, the flowery wreaths and the wandering flocks, Frost has discovered a new myth of rural life. As result, “Frost’s achievement as a pastoral poet, like Burn’s, and Wordsworth’s is a distinctly individual triumph. It has resulted from his discovery of a new and realistic basis for examining the rural scene within the structure of pastoral.”

5.6 Frost's Lyricism, Loneliness, Isolation And Alienation

Lyricism is Frost's greatest strength and he is at his best here. This apparent characteristic of his poetry has contributed to Frost's popularity in a big way. His lyricism is marked by spontaneity, simplicity, freshness, honesty, lilt and charm. It is dramatic and it is vested with smooth serenity and singing even in the conflict-ridden world of today. His lyrical output has the quality of unflagging zeal and he continued writing lyrics throughout his long poetical career. He began as a lyric poet and ended with a singing tune. Louis Untermeyer has rightly observed, "When his work is viewed as a whole, it will be seen that he never left the lyric for long…….the later songs reinforce the early ones; they are perhaps somewhat riper, more mellow, more sure of all I thought was true." His famous lyrical pieces appeared at different periods of his career and are admired for their lyrical excellence. *Reluctance, A Boy's Will, The Road Not Taken, After Apple- Picking, Stopping by Woods, Birches, The Gift Outright, Mending Wall, Fire and Ice, West Running Broo*k etc, to mention only a few, are melodies known world-wide. The closing lines of *Reluctance* have a soft mellow tune-

"Ah, when to the heart of man

Was it ever less than a treason

To go with the drift of things,

To yield with a grace to reason,

And bow and accept the end

Of a love or a season?"

In *Mending Wall,* the lyrical beauty strikes us. Note particularly the theme-related lines-

"Something there is that doesn't love a wall,

That wants it down."

Similarly, *After Apple-Picking, Birches, Fire and Ice* are packed with lines of great lyrical excellence. In *The Road Not Taken*, who can forget the soft mellow lyrical beauty-

"I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence;……."

His lyricism has the pictorial and dreamy quality also. As we read these lyrics, the procession of images, tranquil, serene, graceful, splendid, emerge as lovely pictures singing to the reader-

"Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair

Before them over their heads to dry in the sun."

Fire and Ice is unsurpassed for its beauty, lyricism and thought-

"Some say the world will end in fire,

Some say in ice,

From what I've tasted of desire

I hold with those who favor fire."

Frost uses a different kind of language appropriate for each of his lyrics. In the pure, personal lyrics, Frost's language has a rare smoothness, force and sublimity. The communication is direct without any interruptions and breaks in the form of asides, pauses and parentheses. On the other hand, in the longer dramatic lyrics the medium is the conversational language and so the diction is repiete with the characteristics of the spoken tongue. As in speech, so in these lyrics, there are constant breaks, pauses, unfinished sentences, ellipses, ejaculations, repetitions, etc. The speaker has no patience to round off a sentence but breaks it up as soon as he feels that his meaning has been conveyed. Or, the speaker is too much excited to complete his meaning and breaks off in the middle. Or he abruptly interrupts his speech to talk about something else, or to throw in a side comment or an interjection.

In Frost's lyrics there is a skillful blending of fact and fancy, of imagination and observation. Fact and Fancy are the two polarities of Frost's lyrics. At places Frost would like to escape into a world of ideal existence, but very soon he is back again to hard reality. His flights from the world of reality are only momentary; ultimately he comes back to earth and accepts his duties and reponsiblities. The wood may be lovely and dark but they fail to hold him for long, because he remembers that he has promises to keep, and miles to go before he sleeps, and in *Mowing* the scythe whispers to him, "The fact is the sweetest dream that labour knows." *Birches* illustrates this exquisite blending of fact and fancy most eloquently, for in his lyric the climb, "toward heaven" ultimately results in a move 'earthward.' The withdrawal is mometary and it makes him see life more clearly and face it more courageously. For him Earth is the right place for love, and so he longs to return to it. Frost's devotion to fact shines brightly throughout his lyric. But his is never a mere transcript of actually, a kind of dogged reporting. When he is most faithful to things, he is most lyrical.

In many of his finest lyrics, in the manner of the metaphysical poets of the 17th century, Frost juxtaposes the opposites of life. Concepts antithetical (opposite) in their very nature are brought together, and an effort is made to reconcile and harminise them. Thus in *Birches* the habit of birches suggests to him the way in which man should reconcile his romantic dreams, his ideal, or his higher aspirations, with the facts of prosaic, matter of fact world of reality. Like the birch-swinger, he may climb momentarily, 'toward heaven' but soon like him, he should dip down and come to earth again. Frost's lyrics range from the simple and idyllic to the philosophic, and often the two extremes are combined.

We may say that Frost's lyrics are vibrant, eager and curiously young. We are perfectly at home with his shorter pieces. They are simple pure incantations. That is the fine artistic accomplishment of Frost.

5.7 Boundaries and Barriers in Frost's Poetry

We find that isolation, loneliness and alienation constantly occur in the poetry of Frost. Frost was well aware of the daily sufferings, pains and miseries of human life, especially of the New Englanders, farmers. Frost's sympathies are obviously with such lot and he seems to have involved himself in their situations with empathy and insight. He has expressed the plight of these people and their attitude and behaviour touchingly in some of the greatest poems. Frost was quite aware of the indifference and unkind-

ness of the human world. It was essential that sympathy, good sense of humour and love are shown and practiced. "*North of Boston*" poems have such a flavour. This is also a part of Frost as a thinker and a philosopher whose riper sensibilities come to the fore.

Frost is a great poet of boundaries and barriers, which divide men from men and come in the way of communication, and so result in lack of understanding and friction. Man is not only isolated from other man, but Frost pictures him as also alone and solitary in an impersonal and unfeeling envinment. This concern with barriers, barriers which result in alienation and loneliness, is a predominant theme in Frost's poetry. There are barriers at least of five kinds. First, there is the great natural barrier, the void, the space, which separates man from the stars. Man foolishly tries to bridge this gap, but all his efforts in this respect are of no avail. Such efforts only make him more conscious of his own littleness. As he tells us in the *Lessons for To-day,* the contemplation of the ghast heights of the sky has a belittling effext on man and he is overwhelmed by at errifying sense of his own solitariness in the universe.

The protagonist of the *Star-Splitter*, purchases a telescope with the insurance money that he gets by burning his house down. He gazes at the stars but cannot escape the questions that raises its ugly head towards the end:

We've looked and looked

But after all where are we ?

Secondly, there are the barriers, between man and immediate natural world- the barren and desert places- which man must conquer, reclaim and cultivate. He must constantly wage a war against such wildernesses, if he is to survive in an environment which seems hostile to him, which at least, is not meant for him and in which he is an alien. The woman in *A Servants to Servants* has lost out to the wilderness by losing her sanity. Her days are spent in caring for the house while the men are away, and the emptiness of the world has overcome her.

Thirdly, Man's physical existence itself is a barrier, which divides man from the soul on spirit of nature. While Wordsworth denied the very existence of barriers between man and nature, for Frost a wide gulf separates man and nature, spirit and matter. In a number of poems he stresses the 'otherness' and indifference of Nature, and shows that it is futile to expect any sympathy from the spirit of soul which moves or governs the world. Individual man and the forces of nature are two different principles, and the boundaries which separate them must be respected. These boundaries are insistes upon. *A Minor Bird* stresses the active barriers between man and nature. The poet is bored by the bird which sings at his window and wishes it away:

I have wished the bird would fly away,

And not seen by me have of day

Have clapped my heads at him from the door

When it seemed as if I could hear no more-

Fourthly there are barriers which separate man from man. Such barriers come in the way of social communication, and lack of communication leads to social alienation and emotional isolation and loneliness. *Mending Wall* is an ironic comment on those who raise walls between themselves and their neighbours, because they think, "good fences make good neighburs." Read symbolically, the poem is a comment of racial, religious, national and ideological barriers which divide and separate man from man. Such barriers

come to the way of human relationship, generate tensions, which result in neurosis and emotional imbalance verging on insanity. *North of Boston* is full of such emotionally isoloted and alienated people. In the *Home Burial* there is a grevious lack of communication between the husband and the wife, and the mother's grief deepens into insanity. The shadow of their dead child is the barrier which divides them and alienates them from each other.

Fifthly, man's reason and intellect is the barrier that alienates him from God, his Maker. Her rational bias deprives him of the bliss of communion with God. The theme of the *Masque of Reason* is that reason combined with faith alone can lead to understanding and wisdom. It is only through faith that man can work out his own salvation and make life agreeable. Thus is Frost's view man is a solitary, a stranger in this world, and so he remains upto the end. However, he can improve his lot, and make his life worth living, by recognising the otherness of other individuals. Speaking psycologically, Frost's concern with loneliness is an expression of his intencely felt need for human love, sympathy and fellowhip.

5.8 Frost as a Modern Poet

Modernity in literature is not confined to the historical divisions of periods, nor can contemporarienity be confused with modernity. Even the ancients are modern in many respects. When we ascribe some intrinsic qualities of life and time lived to a particular work of art, it may be called modern. Our awareness and sensibility to our phenomena with all the scientific and technological changes count for our modernity. Frost may not be considered a modern poet if viewed thus. It may be a serious limitation of Frost that he is not in tune with the tendencies and problems of the modern age. It is fair to see that Frost chose to be away from his own age and civilization. Schneider points out in this regard, "We may go therefore to his poetry for diversion and relief from our time, but not for illumination." Yvor Winters and some other critics also disregard Frost as modern poet. Nevertheless, it has been well-established that Frost is a modern poet. In his poetry, we observe that he has depicted the conflicting trends of the modern age without passing any judgement; there is a deep symbolist metaphysical strain in Frost's poetry; Frost has quietly portrayed the disillusionment, disintegration, frustration and distraction of modern life.

In the prevailing mess and confusion of modern life wherein the values and cardinal virtues have been compromised for material gains, not happiness, and which leads to neurotic behaviour, Frost finds relief and recluse in the tranquil harmony and meaning of Nature. Cleanth Brooks and Lionel Trilling see the elements of true modernity in Frost. *Mending Wall* is a typical modern poem which lashes out at the man-made divisions. *After Apple-Picking* is a metaphorical extension of our life of abundance and its subsequent fatigue, monotony and boredom. Frost has beautifully depicted the dichotomy between the mind and mood of modern man. *The Road Not Taken* reveals the confusion of choice and values which cannot be retracted or undone; *Stopping By Woods* also reflects modern man's aspirations and dreams to reach the top and overlook the wayside beauty. These are highly suggestive and symbolic poems with the content, spirit and style of the modern times as captured in the modern poetry.

To conclude, we may say that Frost's poems have the lasting freshness, sparkling wisdom, the sensitivity of a crude witty rural philosopher. He never compromises the values of an artist and frequently states the truths which, in fact, are his directives. His poems are remarkable for their honesty and spontaneity and integrity of language and emotional flow.

Frost's pastoral perspective reveals that he juxtapaposes the rural and the urban, the regional and the cosmopolitan, and the human and the natural exactly the same way as Eliot contrasts social classes and holds up disparate historical periods for comparison. The thing he seems to be talking about is never quite

the thing he means to be talking about. At the same time, unlike them, he does regard explicit statement as an artistic blemish.

If among the critics of Frost there is a failure to recognize the modernity of Frost's thought it is largely due to the fact that his verse lacks those traits of style, which seem characteristic of modern poetry. He does not share certain common qualities of the style with other poets like Eliot, Yeats and Auden. Admittedly, Frost's manner is different but it would be absurd to deny him the claim of being a modern poet on this ground as it is possible to write in a modern idiom and yet show little newness or originality in one's response to the contemporary world. It is pertinent to make a distinction between characteristically modern techniques but it does not mean that he is not modern in a fundamental way. His essential technique is that of pastoral through which he "has explored wide and manifold ranges of being by viewing reality within the mirror of the natural and unchanging world of rural life."

In short, Frost is a modern poet in more ways than one. He may not depict the outward conditions and events of modern life, but the central facts of mdern experience, the uncertainly and painful sense of loss, the disintegration and confusion of values, the frustration and disillusionment, are all there, and they seem more bleak and terrifying because they are presented in their nakedness, stripped of all their social, political and economic manifestations. And his mode of expression is symbolic and indirect. All this is the mark of a genuinely modern poetry.

5.9 Symbolism in Frost's Poetry

It is by the use of symbols that Frost enriches the texture of his verse and reveals the full significance and deeper meaning of particular situations and events. It thus becomes possible to read his poems at different levels. On the surface there might to merely a plain and simple narration or description, and the poem may be enjoyed as such. But a careful reading reveals the hidden and deeper meaning. In his use of this oblique method Frost is at one with such modern poets as T.S.Eliot and W.B. Yeats.

Warren Austin uses the term 'natural symbolism' to describe Frost's symbols, for they are all drawn from the ordinary, common-place objects and phenomena of nature, and from the common everyday events and situations of human life. If we read *Mending Wall* superficially merely an account of two New Englanders, one of whom wants to build a boundary wall between their respective fields for according to him, 'Good fences made good neighbors.' The other does not consider the fence as at all necessary at that particular place.

The dispute between the two neighbors symbolises the clash between tradition and modernity between age and youth. The young wants to demolish the old and the traditional, and re-build society while the old upholds the value of the tradition and customs.

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening has an equally rich texture and admits of several interpretations. On the surface, it is no more than a simple anecdote relating how the poet pauses one evening along a country road to watch the snowfall in the woods: "The woods are lovely, dark and deep" and as he gazes into the soft, silent whiteness, he is tempted to stay on and on, allowing his mind to lose itself in the enchanted grove. "His consciousness seems on the verge of freeing itself from ordinary life, as if it were about to dissolve in the shadowy blank, but his mind holds back from this." He remembers that his journey has a purpose. He has promises to keep and many miles to go before he can yield to the dream-like release which the woods seem to offer. However the poem is not just a record of something that once happened to the poet; it points outward from the moment described towards far broader areas

of experience. It expresses the conflict which everyone has felt, between the demands of practical life, with its obligations to others, and the poignant desire to escape into a land of reverie where consciousness is dimmed and the senses are made independent of necessity.

Since the poet will allow himself to sleep only after he has kept his promise, sleep becomes a deserved reward in contrast to the unearned pleasure of looking at the woods. *The wood in Frost's poetry is* ***an ever-recurring complex symbo****l*. It ***symolises perilous or sensuous enjoyment, the darkness of ignorance, as well as the dark inner self of man.***

Frost's technique of communication is essentially symbolic and oblique. *Fire and Ice* is symbolic and reveals layer within layer of meaning on a careful reading. However, we will have to agree with Cleanth Brooks that often Frost states his themes, overtly and explicitily, and therefore, such poems lie outside the symbolic mode. For example, in *Two Trumps in Mud-time* the theme of the poem- the combination of avocation with vocation- is explicit, and hence the poem and other such poems, must be read as simple lyrics, celebrating country charms, characters and events. The symbolistic method of communication is essentially suggestive, oblique and indirect, and such explicit and direct statement do not square well with it.

5.10 Let Us Sum Up

Frost may not be so great a poet as, say Shakespeare, but he is certainly a distinguished and valuable poet. He has certainly earned a place of distinction, at home and abroad, as a major American poet.

5.11 Review Questions

1. Write a note on symbolism in Frost's poetry.
2. To what extent is it correct to describe Frost as a 'modern' poet?
3. Write an essay on the theme of isolation in Frost's poetry.
4. "Frost is a philosopher-poet." Justify.
5. Briefly examine the evolution of Frost's genius, art and technique.

5.12 Bibliography

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UNIT-6

ROBERT FROST: SOME SELECTED POEMS (II)

Structure

6.0 Objectives

Having studied about the life and works of Robert Frost in detail in the previous unit, we propose to examine some of his major poems in this unit to justify our observations about the poet. The detailed critical analysis of the selected poems of Frost will help you understand the development of thought in the poet and then you will be able to appreciate the poems in a better way.

6.1 Introduction

Frost's volume of verse, published in London in 1913, and entitled *A Boy's Will*, shows a considerable maturity of the poet's power. It is an early collection of lyrics in which the poet's characteristic manner and style are already visible. Lyrics like *Mowing* are in the characteristic style and tone of the rapidly maturing poet, and they show that tendency to moralise which was to grow and become obtrusive in his later poetry. The very next year (1914) Frost published another volume of verse, *North of Boston*, which is one of the major achievement of the poet. It achieved immediate popularity and was published first in London; and then soon after in the U.S.A.

Frost's people in this book are left-lovers of the old stock morbid, pursued by phantoms, slowly sinking to insanity. It has poems like *The Black Cottage*, *A Servant to Servants*, *Home Burial*, *After Apple Piking*, *The Housekeeper, The Generations of Men, North of Boston* was followed by *The Mountain Interval* in 1916. Though it has some fine pieces, the volume is among the lesser known works of Frost. Some of this poet's finest moments are in the lesser known books. Nothing from the more popular collection will last longer than the dramatically suspended *Snow*, the idyllic *Birches*, or the inten-

sity of the *Hill Wife* lyrics. Even *The Death of the Hired Man* scarcely surpasses the charged pathos of *An Old Man's Winter Night*. The volume shows a further evolution of the poet's art.

Frost's next volume of verses, his fourth, entitled *New Hampshire*, was published in 1923 after a long silence of seven years. A great love of the New England countryside, of earth itself, surges from such poem as *Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening, Gathering Leaves, In a Discussed Graveyared*, and the brightly ironic *The Need of Being Versed in Country Things*. A less physical and almost unearth passion speaks in the beautiful, though troubled, lines of *To Earthward*, the mystical sonority of *I Will Sing You One-O*, and he condensed wisdom of *Fire and Ice*.

A Further Range is Frost's sixth volume of verses, published after a long silence in 1936. The habit of moralising has grown on the poet, and he is contantly sermonising. *A Witness Tree* (1942) and *Steeple Bush* (1947) are two volumes of poems which are heavily padded with relatively unimpressive and inartistic matter and add little to Frost's stature as a poet. *A Masuqe of Reason* (1945) and *A Masque* (1947) are two short verse-plays which Frost significantly placed at the end of his *Complete Poems*, published in 1949.

6.2 Critical Analysis of Some Famous Poems

6.2.1 *Mendig Wall*

Mending Wall , one of the most widely quoted poems of Frost, was included in *North of Boston* published in 1914. It is a dramatic lyric or monologue. The speaker is a young man, presumably the poet himself, and the lyric is an expression of his views and attitudes. The other character is the poet's neighbor, an old farmer. He does not speak even a single word, but we know of his views and attitude, of his conservation and orthodoxy, from what the speaker says about him. Apparently the monologue is merely descriptive and anecdotal, but it leaves the readers with a sense of puzzlement, with a feeling that the poet is driving at some point which is not clearly understood.

The speaker in the poem, the poet himself, and his neighbor get together every spring to repair the stone wall between their respective properties. The neighbor, an old New England farmer seems to have a deep-seated faith in the value of walls and fences. He declines to explain his belief and only reiterates his father's saying, "*Good fences make good neighbor*". The speaker is of the opposite opinion. As he points out:

There where it is we do not need the wall:

He is all pine and I am apple orchard.

To him the neighbor's own attitude is also enigmatic and in some respects primitive. He seems to be in sympathy with some elemental spirit in nature which denies all boundaries. It is suggested that there is some supernatural power at work in Nature, that is against all fences and walls:

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,

That sends the frozen ground swell under it,

And spills the upper boulders in the sun;

And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.....

It might be some mysterious fairy:

Something there is that doesn't love a wall

That wants it down. I could say 'Elves' to him,

But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather

He said it for himself.

The poem portrays a clash between these two points of view, and it may, therefore, seem that its meaning is the solution. Though the poem presents the speaker's attitude more sympathetically than the neighbor's, it does not offer this as the total meaning. Frost's intention is to portray a problem and explore the many different and paradoxical issues it involves. He pictures it within an incident from rural life, and in order to reveal its complex nature he develops it through the conflict of two opposed points of view. "The clash between the speaker and his neighbor lays bare the issue, which within their world is the simple matter of whether or not it is worthwhile to maintain the unnecessary wall in defiance of nature's persistent attempt to tear it down."

As a matter of fact, the real strength and effectiveness of the poem arises from this contradiction and clash of opposites. Its two famous lines oppose each other. The poem maintains that:

Something there is that doesn't love a wall.

But is also insists:

Good fences make good neighbor.

The contradiction is logical, for the opposing statements are uttered by two different types of people and both are right. Man cannot live without walls, boundaries, limits and particularity self limitations; yet he resents all bounds and is happy at the downfall of any barrier." In *Mending Wall* the boundary line is useless:

There where it is we do not need the wall.

And, to emphasize the point, the speaker adds playfully:

He is all pine I am apple orchard.

My apple trees will never get across

And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.

The poem has been symbolically interpreted by a number of critics. The wall has been taken to symbolise all kinds of man-made barriers. The wall suggests, the divisions between nations, classes, economic, racial, and religious groups and the like, but none of these, or combination of them all, exhausts the symbolis meaning. In short, the poem represents, two opposite attitudes towards life- the one is surrender to the natural forces which draw human beings together, the other, the conservatism which persists in keeping up the distinctions separating them. Both are represented by two opposite type of characters- one young and progressive, and the other old and conservative.

The poem reveals the characteristic features of Frost's style. The style is colloquial and dramatic. The speaker asks questions and then himself answers them. There is also the usual Yankee reticence and under-statement. A suggestion of some mysterious forces in nature at work against walls and boundaries,

is skillfully thrown out in such lines as "Something there is that doesn't need a wall," or "I could say 'Elves' to him." "Frost often writes of inanimte objects, as if they were alive and capable of human actions thoughts and emotions." Thus in the poem he addresses the boulders and say,

"*Stay where you are until our backs are turned.*"

As if the boulders had a will and understanding of their own. Similarly of apple trees he says,

My apple trees will never get across

And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him,

as if apple trees were mischievous boy robbing the orchard of their neighbors.

The monologue is cast in blank verse, and as usual with Frost there is the artistic balancing of strict iambic pentameter lines with looseness and variety to create the informal and casual effect of conversation.

6.2.2 *The Road Not Taken*

The Road Not Taken is one of the finest and the most popular of the lyrics published in 1916 on the volumes of poems entitled *Mountain Interval*. The poet's imagination is set at work by the difficulty of choosing one of the two roads, which diverge at a particular point, and he comments on the difficulty and significance of making a choice in general.

One day, while travlling alone, the poet reached a point where the road bifurcated into two. He could not decide which road to take. Finally, he chose one because it seemed a little less frequented though actually there was no such difference for, "the passing there had worn them really about the same." Yet, even at the moment of choice, the poet was of the view that the choice was important, that he would someday tell himself he took the less travelled road.

"And that has made all the difference."

The poet's "difference" is in him from the beginning, long before he sets out on his career. The road that Robert Frost took was not only the 'different' road, the right road for him, but it was also the only road he could have taken. It was the 'choice' the poet made which determined his destiny, and made him a poet different from others. It is in this way that the future is determined. It is thus that even minor decisions have far reaching and life-long consequences. A step once taken, a way once chosen, can never be retraced.

The poem has been much admired and much-quoted as well as much misunderstood and criticised. It is a great lyric which records a personal experience of the poet but from the personal and the individual the poet soon rises to the universal and the general. The poet's experience becomes symbolic of human experience in all ages and countries. The difficulty of making a choice is a universal one, and in this way the lyric is true to universal experience.

The language of the lyric is characterized by simplicity, clarity, and epigrammatic force and terseness. There are four stanzas each of five lines. Each line consists of eight syllables, though variations have been skilfully introduced to impart the informality and casualness of the spoken tongue. It is a personal lyric and as such it does not have the parentheses the dashes, the pauses and ejaculations which characterise the dramatic lyrics.

6.2.3 *Birches*

Birches published in the *Mountain of Interval*, 1916, is one of the most widely-quoted and anthologised of the nature-lyrics of Robert Frost. It is remarkable for its skilful blending of fact and fancy, observation and imagination. *Birches* are a common sight in New England. The poet has observed their 'habits' minutely, and in this admirable lyric he describes them precisely and accurately.

The lyric begins in a tone of easy conversation. When the poet sees brirches bending to right and left across the lines of, 'darker, straighter trees,' he imagines that some boy has been swinging them. But soon the truth dawns upon him, and he realises that swinging cannot bend them down permanently. It is the icestroms alone which can bend birches down to stay. After rain and storm the birches are covered with ice. The poet has observed the phenomenon mintuely, and his description is vivid and picturesque. When the wind blows, the birches swing up and down and the ice on them shines, and turns many-coloured, as the rays of the sun are refracted in passing through ice. As the sun grows warmer, the ice is shaken down. It falls on earth covered with snow. It seems as if the central dome of heaven has cracked and the earth is covered with heaps of broken glass. It is with the burden of ice that the birches are bowed so low for so long that, 'they never right themselves.'

This is the true reason, the hard fact, for the permanent bending of birches. But from this truth, the poet again returns to his fancy that the birches have been thus bowed down permanently by, 'some boy's swinging them.' He imagines that some boy, who lives too far from the town to learn baseball, devises a game for himself, a game which he can play alone, summer or winter. He takes to birches swinging as a pleasant sport. He climbs the birches over and over again, so much so that not a single tree remains unconquered and unbent. He has painstakingly acquired such skill that even when he reaches the top, he is able to maintain perfect balance, and then he comes to the ground with a swift movement:

Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish

Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.

The poet is in a reminiscent mood. With a wistful longing he remembers the time when he himself was a swinger of birches. He dreams that he would take to birch swinging once again, sometime in the future, when he is, 'weary of considerations.' Then by birches-swinging he would get away from earth awhile, 'and then, come back to it and begin over.' The poet would never like to leave this earth permanently. After a momentary climb to heaven, he would like to return to it, for,

Earth is the right place for love

I do not know where it is likely to go better.

He would like to climb towards heaven by mounting the birches, but then he would also like that they should set him down on earth after a moment. Birch-swinging, 'is good both going and coming back.' The fine lyrics brings out several aspects of Frost's art. Fact and fancy are the two polarities of Frost's art and both mingle in this fine lyric. His passion for fact is seen in his minuteness of observation and his love of the earth. His imagination or fancy is seen in his imagery, and in his vivid and picturesque descriptions. Fact and fancy play together throughout the poem. The crystal ice becomes heaps of broken glass: "You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen," The arched trees are transformed into girls on hands and knee, "that throw their hair before them over their heads to dry in the sun." The country boy, riding and subduing his father's birches becomes the mature poet.

The poem is an expression of Frost's, "rich and ripe philosophy." The fine lyric is modern in several ways. It fully exhibits the symbolic metaphysical structure of modern verse. Such opposites as fact and fancy, observation and imagination, earth and heaven, reality and ideality, combine to enrich the texture of the lyric. It is possible to read the lyric on several levels. It can be read and enjoyed as a plain, simple description of the habits of birches. But it is also possible to interpret it symbolically. The upward climb towards heaven of the birch swinger symbolises human ideals and aspirations, the human desire for withdrawal from harsh reality, the dream-world of fancy into which man would like to escape from the wearisome conditions of life on this earth. As in a modern poem, the thought is developed metaphorically. There is a gradual progression of metaphors. The poem begins with a simple, concrete description of the 'habits' of birches and the changes wrought upon them by wind and ice-storms, but soon it becomes a parable of human aspirations. The boy who swings the birches shrewdly and carefully suggests metaphorically to the poet that he himself, "weary of consideration" and "wishing to get away from earth awhile", partakes of the same experience. The poem concludes with a note on the question of earth, life and death, and the balance demonstrated in the metaphor of swinging birches between heaven and earth. Man should arrange his life in such a manner that he should attain a balance between his work on earth and his spiritual aspirations. It is not desirable to leave the earthly duties completely, nor is it advisable to have no spiritual aspirations, and he always pinned down to the earth.

The lyric is also an embodiment of the feeling of anxiety, frustration and helplessness which characterises life in a modern city. The poet is 'weary of considerations' and he wants to forget the bitterness of this earthly existence. The poem is reminiscent of Keat's *Ode to a Nightingale* where the poet wants to 'fade, far away, into the world of the nightingale, so that he might have a momentary escape from 'weariness the fever and the fret' of life. But Keats wants to escape this misery of life because he cannot bear it. On the other hand, Robert Frost clearly states that his withdrawal is momentary, it is a period of probation to face 'life' all the more courageously. He certainly loves to return for he knows that 'Earth's the right place for love'. It is this awareness which shows how much Frost is rooted in reality. The language used is, as usual, simple and clear. Many of the lines in it have epigrammatic force and terseness and are frequently quoted.

The lyric also illustrates the poet's mastery over blank verse. The rhythm is varied in keeping with the requirement of thought and emotion. The upward and downward movement of the rhythm fully reflects the going up and slow and stately when the poet moralises on the wearisome condition of human life:

It's when I'm weary of consideration,

And life is too much like a pathless wood

Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs

Broken across it, and one eye is weeping

From a twig's having lashed across it poen.

I'd like to get away from earth awhile

And then come back to it and begin over.

6.2.4 *Fire and Ice*

Mostly Frost's lyrics begin with a simple idea and coax the reader, almost without his awareness,

to extend the implication of the idea far beyond its plain presentation. They, to use Robert Frost's words, "begin with delight and end in wisdom." Likewise Frost's masterly dramatic lyric begins casually as a speculation concerning the end of the world, and ends with the discovery of the most dreadful passions in man.

The real life of the poem lies not is its contents but in the speaker's awareness, his point of view. There is no direct reference to any special event but the words vibrate with the consciousness of experience actually and intensely felt.

The lyric *Fire and Ice* provides the best illustration of Frost's metaphysical manner, his habit of bringing together vastly antithetical concepts. In this lyric, not only have such opposites been juxtaposed they have also been reconciled. The union of fire and ice is indeed remarkable. The poet has been able to reconile and harmonies these opposites by pointing out that both are equally good for destruction. Fire, symbolising the intensity of passion or desire, is as destructive as ice, symbolising the cold of hatred.

It is a short lyric of only nine lines, but within this short space the poet has succeeded in enclosing vast concept, and opening out terrible vistas to the mind's eye. By the linking of desire to fire and hate to ice, human emotions are transformed into vast, impersonal forces. In terms of imagery alone the poem is extremely rich, and one could find great complexity of meaning in the paradoxes it reveals, as for example, in the idea that the intensity of man's passions, the very thing which makes him human creates the inhuman forces of cataclysm.

The lyric expresses the poet's dryed-eyed acceptance of the passion, both of love and hatred in their most destructive form. The intense heat of love or desire and the extreme cold of hate are compared and found to be equally destructive and cataclysmic. The poem is terrifying because of the intensity with which the forces of destruction are diagnosed and accepted. Though the poet does not speak of his personal emotion, yet the lyric vibrates with the consciousness of experience acutely felt. There might be some exaggeration in the imagery, but the intensity of the lyric arises from the harsh, tight-lipped manner in which it is written. The emotion is intensily felt, but its expression is restrained and controlled.

The great complexity of meaning is conveyed through the paradoxes it reveals between the bitterness of emotions and the tightlipped manner of the speaker, and between the two fundamental passions in man, desire and hate. The question which the poem imposes on the reader is: What will end the world? Fire or Ice? The opening words of the poem "Some say" reveal a merciless coldness and indifference on the part of the speaker while the boldness of the metaphor and he richness of imaginary present his poignantly felt emotions. He finally offers two insights: One, what brings the end of the world is unimportant: the important fact is the end itself. Second, it identifies two of the destroyers of life- desire and hate. These emotions are not usually associated with the end of the world or even recognized, by a comparative roughness and artful inadequacy of the speaker's account of them. He introduced the problems casually with 'Some day': he pronounces his decision with "I hold with" and closes the poem with chill politeness "Would suffice". The chill is increased by the usages of the same words and rhymes.

Humble everyday phrase and idiom serve as a medium for expressing the most serious idea. Frost's theme is the destructive force of human passions (both love and hatred) but it is expressed through the humble speech of ordinary, everyday life. Thus, Frost manages to transform the style itself into a symbol and every sentence has a nuance of something newly added to the thought. The emotions of intense bitterness is conveyed through images, as is stated earlier, by linking of desire to fire and hate to ice, which transform the human emotion into vast impersonal forces that arouse the deepest terror.

In short, Frost's *Fire and Ice* is a masterpiece of condensation and proves that understatement is one of the basic sources of the power in English poetry.

6.2.5 *Stopping By the Woods on a Snowy Evening*

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening is one of the most quietly moving of Frost's lyrics. "The lyric" "like Milton's sonnet *On His Blindness* and Arnold;s *Dover Beach*, seems to have established itself permanently in anthologies and textbooks of poetry. It is one of Frost's best known poems, and we might discover, if we had the means, that it is one of the best known poems of the twentieth century." It was this lyric which touched the heart of Pt. Jawahar Lal Neharu, one of the greatest man of the world, and a devoted servant of humanity. After his death on 27th May, 1964 it was discovered that on the office table of Jawahar Lal Neharu there lay a piece of paper bearing the following four lines (written in his own hands) from this lyric:

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,

But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep,

And miles to go before I sleep.

These lines of Robert Frost served as an inspiration to one of the greatest men of India, and reminded him of the service of humanity and of his people to whom he had dedicated himself.

The lyric is simplicity itself. On the surface it is no more than a simple anecdote relating how the poet pauses one evening along a country road to watch the snowfall in the woods. "The woods are lovely dark and deep and deep", and as he sits in his horse driven carriage grazing into the soft, silent whiteness, he is tempted to stay on and on, slowing his mind to lose itself in the charming woods. "His consciousness seems on the verge of freeing itself from ordinary life, as if it were about to dissolve in the shadowy blank but his mind holds back from this. He remembers that his journey has a purpose. He has promises to keep and many miles to go before he can yield to the dreamlike release which the woods seem to offer.

The poem is not just a record of something that once happened to the poet; it points outward from the moment described towards far broader areas of experience. It expresses the conflict, which everyone has felt, between the demands of practical life with its obligations to others, and the poignant desire to escape into a land of reverie, where consciousness is dimmed and the senses are made independent of necessity. There is no overt symbolism yet the reader finds his vision directed in such a way that he sees the poet's purely personal experience as an image of experience common to all. The wide scope of the meaning becomes obvious in the final lines. These state the conflict in a simple, realistic way: the poet will have to fulfil certain duties, perhaps just about the farm, before he can go to bed; but the 'promises', the 'sleep' and the 'miles to go' widen to include more important aspects of his life and, further, elements of every man's life. Sleep here is, of course, well earned reward at the end of day's work; but reaching out beyond this, the idea of sleep merges with the final sleep, death itself. It stands in contrast to the snowy woods, whose temptation is to an irresponsible indulgence ending in the loss of consciousness: it is normal death, the release at the end of a life in which man has kept his promises and travelled the whole journey through human experience.

A very subtle and perceptive analysis of the poem by many renowned critics has made it an extremely popular poem. John Ciardi says that the dramatic force of the poem is best observable as a

progression in the three scenes: The first scene, that presents, the woods as the property of a man which holds for him an economic value and practical purpose, establishes some unspecified relationship between the man and the wood. It is important to note here that the errand is left generalized, perhaps, to suggest any errand in life and therefore, life itself. The owner represents of the forces of the poem- an order of reality from which the poet has separated himself for the moment. Thus, the scene comes to establish not only a relation between the man and the woods, but the fact that man's relation with nature begins with his separation from mankind. The second scene, that is covered by the second and third stanza, introduces a fill; the foil here is the horse. The animal has been conditioned to a routine of purposeful behaviour. The traveller imagines and finds himself to be questioned by the horse: What could be the purpose of stopping there away from bin or stall ? Implicitly it means that the behaviour of the speaker is not purposeful. He watches the wood towards no end, but just watching, for contemplating and for appreciating. Obviously, now the horse becomes a symbol without losing its identity as a horse. One senses that the darkness and snowfall symbolize a death-wish, however momentary, that is, that hunger for a final rest and surrender that a man may feel, but a beast cannot. Thus, by the end of the second scene it becomes clear that the poem establishes man's relation to the world of the wood-owner, his relation to the brute world of the horse and the presence of the unknowable world, the movement of the all-engulfing snow across all the orders of life, the man's the wood-owner's and the horse's-with the difference that the man knows of the second dark-within the dark of which the horse cannot, and the wood-owner will not, know. The third scene introduces a new force in the poem that can be named as obligation, personal commitment of duty. Finally, the speaker has a decision to make. Can he indulge in his mood forever or must he move on ? He repeats the thought and the poem ends here. It is the repetition in the last two lines that transforms "miles to go" and "sleep" into symbols. Many critics have given them many interpretations, but Frost himself has given no answer. It must be noted here that there are no pointed or overt symbols, no literary parallels or signposts to guide the reader yet he sees the poet's personal experience as an image of an experience common to all, that of preferring the arduous journey though human experience to an irresponsible indulgence in escapism. Hence, the poem establishes a contrast between the "merely natural and the human," a theme which continually preoccupied Frost.

Frost's symbols define and explain each other. For example, the woods the poet enjoys looking upon, are opposed to the promises he must keep, and it is clear that they represent a kind of irresponsibility. Again, since the poet will allow himself to sleep only in contrast to the unearned pleasure of looking at the woods.

Few poems say so much in so little. It is a piece of superb craftsmanship. This artistry of the poet is seen in the condensation and concentration of meaning, in the rich texture of the lyric. It is seen in the masterly use of the symbolistic techniques. It is also seen in the poem's language and versification. There is a predominance of monosyllabic words. In this way, there is a concentration of vowel sounds, and this contributes to the music and melody of the poem. Further, there is a skill manipulation of rhymes.

6.2.6 *Two Tramps in Mud Time*

Two Tramps in Mud Time, first published in 1934 in *A Further Range*, is one of those rare lyrics in which the poet speaks in the first person and gives an account of his activities, attitudes and responses. It is an autobiographical poem which gives us a delightful picture of Frost, the farmer working in his dooryard and talking with the passers-by.

Once on an April day, between winter and spring, the poet was splitting wood with a lively sense

of satisfaction. The poet has a joke at his own expense and says humorously that he had lived a life of self-control and wanted to strike blows, "for the common good", but now he spent that strength and power, "on the unimportant wood." Frost is known for the accuracy and precision of hits nature-descriptions, and here follows a beautiful account of the scene and sights of nature at a time when the weather was uncertain and constantly changing. It was the month of April, but at one moment it would be as hot, as if it were the month of May, and the very next moment it would be as cold, as if it were a day in the middle of March. The sun was out and the wind was still, and birds sang merrily, and flowers were in full bloom. The following passage well illustrates the sensitivity of the poet-farmer to the beautiful and bright in nature:

A bluebird comes tenderly up to alight

And turns to the wind to unruffle a plume

His song so pitched as not to excite

A single flower as yet to bloom

It is snowing a flack: and he half knew

Winter was only playing possum.

Except in colour he isn't blue,

But he wouldn't advice a thing to blossom.

It was at this pleasant time, when the poet was busy with the work he loved, that two hulking tramps came, "out of the mud." They come out of the woods like some sub-human creatures- "men of the woods and lumnerjacks"- from, "sleeping God knows where last night." Theirs is an animal-like existence, in sharp contrast with the poet's own life of, 'self-control.' They think that they alone have the right to split wood, and they must have judged the poet to be a fool from the way he handled the axe. They did not say anything to the poet, but all the same the poet understood what they meant by staying over there to look at him. It was clear to the poet, that in their view, he had no right to do that work for his pleasure, through which they earned their living. By taking up their work for play, he was depriving them of the means of earning their livehood. The had a better right to it:

Nothing on either side was said,

They knew they had but to stay their stay

And all their logic would fill my head:

As that I had no right to play

With what was another man's work for gain.

My right might be love but theirs was need

And where the two exist in twain

Theirs was the better right-agreed.

The poet appreciates their point of view that his taking up the work of wood-splitting means unemployment for them. Still, he does not agree with him. In his view, pleasure and need must be combined in work, only then does the highest achievement become possible for man:

But yield who will to their sepration,

My object in living is to unite

My avocation and my vocation

As my two eyes make one sight.

Only where love and need are one,

And the work is play for mortal stakes,

Is the deed ever really done

For Heaven and the futurs's sake.

Avocation and vocation pleasure and profit, must be combined as, "two eyes make one sight," in order that man may achieve something noble, "for heaven and the future's sake".

Thus in the poem the attitudes of the poet and the tramps are contrasted, and the chief interest of the lyric arises from this contrast. The amateur woodchopper and the two tramps represent contrasting views towards human goals and endeavour. The farmer desires, "*To unite My avocation and my vocation As my two eyes make one sight*", that is, to achieve depth and dimension: but the tramps' philosophy is single and inadequate: *"Except as a fellow handled on axe;. They had no way of knowing a fool."* One strives towards the unity of "A Full-time Interest" the others would separate avocation and vocation: love and need, play and work, "mortal stakes" and "Heaven and the futures' sake." The speaker lives a life of human self-control : but the tramps, in the poem's first phrase, come "out of the mud", like sub-human creatures, and live without a regulated principle of self-control. ***A personal experience has been used to highlight universal truths. The idea that the best work is that which combines need with pleasure has been beautifully conveyed.***

The poem also throws light on the poet's attitude to nature. Even the most cheerful nature-sketches of Frost have a dark under-tone. He does enjoy the beauty of nature, yet none of his nature-poems is free from hints of possible danger. Beneath the beautiful and calm surface, there is always the lurking presence of something hostile and sinister. In the poem he interrupts his genial chat about the April weather to advise:

Be glad of water, but don't forget

The lurking frost in the earth beneath

That will steal forth after the sun is set

And show on the water its crystal teeth.

These vistas opening upon fearful realities do not in the least negate the beauty. Love of natural beauty and horror at the remoteness and indifference of the physical world are not opposites, but different aspects of the same view. In the end, we may also note the classical austerity, simplicity and clarity of the lyric, as well as the epigrammatic terseness and force, of lines, such as the following:

My object in living is to unite,

My avocation and my vocation

As my two eyes make one sight.

6.8 Let Us Sum Up

The poems selected for your study are highly representative of Frost's poetic art. These poems vary in themes and style. It is a delightful experience to read them. They sharpen our understanding and deepen our insight into our everyday life in all its simplicity, lyrical beauty and philosophy of life. We may specially note that American writers are pragmatic in their outlook on life and express the same boldly in their creativity. This down-to –earth attitude, being typical of American temperament, gives birth to its ideals and ethics. The major dominant forces and voices in American literature- poetry, novel, drama or prose- seem committed to this pursuit and are faithful and truthful in their expression. Walt Whitman, Robert Frost, Emily Dickinson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, Earnest Hemingway, Mark Twain, Arthur Miller, Tennesse Williams, Eugene O'Neill, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson etc. – all are the strong pointers to the objectives of their creativity. Frost's poetry presents, portrays and reflects on the significant issues and dilemmas faced by man in daily existence. They dwell upon and elaborate a paradox in our life and Frost does his artistic best to resolve that. We find this faithful poetic endeavour in *Mending Wall*, *After Apple Picking*, *Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening*, *Fire and Ice*. *Home Burial* also deals with the pain and agony of human heart in a tragic but irreconcilable situation. "*The Onset*" explains the meaning and purpose of life against the background of Nature; of course, in a different manner from that expressed in "*Stopping By Woods*". "*Birches*" carries the poet to the days of his boyhood at the sight of birches when he was a great swinger of birches. Now he is sick of the considerations of life but escapism is not the forte of his character. So he must live with them for this world, this earth, are the best and finest places for love and life, in spite of its being a pathless wood-

"……Earth's is the right place for love:

I don't know where it's likely to go better."

These poems are known for their lyricism, love of Nature, pastoralism, exquisite child-like simplicity, innocence and beauty. From this all emerges Frost's philosophy of life and his conception and execution of poetry. C. Day Lewis sums up his introduction to the poetry of Frost in these words-

> "Robert Frost's death in 1963 deprived us of a poet we held in deep respect, and a man for whom everyone who knew him felt great affection. Whether time will show him as a major poet, I cannot tell. But, of all poets writing in English since W. B. Yeats, Frost is the one who gives me most satisfaction, the strongest sense of man committed absolutely to his vocation, at home in his medium, and saying things well which we are the better for hearing."

6.9 Review Questions

1. Discuss Frost as a poet of Nature and illustrate your answer with the help of the prescribed poems.
2. *Birches* is a fine example of a "rambling narrative that achieves a subtle naturalness." Discuss.
3. Discuss (a) the theme, and (b) the technique of the poems of Frost you have studied.
4. Give an estimate of Frost as a lyric-poet. What is his contribution and achievement in the field?
5. Bring out the salient features of Frost as a poet of rural life.

6. "Frost is a great poet of barriers and boundaries." Justify.

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UNIT-7

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE : *THE SCARLET LETTER* (I)

Structure

7.0 Objectives

This Unit proposes to introduce the American novelist, Nathaniel Hawthorne and essays a probing leap into the age in which he lived and wrote his fiction. Regarded as his *magnum opus, The Scarlet Letter* throws up some eternal human dilemmas as the religious sanctions about human conduct begin to impinge upon man's freewheeling spirit, throwing him into the morass of his own niggardly individuality which celebrates the self to the chagrin of the custodians of public morality.

7.1 Introduction

Nathaniel Hawthorne, born on July 4, 1804 at Salem, descended from a family which boasted of a judge in early Massachusetts who had been instrumental in the conviction of Salem witches. This incident had a lasting impact on the creative sensibilities of Hawthorne. It is reflected in his portrayal of different characters in his novels. Due to the early death of his father, Capt. Daniel Hawthorne, his early study was erratic, though he graduated from Bowdoin College in 1825 and returned to his mother in Salem. After his college, he wrote short stories which were grouped in "*Seven Tales of My Native Land*." Most of his tales did not bear the name of the author. Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales* was published in 1837, it achieved success and was commended by authors and critics.The period of creative preparation was enriched by Hawthorne's travels and episodes of love in Swamp Scott and Massachusetts, and his romantic liason with Miss Eliza Gibbs in Martha Vineyard. In 1838, he fell in love with Sophia Peabody, the daughter of Dr Nathaniel Peabody who worked as a dentist in Salem and then in Boston. She was a learned and accomplished girl, though invalid. The marriage with Sophia Peabody took place on July 9, 1842. The couple were visited by Emerson, Thoreau, Ellery Channing etc. Una, the new arrival increased the marital bliss of her parents, though Hawthorne did not have stable income while his friends were

actively making efforts to procure a job for him. Eventually, Hawthorne was appointed "Surveyor for the District of Salem and Beverly and Inspector of the Revenue for the Port of Salem." His dismissal from service in June 1849, the death of his mother a month afterward, and the growing financial stringency anguished him. However, his stay in the Custom House endowed him with penetrating insights into human nature and its propensity toward gratification of legitimate human urges which militate against the cramping Calvinistic doctrine. His travels to France and Italy instead of giving him the much needed calm and quiet, created in him contrary feelings. The tragedies on the personal front stared him in face. The nerve and the vitality which he had demonstrated in life began to wane. In 1863, he lost his health and became a sick man. Hawthorne resolved to reinvigorate himself by his journey to the New Hampshire hills in the company of Pierce. Both of them traveled and went to Concord, New Hampshire, stopped at various places journeying North. Unfortunately, Pierce found Hawthorne dead on May 19, 1864. Hawthorne's *magnum opus*, *The Scarlet Letter* quintessentially focuses on the fanaticism and persecution of the custodians of religion against the human beings who listen to the dictates of the heart, rather than the intellect.

7.2 Hawthorne And His Times

The American Renaissance cannot be conceived of without "the Renaissance of New England." And Hawthorne was a child of the American Renaissance. In the year 1835, Tocqueville averred emphatically that men in America were "on a greater equality in point of fortune and intellect . . . more equal in their strength than in any country in the world." It was a period, before the civil war, when the growing rivalry between the whites and blacks had not yet reached the flash point. It was also the time when the energy that was exhibited by the pioneers in the thrust towards the west was at its peak.

It was a highly productive age when the creative writers of Boston and Cambridge and Salem poured out their ideas on religion, democracy, common man, science and industry. It was the most fruitful period when the writers used American imagery, adopted American themes and thought in American terms. In brief, the American flavour characterized their writings. It was again the time when the American stamp on American literature was unmistakable unlike the literature produced under the colonial influences. During the times Nathaniel Hawthorne grew up, people everywhere showed a sense of exhilaration and joy. It was the time when the American expansion towards the West was at its height, thus liberating people from social restraints and encouraging them to seek fulfillment through the conquest of the wilderness in the West. Consequently, the civilization of America had produced contradictory tendencies, the tendency towards domination and exploitation resulted in social disharmony. The Puritan tradition in American literature appeared antithetical to American spirit. In the words of Henry Bamford Parkes, "The country abounded in Utopian experiments, in new religions . . . promising the millennium. Some of the manifestations of America's self-confidence were crude . . . too much nationalistic boasting. But faith in the American experiment could also stimulate men of finer grain. This was a period of vital and profoundly American literature."

7.3 History

The Scarlet Letter was published in the spring of 1850 by Ticknor & Fields, beginning Hawthorne's most lucrative period. When he delivered the final pages to James Thomas Fields in February 1850, Hawthorne said that "some portions of the book are powerfully written" but doubted it would be popular. In fact, the book was an instant best-seller though, over fourteen years, it brought its author only $1,500.Its initial publication brought wide protest from natives of Salem, who did not approve of how Hawthorne

had depicted them in his introduction "The Custom-House". A 2,500-copy second edition of *The Scarlet Letter* included a preface by Hawthorne dated March 30, 1850, that he had decided to reprint his introduction "without the change of a word... The only remarkable features of the sketch are its frank and genuine good-humor... As to enmity, or ill-feeling of any kind, personal or political, he utterly disclaims such motives".

The book's immediate and lasting success are due to the way it addresses spiritual and moral issues from a uniquely American standpoint. In 1850, adultery was an extremely risqué subject, but because Hawthorne had the support of the New England literary establishment, it passed easily into the realm of appropriate reading. It has been said that this work represents the height of Hawthorne's literary genius; dense with terse descriptions. It remains relevant for its philosophical and psychological depth, and continues to be read as a classic tale on a universal theme.

7.4 BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO *THE SCARLET LETTER*

The Scarlet Letter is one of the most disturbing novels thrown up by American imagination. It begins with the description of the Custom House in Salem, the native town of Hawthorne. The occupants of the Salem Custom House were his own Puritan ancestors who had come here two centuries ago from Great Britain. William Hawthorne, the first ancestor, was a soldier, legislator and judge, carried his Bible and the sword, and was known for the martyrdom of the witches. This fact always tormented Hawthorne. It was in the Custom House that Hawthorne chanced upon a dingy paper in which the surveyor Pue had related the details of one Hester Prynne who lived in the early seventeenth century, moved from place to place doing the job of a nurse rendering advice on all matters, while a few regarded her as a vile and undesirable person. The episode triggered off the creative impulses of Hawthorne, and years later he fashioned this story into a 'Romance' and was titled *The Scarlet Letter.*

As the narrative unfolds, Hester emerges out of the Salem prison along with her three month old infant daughter, and is made to put on the scarlet letter for her adulterous act. Hester is described as tall and ladylike as she moves towards the scaffold on which she is required to stand as a part of her punishment. In this hour of severe ordeal, she remembers her dead parents and an aged man (Roger Chillingworth) with a deformed back, and then hugs the child fiercely. The clergymen try to get out of her the name of her paramour which she stubbornly refuses. The public ignominy at the market place and severity of the looks of the crowd, make her unwell as well as her child. In the crowd stands a physician, Roger Chillingworth who is discovered to be Hester's husband. He treats the mother and the daughter. The wronged husband in the physician assures the nervous Hester that he would not have his revenge on her, but on the man who has seduced his wife, enjoining on her to keep his identity secret.

The custodians of public morality debate over the custody of the illegitimate child of Hester Prynne. Fearing that her love off-spring may not be separated from her, Hester meets the Governor who is already in the company of Arthur Dimmesdale, the priest, and Chillingworth, the physician. With Dimmesdale's intervention, the custody of the child, Pearl, is entrusted to the mother. The situation is fraught with irony. The wronged husband, Chillingworth, seeks Dimmesdale's good offices and so does Hester, without any one suspecting that the unknown paramour of Hester is none other than Arthur Dimmesdale. Maybe, Dimmesdale was at that point of time listening to his heart than to his ecclesiastical obligations.

Meanwhile, as Hester and Pearl carry the burden of their existence, Dimmesdale's health deteriorates, and Chillingworth becomes the God-sent physician to take care of the malady that afflicts the

priest. The sin of worm drills into the psyche of the priest and torments him with the acutest pain conceivable, thus throwing him into the morass of depression. The physician observes Dimmesdale minutely. As the two discuss the ideas of guilt and sin, Dimmesdale suffers from a sense of unease and spiritual torment. At this point of time, the wronged husband in Chillingworth zeroes in on the exact cause of Dimmesdale's malady.

Seven years after Hester Prynne suffered ignominy on the scaffold, Arthur Dimmesdale one night, stands on the same scaffold and cries in a sense of anguish, maybe to atone for his sin, complicity, duplicity and cowardice. When in the Forest Scene Hester tries to seduce the mind of Dimmesdale with vision of togetherness at some distant place, the priest's momentary vacillations are subdued because he is skeptical about his surviving if he abandons his profession. Hester gets convinced with the passage of time that Chillingworth's evil association with Dimmesdale is the root cause of the latter's worsening predicament.

Salem witnesses a lot of hustle and bustle on the day the new Governor is to take charge. On this day Dimmesdale delivers the sermon in tremulous voice as the hearers are enraptured by his high voice and holiness. A new sense of confidence, exuberance and hope is perceptible on the face of the priest, and he is all set to confess neither in privacy nor in secrecy. He moves through the crowd, comes to Hester and Pearl, stretches his arms towards the scaffold, calls them to his side. Holding Pearl's hand and supported by Hester, Dimmesdale stands on the scaffold and confesses his sin to the magistrates. He tears open his clothes to reveal some deep wound, and the whole crowd is terror-stricken. Pearl kisses the priest. Smitten with remorse, Dimmesdale dies, reminding her of their sin and the justice of God. Years roll by. Meanwhile, Chillingworth too dies, leaving enormous wealth to Pearl. Hester and Pearl depart for England where Pearl gets married in an aristocratic family. Hester returns to Salem and through her acts of service and mercy to her own society members, she transforms her self through service and becomes an angel of mercy. After her death, she is buried near the grave of Dimmesdale with the letter 'A' marked on her tomb. The novel embodies the spirit of New England life of the seventeenth century.

7.5 Plot Summary

The novel takes place in 17th-century Boston, Massachusetts during the summer, in a then Puritan village. A young woman, Hester Prynne, is led from the town prison with her infant daughter in her arms and on the breast of her gown "a rag of scarlet cloth" that "assumed the shape of a letter. It was the capital letter A". The scarlet letter "A" represents the act of adultery that she has committed and it is to be a symbol of her sin – a badge of shame – for all to see. A man in the crowd tells an elderly onlooker that Hester is being punished for adultery. Hester's husband, who is much older than she is, sent her ahead to America while he settled some affairs in Europe. However, her husband never arrived in Boston. The consensus is that he has been lost at sea. While waiting for her husband, Hester has apparently had an affair, as she has given birth to a child. She will not reveal her lover's identity, however, and the scarlet letter, along with her public shaming, is her punishment for her sin and her secrecy. On this day Hester is led to the town scaffold and harangued by the town fathers, but she again refuses to identify her child's father.

The elderly onlooker is Hester's missing husband, who is now practicing medicine and calling himself Roger Chillingworth. He settles in Boston, intent on revenge. He reveals his true identity to no one but Hester, whom he has sworn to secrecy. Several years pass. Hester supports herself by working as a seamstress, and Pearl (her daughter) grows into a willful, impish child, who is more of a symbol than an actual character, said to be the scarlet letter come to life as both Hester's love and her punishment. Shunned by the community, they live in a small cottage on the outskirts of Boston. Community officials

attempt to take Pearl away from Hester, but, with the help of Arthur Dimmesdale, an eloquent minister, the mother and daughter manage to stay together. Dimmesdale, however, appears to be wasting away and suffers from mysterious heart trouble, seemingly caused by psychological distress. Chillingworth attaches himself to the ailing minister and eventually moves in with him so that he can provide his patient with round-the-clock care. Chillingworth also suspects that there may be a connection between the minister's torments and Hester's secret, and he begins to test Dimmesdale to see what he can learn. One afternoon, while the minister sleeps, Chillingworth discovers something undescribed to the reader, supposedly an "A" burned into Dimmesdale's chest, which convinces him that his suspicions are correct.

Dimmesdale's psychological anguish deepens, and he invents new tortures for himself. In the meantime, Hester's charitable deeds and quiet humility have earned her a reprieve from the scorn of the community. One night, when Pearl is about seven years old, she and her mother are returning home from a visit to the deathbed of John Winthrop when they encounter Dimmesdale atop the town scaffold, trying to punish himself for his sins. Hester and Pearl join him, and the three link hands. Dimmesdale refuses Pearl's request that he acknowledge her publicly the next day, and a meteor marks a dull red "A" in the night sky. It is interpreted by the townsfolk to mean *Angel*, as a prominent figure in the community had died that night, but Dimmesdale sees it as meaning *Adultery*. Hester can see that the minister's condition is worsening, and she resolves to intervene. She goes to Chillingworth and asks him to stop adding to Dimmesdale's self-torment. Chillingworth refuses. She suggests that she may reveal his identity to Dimmesdale.

Hester arranges an encounter with Dimmesdale in the forest because she is aware that Chillingworth knows that she plans to reveal his identity to Dimmesdale, and she wishes to protect him. While walking through the forest, the sun will not shine on Hester, though Pearl can bask in it. They then wait for Dimmesdale, and he arrives. Hester informs Dimmesdale of the true identity of Chillingworth and the former lovers decide to flee to Europe, where they can live with Pearl as a family. They will take a ship sailing from Boston in four days. Both feel a sense of release, and Hester removes her scarlet letter and lets down her hair. The sun immediately breaks through the clouds and trees to illuminate her release and joy. Pearl, playing nearby, does not recognize her mother without the letter. She is unnerved and expels a shriek until her mother points out the letter on the ground. Hester beckons Pearl to come to her, but Pearl will not go to her mother until Hester buttons the letter back onto her dress. Pearl then goes to her mother. Dimmesdale gives Pearl a kiss on the forehead, which Pearl immediately tries to wash off in the brook, because he again refuses to make known publicly their relationship. However, he too clearly feels a release from the pretence of his former life, and the laws and sins he has lived with.

The day before the ship is to sail, the townspeople gather for a holiday and Dimmesdale preaches his most eloquent sermon ever. Meanwhile, Hester has learned that Chillingworth knows of their plan and has booked passage on the same ship. Dimmesdale, leaving the church after his sermon, sees Hester and Pearl standing before the town scaffold. He impulsively mounts the scaffold with his lover and his daughter, and confesses publicly, exposing the mark supposedly seared into the flesh of his chest. He falls dead just after Pearl kisses him.

Frustrated in his revenge, Chillingworth dies a year later. Hester and Pearl leave Boston, and no one knows what has happened to them. Many years later, Hester returns alone, still wearing the scarlet letter, to live in her old cottage and resume her charitable work. She receives occasional letters from Pearl, who was rumored to have married a European aristocrat and established a family of her own. Pearl also inherits all of Chillingworth's money even though he knows she is not his daughter. There is a sense of

liberation in her and the townspeople, especially the women, who had finally begun to forgive Hester of her tragic indiscretion. When Hester dies, she is buried in "a new grave near an old and sunken one, in that burial ground beside which King's Chapel has since been built. It was near that old and sunken grave, yet with a space between, as if the dust of the two sleepers had no right to mingle. Yet one tombstone served for both." The tombstone was decorated with a letter "A", and it was used for Hester and Dimmesdale.

7.6 American Puritanism

In the seventeenth century some Puritan groups separated from the Church of England. Among these were the Pilgrims who in 1620 founded Plymouth Colony in America. Ten years later, the first major Puritan migration to New England took place. The Puritan brought strong religious impulses to bear in all colonies north of Virginia, but New England was their stronghold, and the Congregationalist churches established there were able to perpetuate their viewpoint about a Christian society for more than two hundred years. Men like Richard Mather, John Cotton and Roger Williams held ideas in the mainstream of Calvinistic thought. In addition to believing in the absolute sovereignty of God, the total depravity of man, and the complete dependence of human beings on divine grace for salvation. During the whole colonial period Puritanism had direct impact on both religious thought and cultural patterns in America.

7.7 *Crime & Punishment*

"Crime" and "Punishment" are legal terms, and in that respect, it is a society that imposes its code of conduct on the erring individual. "Sin" and "Redemption" are religious, Christian terms, these mean that the code of conduct that an individual violates is not legal but religious or moral. Through noble deeds and penance, an individual can make amends for his sin. Though the idea of adultery, even ministerial adultery has sparked off a number of novels like Graham Green's *The Power and the Glory,* the theme has never been treated in its traumatic and moral aspect as beautifully and movingly as in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter.*

In the novel under scrutiny, Hawthorne is not so much interested in telling a story, his interest lies in showing how sin affects three different individuals. The sin here is taken not so much as a theological problem but as a psychological one. The Puritan society of Boston was a theocracy, i.e. it was a religious as well as a political organization. Individuals who defied or offended the society were dangerous as they might cause anarchy in the society which was itself still trying to adjust itself in a new country wherein there was danger from the Red Indians, the Spaniards and from the Natives itself. The crime that Hester has committed is over before *The Scarlet Letter* begins. In this sense, the novel deals, not with crime and punishment, but with the effect of a particular sin on a group of people—Hester Prynne, Dimmesdale and Chillingworth.

Hester Prynne is a woman of undaunted courage who withstands the misfortunes and shame that circumstances bring upon her. She is tricked into marriage by an old, misshapen man of learning for whom she "felt no love, nor feigned any." Being still in wedlock, she unlocks her heart to another. This lapse was integral to her nature which was "rich, voluptuous, oriental characteristic, a taste for the gorgeously beautiful." Bullied, tortured and imprisoned, Hester would not name the father of her child. On the contrary, she carried her cross—the flaming letter 'A'—with rare courage and force. She had violated the law of Moses. The sin of her co-partner, Arthur Dimmesdale, is aggravated by his concealment of it, his hypocrisy and his continuing to wear a mask of piety for several years before he determines to make a confession. Hester does not look upon her moral lapse as a sin either against God or against herself, though she certainly

considers it to be a serious violation of the social order. On the contrary, Dimmesdale regards this moral lapse as a sin against God, a sin against himself and a sin against society.

Hawthorne provides a probing leap into the emotions of the wearer of the scarlet letter. The children in Salem begin to have a dread of Hester which they imbibe from their parents. It was a vague idea that there was something horrible in this woman. She lives alienated and isolated but has a remarkable strength of mind to bear the agony. The scarlet letter gives her insight into the hidden sins of others. She knows that if truth be told, everywhere will the letter 'A' blaze on so many other bosoms beside hers. As a result of the penance imposed on Hester by society, a great change comes over her. She stays on in Boston so that the torture of her daily shame might purge her soul so that she could "work out another purity than that which she had lost, more saint-like because of the results of martyrdom." The decision in itself is a step towards moral amelioration. Hester herself admits that "the badge hath taught me." Thus, Hester becomes a Sister of Mercy, helping every soul in distress, with her goodness and resolve. She achieves a spiritual victory over her society which begins to acknowledge her changing status in her community.

Hester's acts of service to society should not, however, blind us to her real weakness. She is by nature a passionate, sensual woman, though her sensuality is successfully suppressed by her for seven long years. It rises to the surface as soon as an opportunity presents itself. Meeting her lover, Dimmesdale, in the forest after seven years, she is ready to do the same thing again. She removes the letter 'A' from her bosom and throws it away. With her rich and luxurious hair tumbling down, her voluptuous beauty casts a spell on the Minister once again. She is able to coax into agreeing to her plan to escape to Boston. Thus, the two sinners who had already suffered a lot, are ready to take another plunge. In case of Hester, the decision to flee is the result of a genuine conviction, though Dimmesdale does not suffer publicly as a criminal, but his raw conscience causes him constant torment, laceration and mortification. He hurts himself physically for his sin but 'punishes' himself in secret. In this sense, whereas Hester's regeneration is more social, Dimmesdale's regeneration is actually a 'salvation. Like King Arthur of yore, he has overcome sin, temptation and evil to emerge triumphant in his public confession of sin and death. Yet his spiritual salvation is, perhaps, more subjective than actual. Roger Chillingworth, the physician, the indifferent but wronged husband of Hester Prynne has every right to know the identity of the man who wronged him. But as a husband, he had nearly abandoned his young and beautiful wife to pursue his academic interests. Nevertheless, in spite of his devilish designs against Dimmesdale, Chillingworth through his act of leaving huge fortune to Pearl, redeems himself significantly.

7.8 Let Us Sum Up

Thus we see that this work is remarkable for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it was Howthorne's first full length story and superior to any full length story written later on. Secondly, with *The Scarlet Letter* the American novel came of age. With this the American novels could be well compared to the best productions of European novelists like Thackeray, Dickens, Balzac, Hugo, George Eliot etc. It was the first important novel in American literature which invited attention. This novel was a declaration of American Literary Independence. The writer says that his wife was seen improving when she heard her husband reading this novel to her. Hawthorne called it a hell-fired story, a tale of human frailty and sorrow and he was positively surprised when this book mer with an unprecedented success.

7.9 Review Questions

1. The primary interest in *The Scarlet Letter* lies in its symbolical and allegorical meaning.

2. On whose side the sympathies of Hawthorne lie, in *The Scarlet Letter*.

3. Discuss *The Scarlet Letter* as a Psychological novel.

4. Draw a pen-portrait of Pearl.

5. Crime and Punishment are revealed as both personal and social matter in *The Scarlet Letter*. Discuss.

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UNIT-8

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE: *THE SCARLET LETTER* (II)

Strucutre

8.0 Objectives

The Scarlet Letter is not merely the study of a singular fall from grace; it is an artistic elaboration of how one sin or flaw affects not only the participants but also the onlookers.

8.1 Introductions

Hawthorne was never an extensive writer which means that his subjects matter was limited and narrow. In *The Scarlet Letter* he hit the pitch and achieved and intensity that only the greatest writers achieve. D.H.Lawrence in his essay on Nathanial Hawthorne says that polite Hawthorne found a terrible subject of Passion and Betrayal in the book which are the mythopoetic powers of the book. This subject has an appeal for our subconscious minds. Its depth and richness have various appeals for various readers. Like the layers of an onion it has a number of layers of meaning. The reason for this is that the writer has put much of himself into this book.

8.2 Major Characters in the Novel

8.2.1 Hester Prynne

Hester is the principal character of *The Scarlet Letter*. She is presented in an ambiguous manner.

When the story begins she has already sinned. The novel deals with her punishment and with her transformation from a sinner to a saint of the sister of charity. We remember Hester alone with Pearl moving in and out of the village on a series of errands. Her punishment might have made her a witch, a prophetess of the founder of a new sect but what saved her from such a fate was Pearl's redeeming presence. Pearl is the living embodiment of the scarlet letter. But gradually Hester transformed her punishment into a virtue. She becomes the Ambassador of Mercy. She triumphs over the evil circumstance by an exercise of her will. Her art of embroidery helps her to overcome her circumstance. Her punishment also gives her an insight into the evil in the human breast.

However, she still shows fear on three occassions. Firstly when the Puritans give her rigid stars, when she is standing alone with little Pearl on the scaffold. Secondly, when Chillingworth visits her in the prison house and obliges her to promise him to keep his secret. Thirdly, when Dimmesdale becomes enraged in the forest, she pleads with fear for his forgiveness. Hense she is not at all perfect in her heroism.

She is also able to hide her real self behind her mask of the scarlet letter and her smiling face. With the scarlet plans of escape Hester moves through the crowd with her mask-like face.

She is at her best in the forest scene with Dimmesdale. Her initiative and courage stand out in comparison with the weak-willed minister who lacks in these very qualities. She is an activist, a person who transforms her situation while the minister listens to her sermons to him. Yet, she shows an incomprehensible respect to the minister.

After a long disappearance after the minister's death she returns to the village having married off Pearl in Europe. She spends her last days as an Angel of Mercy and she is burried next to the Minister after her death. The ambiguity of her character is represented by her symbol- a spot of red against a black background.

8.2.2 Arthur Dimmensdale

Arthur Dimmesdale is the most ambiguous character in the novel. We always remember him as a pale, weak young man, trembling easily and holding his hand over his heart. It is wonderful that the Puritans could not find out his secret early.

He lacks energy and will. He is the pastor and Hester is his spiritual ward. Yet he commits adultery with her. He patiently listens to Hester's sermon in the forest. Though he is a man yet he does not have as much courage and initiative as Hester has, though Hester is a woman. He wants to confess his guilt but words never come out. When they do, people deliberately misunderstand him. That is why there are conflicting views about the hour of his death and his 'confession'. He is a humble man yet he wants to disappear from the village in a blaze of glory. He must deliver his Election Sermon before he goes. In the blindness of his suffering he never understands Chillingworth as others do.

He is a hypocrite in the words of Mistress Hibbins. He can wear a mask and hide his real feeling in public. People of instinctive sympathy discover him easily. That is why he is uneasy in the presence of Pearl. After his return from the forest he is in a strange exhilaration. He wants to utter blasphemies and make secret jokes with Chillingworth.

However he is also transformed at the end of the story. There is saintliness in his new mood. After the success of his election sermon he decides to bow out with a confession. However, he never directly admits his guilt in his final confession.

He speaks a few conventional words about God and sin and pardon before he dies. Even his grave is separated from Hester's. As such we always remember him as a lonely, suffering and incomprehensible man.

8.2.3 Roger Chillingworth

Roger Chillingworth is a mixture of 'chill' and 'worth'. He is a cold-blooded villain who destroys the human soul. His worth is that he has been betrayed by Hester and Dimmesdale, yet he sins more than he is sinned against. He betrays the sanctity of the human heart more as Hester and Dimmesdale never did. His presence suggest the Desert. The fire in his laboratory and his blue eyes suggest that he is connected with hell. His cold efficiency and sceptical mind are in opposition to the conventionalized Puritan religious morality. His sin is that he is not sufficiently detached or scientific. His systematic destruction of the minister's soul owes its inspiration to a motive of revenge. He is a man who was good and who has fallen. He provokes hatred and dislike. Yet, he is indispensable to the village. As Dimmesdale is a hypocritical minister, Chillingworth is a hypocritical physician and friend. In his role of friends and physician he does more than good to Dimmesdale.

He is the wronged husband who may exact his revenge by Elizabethan standards. Hester admits his goodness and generosity in the past. The passion of revenge has made him a villain. His goodness in the past can be gauged by his generosity in leaving all his considerable property to his enemy's child, Pearl. As Hester is identified by her scarlet letter and the minister by his hand on his heart, so the physician is identified by his stoop and his hunch-back.

His monomaniac revenge comes to engross his complete being so much so that he cannot live without his enemy Dimmesdale. He tries to stop Dimmesdale with promises of a happy future. But when he fails in his effort he dies within a year of the minister's death, following him even in death.

8.3 Hester's Moral Guilt

Hester's guilt is complete and unredeemable. According to puritan ethics this is the correct position in Hester's case. She has sinned against the seventh of Ten commandments. An adulteress has sinned against the commandment of God and lost his favour for ever. Therefore in the eyes of a rigid Puritan Hester has sinned unredeemably. She can be made to do penance by making her wear the scarlet letter which will constantly remind her of her guilt. In addition to the scarlet letter the presence of Pearl also reminds her of her guilt. Thus she gets double punishment. The Puritan society asserts its authority over the individual conscience by forcing Hester to accept her punishment. Hester could avoid this punishment by running away alone or with Dimmesdale. But their own minds would not allow them to run away. Hester triumphs over her circumstance by her vocation (needle work) and her implict acceptance of her punishment. Dimmesdale triumps by his confession and public achnowledgement of sin. However they are not allowed to be mixed up even after their death. Society may have to forgive them but their ultimate redemption lies in the hands of God. Therefore, society can only separate them even in death. The puritan ethics is perfectly carried out in this respect.

Jean Calvin, the 16th century French father of Puritanism, made the idea of the eternal sinfulness of man in Christian history very popular for the puritans. According to him all men are guilty and none is capable of judging Hester. All important people in Boston except the old priest John Wilson and the dying Governor Winthrop are guilty of one sin or the other. Dimmesdale is a hypocrite and coward, Chillingworth is guilty of probing improperly into the depths of human heart. Governor Bellungham is proud of his rich

dresses, house and estate while his sister. Mistress Hobbins, is a witch. In the course of story of this book we learn that Hester has developed a sympathetic intuition about sinners in Boston and that she could understand sinfulness in people in whom it was to be the least expected. Dimmesdale himself has blasphemous ideas about God and religion. At the beginning of the story it is the most frustrated people who are the most outspoken critics of Hester. All this shows a Boston Puritan Society that is not capable of judging Hester because all its members are sinful in one way of the other.

The issue of the faith in religious morality is less important than the question of individual conscience. Hence it is Hester's private morality which is correct here. The emphasis on the individual is typically 19th century and it may have owed its origin to Hawthrone being under the influence of Emerson and the Transcendentalists. Therefore if the the whole society is corrupt or sinful, the individual whose conscience makes him do his penance is sensitive to morality and he had his own personal morality as against the morality of a whole society. With her patience, courage and humility allied to good deeds Hester proves that she is as good a Puritan as anybody else. She has been true to her own self-ordained punishment. She feels her sin both through the scarlet letter and the child Pearl but she never tortures herself as Dimmesdale does.

But why does she not torture herself ? This is a question which should be considered in right ernest. It is true that she is not shown, as a beloved of Dimmesdale at all in this book. We do not even know about her motivation for falling in love with Dimmesdale. That she is brave and resolute and resists the temptation of becoming a free thinker like Ann-Hutchison or a witch like Mistress Hibbins do show her own private sense of morality. Yet to say that she never considers herself a sinner at all would be totally false. As we have already seen she refuses to remove the scarlet letter on an order from the community. She is also afraid of the criticiam of the Puritans and her own husband which shows that she admits her sin. It may be truer to say that Hester has a private morality which is not inferior to the social morality of the Puritans, but to suggest that she does not consider herself a sinner is completery false.

8.4 Themes

8.4.1 Sin

Sin and knowledge are linked in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The Bible begins with the story of Adam and Eve, who were expelled from the Garden of Eden for eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. As a result of their knowledge, Adam and Eve are made aware of their disobedience, that which separates them from the divine and from other creatures. Once expelled from the Garden of Eden, they are forced to toil and to procreate – two "labors" that seem to define the human condition. The experience of Hester and Dimmesdale recalls the story of Adam and Eve because, in both cases, sin results in expulsion and suffering. But it also results in knowledge – specifically, in knowledge of what it means to be human. For Hester, the scarlet letter functions as "her passport into regions where other women dared not tread," leading her to "speculate" about her society and herself more "boldly" than anyone else in New England.

As for Dimmesdale, the "cheating minister" of his sin gives him "sympathies so intimate with the sinful brotherhood of mankind, so that his chest vibrates in unison with theirs." His eloquent and powerful sermons derive from this sense of empathy. The narrative of the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale is quite in keeping with the oldest and most fully authorized principles in Christian thought. His "Fall" is a descent from apparent grace to his own damnation; he appears to begin in purity. He ends in corruption. The subtlety is that the minister is his own deceiver, convincing himself at every stage of his spiritual pilgrimage

that he is saved.

The rosebush, its beauty a striking contrast to all that surrounds it – as later the beautifully embroidered scarlet A will be – is held out in part as an invitation to find "some sweet moral blossom" in the ensuing, tragic tale and in part as an image that "the deep heart of nature" (perhaps God) may look more kindly on the errant Hester and her child (the roses among the weeds) than her Puritan neighbors do. Throughout the work, the nature images contrast with the stark darkness of the Puritans and their systems.

Chillingworth's misshapen body reflects (or symbolizes) the evil in his soul, which builds as the novel progresses, similar to the way Dimmesdale's illness reveals his inner turmoil. The outward man reflects the condition of the heart.

Although Pearl is a complex character, her primary function within the novel is as a symbol. Pearl herself is the embodiment of the scarlet letter, and Hester rightly clothes her in a beautiful dress of scarlet, embroidered with gold thread, just like the scarlet letter upon Hester's bosom. Parallels can be drawn between Pearl and the character Beatrice in *Rappaccini's Daughter*. Both are studies in the same direction, though from different standpoints. Beatrice is nourished upon poisonous plants, until she herself becomes poisonous. Pearl, in the mysterious prenatal world, imbibes the poison of her parents' guilt.

The difference between Hester's awarness of her sin and Dimmesdale's awarness of his sin is due to the fact that though Hester is a woman, she is firm and courageous while Dimmesdale is a man, he is timid and weak-willed. Perhaps Dimmesdale's mortified awarness of his sin is either due to his position as a religious minister or due to his intellectual superiority over Hester. Hester, on the other hand, is a common woman- proud, dignified, sensitive but bold. Her public censure at the beginning of the book has also perhaps lessoned her strong and morbid feeling of guilt that a secret sinner like Dimmesdale might have. Her public acceptance of sin is also not without benefit- people permit her to move much more freely. Pearl's presence also saves her from a drastic course of rebellion against society. She does suffer from people's stares and the exposure that the scarlet letter and Pearl enforce upon her, as also from the Puritan children's jeers. Yet, she manages to find a way around her suffering and to convert it into a kind of triumph by her good deeds and humility. Dimmesdale, on the other hand, is found constantly shut up in his room or surrounded by his congregation, so that he is passive, as opposed to Hester's active life. He lacerates and tortures himself because he hates himself for his secret sin. He makes half-hearted attempts to confess his sin but without success. He is frail and tremulous which, is a faminine quality in direct opposition to Hester's activism which is masculine in character. His temperament is also of faminine nature. He wants to leave the settlement only after he has delivered his Election sermon, that is, in a blaze of glory. Whereas Hester's activism leads to her improving status in the community, Dimmesdale, who is a hypocrite and a coward, achieves salvation with his dying confession and changed behaviour at the end of the story. Both find their own regeneration out of a common sin- Hester as a heroic figure, Dimmesdale as a religious figure.

Hawthrone's ambiguity prevents us from reaching any single conclusion as to where his own sympathy does lay. In fact, there is a suggestion in *The Scarlet Letter* that Hester is a devil (chapter XVI where she is related to The Black Man and chapter XVII where she meets Dimmesdale in the forest and makes a 'pact' with him as the 'Black Man' is assumed to do with his followers) and that Dimmesdale is a masochist who inflicts deliberate punishment upon himself. Hester's duplicity is mentioned in chapter XXI as also Dimmesdale's cowardice and hypocrisy are mentioned again and again. On this evidence in the text, we can say that Hawthrone himself accepted the evaluation of the Boston Puritans.

Both Hester and Dimmesdale are sinners, and although each of them has a few, admirable traits, we must never forget their sin, even after their death which may end but not relieve their tragedy. That is

why the symbol on the tombstone shows a dark background with only a spot of red on it. Red (passion) may shine brightly against the dark (repressive Puritan) background but it is a sin, it is to be condemned.

8.4.2 Past and Present

The clashing of past and present is explored in various ways. For example, the character of the old General, whose heroic qualities include a distinguished name, perseverance, integrity, compassion, and moral inner strength, is said to be "the soul and spirit of New England hardihood." Now put out to pasture, he sometimes presides over the Custom House run by corrupt public servants, who skip work to sleep, allow or overlook smuggling, and are supervised by an inspector with "no power of thought, nor depth of feeling, no troublesome sensibilities," who is honest enough but without a spiritual compass.

Hawthorne himself had ambivalent feelings about the role of his ancestors in his life. In his autobiographical sketch, Hawthorne described his ancestors as "dim and dusky," "grave, bearded, sable-cloaked, and steel crowned," "bitter persecutors" whose "better deeds" would be diminished by their bad ones. There can be little doubt of Hawthorne's disdain for the stern morality and rigidity of the Puritans, and he imagined his predecessors' disdainful view of him: unsuccessful in their eyes, worthless and disgraceful. "A writer of story books!" But even as he disagrees with his ancestor's viewpoint, he also feels an instinctual connection to them and, more importantly, a "sense of place" in Salem. Their blood remains in his veins, but their intolerance and lack of humanity becomes the subject of his novel.

8.4.3 Alienation

Most of the characters of *The Scarlet Letter* are remembered in their isolation only. Hester, with Pearl (who does not seem to be human) in her daily rounds to the village and back; the minister with his hand over his heart and his secret tortures and suffering; the physician stooping and collecting herbs, or at the fires in his laboratories. Loneliness seems to be the cure blighting their lives. The curse of isolation is the direct consequence of the sin of main characters. Hester and Dimmesdale are isolated by their original sin, Chillingworth by his hatred and his sin which violated the sanctity of the human heart. Hawthrone's own terror of loneliness seems to have been transferred to these characters.

Hester's isolation is a mark of her social out-caste. *The Scarlet Letter* creates the distance between her and people but it also assures her intellectual and moral growth. She transcends her separation from society by good deeds and the companionship of miserable people.

So far as Dimmesdale is concerned his sensitivity to his sin leads to suffering and private torture. His sin acceptable to his admiring congregation. He feels suffocated in this atmosphere of repression.

Chillingworth's isolation is essentially a result of his shedding the humanity, his wilful defiance of God in violation of the sanctity of the human heart against advice of the people.

Even Pearl is isolated from the society of the Puritan children due to her mother's sin. She is a lonely child who plays with inanimate objects or with animals and repressiveness of the Puritan society. In chapter XXII we see Hester, Pearl, Dimmesdale and Chillingworth isolated from each other by the crowd. Thus we can say that *The Scarlet Letter* is an exercise is the theme of isolation.

8.5 Allusion

1. Anne Hutchinson, mentioned in Chapter 1, The Prison Door, was a religious dissenter (1591-

1643). In the 1630s she was excommunicated by the Puritans and exiled from Boston and moved to Rhode Island.

2. Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a leader of the Protestant Reformation in Germany.

3. Sir Thomas Overbury and Dr. Forman were the subjects of an adultery scandal in 1615 in England. Dr. Forman was charged with trying to poison his adulterous wife and her lover. Overbury was a friend of the lover and was perhaps poisoned.

4. John Winthrop (1588-1649), first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

5. King's Chapel Burying Ground in the final paragraph exists; the Elizabeth Pain gravestone is traditionally considered an inspiration for the protagonists' grave.

6. Richard Dawkins' Out Campaign is represented with the Scarlet Letter A emblem.

8.6 Let Us Sum Up

Thus we see that this work is remarkable for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it was his first full length story and superior to any full length story written later on. Secondly, with *The Scarlet Letter* the American novel came of age. With this the American novels could be well compared to the best productions of European novelists like Thackeray, Dickens, Balzac, Hugo, George Eliot etc. It was the first important novel in American literature which invited attention. This novel was a declaration of American Literary Independence. The writer says that his wife was seen improving when she heard her husband reading this novel to her. Hawthorne called it a hell-fired story, a tale of human frailty and sorrow and he was positively surprised when this book met with an unprecedented success.

8.7 Review Questions

1. Campare the attitude of the sin in Hester and Dimmesdale. Which way does Howthorne lay his sympathy ?

2. Isolation or alienation is an important theme of *The Scarlet Letter*. Discuss.

3. Discuss *The Scarlet Letter* in the light of Hester's moral guilt.

4. Draw a character sketch of-

   (i) Hester Prynne

   (ii) Arthur Dimmesdale

   (iii) Roger Chillingworth

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UNIT-9

ERNEST HEMINGWAY: *A FAREWELL TO ARMS* (I)

Structure

9.0 Objectives

This Unit intends to introduce Ernest Hemingway, one of the versatile American novelists of modern times. The comprehensive introduction to the writer details his times and various formative influences which shaped the art and craft of Hemingway. Keeping in mind the needs of the postgraduate students, a brief summary of the novel has been prepared, followed by the critical portrayal of the protagonist, Frederic Henry.

9.1 Introduction

Ernest Hemingway is one of those authors whose lives and works are interdependent. The writer has derived most of his raw material for his novels and short stories from his personal experiences. A literary giant of the twenties, an ambulance driver in the First World War who was decorated for his bravery on the front, a deep-sea fisherman who won several trophies in fishing competitions, a boxer of no mean stature, a big-game hunter who spent months shooting wild animals in Africa, a soldier of fortune during the Second World War, a Nobel Prize winner for literature, a brilliant columnist who covered major wars and conferences for important newspapers and journals in the United States and Canada, Hemingway was born on July 21, 1898, in a prominent family in the wealthy, conservative suburb of Chicago known as Oak Park. His father was a well-known physician and amateur sportsman. His mother had talent both in music and in painting. In 1917 he graduated from Oak Park High School. The centre of social life was the school and the family church. The standard of education at Oak Park High school was very high. With the main emphasis on the liberal arts it was natural that English occupied an important place in the school curriculum. Hemingway received his grounding in the Bible and the English classics at school. Two of his teachers, Miss Dixons and Miss Fannie Biggs encouraged him to write stories and essays with emphasis

on originality. Thus, Hemingway was initiated into the art of writing at an early age.

While the fate of man was being decided in the war-theatre of Europe, Hemingway at the age of nineteen, felt restless. His uncle Tyler Hemingway took him to Kansas where he became a cub reporter for *The Star*, the first assignment as a reporter. In 1918 he was enlisted as an Honorary Lieutenant in the Italian Army. Fired by the humanitarian impulse that had motivated American participation in the First World War, Hemingway's idealism soon turned to skepticism as he had witnessed human suffering on a massive scale. In the battle, he was hit by the exploding fragments of a trench mortar, and his knee and ankle were badly hit by the machine-gun fire.

The Italian war experience around Fossalta awakened Hemingway to the faithlessness in love. There he had a love affair with an American nurse, Agnes H.von Kurowski who was older than him. He wanted to marry her. She changed her mind but it gave rude shock to Hemingway. The aborted love affair may be accounted for Hemingway's dissatisfaction with a large number of women, including his four wives.

After the war, in 1920, Hemingway returned to Chicago to be a writer but met Hadley Richardson to be her husband in 1921. Soon after his marriage, he went to Europe to become a roving correspondent for *The Star* with headquarters in Paris.

In Paris, he was associated with Ford Maddox Ford, Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein and became famous while still in his twenties. His first really important publication was the slim *Three Stories and Ten Poems* which came out in Paris in 1923. The artistic flame that had been kindled in Europe made journalistic work look pale and lifeless. In 1927, the first marriage came to an end. Pauline Pfeiffer, a dark-haired fashion writer who worked for Paris office of *Vogue*, became his second wife. *In Our Time* and *The Sun Also Rises* were published during his sojourn in Paris. With the publication of *The Sun Also Rises*, the reputation of Hemingway had been established. From 1928 to 1938 he stayed at Key West and his reputation as a sportsman, big-game hunter and fisherman grew and became a world celebrity with the publication of *A Farewell to Arms*.

Hemingway was variously involved in both the Spanish Civil War and in World War II. In Spain, he met Martha Gellhorn who was also covering the Civil War for the Collier's Magazine. She became Hemingway's pupil. Eventually, the pupil and the tutor were attracted, and it resulted in the third marriage of Hemingway. The novelist went to Havana in Cuba in May 1938 to write *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

From 1942 to 1944 Hemingway utilized his forty-foot cabin cruiser The Pilar against the Nazi U-boats in the Pacific off the coast of Cuba. In the Spring of 1944, Hemingway flew with the Royal Air Force to England and was accredited as a correspondent with the Royal Air Force.

During the war, Hemingway's relations with Martha Gellhorn deteriorated as she was extremely ambitious, and Hemingway had a deep-rooted suspicion of ambitious, career women. When he fell ill in Paris, instead of Martha Gellhorn who had certain grudges against Hemingway, it was Mary Walsh who attended upon the sick novelist, and became his fourth wife. With his fourth wife, Mary Walsh, Hemingway lived a semi-patriarchal life in Cuba.

The Nobel Prize which came in 1954 raised his spirits for some time but the Kafkan nightmares made him bone-tired and beat up emotionally. The tragedy of his last days is potentially brought in his own words, "What do you think happens to a man going on sixty two when he realizes that he cannot write the stories and books he promised to himself? Or do any of the other things he promised himself in the good

days." On July 2, 1961, Hemingway shot himself to death and thus came the end of a most colourful and versatile literary giant of modern times.

9.2 A Brief Story of the Novel

The novel is all about war and its horrible consequences. The novel is spread over five books. The first book informs that a war is on and the narrator-hero, an American, is fighting along with the Italian forces. Due to heavy snow, the fighting is suspended for the winter. The protagonist, Frederic Henry is allowed to go on leave, and he spends his vacation in Milan, Rome and Napoli. Throughout his leave, Henry could not tell about the difference between the night and the day, except that the nights were more exciting and exotic than the days. Gradually, the story is set in motion. In the spring, the fighting becomes intensified, he is sent to the British hospital where he is introduced to Catherine Berkley whose fiancé has been blown to bits on the battle front. The tragedy had shaken her absolutely and washed away the romantic concept of war. The trauma of her fiance's tragic death unsettles her mentally. In this hour of distress, Catherine needs somebody to love her and to care for her. She hopefully looks for comfort in Henry for whom love is no more than a game of chess in which one makes moves. The preliminary contact is thus established between Catherine and Henry as the latter is pushed on to the front to bring back the wounded in the offensive that the Italian were going to launch. In this ordeal, Henry is wounded in an explosion, lost one of his knees and was evacuated from the front. It brought him a new awareness about human relationships, and he got fully involved in love and in the action of the war.

In Book II we find Henry in an American hospital in Milan, away from the din and destruction of war, the possibility for real love hangs in air as Catherine is transferred to the same hospital where Henry is recuperating, His nocturnal adventures in brothels are replaced by genuine love. The blooming romance between the two results in Catherine's pregnancy. Again, war intercedes and Henry returns to the front, leaving Catherine behind.

Book III portrays the famous Caporetto retreat in which the Italian Army was routed by the Austro-German alliance. During the retreat Henry's companions drifted away from him. One of the ambulance drivers (Aymo) was hit by a bullet fired perhaps by the Italian rear-guard, another (Bonello) deserted and still another (Piani) separated from Henry. Henry too was arrested by the battle-police, and suspected of being a German in Italian uniform. He jumped into the flooded river to save his life. The trappings of war were discarded by him, and he directed his steps to Milan where he thought he would eventually see Catherine.

Book IV describes the union of lovers in Stresa. For him, war was over, and he was done with all this. From Stresa, Henry and Catherine escaped to Switzerland by boat as Henry feared he might be arrested.

Book V celebrates the blissful interlude of the lovers in Switzerland, in January, February and March. At last, Catherine was taken to the hospital where she gave birth to a stillborn male child. Catherine in the meanwhile had had a haemmohrage. It soon became obvious that Catherine was going to die. Henry's passionate prayers for the safety of Catherine, remained unanswered. Finally, she died.

From the foregoing description it becomes clear that the entire story revolves round the themes of love and war. The war, in the foreground and background of the narrative, keeps haunting. When the war is going to become hot, Henry falls in love, and his involvement in war and love is simultaneous. Love makes its presence when the spectre of war has gone into the background. The Retreat liberates Henry of

his obligations to the Italian army, and he becomes acutely conscious of his obligations to his lady-love, Catherine. As the intensity of war subsides, Henry and Catherine enjoy blissful moments of intimacy and romance in the Swiss mountains. However, when the British break through on the Western front, Catherine breathes her last. Thus, the intricate threads of the two sub-plots are woven into a skilful and beautiful pattern, making *A Farewell to Arms* one of the best novels of the First World War.

9.3 Plot Overview

Lieutenant Frederic Henry is a young American ambulance driver serving the Italian army during World War I. At the beginning of the novel, the war is winding down with the onset of winter, and Henry arranges to tour Italy. The following spring, upon his return to the front, Henry meets Catherine Barkley, an English nurse's aide at the nearby British hospital and the love interest of his friend Rinaldi. Rinaldi, however, quickly fades from the picture as Catherine and Henry become involved in an elaborate game of seduction. Grieving the recent death of her fiancé, Catherine longs for love so deeply that she will settle for the illusion of it. Her passion, even though pretended, wakens a desire for emotional interaction in Henry, whom the war has left coolly detached and numb.

When Henry is wounded on the battlefield, he is brought to a hospital in Milan to recover. Several doctors recommend that he stay in bed for six months and then undergo a necessary operation on his knee. Unable to accept such a long period of recovery, Henry finds a bold, garrulous surgeon named Dr. Valentini who agrees to operate immediately. Henry learns happily that Catherine has been transferred to Milan and begins his recuperation under her care. During the following months, his relationship with Catherine intensifies. No longer simply a game in which they exchange empty promises and playful kisses, their love becomes powerful and real. As the lines between scripted and genuine emotions begin to blur, Henry and Catherine become tangled in their love for each other.

Once Henry's damaged leg has healed, the army grants him three weeks convalescence leave, after which he is scheduled to return to the front. He tries to plan a trip with Catherine, who reveals to him that she is pregnant. The following day, Henry is diagnosed with jaundice, and Miss Van Campen, the superintendent of the hospital, accuses him of bringing the disease on himself through excessive drinking. Believing Henry's illness to be an attempt to avoid his duty as a serviceman, Miss Van Campen has Henry's leave revoked, and he is sent to the front once the jaundice has cleared. As they part, Catherine and Henry pledge their mutual devotion.

Henry travels to the front, where Italian forces are losing ground and manpower daily. Soon after Henry's arrival, a bombardment begins. When word comes that German troops are breaking through the Italian lines, the Allied forces prepare to retreat. Henry leads his team of ambulance drivers into the great column of evacuating troops. The men pick up two engineering sergeants and two frightened young girls on their way. Henry and his drivers then decide to leave the column and take secondary roads, which they assume will be faster. When one of their vehicles bogs down in the mud, Henry orders the two engineers to help in the effort to free the vehicle. When they refuse, he shoots one of them. The drivers continue in the other trucks until they get stuck again. They send off the young girls and continue on foot toward Udine. As they march, one of the drivers is shot dead by the easily frightened rear guard of the Italian army. Another driver marches off to surrender himself, while Henry and the remaining driver seek refuge at a farmhouse. When they rejoin the retreat the following day, chaos has broken out: soldiers, angered by the Italian defeat, pull commanding officers from the melee and execute them on sight. The battle police seize Henry, who, at a crucial moment, breaks away and dives into the river. After swimming a safe distance downstream,

Henry boards a train bound for Milan. He hides beneath a tarp that covers stockpiled artillery, thinking that his obligations to the war effort are over and dreaming of his return to Catherine.

Henry reunites with Catherine in the town of Stresa. From there, the two escape to safety in Switzerland, rowing all night in a tiny borrowed boat. They settle happily in a lovely Alpine town called Montreux and agree to put the war behind them forever. Although Henry is sometimes plagued by guilt for abandoning the men on the front, the two succeed in living a beautiful, peaceful life. When spring arrives, the couple moves to Lausanne so that they can be closer to the hospital. Early one morning, Catherine goes into labor. The delivery is exceptionally painful and complicated. Catherine delivers a stillborn baby boy and, later that night, dies of a hemorrhage. Henry stays at her side until she is gone. He attempts to say goodbye but cannot. He walks back to his hotel in the rain.

The story grows originally out of the material base. Heminway shows great craftmanship in interweaving the central theme of war and love. They are made related to each other. This is done be making hero to remember war when he is making love and love when he is fighting at the border. The word 'Arms' suggests both arms used in war and the arms of Henry's beloved. Morever, a contrast is shown even in different kinds of love. Again Henry's game type love, full of care and vigilance, is contrasted with his careless and all pervading love.

The whole story is told in the first person and this gives a lyrical note to the novel. The term lyrical becomes more apt if we remember that the book is full of Hemingway's personal reminiscences. Hemingway himself like Henry in the novel was wounded on the Italian front and fell in love with an English nurse at Milan hospital. This provides a realistic touch to the story.

The subsurface activity of the novel, as Carlos Baker has pointed out is organised connotatively around two poles: the one pole of the images of home, mountain and priest. And, the other pole of the images of non-home, rain and doctor. The home concept is associated with the mountain, with the dry cold weather, with peace and quiet, with love, dignity, health, happiness and good life, and with worship or at least the consciousness of God. The non-home concept is associated with low-lying planes, with rain and fog; with obscenity, indignity, disease, suffering nervousness, war and death; and with irreligion.

The total structure of the novel is developed in fact around the series of contrasting situations. To Gorizia, the non-home of war, succeeds the Home, which Catherine and Henry make together in Milan hospital. The non-home of the grim retreat from the Isonza is followed by the quiet and happy retreat which the lovers share above Montreux. Home ends for Henry when he leaves Catherine dead in Lausanne Hospital. Hemingway's contrasting images, developed for an aesthetic purpose, have also a moral value. Mr Ludwig Lewisohn is undoubtedly correct in saying that *A Farewell to Arms,* prizes once again the ultimate identity of the moral and the aesthetic." All the Home images are either moral or related to moral truths while the Non-home images are related to immoral things. "Love is moral and war is immoral", that is what the novelist intends to convey.

The use of rain as a kind of symbolic obligate in the novel has been widely and properly admired. The whole idea of climate is related to natural-mythological structure. Every time rain brings some trouble for the hero and the heroine. The rain begins in Italy during October just before Henry's return to Gorizia after his recovery from the wounds. It continues throughout the disastrous retreat and Henry's flight to Stresa. The night during which Henry leaves Stresa for Switzerland is full of rain. The sound of the rain continues like an undersong until, with Catherine dead in the hospital room; Henry walks back to the hotel in vain. In contrast to rain, is dry sunny weather full of joy for both Henry and Catherine as in their happy

life at Milan, at Stresa and on the Swiss mountains. The simple colloquail language, the contrasting images of Home and Not-home- all give a fine organic quality to the novel.

The priest and Rinaldi, and the doctor also serve a purpose in giving weight to the symbolism of the novel. Each in turn represents religious, moral life and the unreligious. One is the man of God and the other is man without God. In the result one is quite tolerant and never deserts his faith while the other is broken by war. The whole structure of the novel is superb in its execution for it contains harmony of events and the character development. The action finds ups and downs, now sunshine then sushade. It moves with dramatic tone and the lyrical note. The personality of Henry develpos in the presence of lot of experiments.

9.4 Hemingway Hero

The heroes of Hemingway fall into two slots. Let us first know about Hemingway hero. He is comparatively young learning to live in an embattled world characterized by violence and uncertainty, confused and bewildered in a society torn by the First World War. An honest, manly, outdoor male who dies a thousand times before his death. Through his encounters with brutish reality, he learns how to live with the contraries, though without fully recovering from the physical and psychological scars inflicted by hostile circumstances. Cut off from his moorings and thrown into a strange world/circumstances, Frederic Henry, in *A Farewell to Arms*, is an American but fights in an Italian army to serve a cause of which he has no clear notion.

As opposed to Hemingway hero, another specimen in the fictional world of Hemingway is his The Code Hero. The Code Hero is usually an older man who has realized his potentialities, a professional man, a bullfighter, a fisherman, a soldier and a prize-fighter. A man of indomitable courage and endurance, the Code Hero excels in the field of his choice. Since of a ripe age, the code hero has more of poise and balance. He represents a code according to which he would be able to live properly in the world of violence, disorder which he inhabits. The code hero exemplifies certain principles of honour, courage and endurance and demonstrates "grace under pressure." The fine specimen of a code hero could be cited as Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea* who loses the battle he has won. The winner takes nothing but the sense of having shown what a man can do when it is necessary. Santiago's victory is the moral victory of having clung without permanent impairment of his belief in the worth of what he has been doing.

9.5 The Theme of Love and War

The whole novel has two distinct themes- war and love. But the interweaving process of the two central themes is so artistic that they cease to appear two distinct unstead they tend to be one, although there is alternative situations in the plot. The two themes are however, achieved by making presence of idea of love in the time of war and the obsession of war at the time of making love. In the first place, the love affair begins in the midst of war. Henary meets Catherine, for the first time, in the Gorizia hospital. Again at every time Henry is with Catherine, he is reminded of war. The war is a kind of obsession for him. When he is Milan, they are again and again reminded, through the porter, through Ferguson and through books and newspapers that the war is going on, that the Italians are retreating, that Henry has to return to Border. Even after he had deserted the army, the obsession of war is not yet over. Though quite reluctant, he is, again and again, reminded of war. His illusion about war is not yet broken, he is, again and again reminded of war.

Similarly the idea of love haunts Henry so much that in the midst of war, he is reminded of his love for Catherine. During the famous Caporetto retreat he dreams of Cathrine repeatedly: "Christ, that my love were in my arms and in my bed again. That my love Catherine, my sweet love Catherine down might rain."

Over all the two themes, war and love, are interwoven by relating war with the rain image. Rain in the novel, is symbol of war, trouble, disease and mutility. So, whenever there is rain, we are reminded of some coming trouble. And, when Catherine or Henry note the raining they are reminded of war, as it is evident in the following expression of Catherine:

"I'm afraid of the rain because sometimes I see me dead in it."

The title of the novel, perhaps conceived intentionally, also suggests the two themes of war and love. "Arms" refers to both the weapons used in war and the arms of Catherine that are symbolic of love. And, Henry first farewells to 'arms' of war as he finds peace and love in love of Catherine. However, some super power desired the second farewell to 'arms'. This time the 'arms' of Catherine, who dies of labour pain in a hospital. Phillip Young points out that the courses of war and love run parallel, so that, in the end we feel we have read one story, not two.

In his affair with war, Henry goes through six phases: from desultory participation to serious action and a wound, and then through his recuperation in Milan to a retreat which leads him to his desertion, carefully interwoven. It furthur takes him to find loving relationship with Catherine and that too goes through six precisely corresponding stages, that proceeds from a trifling sexual affair to actual love and her conception, and then through her confinement in the Alps to a trip to the hospital which leads to her death. By the time the last farewell is taken. The stories of constrasting events arrive at one point, lest there should be any sentimental doubt about it; that, life, both personal and social is a struggle in which the loser takes nothing, either.

Thus, *A Farewell to Arms* with themes of war, love and sex and death, as true fundamental crises of life is centred of Hemingways's work. Here we should not forget that Hemingway was a naturalistic and had a great faith in the energy of primitive man, and in primitive mind, both war and sex are surrounded by religious and fearful influences. Hemingway defies Christianity by way of condemning killing and its concept of sex as sort of necessary sin and he has presented love as a mystic ceremonial experience and killing as a spiritual experience. But we must not forget that the war serves a necessary condition of the love-affair. Without it the lovers would in all probabilities have never met, and even if they had, Catherine would have still had her English fiance whom she would have married. The war, further, inflicts a wound upon Henry, which in turn allows him to see more of Catherine and thus to consumnate their love. Again, by means of retreat, the war allows Henry to return to Catherine and, thus, to be present when time for delivery comes. In short the themes of war and love are closely linked till the action ends.

9.6 Characters in the Novel

1. Fredric Henry

Walter Allen observes that *A Farewell to Arms* is the story of a man and a woman wrought by the intolerable to the pitch of extreme desperation. It is an attempt on Frederic Henry's part to get down to some kind of bedrock in a world that has been stripped of all meaning for him.

Henry, an American citizen, was studying architecture in Italy when the war broke out, joined as

Lieutenant in the Italian army because he could speak Italian, hence joined the war for the fun of it, only to tragically realize that war is no fun. It kills a person psychologically before liquidating him physically. A man given to the celebration of senses, he has no qualms visiting brothels for comfort. In brief, he is not involved in the action for the sake of action. Whenever he returned to his unit after his romantic escapades, he was obsessed with the meaninglessness of his life. The feeling of the futility of his participation in war infused in him "a false feeling of soldiering."

A man of no commitment Henry regards women as playthings. His initial response to Catherine Barkley was very casual: "I thought she was probably a little crazy. It was all right if she was. I did not care what I was getting into. This was better than going every evening to the house for officers. He did not love Catherine, nor did he have any intention of loving her. It was just a diversion for him, probably a better than a brothel. Henry's exposure to the brutalities of war had filled him with the sense of futility of human experience. The sham of patriotism he had witnessed from close quarters when soldiers inflicted wounds on themselves in order to escape going to the front. The war, like pestilence, afflicts everybody. In spite of Henry's lack of involvement, he wants the war to end.

Cupid's arrows begin to affect Henry, in spite of his avowed professions to the contrary. The intimacy with Catherine transforms him. Earlier, he had celebrated the life of senses in order to overcome his boredom and meaninglessness. After meeting Catherine, he feels "lonely and hollow." After his tryst with death on the battle front when the trench mortar hits Henry, the unreality of the war in the movies, is converted into the reality of his own existence. This is the first lesson he learns as far as war is concerned. The second, more important at personal level, is his realization that the life of booze and brothels is unreal vis-à-vis the life of genuine love of the beloved. It will be thus seen that the character of Henry evolves itself, that is one of the most significant stages in the portrayal of a character. For Catherine, love is her religion, she tells Henry: "You're my religion. You're all I've got." For Frederic Henry who "went to the smoke of the cafes and spent nights in rooms which whirled and you needed to look at the wall to make it stop," the unqualified and selfless love of Catherine is a new experience, and his transition from an uncaring one to a caring one is complete.

On the battle front Henry's metamorphosis from a spectator to that of a participant, takes place unconsciously. The killing of one of the ambulance drivers, Aymo and the desertion of Bonello, coupled with the unsympathetic, inhuman and indifferent attitude of the battle-police, created in him revulsion for the war machinery. When he was mistaken for a German and about to be shot, Henry jumped into the swollen river to save himself with a strong feeling that he could no longer be bothered with this war: "You were out of it now. You had no more obligation . . Anger was washed away in the river along with any obligation."

The tragic but premature demise of his lady-love, Catherine, drilled into Henry a strong feeling that death was the ultimate reality. Some were killed in war, some were killed by disease and some just died. The separate peace which Henry had proclaimed for himself when he saved his life by jumping into the river to escape the battle-police, was no longer "separate peace" for man. In fact, it lay only in death.

To quote Gertrude Stein: "Henry's experience becomes symbolic of the crash of the pre-war values and culture. He also is a representative of the new generation, "the lost generation," that looked for new values to replace the old. His experience as represented in the novel is an eloquent testimony to the desperate search for new values." Henry finds significance only in personal relations that are again fraught with the danger of dissolution. He finds no meaning in the abstract words, abstract ideals, and even

religious ideology. In a significant way, Frederic Henry articulates Hemingway's bitter experience of war and his confrontation with death. In brief, Henry exemplifies what man can achieve—"the stiff upper lip, stoic endurance of pain and suffering."

2. Catherine Barkley

Catherine Barkley is presented as a charming English nurse deployed in the war hospitals in Italy. She is a woman of singular charm. She is exquisitely simple, extremely gentle, deeply sincere, intensely emotional and admirably brave. Her concept of love is complete surrender of herself to the man whom she loves. She is a tall, blonde girl with grey eyes and beautiful hair. In the beginning she is seen depressed for she has recently lost fiance in one of the actions of war.

3. Dr. Rinaldi

Rinaldi is an Italian doctor serving in the war, close to the front at Gorizia. His excessive sexuality, his garrulity, his sense of humour, his predilection for drinking his impiety, his capacity for friendship, his painstaking performance of his duties as a surgeon, make him a likeble character in the action of *A Farewell to Arms*. He is an open minded fellow though vulgar in thought and action. It is he who introduces Catherine, the heroine of the novel to Henry. When he finds that Catherine is different type of girl and she has interest in Henry, he transfers his attention to Miss Ferguson, who is a Scottish nurse at the same hospital. Henry calls him, 'foul mouthed', 'uniformed', 'sloppy' but all in fun. They are good friends.

He feels depressed by the continuing war. He is fed up from performing excessive operations, although it has made him an experienced surgeon. In order to forget war disgust, he drinks and offers Henry to have drinks. When Henary says, he had jaundice recently so he should not drink, Rinaldi tells him: 'I will get you drunk and take out your liver out and put in you a good Italian liver and make you man again." He, then talks about Henry's love affair with the English nurse Catherine. Though, war has filled his heart with disgust, he visits brothels regularly even when he suspects that he had caught syphilis. He never goes off his sense of homour even when he is in distress. His affection for Henry remains undiminished, Besides, Rinaldi doesn't stop baiting the priest. He would provoke to priest: "To hell with you, priest, that Saint Paul, he was a rounder and a chaser and when he was no longer hot he said it was no good. When he was finished he made the rules for us who are still hot." However, we see that Rinaldi is a practical man. His friendship with Henary establishes his importance in the novel. In all he is a person who lives by hard work but cheerfully, unmindful of wordliness and social concept.

9.7 Themes, Motifs and Symbols

Themes

The Grim Reality of War

As the title of the novel makes clear, *A Farewell to Arms* concerns itself primarily with war, namely the process by which Frederic Henry removes himself from it and leaves it behind. The few characters in the novel who actually support the effort—Ettore Moretti and Gino—come across as a dull braggart and a naïve youth, respectively. The majority of the characters remain ambivalent about the war, resentful of the terrible destruction it causes, doubtful of the glory it supposedly brings.

The novel offers masterful descriptions of the conflict's senseless brutality and violent chaos: the scene of the Italian army's retreat remains one of the most profound evocations of war in American

literature. As the neat columns of men begin to crumble, so too do the soldiers' nerves, minds, and capacity for rational thought and moral judgment. Henry's shooting of the engineer for refusing to help free the car from the mud shocks the reader for two reasons: first, the violent outburst seems at odds with Henry's coolly detached character; second, the incident occurs in a setting that robs it of its moral import—the complicity of Henry's fellow soldiers legitimizes the killing. The murder of the engineer seems justifiable because it is an inevitable by-product of the spiraling violence and disorder of the war.

Nevertheless, the novel cannot be said to condemn the war; A Farewell to Arms is hardly the work of a pacifist. Instead, just as the innocent engineer's death is an inevitability of war, so is war the inevitable outcome of a cruel, senseless world. Hemingway suggests that war is nothing more than the dark, murderous extension of a world that refuses to acknowledge, protect, or preserve true love.

The Relationship between Love and Pain

Against the backdrop of war, Hemingway offers a deep, mournful meditation on the nature of love. No sooner does Catherine announce to Henry that she is in mourning for her dead fiancé than she begins a game meant to seduce Henry. Her reasons for doing so are clear: she wants to distance herself from the pain of her loss. Likewise, Henry intends to get as far away from talk of the war as possible. In each other, Henry and Catherine find temporary solace from the things that plague them. The couple's feelings for each other quickly pass from an amusement that distracts them to the very fuel that sustains them. Henry's understanding of how meaningful his love for Catherine is outweighs any consideration for the emptiness of abstract ideals such as honor, enabling him to flee the war and seek her out. Reunited, they plan an idyllic life together that promises to act as a salve for the damage that the war has inflicted. Far away from the decimated Italian countryside, each intends to be the other's refuge. If they are to achieve physical, emotional, and psychological healing, they have found the perfect place in the safe remove of the Swiss mountains. The tragedy of the novel rests in the fact that their love, even when genuine, can never be more than temporary in this world.

Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

Masculinity

Readers of Hemingway's fiction will quickly notice a consistent thread in the portrayal and celebration of a certain kind of man: domineering, supremely competent, and swaggeringly virile. A Farewell to Arms holds up several of its minor male characters as examples of fine manhood. Rinaldi is a faithful friend and an oversexed womanizer; Dr. Valentini exhibits a virility to rival Rinaldi's as well as a bold competence that makes him the best surgeon. Similarly, during the scene in which Henry fires his pistol at the fleeing engineering sergeants, Bonello takes charge of the situation by brutally shooting the fallen engineer in the head. The respect with which Hemingway sketches these men, even at their lowest points, is highlighted by the humor, if not contempt, with which he depicts their opposites. The success of each of these men depends, in part, on the failure of another: Rinaldi secures his sexual prowess by attacking the priest's lack of lust; Dr. Valentini's reputation as a surgeon is thrown into relief by the three mousy, overly cautious, and physically unimpressive doctors who precede him; and Bonello's ruthlessness is prompted by the disloyal behavior of the soldier whom he kills.

Games and Divertissement

Henry and Catherine begin flirting with each other in order to forget personal troubles. Flirting, which Henry compares to bridge, allows Henry to "drop the war" and diverts Catherine's thoughts from the death of her fiancé. Likewise, the horse races that Catherine and Henry attend enable them to block out thinking of Henry's return to the front and of their imminent separation. Ironically, Henry and Catherine's relationship becomes the source of suffering from which Henry needs diversion. Henry cannot stand to be away from Catherine, and while playing pool with Count Greffi takes his mind off of her, the best divertissement turns out to be the war itself. When Catherine instructs him not to think about her when they are apart, Henry replies, "That's how I worked it at the front. But there was something to do then." The transformations of the war from fatal threat into divertissement and love from distraction into pain signal not only Henry's attachment to Catherine but also the transitory nature of happiness. Pathos radiates from this fleeting happiness because, even though happiness is temporary, the pursuit of it remains necessary. Perhaps an understanding of the limits of happiness explains the count's comment that though he values love most in life, he is not wise for doing so. The count is wiser than he claims, however. He hedges against the transitory nature of love by finding pleasure and amusement in games, birthday parties, and the taking of "a little stimulant." That one can depend on their simple pleasures lends games and divertissement a certain dignity; while they may not match up to the nobility of pursuits such as love, they prove quietly constant.

Loyalty versus Abandonment

The notions of loyalty and abandonment apply equally well to love and war. The novel, however, suggests that loyalty is more a requirement of love and friendship than of the grand political causes and abstract philosophies of battling nations. While Henry takes seriously his duty as a lieutenant, he does not subscribe to the ideals that one typically imagines fuel soldiers in combat. Unlike Ettore Moretti or Gino, the promise of honor and the duties of patriotism mean little to Henry. Although he shoots an uncooperative engineering sergeant for failing to comply with his orders, Henry's violence should be read as an inevitable outcome of a destructive war rather than as a conscious decision to enforce a code of moral conduct. Indeed, Henry eventually follows in the engineering sergeants' footsteps by abandoning the army and his responsibilities. While he does, at times, feel guilt over this course of action, he takes comfort in the knowledge that he is most loyal where loyalty counts most: in his relationship with Catherine. That these conflicting allegiances cannot be reconciled does not suggest, however, that loyalty and abandonment lie at opposite ends of a moral spectrum. Rather, they reflect the priorities of a specific individual's life.

Illusions and Fantasies

Upon meeting, Catherine and Henry rely upon a grand illusion of love and seduction for comfort. Catherine seeks solace for the death of her fiancé, while Henry will do anything to distance himself from the war. At first, their declarations of love are transparent: Catherine reminds Henry several times that their courtship is a game, sending him away when she has played her fill. After Henry is wounded, however, his desire for Catherine and the comfort and support that she offers becomes more than a distraction from the world's unpleasantness; his love begins to sustain him and blossoms into something undeniably real. Catherine's feelings for Henry follow a similar course.

While the couple acts in ways that confirm the genuine nature of their passion, however, they never escape the temptation of dreaming of a better world. In other words, the boundary between reality and illusion proves difficult to identify. After Henry and Catherine have spent months of isolation in Switzerland,

Hemingway depicts their relationship as a mixture of reality and illusion. Boredom has begun to set in, and the couple effects small daily changes to reinvigorate their lives and their passion: Catherine gets a new haircut, while Henry grows a beard. Still, or perhaps because of, the comparative dullness of real life (not to mention the ongoing war), the couple turns to fantasies of a more perfect existence. They dream of life on a Swiss mountain, where they will make their own clothes and need nothing but each other, suggesting that fantasizing is part of coping with the banal, sometimes damaging effects of reality.

Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

Rain

Rain serves in the novel as a potent symbol of the inevitable disintegration of happiness in life. Catherine infuses the weather with meaning as she and Henry lie in bed listening to the storm outside. As the rain falls on the roof, Catherine admits that the rain scares her and says that it has a tendency to ruin things for lovers. Of course, no meteorological phenomenon has such power; symbolically, however, Catherine's fear proves to be prophetic, for doom does eventually come to the lovers. After Catherine's death, Henry leaves the hospital and walks home in the rain. Here, the falling rain validates Catherine's anxiety and confirms one of the novel's main contentions: great love, like anything else in the world—good or bad, innocent or deserving—cannot last.

Catherine's Hair

Although it is not a recurring symbol, Catherine's hair is an important one. In the early, easy days of their relationship, as Henry and Catherine lie in bed, Catherine takes down her hair and lets it cascade around Henry's head. The tumble of hair reminds Henry of being enclosed inside a tent or behind a waterfall. This lovely description stands as a symbol of the couple's isolation from the world. With a war raging around them, they manage to secure a blissful seclusion, believing themselves protected by something as delicate as hair. Later, however, when they are truly isolated from the ravages of war and living in peaceful Switzerland, they learn the harsh lesson that love, in the face of life's cruel reality, is as fragile and ephemeral as hair.

9.8 Let Us Sum Up

Thus, we see that *A Farewell to Arms* as a novel is one of the superb achievement of Hemingway. It is the most popular of post-first World-War novels and second only to *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in the long series of Hemingway fiction. The plot of the novel is skilfully conceived and carefully executed. The novelist himself was greatly pleased at his achievement because it reflected upon his own war experiences.

9.9 Review Questions

1. Discuss the fusion of the theme of love and war in *A Farewell to Arms*.
2. A Farewell to Arms is a severe indictment of the modern warfare. Discuss.
3. Discuss Frederic Henry as a typical Hemingway hero.
4. Discuss Catherine Barkley as a tragic heroine

9.10 Bibliography

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UNIT-10

ERNEST HEMINGWAY: *A FARWELL TO ARMS* (II)

Strucuture

10.0 Objectives

In continuation to the previous unit we wish to give here a detailed chapter wise summary of the novel with critical comments. This unit will help you not only to read the novel with a critical eye but also make a proper assessment of the novel.

10.1 Introduction

The story is told in the now famous terse Hemingway style, combined with tough dry dialogue. This is one of the greatest novels of the war, contrasting as it does the hero's bitter feelings about the fighting with his passion for the woman who bears his child.

10.2 Detailed Critical Analysis of the Novel

Book-I

Summary: Chapters 1-5

The narrator, Lieutenant Henry, describes the small Italian village in which he lives. It is a summer during World War I, and troops often march along the road toward the nearby battlefront. Officers speed by in "small gray motor cars." If one of these cars travels especially fast, Henry speculates, it is probably carrying the king, who makes trips out to assess the battle almost every day. At the start of the winter, a cholera epidemic sweeps through the army and kills seven thousand soldiers.

Lieutenant Henry's unit moves to the town of Gorizia, further from the fighting, which continues in the mountains beyond. Life in Gorizia is relatively enjoyable: the buildings are not badly damaged, and there are nice cafés and two brothels—one for officers, one for enlisted men. One winter day, Henry sits in the mess hall with a group of fellow officers, who declare that the war is over for the year because of the snow. Spurred by their contempt for religion, the men taunt the military priest, baiting him with crude innuendos about his sexuality. A captain jokingly chides the priest for never cavorting with women, and the good-natured priest blushes. Though he is not religious, Henry treats the priest kindly. The officers then argue over where Henry should take his leave. The priest suggests that he visit the Abruzzi region, where the priest's family resides, but the officers have other ideas. They encourage him to visit Palermo, Capri,

Rome, Naples, or Sicily. Soon the conversation turns to opera singers, and the officers retire to the whorehouse.

When he returns from his leave, Henry discusses his trip with his roommate, the lieutenant and surgeon Rinaldi. Henry claims to have traveled throughout Italy, and Rinaldi, who is obsessed with "beautiful girls," tells him that travel is no longer necessary to find such women. He reports that beautiful English women have been sent to the front and that he has fallen in love with a nurse named Catherine Barkley. Henry loans him fifty lire (the plural of "lira," the Italian unit of currency) so that Rinaldi can give the woman the impression of being a wealthy man. At dinner that night, the priest is hurt that Henry failed to visit Abruzzi. Henry, feeling guilty, drunkenly explains that he wanted to make the visit but circumstances prevented him from doing so. By the end of the meal, the officers resume picking on the priest.

The next morning, a battery of guns wakes Henry. He goes to the garage, where the mechanics are working on a number of ambulances. He chats briefly with the men and then returns to his room, where Rinaldi convinces him to tag along on a visit to Miss Barkley. At the British Hospital, Rinaldi spends his time talking with Helen Ferguson, another nurse, while Henry becomes acquainted with Catherine. Henry is immediately struck by her beauty, especially her long blonde hair. She carries a stick that resembles a "toy riding-crop"; when Henry asks what it is, she confides that it belonged to her fiancé, who was killed in the Battle of the Somme. When she, in turn, asks if he has ever loved, Henry says no. On the way home, Rinaldi observes that Catherine prefers Henry to him.

The next day, Henry calls on Catherine again. The head nurse expresses surprise that an American would want to join the Italian army. She tells him that Miss Barkley is on duty and unavailable to visitors until her shift ends at seven o'clock that evening. Henry drives back along the trenches, investigating the road that, when completed, will allow for an offensive attack. After dinner, Henry returns to see Catherine. He finds her in the garden with Helen Ferguson; Helen soon excuses herself. After chatting about Catherine's job, Henry and Catherine agree to "drop the war" as a subject of conversation. Henry tries to put his arm around her. She resists but, in the end, lets him. When he moves to kiss her, however, she slaps him. Their little drama, Henry notes with amusement, has gotten them away from talk of the war. Catherine lets Henry kiss her and begins to cry, saying, "We're going to have a strange life." Henry returns home, where Rinaldi teases him about his romantic glow.

Analysis

Many critics maintain that Ernest Hemingway did more to change the tenor of twentieth-century American fiction than any other writer. He favored a boldly declarative, pared-down prose style, which readers of the 1920s and 1930s considered a wildly experimental departure from the baroque, Victorian-influenced style that was then the standard for high literature. The short first chapter, in which Frederic Henry describes his situation on the war front, is one of the most famous descriptive passages in American literature. Hemingway sketches the description with a detached, almost journalistic prose style that is nevertheless emotionally poignant: "The trunks of the trees too were dusty and the leaves fell early that year and we saw the troops marching along the road and the dust rising and leaves. . . ." With relatively few but remarkably precise details, Hemingway captures life on the battlefront of a small Italian town during World War I.

In his *Death in the Afternoon*, a meditation on the arts of bullfighting and writing, Hemingway advocates an "Iceberg Theory" of fiction:

If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows

and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water.

True to Hemingway's ideal, the above description of trees, leaves, and a dusty road leaves the reader with more than a simple sense of Henry's environment. The lieutenant's language, mournful and repetitive as an elegy, hints at the great losses that he will eventually suffer.

Once Henry picks up the narrative in Gorizia, the reader is introduced to several of the novel's major characters and themes. Rinaldi immediately emerges as a vibrant and mischievous character (only Henry's word positions him as a passionate and committed surgeon). Henry soon establishes himself as a conflicted soldier. Having joined the army with neither a thirst for glory nor a fierce belief in its cause, Henry is physically, psychologically, and morally drained by the war. He is not alone. Catherine Barkley, who is tense and unnerving the first time Henry meets her, softens toward him quickly. Her strange behavior—the haste with which she attaches herself to a man whom she barely knows—belies the grief that she feels over the death of her fiancé.

Two dominant themes in *A Farewell to Arms* are love and war. War, which is described with brutal intensity, fills the mind of everyone in Henry's world. Thoughts of it afflict the characters like a painful, chronic headache. War fuels the sense of despair and grief at the heart of the book, establishing the harsh conditions whereby the loss of seven thousand soldiers to a cholera epidemic can be considered nominal. As Henry's initial conversations with Catherine make clear, everyone is desperate for an antidote to the numbing effects of war. People would prefer to think any other thoughts, to feel any other emotions, and so plunge headlong into love as a means of overcoming their fear, pain, and grief. Rinaldi pretends to love every beautiful woman he meets, while Catherine and Henry, upon meeting, play a seductively distracting game in which they pretend to love and care for each other.

Summary: Chapters 6-9

After spending two days at "the posts," Henry visits Catherine again. She asks him if he loves her and he says yes. She tells him to call her by her first name. They walk through the garden, and Catherine expresses how much she loves him and says how awful the past few days have been without him. Henry kisses her, thinking that she is "probably a little crazy," but not caring. Aware that he does not love Catherine, Henry feels that he is involved in a complicated game, like bridge. To his surprise, she acknowledges their charade, asking, "This is a rotten game we play, isn't it?" She assures him that she's not crazy, and, though they are no longer playing, he persuades her to kiss him. She breaks from the kiss suddenly and sends him away for the night. At home, Rinaldi senses Henry's romantic confusion and admits to feeling relieved that he himself did not become involved with a British nurse.

Driving back from his post the next afternoon, Henry picks up a soldier with a hernia. The man admits that he threw away his truss (a support for a hernia) on purpose so that he would not have to return to the front. He fears being turned over to his commanding officers, aware that they are familiar with this trick. Henry instructs the man to give himself a bump on the head, which he does, thereby earning his way into the hospital. Henry thinks about the upcoming offensive, which is scheduled to start in two days. He wishes that he were with Catherine, enjoying a hot night and good wine in Milan. At dinner, the men drink and tease the priest. Rinaldi escorts the drunken Henry to the British hospital, feeding him coffee beans to sober him up. At the nurses' villa, Helen Ferguson tells Henry that Catherine is sick and will not see him. Henry feels surprisingly "lonely and hollow."

The next day, Henry hears of an attack scheduled for that night. As the cars pass the British hospital on their way to the front, Henry tells the driver of his car to stop. He hurries in and asks to see Catherine. He tells her that he is off for "a show" and that she shouldn't be worried. She gives him a St. Anthony medal to protect him. Henry returns to the car and the caravan continues toward Pavla, where the fighting will take place.

At Pavla, Henry sees roadside trenches filled with artillery and Austrian observation balloons hanging ominously above the distant hills. A major greets Henry and his drivers and installs them in a dugout. The men talk disparagingly about the various ranks of soldiers and engage Henry in a discussion about ending the war. Henry maintains that they would all be worse off if the Italian army decided to stop fighting, but Passini, one of the ambulance drivers, respectfully disagrees, maintaining that the war will go on forever unless one side decides to stop. The men are hungry, so Henry and Gordini, another driver, fetch some cold macaroni and a slab of cheese from the main wound-dressing station. As they return to the dugout, shelling begins and bombs burst around them. As the men eat the food, there is "a flash, as when a blast-furnace door is swung open." Henry finds himself unable to breathe and thinks himself about to die. A trench mortar has exploded through the dugout, killing Passini and injuring Gordini. The two remaining drivers, Gavuzzi and Manera, carry Henry to a wound-dressing station, where a British doctor treats Henry's ruined leg. An ambulance is loaded with the wounded and sent off to the hospital.

Analysis

Henry's small personal stake in the war, toward which he displays a supreme indifference, becomes increasingly clear in these chapters. As an American soldier fighting in the Italian army—an army that Catherine and the other British nurses don't take seriously—Henry feels as detached from the war as he feels from everything else in his life. He claims that the war does "not have anything to do with me," and he feels no real commitment to it. His behavior with the soldier who admits to tossing away his truss in order to worsen his hernia and thereby evade service is telling; Henry exhibits none of the integrity that the reader might expect of the young man's commanding officer. Rather than chastise him for his self-serving, irresponsible attitude, Henry helps him plot his way into the hospital, thereby contributing, in a small way, to the overall deterioration of the Italian army.

Henry's behavior with the ambulance drivers further establishes his detachment from the war. The men feel comfortable voicing their contempt for the soldiers and their belief that Italy should withdraw from the war in front of Henry, though they know better than to "talk so other officers can hear." Although Henry defends the Italian army and the war effort, he does so from a calm, philosophical standpoint rather than anger at the men's disrespect. Also noteworthy is that Henry risks his life for something as inglorious as a slab of cheese. The scene in which he braves falling mortar shells in order to dress his pasta upends the popular literary convention of the protagonist facing great adversity to accomplish a noble end. Henry's objective is ridiculous, pathetic, and decidedly not heroic. That this scene follows on the heels of a conversation in which the men maintain that "war is not won by victory" amplifies the doubt cast upon romantic ideals such as glory and honor.

At this point in the novel, and especially in his dealings with the ambulance drivers, Henry comes off as rather stoic. His engagement with the men as they discuss victory and defeat seems academic rather than passionate; he appears indifferent to the sense of loss, fear, and anger that fuels the Italians' arguments, indifferent even to whether he lives or dies. In this context, his recurring thoughts of, and increasing feeling for, Catherine are somewhat curious. The notion of visiting her interrupts his daydreaming about the war

the night before he leaves for the front. In a very beautiful, sensuous passage, Henry imagines himself and Catherine stealing away to a hotel, where she pretends that he is her dead lover: "we would drink the capri and the door locked and it hot and only a sheet and the whole night and we would both love each other all night in the hot night in Milan." Even though his attachment to Catherine is, at this point, casual, Henry is beginning to develop feelings that extend beyond the game he plays with her. The sorrow that he feels when Helen Ferguson announces that Catherine is sick and cannot see him surprises him and hints at the depth of feeling, commitment, and attachment of which this usually stoic soldier is capable.

Summary: Chapters 10-13

At the field hospital, Henry lies in intense pain. Rinaldi comes to visit and informs Henry that he, Henry, will be decorated for heroism in battle. Henry protests, declaring that he displayed no heroism, but Rinaldi insists. He leaves Henry with a bottle of cognac and promises to send Catherine to see him soon.

At dusk, the priest comes to visit. He tells Henry that he misses him at the mess hall and offers gifts of mosquito netting, a bottle of vermouth, and English newspapers, for which Henry is grateful. The men drink and discuss the war. Henry admits to hating it, and the priest theorizes that there are two types of men in the world: those who would make war and those who would not. Henry laments that the "the first ones make [the second ones] do it . . . And I help them." Henry wonders if ending the war is a hopeless effort; the priest assures him that it is not, but admits that he, too, has trouble hoping. The conversation turns to God, and the priest defends his beliefs against the other officers' teasing. A man who loves God, he says, is not a dirty joke. Henry cannot say that he loves God, but he does admit to fearing Him sometimes. The priest concludes by telling Henry that he, Henry, has a capacity to love. He makes a distinction between sleeping with women at brothels and giving fully of oneself to another human being, and assures Henry that, eventually, he will be called upon to love truly. Henry remains skeptical. The priest says goodbye, and Henry falls asleep.

The doctors are anxious to ship Henry to Milan, where he can receive better treatment for his injured knee and leg. They are eager to get the wounded soldiers fixed up or transferred as quickly as possible because all of the hospital beds will be needed when the offensive begins. The night before Henry leaves for Milan, Rinaldi and a major from Henry's company return for a visit. America has just declared war on Germany, and the Italians are very excited and hopeful. Rinaldi asks if President Wilson will declare war on Austria, and Henry responds that Wilson will within days. The men get drunk, discussing the war and life in Milan. Rinaldi reports that Catherine will be going to serve at the hospital in Milan. The following morning, Henry sets off for Milan. He describes the train ride, during which he gets so drunk that he vomits on the floor.

Two days later, Henry arrives in Milan and is taken to the American hospital. Two ambulance drivers carry him inside clumsily, causing him a great amount of pain. In the ward, the men are met by an easily frazzled, gray-haired nurse named Mrs Walker, who cannot get Henry a room without a doctor's orders. Henry asks the men to carry him into a room and goes to sleep. The next morning, a young nurse named Miss Gage arrives to take his temperature. Mrs Walker returns and, together with Miss Gage, changes Henry's bed. In the afternoon, the superintendent of the hospital, Miss Van Campen, appears and introduces herself. She and Henry take an immediate dislike to each other. Henry asks for wine with his meals, but Miss Van Campen says that wine is out of the question unless prescribed by a doctor. Later, Henry sends for a porter to bring him several bottles of wine and the evening papers. Before Henry goes to sleep, Miss Van Campen sends him something of a peace offering: a glass of eggnog spiked with sherry.

Analysis

Henry's unemotional reaction to being wounded further displays his stoicism: he exhibits neither despair at the wound itself nor excitement at Rinaldi's promise that the wound will bring him glory. As his conversation with Rinaldi makes clear, he has no interest in being decorated with medals. Despite Henry's aloofness, however, his chat with Rinaldi furthers a sympathetic impression of how men behave toward, and care for, one another. While allegiance to their countries is, in a way, voluntary—after all, no one wants to fight this war—men are expected to show unconditional loyalty to their friends. This expectation adds to a code of conduct partially expounded upon earlier when the officers harass the priest for his lack of sexual exploits. Loyalty, strength, resilience in the face of adversity, and a healthy sexual appetite—these are the traditional tropes of masculinity that the novel celebrates.

Rinaldi, with his endless talk about "pretty girls" and frequent trips to the brothel, embodies the overactive male sex drive. But, as the priest suggests in his conversation with Henry, sex is not enough to satisfy a man. The priest believes that Henry lacks someone to love and, when Henry protests, draws a distinction between lust for prostitutes, of which there is no shortage among the soldiers, and true, profound love. Love, in the priest's estimation, makes a man want to give of himself, to make sacrifices for the sake of another. Although Henry remains unconvinced, his increasing affection for Catherine hints that he will inevitably experience the kind of passionate and meaningful connection that the priest describes.

The characters in *A Farewell to Arms* are constantly seeking solace from a world ravaged by war. This solace, most often and most simply, comes in the form of alcohol. Throughout the novel, vast amounts of wine and liquor are consumed. Henry depends upon alcohol, and goes so far as to consider it a necessary part of his convalescence: when Miss Van Campen refuses him wine with his meals, he immediately arranges to have some smuggled into the hospital. This sort of escape is understandable, given the reader's growing impression of the folly of war. Just as Henry is scornful of medals and the honor that they supposedly bestow, the novel questions whether war is truly an appropriate forum for such lofty and romantic distinctions. As evidenced by the preposterous purpose for which Henry risks his life in battle—getting some cheese to top his pasta—the novel severs any traditional association between battle and glory. Similarly, once Henry arrives at the hospital in Milan, the reader witnesses an equally pathetic and ludicrous world in which clumsy ambulance drivers cannot manage the weight of a wounded soldier and inept nurses cry rather than care for their patients.

Summary: Chapters 14-17

In the morning, Miss Gage shows Henry the vermouth bottle that she found under his bed. He fears that she will get him into trouble, but, instead, she wonders why he did not ask her to join him for a drink. She reports that Miss Barkley has come to work at the hospital and that she does not like her. Henry assures her that she will. At Henry's request, a barber arrives to shave him. The man treats Henry very rudely, and the porter later explains that he had mistaken Henry for an Austrian soldier and was close to cutting his throat. The misunderstanding causes the porter much amusement. After the barber and the porter leave, Catherine enters, and Henry realizes that he is in love with her. He pulls her onto the bed with him, and they make love for the first time.

Henry meets a thin, little doctor who removes some of the shrapnel from his leg, but whose "fragile delicacy" is soon exhausted by the task. The doctor sends Henry for an X ray. Later, three doctors arrive to consult on the case. They agree that Henry should wait six months before having an operation. Henry jokes that he would rather have them amputate the leg. As he cannot stand the thought of spending

so long in bed, he asks for another opinion. Two hours later, Dr. Valentini arrives. Valentini is cheerful, energetic, and competent. He has a drink with Henry and agrees to perform the necessary operation in the morning.

"There, darling. Now you're all clean inside and out. Tell me. How many people have you ever loved?"

"Nobody."

Catherine spends the night in Henry's room. They lie in bed together, watching the night through the windows and a searchlight sweep across the ceiling. Henry worries that they will be discovered, but Catherine assures him that everyone is asleep and that they are safe. In the morning, Henry fancies going to the park to have breakfast, while Catherine prepares him for his operation. He urges her to come back to bed. She refuses and tells him that he probably will not want her later that night when he returns from surgery, groggy with an anesthetic. She warns him that such drugs tend to make patients chatty and begs him not to brag about their affair. They discuss their affair, and Catherine asks him how many women he has slept with. He answers none, and though she knows he is lying, she is pleased.

After the operation, Henry grows very sick. As he recovers, three other patients come to the hospital—a boy from Georgia with malaria, a boy from New York with malaria and jaundice, and a boy who tried to unscrew the fuse cap from an explosive shell for a souvenir. Henry develops an appreciation for Helen Ferguson, who helps him pass notes to Catherine while she is on duty. He asks if she will come to their wedding, and Helen responds that she doubts that they will get married. Worried for her friend's health, Helen convinces Henry that Catherine should have a few nights off. Henry speaks frankly to Miss Gage about getting Catherine some time to rest. Catherine returns to Henry after three days, and they enjoy a passionate reunion.

Analysis

Just as the officers' early interactions with the priest establish the novel's sympathies toward a strong, virile type of male behavior, a number of peripheral characters strengthen this sentiment. Hemingway describes the doctor who begins to diagnose Henry's injuries as "a thin quiet little man who seemed disturbed by the war." While Henry himself is disturbed, if not sickened, by the war, he maintains a competence and self-assurance that set him apart from men like the doctor, who needs to consult a team of his colleagues. This doctor's character stands in sharp contrast to Dr. Valentini, a gregarious but competent surgeon who drinks hard and wears his sexual appetite on his sleeve. Valentini's presence contributes to the novel's celebration of a particular kind of manhood, a fraternal bond supported by a love of wine and women and by displays of reckless boldness, whether they happen on the battlefield, in the bedroom, or on the operating table.

Henry conforms to this type of masculine ideal by rushing boldly into a passionate affair with Catherine. When she appears in his room, he is struck by her beauty and declares the depth of his love for her in a single sentence: "Everything turned over inside of me." Henry's exchange with Catherine is incredibly powerful and suggestive. As they volley simple questions back and forth, asking whom the other has loved and made love to, the line between game-playing and true passion begins to blur. In between the lovers' terse, deceptively simple lines of dialogue, Hemingway manages to point the way toward reserves of untapped feeling. Both Henry and Catherine feel more than they say or can say. Grief, fear, and a profound desire to be protected from a hostile world are among the forces that bring them together. But these

confessions are beyond them; rather, they speak in strikingly nonromantic terms:

"You've such a lovely temperature."

"You've got a lovely everything."

"Oh no. You have the lovely temperature. I'm awfully proud of your temperature."

Such conversations might strike the reader as a silly, indulgent imitation of the way lovers speak to each other. Hemingway, however, rescues these lines from saccharine sentimentality by establishing a complex psychological motivation for them. For Henry and Catherine, such foolishly romantic lines offer a respite from their war-torn world. The frivolity and banality of their dialogue gauge their desire to escape the horror of the war.

Interestingly, in addition to being innovative, Hemingway's suggestive style of writing served a very practical purpose. The standards of decency in 1929 America would have barred a more explicit version of *A Farewell to Arms* from appearing in print. Hence, Hemingway hints at Henry and Catherine's first sexual encounter, demanding that his audience read between the lines. Even though such scenes spared puritanical readers explicit details, the novel was plagued by charges of indecency. A public outcry in Boston, for example, led to the excision of such perceived profanities as "balls" from the novel.

Summary: Chapters 18-21

During the summer, Henry learns to walk on crutches, and he and Catherine enjoy their time together in Milan. They befriend the headwaiter at a restaurant called the Gran Italia, and Catherine continues to spend her nights with Henry. They pretend to themselves that they are married, though Henry admits that he is glad they are not. They discuss marriage: Catherine, sure that they would send a married woman away from the front, remains opposed to the idea. Marriage, she continues, is beside the point: "I couldn't be any more married." Catherine pledges to be faithful to Henry, saying that although she is sure "all sorts of dreadful things will happen to us," unfaithfulness is not one of them.

When not with Catherine, Henry spends his time with various people from Milan. He keeps company with the Meyerses, an older couple who enjoy going to the races. One day, after running into the Meyerses on the street, Henry enters a shop and buys some chocolates for Catherine. At a nearby bar, he runs into Ettore Moretti, an Italian from San Francisco serving in the Italian army, and Ralph Simmons and Edgar Saunders, two opera singers. Ettore is very proud of his war medals and claims that he works hard for them. Henry calls the man a "legitimate hero" but notes that he is incredibly dull. When he reaches the hospital, he chats with Catherine, who cannot stand Moretti; she prefers the quieter, English gentleman-type heroes. As the couple talks on into the night, it begins to rain. Catherine fears the rain, which she claims is "very hard on loving," and begins to cry until Henry comforts her.

Henry and Catherine go to the races with Helen Ferguson, whom Henry calls "Fergie" or "Ferguson," and the boy who was wounded while trying to unscrew the nose cap on the shrapnel shell. They bet on horses based on Meyers's tips; Meyers usually bets successfully but shares his secrets very selectively. While watching the preparations for a race of horses that have never won a purse higher than 1,000 lire, Catherine spies a purplish-black horse that, she believes, has been dyed to disguise its true color. As Italian horse racing is rumored to be extremely corrupt, Catherine is sure that the horse is a champion in disguise. She and Henry bet their money on it but win much less than expected. Catherine eventually grows tired of the crowd, and she and Henry decide to watch the remaining races by themselves.

They both claim to feel better, or less lonely, when they are alone together.

By September, the Allied forces are suffering greatly. A British major reports to Henry that if things continue as they are, the Allies will be defeated in another year. He suggests, however, that such a development is fine so long as no one realizes it. As Henry's leg is nearly healed, he receives three weeks of convalescent leave, after which he will have to return to the front. Catherine offers to travel with him and then gives him a piece of startling news: she is three months pregnant. Catherine worries that Henry feels trapped and promises not to make trouble for him, but he tells her that he feels cheerful and that he thinks she is wonderful. Catherine talks about the obstacles they will face, and Henry states that a coward dies a thousand deaths, the brave but one. They wonder aloud who authored this observation, but neither is able to remember. Catherine then amends Henry's words, saying that intelligent brave men die perhaps two thousand deaths but never mention them.

Analysis

This part of the novel chronicles the happy summer that Henry and Catherine spend together before he must return to the front. As his leg heals, Henry enjoys increasing mobility, and he develops a more normal, social relationship with Catherine. One of the reasons that the reader is able to believe more fully in their relationship is that these chapters do much to develop Catherine's character. Whereas in earlier chapters Catherine can be read as an emotionally damaged woman who desperately craves companionship and protection, she now emerges as a more complicated and self-aware character. The trip to the racetrack, for example, shows her fundamental independence: she would rather lose money on a horse that she herself chooses than win based on a tip.

She exhibits this independence even further when she announces her pregnancy to Henry. Concerned that he will feel trapped or obligated, she offers to deal with the situation by herself. Whereas she earlier gushes determined, over-the-top romanticism, she now provides small reminders of the real and hostile world in which her relationship with Henry exists. Assuring him of her loyalty to him, she cannot help but admit, "I'm sure all sorts of dreadful things will happen to us." Even more striking is her admission, soon after announcing her pregnancy, that "I've never even loved anyone." We can access her intricate psychological state only partially. For instance, when she tells Henry, rather poetically, that she fears the rain because "it's very hard on loving," the reader can only begin to guess the kinds of sorrow, fear, and joy that have shaped her. As a result of our incomplete understanding of her, Catherine can appear somewhat underdeveloped as a character. But her loyalty to Henry and her courage remain strong and constant.

The introduction of Ettore Moretti brings Henry's character into greater focus by juxtaposing him with a sharp contrast. The Italian-American soldier is boastful, ambitious, and arrogant; he is quick to insult others, such as the tenor at whom, he claims, audiences throw benches, and equally quick to sing his own praises. Henry, on the other hand, is reserved, detached, and disciplined. Suspicious of, or simply uninterested in, the glory for which the army awards medals, Henry maintains a calm levelheadedness that helps to convince the reader that his feelings for Catherine are indeed genuine.

Henry's words about cowards echo Julius Caesar's defiant utterance in Shakespeare's play Julius Caesar: "Cowards die many times before their deaths; / The valiant never taste of death but once" (II.ii.32–33). Although Caesar's stoicism carries an arrogant refusal to believe that any harm can actually befall him, Henry, like Caesar, remains philosophical and unafraid in the face of potential peril. His inability to contextualize the reference suggests shortsightedness about the development of his relationship with Catherine. His failure to recognize that Caesar dies a few scenes after making this bold declaration seems

to foreshadow disaster for Henry.

Summary: Chapters 22-26

The next morning, it begins to rain, and Henry is diagnosed with jaundice. Miss Van Campen finds empty liquor bottles in Henry's room and blames alcoholism for his condition. She accuses him of purposefully making himself ill in order to avoid being sent back to the front. She orders his liquor stash to be taken away and promises to file a report that will deny him his convalescent leave, which she successfully does.

Henry prepares to travel back to the front. He says his goodbyes at the hospital and heads out to the streets. While passing a café, he sees Catherine in the window and knocks for her to join him. They pass a pair of lovers standing outside a cathedral. When Henry observes, "They're like us," Catherine unhappily responds, "Nobody is like us." They enter a gun shop, where Henry buys a new pistol and several ammunition cartridges. On the street, they kiss like the lovers outside the cathedral did. Henry suggests that they go somewhere private, and Catherine agrees. They find a hotel. Even though it is a nice hotel and Catherine stops on the way to buy an expensive nightgown, she still feels like a prostitute. After dinner, however, they both feel fine. Henry utters the lines, "'But at my back I always hear / Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near,'" which Catherine recognizes as a couplet from the poetry of Andrew Marvell. Henry asks Catherine how she will manage having the baby; she assures him that she will be fine and that she will have set up a nice home for Henry by the time he returns.

Outside, Henry calls for a carriage to bring him and Catherine from the hotel to the train station. He gets out at the station and sends her on to the hospital. He begs her to take care of herself and "little Catherine." There is a small commotion on the crowded train because Henry has arranged for a machine-gunner to save him a seat. A tall, gaunt captain protests. Eventually, Henry offers the offended captain his seat and sleeps on the floor.

After returning to Gorizia, Henry has a talk with the town major about the war. It was a bad summer, the major says. The major is pleased to learn that Henry received his decorations and decides that Henry was lucky to get wounded when he did. The major admits that he is tired of the war and states that he doesn't believe that he would come back if he were given leave from the front. Henry then goes to find Rinaldi, and while he waits for his friend, he thinks about Catherine. Rinaldi comes into the room and is glad to see Henry. He examines his friend's wounded knee and exclaims that it is a crime that Henry was sent back into battle. Rinaldi asks if Henry has married and if he is in love. He asks if Catherine is good in bed, which offends Henry, who says that he holds certain subjects "sacred." They drink a toast to Catherine and go down to dinner. Rinaldi halfheartedly picks on the priest, trying to animate the nearly deserted dining hall for Henry's sake.

After dinner, Henry talks with the priest. The priest thinks that the war will end soon, though he cannot say why he thinks so. Henry remains skeptical. The priest notices a change in the men, citing the major, whom he describes as "gentle," as an example. Henry speculates that defeat has made the men gentler and points the priest to the story of Jesus Christ, who, Henry suggests, was mild because he had been beaten down. Henry claims that he no longer believes in victory. At the end of the evening, when the priest asks what Henry does believe in, he responds, "In sleep."

Analysis

If Catherine's behavior in the last section casts a slight shadow over the romantic idealism surrounding

her relationship with Henry, her farewell to him casts it into darkness. A sense of doom slowly closes in. Catherine's observation, as she and Henry pass a young, amorous couple, that "nobody is like us" betrays the pathos at the heart of their relationship. By removing their relationship from the lofty realm of idealized love, Hemingway makes Catherine and Henry's love for each other more real, more complicated, and more convincing.

The lines of poetry that Henry quotes are from Andrew Marvell's poem "To His Coy Mistress" (1681). In the poem, a man addresses the young object of his desire and tries to convince her that the social norms that keep her chaste are unimportant in the face of inevitable death. Life is painfully short, the poem suggests; whatever pleasure can be had should be had regardless of fussy, moralistic traditions. The poem plays an important role in shaping the farewell scene between Catherine and Henry. In their hotel room, Catherine says that she feels like a whore; even though she feels no need to marry—and has asked Henry how they could possibly be more married than they are now—the strict moral expectations of society still exert a force strong enough to vex her happiness. She quickly overcomes this feeling and actually wants to do "something really sinful" with Henry. A sin, she imagines, would bring them closer together by throwing them into sharper contrast with the outside world. As she says at the racetrack, she feels she is at her best and least lonely when she and Henry are separated from everyone around them. The final lines of Marvell's poem evoke this aspect of Catherine and Henry's relationship:

Let us roll all our strength, and all

Our sweetness, up into one ball:

And tear our pleasures with rough strife,

Through the iron gates of life.

Given the lack of comforts in a world so ravaged by war, it is little wonder that Catherine wants to unite with Henry against life's harsh realities.

Henry's discussion with the priest confirms the difficulties of living in a world in which war has crumbled many of the foundations—God, love, honor—that help to structure human life and give it meaning. Those of Hemingway's characters who have not yet lost all sense of these beliefs, as Rinaldi has, try to make up for the loss in other ways, as Catherine does. Henry's conversation with the priest illustrates the numb horror one feels when there is nothing left in which to believe. Without a belief in God or a commitment to the war in which he is fighting, Henry can safely say that he believes only in the oblivion that sleep brings.

Summary: Chapters 27-29

The next morning, Henry travels to the Bainsizza, a succession of small mountains in which intense fighting has taken place. Henry meets a man named Gino, who tells him about a battery of terrifying guns that the Austrians have. The men discuss the Italian army's position against Croatian troops; Gino predicts that there will be nowhere for the Italians to go should the Austrians decide to attack. He claims that the summer's losses were not in vain, and Henry falls silent, thinking how words like "sacred, glorious, and sacrifice" embarrass him. He believes that concrete facts, such as the names of villages and the numbers of streets, have more meaning than such abstractions.

That night, the rain comes down hard and the enemy begins a bombardment. In the morning, the Italians learn that the attacking forces include Germans, and they become very afraid. They have had little contact with the Germans in the war and would prefer to keep it that way. The next night, word arrives that

the Italian line has been broken; the forces begin a large-scale retreat. The troops slowly move out. As they come to the town of Gorizia, Henry sees women from the soldiers' whorehouse being loaded into a truck. Bonello, one of the drivers under Henry's command, offers to go with the women. At the villa, Henry discovers that Rinaldi has taken off for the hospital; everyone else has evacuated too. Henry, Bonello, and two other drivers, Piani and Aymo, rest and eat before resuming the retreat.

The men drive slowly through the town, forming an endless column of retreating soldiers and vehicles. Henry takes a turn sleeping; shortly after he wakes, the column stalls. Henry exits his vehicle to check on his men. He discovers two engineering officers in Bonello's car and two women with Aymo. The girls seem suspicious of Aymo's intentions, but he eventually, if crudely, convinces them that he means them no harm. Henry returns to Piani's car and falls asleep. His dreams are of Catherine, and he speaks aloud to her. That night, columns of peasants join the retreating army. In the early morning, Henry and his men decide to separate from the column and take a small road going north. They stop briefly at an abandoned farmhouse and eat a large breakfast before continuing their journey.

Aymo's car gets stuck in the soft ground, and the men are forced to cut brush hurriedly to place under the tires for traction. Henry orders the two engineering sergeants riding with Bonello to help. Afraid of being overtaken by the enemy, they refuse and try to leave. Henry draws his gun and shoots one of them; the other escapes. Bonello takes Henry's pistol and finishes off the wounded soldier. The men use branches, twigs, and even clothing to create traction, but the car sinks further into the mud. They continue in the other vehicles but soon get stuck again. Henry gives some money to the two girls traveling with Aymo and sends them off to a nearby village. The men continue to Udine on foot.

Analysis

Hemingway's description of the retreat, which is based on one of the most large-scale retreats of World War I, is one of the most famous descriptive passages in the novel. As the lumbering columns of army vehicles wind through the country night, Hemingway's prose mimics the dark and streaming motion of the men. When the movement of the columns becomes choppy, so do Hemingway's sentences: "Then the truck stopped. The whole column was stopped. It started again and went a little farther, then stopped."

These three chapters are most noteworthy for their powerful, uncompromising, and unromantic evocation of war. As Henry reflects in his conversation with the priest, abstract concepts like courage and honor have no place alongside the concrete reality of war. In describing the retreat, Hemingway strips war of its romantic packaging and provides the reader with only the most solid, evocative, and precise details.

Now the focus of the novel switches noticeably from love to war. Hemingway reports from the battlefront with a neutral, journalistic style that heightens the realism of the narrative and proves surprisingly unsettling. When Henry shoots at the two engineering officers for refusing to help free the car from the mud, Hemingway's detached prose refrains from passing moral judgment on his action. Rather, the text offers just the facts. This spare, disinterested tone sets Henry's wanton violence against an amoral landscape; shooting a man out of anger is given the same weight as pushing a car out of the mud. Refusing to give the reader reliable moral ground from which he or she may view and judge the scene, Hemingway challenges the reader to deal with the scene on his or her own terms. Certainly, the support that Henry receives from his fellow soldiers suggests that his actions are not abnormal and that there is a larger, pervasive irrationality at work. Indeed, the lack of a well-defined sense of right and wrong in the narrative perspective mirrors the situation in which Henry finds himself. War has stripped the world of its certainties, leaving men to set their own moral compass. Some, like Gino, fight for their homeland because they believe in ideals such as

sacred ground and sacrifice, while others, like Henry, attach no such grandeur or meaning to their behavior on the battlefield.

The murder of the engineering officer is a testament to Hemingway's brilliant depiction of the confusion and meaninglessness of war. This act seemingly comes out of nowhere. The reader doesn't expect the normally self-possessed Henry to display such aggression, nor does such behavior seem particularly justified. Bonello's ruthless, point-blank extermination of the man's life is equally senseless. That the engineer is guilty of no capital crime and thus merits no punishment so grave as death emphasizes that, oftentimes, one cannot account for men's behavior in war.

Summary: Chapters 30-32

Crossing a bridge, Henry sees a German staff car crossing another bridge nearby. Aymo soon spots a heavily armed bicycle troop. Fearing capture, Henry and the men decide to avoid the main road, which the retreat follows, and head for the smaller secondary roads. They start down an embankment and are shot at. A bullet hits Aymo and kills him almost instantly. Realizing that their friend has been shot by their own troops—the Italian rear guard, which is afraid of everything—Henry and his men realize that they are in more danger than they would be facing the enemy. They look for a place to hide until dark and come across an abandoned farmhouse.

Henry camps out in the hayloft, while Piani and Bonello search for food. Piani returns alone and reports that Bonello, fearing death, left the farm in hopes of being taken prisoner and thereby escaping death. The men hide in the barn until nightfall and then set out to rejoin the Italians. They come upon a large gathering of soldiers where officers are being separated and interrogated for the "treachery" that led to an Italian defeat. Suddenly, two men from the battle police seize hold of Henry. He watches as a lieutenant colonel is led away, questioned, and shot to death. Sensing the opportunity to escape, Henry runs for the water and dives in. As he swims away he hears shots, but as he gains distance from shore, the sounds of gunfire fade.

After floating in the cold river water for what seems to him a very long time, Henry climbs out, removes from his shirt the stars that identify him as an officer, and counts his money. He crosses the Venetian plain that day and jumps aboard a military train that evening. He freezes when a young soldier with a helmet that is too large for his head spots him, but the boy assumes that Henry belongs on the train and does nothing. Henry then hides in a car stocked with guns. While crawling under a huge canvas tarp, he cuts his head open. He waits for the blood to coagulate so that he can pick the dried blood off of his forehead. He does not want to be conspicuous when he gets out.

Exhausted, lying under the canvas, Henry thinks about how well the knee upon which Dr. Valentini operated has held up under the circumstances. He reflects that his thoughts still belong to him, and thinks about Catherine, though he realizes that thinking about her without promise of seeing her might drive him crazy. Thoughts of loss plague him. Without his men, an army to which to return, or the friends that he remembers, like the priest and Rinaldi, Henry feels that the war is over for him. "It was not my show anymore," he ruminates. Soon, though, the needs of his body distract him from these thoughts. He needs to eat, drink, and sleep with Catherine, whom he dreams of taking away to a safe place.

Analysis

In these chapters the already delicate world of the Italian military falls apart. This unraveling begins with the crumbling of Henry's normally calm exterior, which leads him to shoot the engineering sergeant.

The world descends even further into chaos: the panicky Italian rear guard begins shooting at its own men; Bonello, fearing death, abandons Henry and Piani; and the neat columns that characterized the retreat at its beginning have broken into a terrifying mob. Battle police randomly pull officers from the columns of retreating men and execute them on sight. Hemingway expertly evokes the horror, confusion, and irrationality of war.

Two types of characters are presented as a counterpoint to Henry. The zealous patriotism of the moblike battle police stands in contrast to Henry's distrust of noble ideals. Their rhetoric of God, blood, and soil, in its senselessness and cruelty, makes Henry's skepticism appear saintly. The character of the officer who is executed is more complex. The grim and sobering tone of his question—"Have you ever been in a retreat?"—resonates with Henry's realistic outlook. The officer, however, is resigned to his defeat. He neither flees nor protests his execution. Still, he tries to salvage a quiet dignity by asking not to be pestered with stupid questions before he is shot. Henry, however, is neither defeated nor interested in saving face. Because he doesn't believe in the sacredness of war or victory, he cannot muster a response comparable to the officer's. He flees not out of cowardice but out of an unwillingness to make a sacrifice for a cause that, to him, seems meaningless. In the context of total irrationality, self-preservation seems to him as valid a choice as any.

Just as war has been stripped of its romantic ideals, Henry strips himself of the stars that mark him as a lieutenant. With this action, he feels as if a certain portion of his life is over. His escape through the river is a baptism of sorts, a journey that washes away his anger and obligations and renews his sense of what truly matters in the world. His thoughts return to Catherine. In these chapters, Henry makes a "separate peace," as he later calls it, with the war—the farewell to arms that gives the novel its title.

Summary: Chapters 33-37

Henry gets off the train when it enters Milan. He goes to a wine shop and has a cup of coffee. The proprietor offers to help him, but Henry assures the man that he is in no trouble. After they share a glass of wine, Henry goes to the hospital, where he learns from the porter that Catherine has left for Stresa. He goes to visit Ralph Simmons, one of the opera singers that he encounters earlier, and asks about the procedures for traveling to Switzerland. Simmons, offering whatever help he can, gives Henry a suit of civilian clothes and sends him off to Stresa with best wishes.

Henry takes the train to Stresa. He feels odd in his new clothes, noticing the scornful looks that he receives as a young civilian. Still, he claims that such looks do not bother him, for he has made a "separate peace" with the war. The train arrives in Stresa, and Henry heads for a hotel called the Isles Borromées. He takes a nice room and tells the concierge that he is expecting his wife. In the bar, Emilio, the bartender, reports that he has seen two English nurses staying at a small hotel near the train station. Henry eats but does not answer Emilio's questions about the war, which, he reflects, is over for him.

Catherine and Helen Ferguson are having supper when Henry arrives at their hotel. While Catherine is overjoyed, Helen becomes angry and berates Henry for making such a mess of her friend's life. Neither Henry nor Catherine yields to Helen's stern moralizing, and soon Helen begins to cry. Henry describes the night spent with Catherine: he has returned to a state of bliss, though his thoughts are darkened by the knowledge that the "world breaks everyone" and that good people die "impartially."

In the morning, Henry refuses the newspaper, and Catherine asks if his experience was so bad that he cannot bear to read about it. He promises to tell her about it someday if he ever gets "it straight in [his] head." He admits to feeling like a criminal for abandoning the army, but Catherine jokingly assures

him that he is no criminal: after all, she says, it was only the Italian army. They agree that taking off for Switzerland would be lovely, and return to bed.

Later that morning, Catherine goes to see Helen, and Henry goes fishing with Emilio. Emilio offers to lend Henry his boat at any time. Henry and Catherine eat lunch with Helen Ferguson. Count Greffi, a ninety-four-year-old nobleman whom Henry befriends on an earlier trip to Stresa, is also at the hotel with his niece. That evening, Henry plays billiards with the count. They talk about how the count mistakenly thought religious devotion would come with age and about whether Italy will win the war.

Later that night, Emilio wakes Henry to inform him that the military police plan to arrest Henry in the morning. He suggests that Henry and Catherine row to Switzerland. Henry wakes Catherine, and they pack and head down to the dock. Emilio stocks them up with brandy and sandwiches and lets them take the boat. He takes fifty lire for the provisions and tells Henry to send him five hundred francs for the boat after he is established in Switzerland.

Because of a storm, the waters are choppy and rough. Henry rows all night, until his hands are dull with pain. Catherine takes a short turn rowing, then Henry resumes. Hours later, having stayed safely out of sight of customs guards, the couple lands in Switzerland. They eat breakfast, and, as expected, the Swiss guards arrest them and take them to Locarno, where they receive provisional visas to remain in Switzerland. The guards argue comically over where the couple will find the best winter sports. Relieved but tired, Catherine and Henry go to a hotel and immediately fall asleep.

Analysis

Up to this point in the novel, reactions to the war have been voiced primarily by those involved in it: officers, soldiers, nurses, and surgeons. When Henry flees the front line, his travels expose him to several civilian characters whose respective attitudes toward the war echo those of military personnel. Neither Simmons, Emilio, nor Count Greffi support the war, with Simmons and Emilio going so far as to help Henry escape from duty. This rather one-sided presentation of the public's perception of war advances the novel's fundamental argument that war offers more opportunities for senseless loss and destruction than for glory and honor.

As if to underline this point, Hemingway skewers a more optimistic contemporary of his during Henry's conversation with Count Greffi. Asked by Henry about literature written in wartime, the count names Henri Barbusse, author of the 1916 war novel Le Feu (Under Fire), and H. G. Wells, the English writer most famous for The Island of Doctor Moreau and The War of the Worlds. Wells also penned Mr. Britling Sees It Through, which the count mistakenly calls Mr. Britling Sees Through It. Hemingway, probably irritated by this book's upbeat take on the war, deflates the optimism of the work's title with Henry's rejoinder, "No, he doesn't." Henry's comment that he has read "nothing any good" makes clear that Hemingway dislikes Barbusse as well. Barbusse argues against the war in Le Feu, but the novel's collective, everyman perspective clashes with Hemingway's rugged individualism. (Barbusse's later devotion to the Communist Party and Stalin didn't win him many points with Hemingway either.) Beyond their disputatious nature, these literary inside jokes reinforce the sense of impending doom: the optimistic war novel winds up in the hands of wounded soldiers, and the grim reality of the war belies Wells's optimistic depiction.

Once reunited with Catherine, Henry seems content with his decision to abandon the military. Several times, he assures himself that he is done with the war, but his "separate peace" is, perhaps, more a matter of wishful thinking than an actual state of mind. Henry admits that his thoughts are muddled when

it comes to the war and his role in it. He tells Catherine that he will one day share his experience, if he can "get it straight in [his] head." This psychological turmoil and Henry's declaration that he feels like a criminal for leaving the front speak to a conflict deeper than Henry is willing to admit.

As Catherine and Henry prepare to journey to Switzerland, there is a gathering sense of doom. Although Hemingway prizes sharp-edged realism too highly to rely on traditional means of foreshadowing, he manages to forecast the coming tragedy in a number of ways. Helen Ferguson's uncharacteristic outburst in the hotel points not so much to an extreme adherence to social mores or her fear of solitude as it does to an unspeakable sense that the world is a harmful place in which a love as true as Catherine and Henry's cannot survive. Henry's nighttime meditation—one of the most beautifully written and moving passages in the novel—echoes this sentiment. While his incredibly bleak observation that the world was designed to kill the good, the gentle, and the brave seems to come out of nowhere, it anticipates the workings of the cruel world that soon "break[s]" what he holds most dear.

Summary: Chapters 38-41

By fall, Henry and Catherine have moved to a wooden house on a mountain outside the village of Montreux. They pass a splendid life together, enjoying the company of Mr. Guttingen and his wife, who live downstairs, and taking frequent walks into the peaceful nearby villages. One day, after Catherine has her hair done in town, the couple goes out for a beer, which Catherine believes will help keep the baby small. Catherine has been increasingly worried about the baby's size, since the doctor has warned her that she has a narrow pelvis. Again, Henry and Catherine discuss marriage. Catherine agrees to marry someday because it will make the child "legitimate," but she prefers to talk about the sights that she hopes to see, such as Niagara Falls and the Golden Gate Bridge, when the marriage makes her an American.

Three days before Christmas, snow falls. Catherine asks Henry if he feels restless. He says no, though he does wonder about Rinaldi, the priest, and the men on the front. Catherine, suspecting that Henry might be restless, suggests that he change something to reinvigorate his life. He agrees to grow a beard. Catherine suggests that she cut her hair to make her look more like Henry, but Henry doesn't like this idea. When she proposes that they try to fall asleep together at the same time, Henry is unable to and lies awake looking at Catherine and thinking for a long time.

By mid-January, Henry's beard has come in fully. While out on a walk, he and Catherine stop at a dark, smoky inn. They relish their isolation and wonder if things will be spoiled when the "little brat" comes. Catherine says that she will cut her hair when she is thin again after the baby is born so that she can be "exciting" and Henry can fall in love with her all over again. He tells her that he loves her enough now and asks, "What do you want to do? Ruin me?"

In March, the couple moves to the town of Lausanne to be nearer to the hospital. They stay in a hotel there for three weeks. Catherine buys baby clothes, Henry exercises in the gym, and both feel that the baby will come soon and that therefore they should not lose any time together.

Around three o'clock one morning, Catherine goes into labor. Henry takes her to the hospital, where she is given a nightgown and a room. She encourages Henry to go out for breakfast, which he does. When he returns to the hospital, he finds that Catherine has been taken to the delivery room. He goes in to see her; the doctor stands by as Catherine inhales an anesthetic gas to get her through the painful contractions. Later that afternoon, when Henry returns from lunch, Catherine has become intoxicated from the gas and has made little progress in her labor. The doctor tells Henry that the best solution would be a Caesarean

operation. Catherine suffers unbearable pain and pleads for more gas. Finally, they wheel her out on a stretcher to perform the operation. Henry watches the rain outside.

The doctor soon comes out with a baby boy, for whom Henry, strangely, has no feelings. Henry sees the doctor fussing over the child, but he rushes off to see Catherine without speaking to him. When Catherine asks about their son, Henry tells her that he is fine. The nurse gives him a quizzical look; ushering him outside, the nurse explains that the umbilical cord had strangled the child prior to birth.

Henry goes out for dinner. When he returns, the nurse tells him that Catherine is hemorrhaging. He is terrified that she will die. When he is finally allowed to see her, she tells him that she will die and asks him not to say the things that he once said to her to other girls. He stays with her until she dies. Once she is dead, he attempts to say goodbye but cannot find the sense in doing so. He leaves the hospital and walks back to his hotel in the rain.

Analysis

Henry and Catherine's simple domestic rituals in the first half of this section illustrate their happiness together. Hemingway efficiently marks their distance from the outside world by juxtaposing this bliss, with news of the German attack: "It was March, 1918, and the German offensive had started in France. I drank whiskey and soda while Catherine unpacked and moved around the room." A subtle nervousness, however, hangs over the tranquility. Henry, as is typical for Hemingway's heroes, craves adventure and finds himself becoming restless with what has essentially become married life. When he shadowboxes at the gym, he can't bear to look at himself long in the mirror because a boxer with a beard looks strange to him. This clash of new and old identities explodes later when Henry feels nothing for his son. As much as Henry has desired his isolation from the world and solitude with Catherine, their exclusive union poses for him a new problem of maintaining a modicum of independence. While Catherine is happy to have their lives "all mixed up," Henry confesses, "I haven't any life at all any more." As the ending of the novel shows, Henry is still very much in love with Catherine. But when Catherine wants to make love, Henry wants to play chess. Love, the last ideal left standing in the novel, proves to be problematic, like glory and honor.

Throughout this last section, Hemingway foreshadows Catherine's death. Her attempt to keep the baby small by drinking beer anticipates the painful labor through which she will suffer, while her claim that the world has "broken" her echoes the passage in which Henry fears the death of the good and the gentle. These subtleties create an expectation that casts a pall on the domestic satisfaction and relative optimism that Catherine and Henry feel. When Catherine's death comes, Henry reports it in the baldest, most unadorned terms: "It seems she had one hemorrhage after another. They couldn't stop it. I went into the room and stayed with Catherine until she died." Although Hemingway shows only the tip of the iceberg, the reader feels the immeasurable grief that extends below the surface. Here, in its ability to evoke so much by using so little, is the power of Hemingway's writing.

Though the novel ends in tragedy, Catherine's death fails to initiate an epiphany in Henry. Her death is not the catalyst for a great change or revelation. The realization that does come only confirms the novel's largest thematic focus: both love and war lead to losses for which there is no compensation. The storm with which the novel ends reminds the reader of Catherine's fear of rain. Catherine speaks about an unidentifiable malevolence in the world. The rain that now falls on Henry as he leaves the hospital signals the same destructive forces—forces that render one powerless, speechless, and hopeless. By ending on this note, the novel seems to suggest that any epiphany Henry might have had, any thoughts that might have given him a more promising perspective, or any words that might have lent him solace would be false or

impossible. They belong to the realm of Rinaldi's prostitutes, of Henry's drinking, of Catherine's lust for love: each of these provides much needed shelter from the world's inhospitable forces. But, as the closing passage of A Farewell to Arms makes heartbreakingly clear, such shelter is always temporary.

10.3 Let Us Sum Up

A Farewell to Arms has been designed on the pattern of a dramatic action. In the course of progress of action Hemingway maintains a logical sequence of events. The plot is composed of five separate Books, each Book has a series of scenes and each scene broken into sections which might be likened to stage direction and dialogue. From the very beginning we find the events progressing hand in hande like a dramatic action. All the major characters are introduced gradually. The shifting of war scene to love scenes and back to war field and again thrilling romance of love make the narration absorbing as well as interesting. Hence, the general war setting in Book-I finds relief in Henary Catherine romance. Then, in Book III it is retreat relief in Henary Catherine Henary's decision to escape; in Book IV the rowing thrill to Switzerland seeks a hopeful recess that follows in Book V. But, the very Book desplays reveral of happy state as Catherine dies in child-birth and Henary is left broken and disappointed all alone.

10.4 Review Questions

1. *A Farewell to Arms* is one of the most famous war novels ever written. Unlike many war stories, however, the novel does not glorify the experience of combat or offer us portraits of heroes as they are traditionally conceived. What is the novel's attitude toward war? Is it fair to call A Farewell to Arms an antiwar novel?

2. Discuss the various ways in which characters seek solace from the pains of a war-ravaged world. In the end, what does the novel suggest about such comforts?

3. Discuss Frederic Henry as a narrator. Assuming that, as a character, he is writing his story many years after living it, how does he convey its sense of extreme immediacy?

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UNIT-11

MARK TWAIN : *THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN* (I)

Structure

11.0 Objectives

This Unit intends to introduce the American writer, Mark Twain and give a brief overview of his life and times. The discussion will veer round his most celebrated novel, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and the various influences that went into the making of the novel. Eventually, the students would be in a position to understand Mark Twain's freewheeling philosophy of life, his satiric vision, and his humanitarian beliefs in spite of his professed southern heritage which created in him momentary vacillations vis-à-vis the Civil War.

11.1 Introduction

Mark Twain, the pen name of Samuel Langhorne Clemens, is regarded as one of America's first and foremost realists and humorists, who usually wrote about his own personal experiences. Mark Twain was born in the little town of Florida, Missouri, on 30th November, 1835, shortly after his family had moved there from Tennessee. He was the third son and the fifth child of John Marshall Clemens and Jane Lampton Clemens. Four years after his birth, the family migrated to Hannibal, Missouri. Hannibal was dusty and quiet with large forests nearby which Twain knew as a child and which he uses in the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn when Pap kidnaps Huck and hides out in the great forest. The steamboats which passed daily were the fascination of the town and became the subject matter of Twain's Life on the Mississippi.

11.2 About the Author

Mark Twain's father was a lawyer by profession, though mildly successful. However, he was a

highly intelligent man who was a strict disciplinarian. As a child, Twain was more close to his mother than the father. Although the family was not wealthy, Twain apparently had a happy childhood. His father died when Twain was twelve years old and, for the next ten years, he was an apprentice printer and then a printer both in Hannibal and in New York City. But the place of his childhood was far from satisfactory and had its grim aspects in the sensational murders, drunkenness, and the degrading institution of slavery which left their deep imprint on Twain's mind.

The year 1857 is a turning point in the life of Twain. He met Horace Bixby, the expert pilot, who whetted his appetite for the profession, and assured him to make an expert pilot on payment of five hundred dollars to her. So he became a trained pilot only in eighteen months. To Twain, the job of a pilot and even that of the menial crew presented glamour and excitement. It symbolized a spirit of freedom, adventure and travel which thrilled the heart of the young man. Mark Twain continued as a pilot on the river Mississippi until the outbreak of Civil War in America.

The Civil War raged in 1861 between the Unionists and the Confederates. All navigation and traffic ceased. The novelist was on the horns of dilemma. As a slave holder he sided with the Confederates who stressed the perpetuation of the Negro slavery. On the other hand, as an advocate of the liberty and emancipation, he could not tolerate this vice which was an outrage on the human dignity and a denial of the social justice. This is what he severely denounced in his works.

The freewheeling spirit of Twain got a boon through his brother, Orion who had become a secretary to James W. Nye, the Governor of Nevada. He accompanied his brother to the West as his secretary with any wages. As he had no specific duties and no remuneration, he was free most of the time and paid visit to the Lake Tahoe, renowned for its scenic charms. On his return to the town, Carson City he became smitten with the silver fever in the hope of becoming a wealthy person, but like many others got disenchanted. His frustrating experiences in Carson became the subject matter of his humorous articles which he wrote for the Virginia City Territorial Enterprise. Poverty forced him to join this paper as a reporter.

Mark Twain's satirical writings some times landed him in deep troubles and created awkward situations. He clashed with the editor of Union in Virginia city, and had to leave the town for San Francisco to avoid the consequences of clash in 1864. His acquaintance with Artemus Ward, the great humorist, influenced his sense of humour. His Jim Smiley and Jumping Frog, published in The New York Saturday Press, made him famous. This work introduced the spoken language and the digressions which became the chief traits of his creative writing later. He gained popularity and enjoyed reputation as a writer. Twain's publication of his interviews with the injured survivors of the ship Hornet which had caught fire, made him quite a famous person. Through the charms of his magnetic personality and through the hard labour with which he prepared his speeches and committed them to memory, he became a successful lecturer. The stamp of his lecturing ability is quite evident in his novels. Apart from his experiences of voyage to Holyland through the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, and his letters to the newspapers, he visited France and was appalled by the immorality of the French women which he had depicted in *The Innocent Abroad* which bestowed fame on him, and he was asked by Elisha Bliss, the publisher, to write another book dealing with the life of the West.

Twain returned to New York in 1867, met Olivia Langdon, fell in love with her, the marriage took place in 1870, was blessed with two children, both of them died. Susan, the daughter was born in 1872, and Clara in 1874. He went to England in 1872 and met the great creative artists, poets and novelists—Robert Browning, his wife, Turgenev, Charles Kingsley which culminated in *The Prince and the Pauper*

(1882), a satire on the privileges and pretences of the aristocracy. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) are some of Mark Twain's principal works of fiction. During 1903-1904, Twain lived in Florence (Italy) due to the declining health of his wife who eventually died in June, 1904. Mark Twain shifted his residence to Stormfield, near Redding, Connecticut. Having lost his wife, two sons and daughter, Samuel Langhorn Clemens, popularly known as Mark Twain to the literary world, died in April, 1910

11.3 About the Age

Mark Twain (1835-1910) lived during the times when America was facing tremendous geographical, cultural, social, economic and political challenges. It was the most volatile period when America, free from the colonial baggage, was frantically searching and fighting for her national identity and position in the world. Probably, till the mid-nineteenth century, the Americans were obsessed with the composite national character. This was the dilemma of the creative artists who attempted solution to the vexed problem in their own peculiar ways. One has to take recourse to the history, as by 1800, the population of America had reached five million, of whom nearly one-fifth were slaves. It was an agrarian country comprising farmers, planters and wood-landers who settled in coastal districts or near the rivers where goods could be easily taken to by boats. Hence, there were little marks of urbanity on the life patterns of the settlers in the early years of Mark Twain.

The settlers were in search of new settlements, and this desire motivated them to move westwards. In order to settle down in new lands, people had to wage grim fight against the Red Indians. Inspired by the government's offer of fifty acres of land free to anyone who could settle down and work there, the people cut tracks through woods and forests, crossed rivers, struggled over mountains in search of good lands and better life in new settlements. Mark Twain breathed in the socio-economic life of America, absorbed its various nuances and portrayed the same in his works.

The transformation of America, from agrarian to industrial economy, was an interesting spectacle. The Industrial Revolution and its success in Europe opened new vistas of economic prosperity. With the setting up of spinning and weaving mills, the demand for cotton grew, the price of cotton started rising. Thus, the settlers in America started growing cotton in place of tobacco. As a result of the economic boom, the rich and powerful farmers forced the small settlers out of business, bought their land and the circumstances compelled them to move still farther to the west. It ushered in a complex social structure as the life of a plantation owner with a hundred slaves was very different from that of the one-horse planter who works his own farm with the help of a few slaves, hence the desire of small land holders to buy a slave gathered momentum.

It brings to the fore another important facet of American social life in which the institution of slavery and bonded labour were distinguishing features. Slaves and bonded labourers were imported from various poor countries of the world, especially Africa. The Portuguese had control of a great part of the African coast and were able to buy slaves from the African chiefs. Soon after, the English and the Dutch also joined in the slave trade. The African slaves were sold like cattle by the nigger traders in the growing cities of America.

The story institution of slavery cannot be complete without reference to the American Civil War. Slavery was a big blot on the face of America, it pricked the conscience of the people in northern states..

The Southern states of America depended on the slaves for the working of their farms. It led to a confrontation between the northern and the southern states. This confrontation led to the civil war in America. The Civil War ended in 1865 with the defeat of the southern states and abolition of the institution of slavery. Abraham Lincoln, then President of America is credited with the abolition of slavery.

America was a land of immigrants from all European countries and some Asian countries, during the nineteenth century, and also in present times. The American population was an amalgam of a large number of races and nations. Initially, there was nothing like an American nation. One is reminded of Robert Frost's utterance, "America was our before we were of the America." Gradually, the inhabitants of America forgot their identity and became one composite American nation. Christianity, which the founding fathers brought with them, became the religion of the people. The American culture, on the path of progress and industrialization, gathered roots. These were the trying times during which Mark Twain lived and wrote.

Huckleberry Finn and the 18th century American SocietyLiterature and society are intertwined. Literature cannot be produced in vacuum, and its producer, through his interactions with other existents, keeps on piling or imbibing his impressions which during the heightened process of creativity, get transformed into a literary text. Mark Twain has been rightly called the social critic of his day. Most of his works are reared on socio-religious ethos and embody the ethical and moral ideas prevailing in the mid-nineteenth century America. In his novels and short fiction Mark Twain recreates the historical, political and economic conditions through which the American nation was trekking its way. It is not surprising, therefore, that his monumental work, *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* derive their power from the fact that they are solidly rooted in the American milieu of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The note of social criticism is quite sharp in *Huckleberry Finn*.

Henry Nash Smith opines that *Huckleberry Finn* focuses on adventures of Jim and Huck in their flight towards freedom and the social satires on the two along the Mississippi River. All these elements are related to the basic theme of freedom. The central idea of Twain's philosophy was that freedom was the greatest good and that slavery was the greatest evil. In *Huckleberry Finn* it is the slavery of Negroes in the South that comes in for censure whereas elsewhere it is either the slavery of the minions of monarchs or the spiritual slavery of the church-goers.

The institution of slavery is the chief target of attack in *Huckleberry Finn*. The slaves are shown being owned like animals, bought and sold like animals and being treated with no regard to their emotions whatsoever. The first major evidence of human cruelty is shown in the case of Jim, the negro slave whose history and existence personify the cruelty of a slave society. Twain holds this ugly institution of slavery to ridicule which was supported by law. For instance, in 1850 the American Congress passed the notorious Fugitive Slave Law which protected the rights of the white owner to get the run-away nigger apprehended and punished. Whipping was common, and in some cases the slaves were even branded with hot iron. Through the weapon of irony, Mark Twain exposes the so-called naked superiority of white community.

Twain's critical lenses do not spare people's obsession with money and money-matters. The novelist delineates the Frontier society's obsession with money as it seems to be the be all and end all of their lives. For the sake of money people sacrifice whatever is dear to them. Miss Watson cannot resist the temptation of eight hundred dollar. The cut-throats on the Wreck of "Walter Scott" are ready to kill their comrade on the issue of division of booty. The Duke and the Dauphin attempt to swindle the innocent Wilkis sisters. And in the portrayal of Pap, we are shown how consideration of money can eliminate all

human and parental feelings even in a father. When Huck transfers all his money to Judge Thatcher, and runs away, the novelist condemns the cash-crazy society of his times. Just for forty dirty dollars, Duke and Dauphin sell Jim away to be a slave all his life. The portrayal of the sordid realities operating in the society, makes the narrative interesting to the readers who are unfamiliar with the sinister effects of the institution of slavery in America of those times.

As the narrative unfolds, the religion of South Western Society was Puritanism. But the people cared two hoots for the principles of religion. Of course, they attended the church, went to the Mass, but showed no regard to these values in life. Thus, there was a wide gulf between their theory and practice. Churches were used for gossips and romance, except for Sundays. Often, these were frequent haunts of pigs and other stray animals. In Shepherdson episode, one sees how these families went to the church with their guns loaded. The reader comes across a camp meeting where preaching was on, but the young ones were busy courting.

The novelist, through implications, wonders at the false sense of values among the feudal families, especially Grangerford and Shepherdson who pride themselves on their culture and high sense of honour. Owning a slave is a mark of honour and respect. They are involved in a deadly feud and take pride in killing others for the sake of honour and dignity. One witnesses the tragic consequences of such a false and hypocritical notion of honour in the reckless shooting spree of Colonel Sherburn. It is a sheer waste in the name of honour.

Apart from the indictment of mob-hysteria, reminiscent of Julius Caesar, the novelist shows humanity as petty, mean and herded into a cocoon of hatred and suspicion. The king and the duke are a true mirror of the society's predatory nature. The men of letters too do not escape the critical attention of Mark Twain. They indulge in writings about fops and dandies, after the tradition of writers of England. Twain's distrust of the romantic tradition in literature becomes quite pronounced in his denunciation of the above writers. In brief, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn provides a panoramic picture of the nineteenth century American life in the South, and offers an authentic commentary on the social structure of the society.

11.4 Plot Overview

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn opens by familiarizing us with the events of the novel that preceded it, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.* Both novels are set in the town of St. Petersburg, Missouri, which lies on the banks of the Mississippi River. At the end of *Tom Sawyer*, Huckleberry Finn, a poor boy with a drunken bum for a father, and his friend Tom Sawyer, a middle-class boy with an imagination too active for his own good, found a robber's stash of gold. As a result of his adventure, Huck gained quite a bit of money, which the bank held for him in trust. Huck was adopted by the Widow Douglas, a kind but stifling woman who lives with her sister, the self-righteous Miss Watson.

As *Huckleberry Finn* opens, Huck is not very happy with his new life of cleanliness, manners, church, and school. However, he sticks it out at the request of Tom Sawyer, who tells him that in order to take part in Tom's new "robbers' gang," Huck must stay "respectable." All is well and good until Huck's brutish, drunken father, Pap, reappears in town and demands Huck's money. The local judge, Judge Thatcher, and the Widow try to get legal custody of Huck, but another new judge in town believes in the rights of Huck's natural father and even takes the old drunk into his own home in order to reform him. This effort fails miserably, and Pap soon returns to his old ways. He hangs around town for several months, harassing his son, who in the meantime has learned to read under the guidance of the Widow. Finally,

outraged when the Widow Douglas warns him to stay away from her house, Pap kidnaps Huck and holds him in a cabin across the river from St. Petersburg.

Whenever Pap goes out, he locks Huck in the cabin, and when he returns home drunk, he beats the boy. Tired of his confinement and fearing the beatings will worsen, Huck escapes from Pap by faking his own death, killing a pig and spreading its blood all over the cabin. Hiding on Jackson's Island in the middle of the Mississippi River, Huck watches the townspeople search the river for his body. After a few days on the island, he encounters Jim, one of Miss Watson's slaves. Jim has run away from Miss Watson after hearing her talk about selling him to a plantation down the river, where he would be treated horribly and separated from his wife and children. Huck and Jim team up, despite Huck's uncertainty about the legality or morality of helping a runaway slave. While they camp out on the island, a great storm causes the Mississippi to flood. Huck and Jim spy a log raft and a house floating past the island. They capture the raft and loot the house, finding in it the body of a man who has been shot. Jim refuses to let Huck see the dead man's face.

Although the island is blissful, Huck and Jim are forced to leave after Huck learns from a woman onshore that her husband has seen smoke coming from the island and believes that Jim is hiding out there. Huck also learns that a reward has been offered for Jim's capture. Huck and Jim start downriver on the raft, intending to leave it at the mouth of the Ohio River and proceed up that river by steamboat to the free states, where slavery is prohibited. Several days' travel takes them past St. Louis, and they have a close encounter with a gang of robbers on a wrecked steamboat. They manage to escape with the robbers' loot.

During a night of thick fog, Huck and Jim miss the mouth of the Ohio and encounter a group of men looking for run away slaves. Huck has a brief moral crisis about concealing stolen "property"—Jim, after all, belongs to Miss Watson—but then lies to the men and tells them that his father is on the raft suffering from smallpox. Terrified of the disease, the men give Huck money and hurry away. Unable to backtrack to the mouth of the Ohio, Huck and Jim continue downriver. The next night, a steamboat slams into their raft, and Huck and Jim are separated.

Huck reaches the home of the kindly Grangerfords, a family of Southern aristocrats involved in a bitter and silly feud with a neighboring clan, the Shepherdsons. The elopement of a Grangerford daughter with a Shepherdson son leads to a gun battle in which many in the families are killed. While Huck is caught up in the feud, Jim shows up with the repaired raft. Huck hurries to Jim's hiding place, and they take off down the river.

A few days later, Huck and Jim rescue a pair of men who are being pursued by armed bandits. The men, clearly con artists, claim to be a displaced English duke (the duke) and the long-lost heir to the French throne (the dauphin). Powerless to tell two white adults to leave, Huck and Jim continue down the river with the pair of "aristocrats." The duke and the dauphin pull several scams in the small towns along the river. Coming into one town, they hear the story of a man, Peter Wilks, who has recently died and left much of his inheritance to his two brothers, who should be arriving from England any day. The duke and the dauphin enter the town pretending to be Wilks's brothers. Wilks's three nieces welcome the con men and quickly set about liquidating the estate. A few townspeople become skeptical, and Huck, who admires the Wilks sisters, decides to thwart the scam. He steals the dead Peter Wilks's gold from the duke and the dauphin but is forced to hide it in Wilks's coffin. Huck then reveals all to the eldest Wilks sister, Mary Jane. Huck's plan for exposing the duke and the dauphin is about to unfold when Wilks's real brothers arrive from England. The angry townspeople hold both sets of Wilks claimants, and the duke and the dauphin just

barely escape in the ensuing confusion. Fortunately for the sisters, the gold is found. Unfortunately for Huck and Jim, the duke and the dauphin make it back to the raft just as Huck and Jim are pushing off.

After a few more small scams, the duke and dauphin commit their worst crime yet: they sell Jim to a local farmer, telling him that Jim is a runaway for whom a large reward is being offered. Huck finds out where Jim is being held and resolves to free him. At the house where Jim is a prisoner, a woman greets Huck excitedly and calls him "Tom." As Huck quickly discovers, the people holding Jim are none other than Tom Sawyer's aunt and uncle, Silas and Sally Phelps. The Phelpses mistake Huck for Tom, who is due to arrive for a visit, and Huck goes along with their mistake. He intercepts Tom between the Phelps house and the steamboat dock, and Tom pretends to be his own younger brother, Sid.

Tom hatches a wild plan to free Jim, adding all sorts of unnecessary obstacles even though Jim is only lightly secured. Huck is sure Tom's plan will get them all killed, but he complies. After a seeming eternity of pointless preparation, during which the boys ransack the Phelps's house and make Aunt Sally miserable, they put the plan into action. Jim is freed, but a pursuer shoots Tom in the leg. Huck is forced to get a doctor, and Jim sacrifices his freedom to nurse Tom. All return to the Phelps's house, where Jim ends up back in chains.

When Tom wakes the next morning, he reveals that Jim has actually been a free man all along, as Miss Watson, who made a provision in her will to free Jim, died two months earlier. Tom had planned the entire escape idea all as a game and had intended to pay Jim for his troubles. Tom's Aunt Polly then shows up, identifying "Tom" and "Sid" as Huck and Tom. Jim tells Huck, who fears for his future—particularly that his father might reappear—that the body they found on the floating house off Jackson's Island had been Pap's. Aunt Sally then steps in and offers to adopt Huck, but Huck, who has had enough "sivilizing," announces his plan to set out for the West.

11.5 Major Characters

Huckleberry Finn - He is the protagonist and narrator of the novel. Huck is the thirteen-year-old son of the local drunk of St. Petersburg, Missouri, a town on the Mississippi River. Frequently forced to survive on his own wits and always a bit of an outcast, Huck is thoughtful, intelligent (though formally uneducated), and willing to come to his own conclusions about important matters, even if these conclusions contradict society's norms. Nevertheless, Huck is still a boy, and is influenced by others, particularly by his imaginative friend, Tom.

From the beginning of the novel, Twain makes it clear that Huck is a boy who comes from the lowest levels of white society. His father is a drunk and a ruffian who disappears for months. Huck himself is dirty and frequently homeless. Although the Widow Douglas attempts to "reform" Huck, he resists her attempts and maintains his independent ways. The community has failed to protect him from his father, and though the Widow finally gives Huck some of the schooling and religious training that he had missed, he has not been indoctrinated with social values in the same way a middle-class boy like Tom Sawyer has been. Huck's distance from mainstream society makes him skeptical of the world around him and the ideas it passes on to him.

Huck's instinctual distrust and his experiences as he travels down the river force him to question the things society has taught him. According to the law, Jim is Miss Watson's property, but according to Huck's sense of logic and fairness, it seems "right" to help Jim. Huck's natural intelligence and his willingness to think through a situation on its own merits lead him to some conclusions that are

correct in their context but that would shock white society. For example, Huck discovers, when he and Jim meet a group of slave-hunters, that telling a lie is sometimes the right course of action.Since Huck is a child, the world seems new to him. Everything he encounters is an occasion for thought. Because of his background, however, he does more than just apply the rules that he has been taught—he creates his own rules. Yet Huck is not some kind of independent moral genius. He must still struggle with some of the preconceptions about blacks that society has ingrained in him, and at the end of the novel, he shows himself all too willing to follow Tom Sawyer's lead. But even these failures are part of what makes Huck appealing and sympathetic. He is only a boy, after all, and therefore fallible. Imperfect as he is, Huck represents what anyone is capable of becoming: a thinking, feeling human being rather than a mere cog in the machine of society.

Tom Sawyer - He is Huck's friend, and the protagonist of *Tom Sawyer,* the novel to which *Huckleberry Finn* is the sequel. In *Huckleberry Finn*, Tom serves as a foil to Huck: imaginative, dominating, and given to wild plans taken from the plots of adventure novels, Tom is everything that Huck is not. Tom's stubborn reliance on the "authorities" of romance novels leads him to acts of incredible stupidity and startling cruelty. His rigid adherence to society's conventions aligns Tom with the "sivilizing" forces that Huck learns to see through and gradually abandons.

Tom is the same age as Huck and his best friend. Whereas Huck's birth and upbringing have left him in poverty and on the margins of society, Tom has been raised in relative comfort. As a result, his beliefs are an unfortunate combination of what he has learned from the adults around him and the fanciful notions he has gleaned from reading romance and adventure novels. Tom believes in sticking strictly to "rules," most of which have more to do with style than with morality or anyone's welfare. Tom is thus the perfect foil for Huck: his rigid adherence to rules and precepts contrasts with Huck's tendency to question authority and think for himself.

Although Tom's escapades are often funny, they also show just how disturbingly and unthinkingly cruel society can be. Tom knows all along that Miss Watson has died and that Jim is now a free man, yet he is willing to allow Jim to remain a captive while he entertains himself with fantastic escape plans. Tom's plotting tortures not only Jim, but Aunt Sally and Uncle Silas as well. In the end, although he is just a boy like Huck and is appealing in his zest for adventure and his unconscious wittiness, Tom embodies what a young, well-to-do white man is raised to become in the society of his time: self-centered with dominion over all.

Widow Douglas and Miss Watson - They are the two wealthy sisters who live together in a large house in St. Petersburg and who adopt Huck. The gaunt and severe Miss Watson is the most prominent representative of the hypocritical religious and ethical values Twain criticizes in the novel. The Widow Douglas is somewhat gentler in her beliefs and has more patience with the mischievous Huck. When Huck acts in a manner contrary to societal expectations, it is the Widow Douglas whom he fears disappointing.

Jim - He is one of Miss Watson's household slaves. Jim is superstitious and occasionally sentimental, but he is also intelligent, practical, and ultimately more of an adult than anyone else in the novel. Jim's frequent acts of selflessness, his longing for his family, and his friendship with both Huck and Tom demonstrate to Huck that humanity has nothing to do with race. Because Jim is a black man and a runaway slave, he is at the mercy of almost all the other characters in the novel and is often forced into ridiculous and degrading situations.

Jim, Huck's companion as he travels down the river, is a man of remarkable intelligence and compassion. At first glance, Jim seems to be superstitious to the point of idiocy, but a careful reading of the time that Huck and Jim spend on Jackson's Island reveals that Jim's superstitions conceal a deep knowledge of the natural world and represent an alternate form of "truth" or intelligence. Moreover, Jim has one of the few healthy, functioning families in the novel. Although he has been separated from his wife and children, he misses them terribly, and it is only the thought of a permanent separation from them that motivates his criminal act of running away from Miss Watson. On the river, Jim becomes a surrogate father, as well as a friend, to Huck. He cooks for the boy and shelters him from some of the worst horrors that they encounter, including the sight of Pap's corpse, and, for a time, the news of his father's passing.

Some readers have criticized Jim as being too passive, but it is important to remember that he remains at the mercy of every other character in this novel, including even the poor, thirteen-year-old Huck, as the letter that Huck nearly sends to Miss Watson demonstrates. Like Huck, Jim is realistic about his situation and must find ways of accomplishing his goals without incurring the wrath of those who could turn him in. In this position, he is seldom able to act boldly or speak his mind. Yet, despite these restrictions and constant fear, Jim consistently acts as a noble human being and a loyal friend. In fact, Jim could be described as the only real adult in the novel, and the only one who provides a positive, respectable example for Huck to follow.

11.6 Minor Characters

Pap – He is Huck's father, the town drunk and ne'er-do-well. Pap is a wreck when he appears at the beginning of the novel, with disgusting, ghostlike white skin and tattered clothes. The illiterate Pap disapproves of Huck's education and beats him frequently. Pap represents both the general debasement of white society and the failure of family structures in the novel.

The duke and the dauphin - They are a pair of con men whom Huck and Jim rescue as they are being run out of a river town. The older man, who appears to be about seventy, claims to be the "dauphin," the son of King Louis XVI and heir to the French throne. The younger man, who is about thirty, claims to be the usurped Duke of Bridgewater. Although Huck quickly realizes the men are frauds, he and Jim remain at their mercy, as Huck is only a child and Jim is a runaway slave. The duke and the dauphin carry out a number of increasingly disturbing swindles as they travel down the river on the raft.

Judge Thatcher - He is the local judge who shares responsibility for Huck with the Widow Douglas and is in charge of safeguarding the money that Huck and Tom found at the end of *Tom Sawyer.* When Huck discovers that Pap has returned to town, he wisely signs his fortune over to the Judge, who doesn't really accept the money, but tries to comfort Huck. Judge Thatcher has a daughter, Becky, who was Tom's girlfriend in Tom Sawyer and whom Huck calls "Bessie" in this novel.

The Grangerfords – It is the family that takes Huck in after a steamboat hits his raft, separating him from Jim. The kindhearted Grangerfords, who offer Huck a place to stay in their cheap country home, are locked in a long-standing feud with another local family, the Shepherdsons. Twain uses the two families to engage in some rollicking humor and to mock the ideas about family honor. Ultimately, the families' sensationalized feud gets many of them killed.

The Wilks family - At one point during their travels, the duke and the dauphin encounter a man who

tells them of the death of a local named Peter Wilks, who has left behind a rich estate. The man inadvertently gives the con men enough information to allow them to pretend to be Wilks's two brothers from England, who are the recipients of much of the inheritance. The duke and the dauphin's subsequent conning of the good-hearted and vulnerable Wilks sisters is the first step in the con men's increasingly cruel series of scams, which culminate in the sale of Jim.

Silas and Sally Phelps - They are Tom Sawyer's aunt and uncle, whom Huck coincidentally encounters in his search for Jim after the con men have sold him. Sally is the sister of Tom's aunt, Polly. Essentially good people, the Phelpses nevertheless hold Jim in custody and try to return him to his rightful owner. Silas and Sally are the unknowing victims of many of Tom and Huck's "preparations" as they try to free Jim. The Phelpses are the only intact and functional family in this novel, yet they are too much for Huck, who longs to escape their "sivilizing" influence.

Aunt Polly - She is Tom Sawyer's aunt and guardian and Sally Phelps's sister. Aunt Polly appears at the end of the novel and properly identifies Huck, who has pretended to be Tom, and Tom, who has pretended to be his own younger brother, Sid.

11.7 Themes

Racism and Slavery

Although Twain wrote *Huckleberry Finn* two decades after the Emancipation Proclamation and the end of the Civil War, America—and especially the South—was still struggling with racism and the after effects of slavery. By the early 1880s, Reconstruction, the plan to put the United States back together after the war and integrate freed slaves into society, had hit shaky ground, although it had not yet failed outright. As Twain worked on his novel, race relations, which seemed to be on a positive path in the years following the Civil War, once again became strained. The imposition of Jim Crow laws, designed to limit the power of blacks in the South in a variety of indirect ways, brought the beginning of a new, insidious effort to oppress. The new racism of the South, less institutionalized and monolithic, was also more difficult to combat. Slavery could be outlawed, but when white Southerners enacted racist laws or policies under a professed motive of self-defense against newly freed blacks, far fewer people, Northern or Southern, saw the act as immoral and rushed to combat it.

Although Twain wrote the novel after slavery was abolished, he set it several decades earlier, when slavery was still a fact of life. But even by Twain's time, things had not necessarily got much better for blacks in the South. In this light, we might read Twain's depiction of slavery as an allegorical representation of the condition of blacks in the United States even *after* the abolition of slavery. Just as slavery places the noble and moral Jim under the control of white society, no matter how degraded that white society may be, so too did the insidious racism that arose near the end of Reconstruction oppress black men for illogical and hypocritical reasons. In *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain, by exposing the hypocrisy of slavery, demonstrates how racism distorts the oppressors as much as it does those who are oppressed. The result is a world of moral confusion, in which seemingly "good" white people such as Miss Watson and Sally Phelps express no concern about the injustice of slavery or the cruelty of separating Jim from his family.

Intellectual and Moral Education

As a poor, uneducated orphan, Huck distrusts the morals and precepts of the society that treats him as an outcast and fails to protect him from abuse. He questions many of the teachings that he has received, especially regarding race and slavery. More than once, we see Huck choose to "go to hell"

rather than go along with the rules and follow what he has been taught. Huck bases these decisions on his experiences, his own sense of logic, and what his developing conscience tells him. On the raft, away from civilization, Huck is especially free from society's rules, able to make his own decisions without restriction. Through deep introspection, he comes to his own conclusions, unaffected by the accepted—and often hypocritical—rules and values of Southern culture. By the novel's end, Huck has learned to "read" the world around him, to distinguish good, bad, right, wrong, menace, friend, and so on. His moral development is sharply contrasted to the character of Tom Sawyer, who is influenced by adventure novels and Sunday-school teachings, which he combines to justify his outrageous and potentially harmful escapades.

The Hypocrisy of "Civilized" Society

When Huck plans to head west at the end of the novel in order to escape further "sivilizing," he is trying to avoid more than regular baths and mandatory school attendance. Throughout the novel, Twain depicts the society that surrounds Huck as little more than a collection of degraded rules and precepts that defy logic. This faulty logic appears early in the novel, when the new judge in town allows Pap to keep custody of Huck. The judge privileges Pap's "rights" to his son as his natural father over Huck's welfare. At the same time, this decision comments on a system that puts a white man's rights to his "property"—his slaves—over the welfare and freedom of a black man. In implicitly comparing the plight of slaves to the plight of Huck at the hands of Pap, Twain implies that it is impossible for a society that owns slaves to be just, no matter how "civilized" that society believes and proclaims itself to be. Again and again, Huck encounters individuals who seem good—Sally Phelps, for example—but who are prejudiced slave-owners. This shaky sense of justice that Huck repeatedly encounters lies at the heart of society's problems: terrible acts go unpunished, yet frivolous crimes, such as drunkenly shouting insults, lead to executions. Sherburn's speech to the mob that has come to lynch him accurately summarizes the view of society Twain gives in *Huckleberry Finn*: rather than maintain collective welfare, society instead is marked by cowardice, a lack of logic, and profound selfishness.

Childhood

Huck's youth is an important factor in his moral education over the course of the novel, for we sense that only a child is open-minded enough to undergo the kind of development that Huck does. Since Huck and Tom are young, their age lends a sense of play to their actions, which excuses them in certain ways and also deepens the novel's commentary on slavery and society. Ironically, Huck often knows better than the adults around him, even though he has lacked the guidance that a proper family and community should have offered him. Twain also frequently draws links between Huck's youth and Jim's status as a black man: both are vulnerable, yet Huck, because he is white, has power over Jim. And on a different level, the silliness, pure joy, and naïveté of childhood give *Huckleberry Finn* a sense of fun and humor. Though its themes are quite weighty, the novel itself feels light in tone and is an enjoyable read because of this childhood excitement that enlivens the story.

In using a child protagonist, Twain is able to imply a comparison between the powerlessness and vulnerability of a child and the powerlessness and vulnerability of a black man in pre-Civil War America. Huck and Jim frequently find themselves in the same predicaments: each is abused, each faces the threat of losing his freedom, and each is constantly at the mercy of adult white men. As we see in Huck's moral dilemmas, however, Jim is also vulnerable to Huck, who, although he occupies the lowest rung of the white social ladder, is white nonetheless. Twain also uses his child protagonist to dramatize the conflict between societal or received morality on the one hand and a different kind of morality based on intuition and

experience on the other. As a boy, Huck is a character who can develop morally, whose mind is still open and being formed, who does not take his principles and values for granted. By tracing the education and experiences of a boy, Twain shows that conclusions about right and wrong that are based on logic and experience often stand at odds with the society's rules and morals, which are often hypocritical rather than logical.

Lies and Cons

Huckleberry Finn is full of malicious lies and scams, many of them coming from the duke and the dauphin. It is clear that these con men's lies are bad, for they hurt a number of innocent people. Yet Huck himself tells a number of lies and even cons a few people, most notably the slave-hunters, to whom he makes up a story about a smallpox outbreak in order to protect Jim. As Huck realizes, it seems that telling a lie can actually be a good thing, depending on its purpose. This insight is part of Huck's learning process, as he finds that some of the rules he has been taught contradict what seems to be "right." At other points, the lines between a con, legitimate entertainment, and approved social structures like religion are fine indeed. In this light, lies and cons provide an effective way for Twain to highlight the moral ambiguity that runs through the novel.

Superstitions and Folk Beliefs

From the time Huck meets him on Jackson's Island until the end of the novel, Jim spouts a wide range of superstitions and folktales. Whereas Jim initially appears foolish to believe so unwaveringly in these kinds of signs and omens, it turns out, curiously, that many of his beliefs do indeed have some basis in reality or presage events to come. Much as we do, Huck at first dismisses most of Jim's superstitions as silly, but ultimately he comes to appreciate Jim's deep knowledge of the world. In this sense, Jim's superstition serves as an alternative to accepted social teachings and assumptions and provides a reminder that mainstream conventions are not always right.

Parodies of Popular Romance Novels

Huckleberry Finn is full of people who base their lives on romantic literary models and stereotypes of various kinds. Tom Sawyer, the most obvious example, bases his life and actions on adventure novels. The deceased Emmeline Grangerford painted weepy maidens and wrote poems about dead children in the romantic style. The Shepherdson and Grangerford families kill one another out of a bizarre, overexcited conception of family honor. These characters allow Twain a few opportunities to indulge in some fun, and indeed, the episodes that deal with this subject are among the funniest in the novel. However, there is a more substantive message beneath: that popular literature is highly stylized and therefore rarely reflects the reality of a society. Twain shows how a strict adherence to these romantic ideals is ultimately dangerous: Tom is shot, Emmeline dies, and the Shepherdsons and Grangerfords end up in a deadly clash.

11.8 Symbols

The Mississippi River

For Huck and Jim, the Mississippi River is the ultimate symbol of freedom. Alone on their raft, they do not have to answer to anyone. The river carries them toward freedom: for Jim, toward the free states; for Huck, away from his abusive father and the restrictive "sivilizing" of St. Petersburg. Much like the river itself, Huck and Jim are in flux, willing to change their attitudes about each other with little prompting. Despite their freedom, however, they soon find that they are not completely free from the evils and influences

of the towns on the river's banks. Even early on, the real world intrudes on the paradise of the raft: the river floods, bringing Huck and Jim into contact with criminals, wrecks, and stolen goods. Then, a thick fog causes them to miss the mouth of the Ohio River, which was to be their route to freedom.

As the novel progresses, then, the river becomes something other than the inherently benevolent place Huck originally thought it was. As Huck and Jim move further south, the duke and the dauphin invade the raft, and Huck and Jim must spend more time ashore. Though the river continues to offer a refuge from trouble, it often merely effects the exchange of one bad situation for another. Each escape exists in the larger context of a continual drift southward, toward the Deep South and entrenched slavery. In this transition from idyllic retreat to source of peril, the river mirrors the complicated state of the South. As Huck and Jim's journey progresses, the river, which once seemed a paradise and a source of freedom, becomes merely a short-term means of escape that nonetheless pushes Huck and Jim ever further toward danger and destruction.

At the beginning of *Huckleberry Finn*, the river is a symbol of freedom and change. Huck and Jim flow with the water and never remain in one place long enough to be pinned down by a particular set of rules. Compared to the "civilized" towns along the banks of the Mississippi, the raft on the river represents a peaceful, alternative space where Huck and Jim, free of hassles and disapproving stares, can enjoy one another's company and revel in the small pleasures of life, like smoking a pipe and watching the stars.

As the novel continues, however, the real world beyond the Mississippi's banks quickly intrudes on the calm, protected space of the river. Huck and Jim come across wrecks and threatening snags, and bounty hunters, thieves, and con artists accost them. Although the river still provides refuge when things go wrong ashore, Huck and Jim's relation to the river seems to change and become less friendly. After they miss the mouth of the Ohio River, the Mississippi ceases to carry them toward freedom. Instead, the current sweeps them toward the Deep South, which represents the ultimate threat to Jim and a dead end for Huck. Just as the Mississippi would inevitably carry Huck and Jim to New Orleans (where Miss Watson had wanted to send Jim anyway), escape from the evils inherent in humanity is never truly possible.

11.9 Let Us Sum Up

In this unit we have introduced you to the American writer Mark Twain and to one of the most celebrated novels in American literature-arguably the greatest novel in American literature- *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. As such the book is frequently taught in high school English, college literature classes, American history classes, and every other opportunity teachers can find. The justification usually cited is its commentary on the social institutions of slavery and discrimination; but no less important is the aspect of the story that demonstrates one boy's coming of age.

11.10 Review Questions

1. Lying occurs frequently in this novel. Curiously, some lies, like those Huck tells to save Jim, seem to be "good" lies, while others, like the cons of the duke and the dauphin, seem to be "bad." What is the difference? Are both "wrong"? Why does so much lying go on in *Huckleberry Finn*?

2. Describe some of the models for families that appear in the novel. What is the importance of family structures? What is their place in society? Do Huck and Jim constitute a family? What about Huck and Tom? When does society intervene in the family?

3. The revelation at the novel's end that Tom has known all along that Jim is a free man is startling. Is

Tom inexcusably cruel? Or is he just being a normal thirteen-year-old boy? Does Tom's behavior comment on society in some larger way?

4. What techniques does Twain use to create sympathy for his characters, in particular, Jim? Are these techniques effective?

5. Discuss the place of morality in *Huckleberry Finn*. In the world of the novel, where do moral values come from? The community? The family? The church? One's experiences? Which of these potential sources does Twain privilege over the others? Which does he mock, or describe disapprovingly?

6. Why might Twain have decided to set the novel in a time before the abolition of slavery, despite the fact that he published it in 1885, two decades after the end of the Civil War?

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UNIT-12

MARK TWAIN : *THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN*(II)

Structure

12.0 Objectives

In continuation of the previous unit we intend to give you a detailed and in-depth analysis of the chapters of the novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* so that you will be in a position to see for yourself how Mark Twain recreates the historical, political and economic conditions through which the American nation was trekking its way in the mid nineteenth centuryThe note of social criticism is quite sharp in this monumental work by Mark Twain.

12.1 Notice and Explanatory

The novel begins with a Notice from someone named G. G., who is identified as the Chief of Ordnance. The Notice demands that no one try to find a motive, moral, or plot in the novel, on pain of various and sundry punishments. The Notice is followed by an Explanatory note from the Author, which states that the attention to dialects in the book has been painstaking and is extremely true-to-life in mimicking the peculiar verbal tendencies of individuals along the Mississippi. It assures the reader that if he or she feels that the characters in the book are "trying to talk alike but failing," then the reader is mistaken.

The Notice and Explanatory set the tone for *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* through their mixing of humor and seriousness. In its declaration that anyone looking for motive, plot, or moral will be prosecuted, banished, or shot, the Notice establishes a sense of light comedy that pervades the rest of the novel. The Explanatory takes on a slightly different tone, still full of a general good-natured ness but also brimming with authority. In the final paragraph, Twain dares the reader to believe that he might know or understand more about the dialects of the South, and the South itself. Twain's good nature stems in part from his sense of assurance that, should anyone dare to challenge him, Twain would certainly prove victorious.

Beyond tone, the Notice and Explanatory set the stage for the themes that the novel explores later. Twain's coy statement about the lack of seriousness in *Huckleberry Finn* actually alerts us that such seriousness does in fact exist in the text. At the same time, Twain's refusal to make any straightforward claims for the seriousness of his work adds a note of irony and charm. The Explanatory note from the Author concerns the use of dialect, which Twain says has been reconstructed "painstakingly." Again, if *Huckleberry Finn* is not meant to be a "serious" novel, the claim seems strange. But it is a serious novel,

and Twain's note on dialogue speaks for the authority and experience of the author and establishes the novel's antiromantic, realistic stance. In short, the Notice and Explanatory, which at first glance appear to be disposable jokes, link the novel's sense of fun and lightheartedness with its deeper moral concerns. This coupling continues throughout *Huckleberry Finn* and remains one of its greatest triumphs.

12.2 Detailed Analysis of the Chapters

Chapter I

In the opening pages of *Huckleberry Finn,* we feel the presence of both Huck's narrative voice and Twain's voice as author. From the start, Huck speaks to us in a conversational tone that is very much his own but that also serves as a mouthpiece for Twain. When Huck mentions "Mr. Mark Twain" by name, he immediately gains an independence from his author: if he can mention his author, then in some sense he must exist on the same level that the author does. At the same time, Huck links Twain's new novel to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,* although he is careful to note that the two works are independent of one another and that we do not need to have read the previous novel to understand this one. Nevertheless, Twain does seek to take advantage of *Tom Sawyer* 's popularity by featuring the earlier novel's characters in this one.

Besides, the first paragraph also conveys Huck's deeper personality. Huck is not just a poor boy with a humorous way of speaking and thinking, he is also a thoughtful young man who is willing and eager to question the "facts" of life and facets of human personality, such as the tendency to lie. The events in *Tom Sawyer* have already established Huck as a somewhat marginal character in the town of St. Petersburg. Although he is white, he is poor and therefore out of touch with civilized society. The novelty of practices like "grumbling" over food lends Huck's observations a humorous, fresh perspective on the foibles of society. Though Huck always remains open to learning, he never accepts new ideas without thinking, and he remains untainted by the rules and assumptions of the white society in which he finds himself. Though quick to comment on the absurdity of much of the world around him, Huck is not mean-spirited. He is equally quick to tell us that though the "widow cried over me, and called me a poor lost lamb . . . she never meant no harm by it."

The first chapter begins Twain's exploration of race and society, two of the major thematic concerns in *Huckleberry Finn*. We see quickly that, in the town of St. Petersburg, owning slaves is considered normal and unremarkable—even the Widow Douglas, a pious Christian, owns slaves. The slaves depicted in the novel are "household slaves," slaves who worked on small farms and in homes in which the master owned only a few slaves. Twain implicitly contrasts this type of slavery with the more brutal form of plantation slavery, in which hundreds of slaves worked for a single master, creating greater anonymity between slave and master, which in turn led to more backbreaking labor—and, often, extreme cruelty. Some critics have accused Twain of painting too soft a picture of slavery by not writing about plantation slaves. However, by depicting the "better" version of slavery, Twain is able to make a sharper criticism of the insidious dehumanization that accompanies *all* forms of slavery: the "lucky" household slaves, just like their counterparts on the plantations, are also in danger of having their families torn apart and are never considered fully human. Twain's portrayal suggests that if the "better" slavery is this terrible, the horrors of the "worse" type must be even more awful and dehumanizing. It is important to note here that Twain uses the word "nigger," which has got *Huckleberry Finn* in trouble with many twentieth-century school boards. The word would not have been disturbing in Twain's time, however, and is sadly necessary to any novel claiming to paint a realistic portrait of the slaveholding South at the time.

Twain's portrayal of slaveholding in this first chapter also raises questions about the hypocrisy and moral vacuity of society. Throughout the novel, Huck encounters seemingly good people who happen to own slaves—an incongruity that is never easily resolved. We are not meant to think that the Widow Douglas, for example, is thoroughly evil. People like the Widow serve as foils for Huck throughout the novel, as he tries to sort out the value of civilizing influences. Huck is a kind of natural philosopher, skeptical of social doctrines like religion and willing to set forth new ideas—for example, his idea that hell might actually be a better place than the Widow Douglas's heaven. Beneath the adventure story, *Huckleberry Finn* is a tale of Huck's moral development and of what his realizations can teach us about race, slavery, Southern society, and morality.

Chapters II–III

These chapters establish Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer as foils for each other—characters whose actions and traits contrast each other in a way that gives us a better understanding of both of their characters. Twain uses Tom to satirize romantic literature and to comment on the darker side of so-called civilized society. Tom insists that his make-believe adventures be conducted "by the book." As Tom himself admits in regard to his gang's oath, he gets many of his ideas from fiction. In particular, Tom tries to emulate the romantic—that is, unrealistic, sensationalized, and sentimentalized—novels, mostly imported from Europe, that achieved enormous popularity in nineteenth-century America. Tom is identified with this romantic genre throughout the novel. Whereas Tom puts great stock in literary models, Huck is as skeptical of these as he is of religion. In both realms, Huck refuses to accept much on faith. He rejects both genies and prayers when they fail to produce the promised results. Twain makes this contrast between Tom's romanticism and Huck's skepticism to show that both points of view can prove equally misleading if taken to extremes.

Although Huck and Tom are set up as foils for one another, they still share some traits, which help to sustain their friendship throughout the novel. Perhaps most important, the two share a playful boyishness; they delight in the dirty language and pranks that the adult world condemns. Yet Huck's feelings about society and the adult world are based on his negative experiences—most notably with his abusive father—and ring with a seriousness and weight that Tom's fancies lack. We get the sense that Tom can afford to accept the nonsense of society and romantic literature, but Huck cannot. On the whole, Huck's alienation from the "civilization" of the adult world is a bit starker and sadder.

Ironically, the novel that Tom explicitly mentions as a model for his actions is Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. In his masterpiece, Cervantes satirizes romantic adventure stories as Twain does in *Huckleberry Finn*. In referencing *Don Quixote*, Twain also gives a literary tip of the hat to one of the earliest and greatest picaresque novels, which, through its naïve protagonist's crazy adventures, satirizes literature, society, and human nature in much the same way that Twain does in *Huckleberry Finn*. By means of the reference to *Don Quixote*, Twain tells us that, though he intends to write a humorous novel, *Huckleberry Finn* also fits into a longstanding tradition of novels that seek to criticize through humor, to point out absurdity through absurdity. In this chapter, for instance, Twain comments on Tom's absurdity and blind ignorance in basing his actions on a novel that is so clearly a satire. Tom, who is interested in contracts, codes of conduct, fancy language, and make-believe ideas, believes in these frilly ideas at the expense of common sense. He cares more about absurd stylistic ideals than he does about people. Tom also displays some of the hypocrisy of civilized society. For instance, he makes the members of his gang sign an oath in blood and swear not to divulge the group's secrets, but when a boy threatens to betray that promise, Tom simply offers him a bribe.

Chapters IV–V

In these chapters, Twain makes a number of comments on the society of his time and its attempts at reform. We see a number of well-meaning individuals who engage in foolish, even cruel behavior. The new judge in town refuses to give custody of Huck to Judge Thatcher and the Widow, despite Pap's history of neglect and abuse. This poorly informed decision not only makes us question the wisdom and morality of these public figures but also resonates with the plight of slaves in Southern society at the time. The new judge in town returns Huck to Pap because he privileges Pap's "rights" over Huck's welfare—just as slaves, because they were considered property, were regularly returned to their legal owners, no matter how badly these owners abused them. Twain also takes the opportunity to mock the bleeding-heart do-gooders of the temperance, or anti-alcohol, movement: the judge is clearly naïve, misguided, and blind to the larger evils around him, and the weeping and moralizing that goes on in his home is grating.

Throughout these chapters, Huck is at the center of countless failures and breakdowns in the society around him, yet he maintains his characteristic resilience. Indeed, Huck's family, the legal system, and the community all fail to protect him or to provide a set of beliefs and values that are consistent and satisfying to him. Huck's wrongful imprisonment elicits sympathy and concern on our part, even though this imprisonment does not seem to distress Huck in the least. Sadly, Huck is so used to social abuses by this point in his life that he has no reason to prefer one set of abuses over the other. Likewise, although Pap is a hideous, hateful man in nearly ever respect, Huck does not immediately abandon him when given the chance. Pap is, after all, Huck's father, and Huck is still a fairly young boy. Ultimately, Pap's kidnapping of Huck provides an opportunity for Huck to break from this society that has done him harm.

Pap, the embodiment of pure evil, is one of Twain's most memorable characters. Because we have no background information to explain his present state, his role is primarily symbolic. The deathly pallor of his skin, which is nauseating to Huck, makes Pap emblematic of whiteness. Unfortunately, Pap represents the worst of white society: he is illiterate, ignorant, violent, and profoundly racist. The mixed-race man who visits the town contrasts Pap in every way: he is a clean-cut, knowledgeable, and seemingly politically conscious professor. In establishing the contrast between Pap and the mixed-race man, Twain overturns traditional symbolism of his time and implies that whiteness, not blackness, is associated with evil. Jim's vision of Pap's two angels and Huck's two future wives extends this sense of confusion over good and bad, human and inhuman, right and wrong in Huck's world. At this point, Jim is unclear as to which will win, and even less clear about which *should* win.

Chapters VII–X

Despite Twain's disdain for the romantic, sentimentalized novels, these chapters are a tightly constructed mix of the romantic and the practical. Huck and Jim's meeting on the island begins the main story arc of the novel. Huck and Jim, both alienated from society in fundamental ways, find themselves sharing a pastoral, dreamlike setting: a safe, peaceful island where food is abundant. From this point in the novel forward, their fates are linked. Jim has had no more say in his own fate as an adult than Huck has had as a child. Both in peril, Huck and Jim have had to break with society. Freed from the hypocrisy and injustice of society, they find themselves in what seems a paradise, smoking a pipe, watching the river, and feasting on catfish and wild berries.

Two episodes in these chapters, however, remind Huck and Jim of the looming threat from outside and give us the sense that this fantasy on the island is unlikely to last. The first involves the house that floats down the river past the island. The man inside the house has clearly been murdered, and the house bears

other marks of human vices: playing cards, whiskey bottles, and obscene graffiti. Although Huck and Jim gather some useful goods from the house, it reminds them that Jackson's Island is not completely isolated from the outside world. The second incident involves Jim's rattlesnake bite, a direct result of a stupid prank Huck tries to play on Jim. As in the biblical Garden of Eden, snakes lurk on this island paradise and hurt people who behave unwisely. Once again, Huck and Jim are reminded that no location is safe for them.

These two incidents also flesh out some important aspects of the relationship between Huck and Jim. In the episode with the rattlesnake, Huck acts like a child, and Jim gets hurt. In both incidents, Jim uses his knowledge to benefit both of them but also seeks to protect Huck: he refuses to let Huck see the body in the floating house, for it is the body of Huck's father. Jim is an intelligent and caring adult who has escaped out of love for his family—and he displays this same caring aspect toward Huck here. While Huck's motives are equally sound, he is still a child and frequently behaves like one. In a sense, Jim and Huck together make up a sort of alternative family in an alternative place, apart from the society that has only harmed them up to this point.

Chapters XI–XIII

Mrs. Loftus is one of the more sincere people Huck encounters throughout the course of the novel, but her attitude toward Jim makes her goodness somewhat problematic. Mrs. Loftus is clearly a clever woman, as we see in the tests she spontaneously designs to unmask Huck. Despite her charity toward Huck, however, Mrs. Loftus and her husband are only too happy to profit from capturing Jim, and her husband plans to bring a gun to hunt Jim like an animal. Mrs. Loftus makes a clear distinction between Huck, who tells her he has run away from a mean farmer, and Jim, who has done essentially the same thing by running away from an owner who is considering selling him.

Whereas Mrs. Loftus and the rest of white society differentiate between an abused runaway slave and an abused runaway boy, Huck does not. Huck and Jim's raft becomes a sort of haven of brotherhood and equality, as both find refuge and peace from a society that has treated them poorly. The two even engage in a bit of moral philosophizing about stealing. Though their resolution to give up stealing a few items to render their other stealing less sinful seems childish, it nevertheless represents an attempt to reconcile practical and moral concerns.

The pattern of Huck's childishness getting both himself and Jim into trouble continues in these chapters, as Huck follows his boyish, Tom Sawyer-like impulses and nearly has a run-in with the robbers on the wrecked steamboat. There is no good reason why Huck and Jim should tie up to the wrecked ship, particularly at night and in a storm, but Huck is unable to resist. The two are lucky to escape, and the incident proves to be another reminder that even on the river they are not safe from the problems that plagued them at home—violence, cruelty, and powerlessness at the hands of any white adult. Huck's attempts to reconcile the situation show that he is learning, despite his initial immaturity. When Huck acts like Tom Sawyer, trouble follows, but when he acts like himself—when he seeks to interpret and react to experience in a practical manner—things generally turn out fine.

The fact that Jim sees the foolishness of many of Huck's endeavors but never restrains Huck reminds us of Jim's extremely tenuous position as an escaped slave. In a number of instances in the novel, Jim protests when Huck formulates a foolish plan, but eventually gives in to the boy. Twain never explicitly explains Jim's reasoning, but the implication is always there that Jim's caution stems from his constant fear of being caught and returned to his former owner. After all, Huck, though a child, is a free, white child who could turn in Jim at any time and collect a large reward for doing so. Although this idea seems never to

cross Huck's mind, it lurks beneath the surface of Jim and Huck's interactions and reminds us of the constant fear Jim lives with as an escaped slave.

Chapters XIV–XV

We see in these chapters that Huck, though open-minded, still largely subscribes to the Southern white conception of the world. When Jim assesses their "adventure," Huck does admit that he has acted foolishly and jeopardized Jim's safety, but he qualifies his assessment by adding that Jim is smart—for a black person. Huck also genuinely struggles with the question of whether or not to turn over Jim to the white men who ask if he is harboring any runaway slaves. In some sense, Huck still believes that turning Jim in would be the "right" thing to do, and he struggles with the idea that Miss Watson is a slave owner yet still seems to be a "good" person. Over the course of these chapters, as he spends more time with Jim, Huck is forced to question the facts that white society has taught him and that he has taken for granted.

The arguments Huck and Jim have over Huck's stories provide remarkable mini-allegories about slavery and race. When Huck tells the tale of King Solomon, who threatened to chop a baby in half, Jim argues that Solomon had so many children that he became unable to value human life properly. Huck's comments lead us to compare Jim's assessment of Solomon with whites' treatments of blacks at the time—as infinitely replaceable bodies, indistinguishable from one another. Later, Huck tells Jim that people in France don't speak English. Huck tries to convince the skeptical Jim by pointing out that cats and cows don't "talk" the same, and that, by analogy, neither should French people and American people. Jim points out that both are men and that the analogy is inappropriate. Although Jim is misinformed in a sense, he is correct in his assessment of Huck's analogy. Jim's argument provides yet another subtle reminder that, in American society at the time, not all men are treated as men. Although Jim's discussion with Huck shows that both have clever minds, we see that Jim is less imprisoned by conventional wisdom than Huck, who has grown up at least partly in mainstream white society.

We see the moral and societal importance of Huck and Jim's journey in Huck's profound moral crisis about whether he should return Jim to Miss Watson. In the viewpoint of Southern white society, Huck has effectively stolen $800—the price the slave trader has offered for Jim—from Miss Watson. However, Jim's comment that Huck is the only white man ever to keep his word to him shows that Huck has been treating Jim not as a slave but as a man. This newfound knowledge, along with Huck's guilt, keep Huck from turning Jim in. Huck realizes that he would have felt worse for doing the "right" thing and turning Jim in than he does for not turning Jim in. When Huck reaches this realization, he makes a decision to reject conventional morality in favor of what his conscience dictates. This decision represents a big step in Huck's development, as he realizes that his conscience may be a better guide than the dictates of the white society in which he has been raised.

Chapters XVII–XIX

Huck's stay at the Grangerfords represents another instance of Twain poking fun at American tastes and at the conceits of romantic literature. For Huck, who has never really had a home aside from the Widow Douglas's rather spartan house, the Grangerford house looks like a palace. Huck's admiration is genuine but naïve, for the Grangerfords and their place are somewhat absurd. In the figure of deceased Emmeline Grangerford, Twain pokes fun at Victorian literature's propensity for mourning and melancholy. Indeed, Emmeline's hilariously awful artwork and poems mock popular works of the time. The combination of overzealous bad taste and inherently sad subject matter in Emmeline's art is both bizarre and comical: as we learn, Emmeline was so enthusiastic in her artistic pursuits that she usually beat the undertaker to a new

corpse. Huck, meanwhile, feels uneasy about the macabre aspect of Emmeline's work. His attempts to accept her art and life remind us that sometimes laughter is insensitive: Emmeline and her subjects were all real people who died, after all.

The great Grangerford-Shepherdson feud is yet another conceit taken from romantic literature, specifically that literature's concern with family honor. The Grangerfords and Shepherdsons are rather like Tom Sawyer grown up and armed with weapons: motivated by a sense of style and this ridiculous notion of family honor, they actually kill each other. However comical the feud is in general, though, Buck's death is a terrible moment, and Twain's tone turns entirely serious at this point. Before fleeing, Huck pulls Buck's body from the river and cries as he covers his friend's face. Twain uses this incident to comment on all systems of belief that deny another group of people their humanity. While this section of *Huckleberry Finn* is undeniably humorous, it also demonstrates how confused Huck's world is. Like so many other people Huck meets in the novel, the Grangerfords are a mix of contradictions: although they treat Huck well, they own slaves and behave more foolishly than almost anyone else in the novel.

Jim's reemergence on the raft and the encounter with the duke and the dauphin illustrate the shifting power dynamics between blacks and whites as Huck and Jim move further down the river. Jim's use of Huck's whiteness to threaten his fellow black men shows how corrupting racism and the slave system can be. We should remember that although Jim acts maliciously, he does so to protect his own freedom, which makes it difficult to judge his actions harshly. Shortly afterward, the encounter with the duke and the dauphin reminds Huck and Jim of their relative powerlessness. Although the duke and the dauphin are criminals, they are free, adult, white men who have the power to turn in both Huck and Jim. Despite Huck's feeling that one is "mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft," the outside world and its evils remain a firmly established presence on the river. As Huck and Jim travel further, the Mississippi becomes a source of foreboding rather than freedom, a conduit toward the American "heart of darkness"—the plantations of the deep South.

Chapters XX–XXII

Although these chapters involving the duke and the dauphin appear purely comic on the surface, a dark commentary undercuts the comedy in virtually every episode. On the surface, the duke and the dauphin seem to be just two bumbling con artists, but they present an immediate threat to Huck and Jim. The two men constantly and cruelly toy with Jim's precarious status as a runaway slave and even use this fact to their own advantage when they print the fake leaflet advertising a reward for Jim's capture. Moreover, the fact that the duke and the dauphin run their first scam at a sacred event—a religious meeting—demonstrates their incredible malice. At the same time, however, it also suggests that the religious revival meeting may be as much of a scam as any of the "royal" pair's shenanigans. Continuing the pattern that we have seen throughout *Huckleberry Finn*, nearly everyone Huck and Jim encounter on the river is an unsavory character or a fake in one way or another.

Sherburn's murder of the drunk and the subsequent mob scene continue this vein of simultaneous absurdity and seriousness in the novel and contribute to the sense of moral confusion in the town. Although Sherburn's shooting of the drunk is cold-blooded, his speech to the angry mob is among the most profound meditations on human nature in *Huckleberry Finn*. Sherburn's criticisms of the cowardice and despicable behavior of his fellow citizens are accurate, and his eloquence is impressive. Furthermore, much of what he has to say about cowardice relates directly to the deplorable behavior of the people of St. Petersburg, which has put Huck and Jim in peril in the first place. All the while, however, we are aware that this

thoughtful speech comes from the mouth of a man who has just shot a defenseless drunk. Like Huck, we are confused and disoriented.

Rather than providing some relief from this world of malice and chaos, Huck's leisurely trip to the circus only complicates matters further. Coming between the religious revival and the con men's performance, the circus illustrates just how fine the line is between spiritually enriching experience, legitimate entertainment, and downright fraud. Huck's concern for the seemingly drunk horseman is an elegantly constructed ending to this set of chapters. In a world like the one Twain depicts in the novel, one can no longer distinguish between reality and fakery, doom and deliverance.

Chapters XXIII–XXV

Although the duke and the dauphin become increasingly malicious and cruel in their scams, Twain continues to portray the victims of the con men's schemes as unflatteringly as the con men themselves. The duke and the dauphin's production of The Royal Nonesuch, for example, is a complete farce, a brief, insubstantial show for which the audience is grossly overcharged. But what makes the con men's show a real success, however, is not any ingenuity on their part—they are as inept as ever—but rather the audience's own selfishness and vindictiveness. Rather than warning the other townspeople that the show was terrible, the first night's ticket holders would rather see everyone else get ripped off in the same way they did. Thus, the con men's scheme becomes even more successful because the townspeople display vindictiveness rather than selflessness. In much the same way, the cruel scheme to steal the Wilks family's inheritance succeeds only because of the stupidity and gullibility of the Wilks sisters, particularly Mary Jane. Admittedly, the grieving Wilks sisters likely are not in the best frame of mind to think rationally after their loss. Nonetheless, despite the fact that the duke and the dauphin are hilariously inept in their role-playing and fake in their accents, the only person who even begins to suspect them is Doctor Robinson—and Mary Jane dismisses his advice without a thought. But even the Doctor comes across as annoyingly self-righteous. Together, these episodes contribute to the overall sense of moral confusion in the world of *Huckleberry Finn*. Although the con men's audacity and maliciousness are sometimes shocking, Twain's portrayal of the victims is often equally unsympathetic.

Jim, meanwhile, displays an honest sensitivity that contrasts him ever more strongly with the debased white characters who surround him. Jim bares himself emotionally to Huck, expressing a poignant longing for his family and admitting his errors as a father when he tells of the time he beat his daughter when she did not deserve it. Jim's willingness to put himself in a vulnerable position and admit his failings to Huck adds a new dimension of humanity to his character. Jim's nobility becomes even more apparent when we recall that he has been willing to forgive others throughout the novel, even though he is unable to forgive himself for one honest mistake. As we see in these chapters, Jim's honesty and emotional openness have a profound effect on Huck. Having been brought up among racist white assumptions, Huck is surprised to see that ties of familial love can be as strong among blacks as among whites. Although Huck's development is still incomplete—he still qualifies his observations a bit, noting that it doesn't seem "natural" for Jim to be so attached to his family—his mind is open and he clearly views Jim more as a human and less as a slave.

Chapters XXVI–XXVIII

These chapters mark several milestones in Huck's development, as he acts on his conscience for the first time and takes concrete steps to thwart the schemes of the duke and the dauphin. Although Huck has shown an increasing maturity and sense of morality as the novel has progressed, he has been tentative in taking sides or action, frequently hedging his bets and qualifying the statements he makes. He has chosen

not to challenge or expose the duke and the dauphin even though he has been aware from the start that they are frauds. Earlier, watching as the con men scam the Wilks sisters in Chapter XXIV, Huck tells him that the sight makes him ashamed to be part of the human race. Though this strong statement is, in itself, a step for Huck, he does not act on it until now. The first concrete action Huck takes is his retrieval of the $6,000 in gold, which he places in Wilks's coffin.

Despite these developments, however, Huck still has several lessons to learn and still struggles with the conflicting messages he receives from society and from his personal experiences. Even though Huck rightly takes the money from the con men, he does not give it to the Wilks sisters directly, and he still cannot bring himself to expose the con men to the Wilkses. It is not until two chapters later that Huck, seeing Mary Jane crying in her bedroom, blurts out that the duke and the dauphin are frauds. Also, Huck seems relatively unfazed when he hears that the dauphin's plan to liquidate the Wilks's property will require the separation of a slave woman from her children. Huck confesses to Mary Jane not because he is upset about the splitting of the slave family but because he feels bad that she is upset about it. Twain implies, through Huck's struggle with the issue, that the attitudes and assumptions that enable racism and slavery in the South are deep-seated and difficult to overcome. Although Huck has made great strides, he still struggles to make sense of the confusing world around him. His predicament is understandable: after all, a world in which both seemingly good people (Miss Watson) and clearly evil people (the duke and the dauphin) are willing to perpetrate great cruelty—separating a mother from her children—is a confusing world indeed.

Although these chapters are generally serious in tone, Twain maintains his characteristic mix of absurdity, suspense, humor, and biting cynicism throughout. The funeral scene is one of Twain's brilliant comic set pieces, complete with screechy music, blubbering mourners, and an undertaker, all of which enable Huck to make wry observations about human nature while he sweats out the fate of the money he has hidden in the coffin. Then, the climactic appearance of an alternate set of Wilks brothers at the end of Chapter XXVIII sets the stage for more absurdity and confrontation. The remarkable mix of serious social commentary and entertaining suspense and humor is what Twain is perhaps best known for—and what has made *Huckleberry Finn* such an enduring work.

Chapters XXIX–XXXI

In the aftermath of the Wilks episode, the duke and the dauphin lose the last vestiges of their inept, bumbling charm and become purely menacing and dangerous figures. Although the standoff over the Wilks estate ultimately is resolved without any physical or financial harm to anyone, the depth of greed and sliminess the con men display is astonishing. Then, just when it appears the duke and the dauphin can sink no lower, the catastrophe that Twain has foreshadowed for the last few chapters materializes when Huck discovers that Jim is missing. Just as it has throughout *Huckleberry Finn*, evil follows Huck and Jim onto the raft and thwarts their best attempts to escape it.

Jim's capture significantly matures Huck, for it convinces him to break with the con men for good and leads him to a second moment of moral reckoning. Huck searches the social and religious belief systems that white society has taught him for a way out of his predicament about turning Jim in. In the end, Huck is unable to pray because he cannot truly believe in these systems, for he cares too much about Jim to deny Jim's existence and humanity. Huck's thoughts of his friendship with Jim lead him to listen to his own conscience, and, echoing his sentiments from Chapter I, Huck resolves to act justly by helping Jim and "go to hell" if necessary. Once again, Huck turns received notions upside down, as he figures that even

hell would be better than the society in which he lives. Huck then sets out on his first truly adult endeavor—setting off to free Jim at whatever moral or physical cost to himself. It is vital to note that Huck undertakes this action with the belief that it might send him to hell. Though he does not articulate this truth to himself, he trades his fate for Jim's and thereby accepts the life of a black man as equal to his own.

Chapters XXXII–XXXV

As in the early chapters of the novel, Tom Sawyer again serves as a foil to Huck in these chapters. Brash, unconcerned with others, and dependent on the "authorities" of romantic adventure novels, Tom hatches a wild plan to free Jim. Huck recognizes the foolishness and potential danger of Tom's plan and says it could get the three of them killed. It is not surprising that Tom's willingness to help free Jim confuses Huck, for Tom has always concerned himself with conforming to social expectations and preserving his own reputation. Freeing Jim would seem to be objectionable on both counts. Huck, meanwhile, though willing to trade his life and reputation for Jim, thinks of himself as a poor, worthless member of white society. Huck sees Tom's life as worth something more than that and believes that Tom has something to lose by helping to free Jim. In the end, though, we sense that Tom has no concept of the life-and-death importance of Jim's liberation but instead just views the effort simply as one big opportunity for fun and adventure.

Twain makes a scathing comment on the insidious racism of the South in the exchange between Sally and Huck about the explosion on the steamboat. When Sally asks if anyone was hurt in the explosion, Huck replies "No'm. Killed a nigger," to which Sally replies, "Well, it's lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt." It is unclear whether Huck is simply role-playing—mimicking the attitudes of an average white Southern boy in pretending to be Tom—or whether he still retains some vestiges of the racism with which he has been brought up. Sally, however, is inarguably racist in her response, saying that it's fortunate no one was hurt when she has just learned that a black man lost his life. Twain condemns this kind of automatic, offhand racism throughout the novel, but his criticism is at its most apparent here. This conversation provides yet another example of the confusing moral environment that surrounds Huck: Sally is clearly a "good" and kind woman in many traditional senses, yet she doesn't think twice about considering the loss of a black man's life no loss at all.

Chapters XXXVI–XXXIX

In these chapters, Tom, Huck, and Jim revert, in many ways, to the roles they played at the beginning of the novel. Tom once again gets caught up in his romantic ideas of valiantly rescuing Jim, which, though humorous, are frustrating when we see how long they delay Jim's escape. Tom gets so enmeshed in his imagination that he and Huck almost forget why they are going to so much trouble. Huck, for his part, reverts to the same follower status in relation to Tom that he held at the beginning of the novel. Normally the voice of reason and conscience in his dealings with Tom, Huck seems to have totally forgotten his principles and his friendship with Jim. Both Tom and Huck get so enthralled in their game that they seem to forget that Jim is a human being. To the boys, he becomes almost an object or a prop, to the extent that they even ask him in all seriousness to share his quarters with snakes and rats. Imprisoned in the shed, Jim is just as captive and powerless as he was before he originally escaped.

The return of this old dynamic between the boys and Jim clouds our view of the boys and of Huck's development in particular. Indeed, it seems in many ways that Huck, in his decision to follow Tom's plans, forgets many of the lessons he has learned with Jim on the raft. In a sense, Tom and Huck, in their manipulations of Jim, descend to the level of those who own or trade slaves. The boys' thoughtlessness

and callousness contrast with the behavior of Aunt Sally and Uncle Silas, who, though themselves slave owners, frequently visit and pray with Jim. At the same time, however, Sally and Silas plan to return Jim to a life of imprisonment and cruelty, while the boys, despite their toying with Jim, are nevertheless trying to free him. This moral confusion becomes even deeper when we see how the boys dupe and victimize Aunt Sally as much as Jim. In the end, the moral confusion evident in these characters' interaction is so great that Twain leaves us with little basis upon which to make any substantive judgment.

XL-XLIII

The ending of *Huckleberry Finn* reveals Tom to be even more callous and manipulative than we realized. The bullet in Tom's leg seems rather deserved when Tom reveals that he has known all along that Miss Watson has been dead for two months and that she freed Jim in her will. Tom's confession reveals a new depth of cruelty: he treats blacks only a little better than slaveholders do, using Jim as a plaything to indulge in a great "adventure." Tom's claim that he meant to pay Jim for his troubles is surely of little consolation to anyone, and indeed, the very idea of making up for such callousness with money is deeply insulting. However, no one ever chastises Tom for his behavior. Instead, he turns the bullet—the symbol of the fine line between fun and foolishness—into a trophy, and he proposes to Huck that they go look for more adventures among the "Injuns," another people ravaged and oppressed by whites.

At the end of the novel, Tom seems to be beyond reform, Huck opts out of society in his desire to go to Oklahoma, and the other adults are left in compromised positions. Jim is the only character who comes out of the mess looking like a respectable adult. By helping the doctor treat Tom and shielding Huck from seeing his father's corpse, Jim yet again affirms that he is a decent human being. The Phelpses, although they immediately try to make amends for their previous treatment of Jim, still own slaves. Miss Watson, although she has done the right thing by freeing Jim, sullies her good intentions by making the action a provision of her will, something to be carried out in the future—at her death—rather than immediately. Aunt Sally smothers, Aunt Polly scolds, and everyone bumbles along. In the end, it is no wonder Huck wants to avoid further "sivilizing."

Possibly the most troubling aspect of the novel's close is the realization that all has been for naught. Jim has, technically, been a free man almost the entire time. All of Huck's moral crises, all the lies he has told, all the societal conventions he has broken, have been part of a great game. In a way, the knowledge of Jim's emancipation erases the novel that has come before it. Ultimately, we are left questioning the meaning of what we have read: perhaps Twain means the novel as a reminder that life is ultimately a matter of imperfect information and ambiguous situations, and that the best one can do is to follow one's head and heart. Perhaps Twain, finishing this novel twenty years after the Civil War concluded and slaves were freed, means also to say that black Americans may be free in a technical sense, but that they remain chained by a society that refuses to acknowledge their rightful and equal standing as individuals. In a sense, perhaps Tom's mistreatment of Jim is actually a boon, for it leads the other characters in the novel to acknowledge Jim as a worthy human being. In the end, *Huckleberry Finn* moves beyond questions of slavery, to broader questions of morality and race. Unfortunately, these questions seldom have straightforward answers, and thus the ending of the novel contains as many new problems as solutions.

12.3 Let Us sum Up

Thus we see that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has proved significant not only as a novel that explores the racial and moral world of its time but also, through the controversies that continue to surround it, as an artifact of those same moral and racial tensions as they have evolved to the present day.

12.4 Review Questions

1. Discuss *Huckleberry Finn* as a critique of the institution of slavery.
2. Describe Huck's experiences with his father in the old log cabin in the forest, and recount how he managed to escape to Jackson's island.
3. Write a pen-portrait of Huck.
4. Trace the picaresque element in *Huckleberry Finn*.
5. Humour and satire in the novel.

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UNIT-13

TONI MORRISON: *THE BLUEST EYE* (I)

Structures

13.0 Objectives

The Unit intends to introduce the nobel laureate, Toni Morrison, the African-American novelist, some biographical facts and the factors that went into the making of the novelist, and acquaint the students with the distinguishing features of the African-American literature in its historical backdrop. The discussion of the textual problem in *The Bluest Eye* is followed by an inventory of significant textual problems and the bibliography of the selected works by Toni Morrison. It will acquaint the scholar with the necessary background in order to make an accurate assessment of Morrison's fiction.

13.1 Introduction

Toni Morrison was born as Chloe Anthony Wofford on February 18,1931 in Lorain, Ohio. Both her parents came from Southern families. Her maternal grandparents had moved to Lorain via Kentucky where her grandfather worked as a coal miner, while her father had come to Ohio to escape the racial violence of Georgia. As a state, Ohio embraced in microcosm, the schizophrenic nature of the Union itself in which the free states of the North and slave states of the South were brought together under one umbrella. As Morrison recalls in an interview with Claudia Tate: "Ohio is an interesting and complex state. It has both a Southern and Northern disposition .... Ohio is a curious juxtaposition of what was ideal in this country and what was base."

The way in which Morrison professes to see Ohio is not irrelevant to her work. Perhaps in her own perspective on the state lie the origins of two of the major preoccupations of the novels: the pursuit of individual advancement by black people in a white-determined nation and culture at the expense of their

black ancestry; and the reclamation of black solidarity based upon, to use her own word from *Beloved* (1987), 'rememory' of slavery and white America's continual denial of black people. Indeed, demonstrating the black critics' interest in the social context of literature, traces Morrison's own interest in class to her upbringing in Lorain. Toni Morrison does not retain any sound of her childhood name, Chloe Wofford which she had changed to Toni on the suggestion of her friends at Howard University. It could be treated as the precursor of her confrontation with the **Other** resulting in her new identity, her earlier one repressed though, nevertheless impinging on her subjectivity suspended somewhere between the two nodal points of symbolic relationship. She joined Howard University players in an effort to inscribe her newly acquired name on the sports firmament.

In 1953, Toni received a B.A in English and Minors in Classics. It was here that she had the exposure to the canonical, classical and critical tradition of western art, literature and philosophy. Overwhelmed and encouraged with her good performance at Howard, she went to Cornell University and in 1955 received an M.A with her dissertation on "Suicide in the Works of Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner." Thereafter, she got her appointment to teach English and Humanities in Texas Southern University in Houston.

As a teacher in Howard University, Toni was in for another confrontation detrimental to her earlier identity. Here she met a Jamaican architect, Harold Morrison who left an indelible imprint on her persona. Their relationship could not last for more than six years, but it wrought a momentous change in her life. Despite the presence of two sons, the strong absence of Harold Morrison vitiated her sanguinity. Her imaginative powers, however, metamorphosed her personal loss into the impersonal which she tries to recapitulate through her heterogeneous narratives. The marriage broke when the family had returned from a visit to Europe in 1964.

It appears as if Toni Morrison's encounter with Europe gave her sinister and uncanny knowledge. The same year Europe was abuzz with Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* in which Europe stood exposed in its vicious designs in the third world. Morrison must have been too much absorbed in secret messages of the subterranean knowledge that problematized herself with issues of greater importance. However, the marital split had visitation of 'circles and circles' of pain, leaving her in the bottomless pit of agony. It was only through writing that she could save herself from the swamp of sorrows. Fortunately, at that time, she was appointed Editor for L.W. Singer, a division of Random House, Syracuse, New York. The editing work coupled with writing of her first novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970) exercised a therapeutic effect, since she had started growing up in a new image of affirmation and authority. One year before her divorce, when Toni Morrison wrote a story for the writing Group she had joined, she never knew that it would develop into her first novel. Writing on her first novel was a long process because she kept revising her ideas and because she was conscious of herself as a black woman entering a field where the high ground was held by whites. Not wanting her employer to know, she was publishing with another press when the book was eventually published, her new identity emerged along with it because she changed her name and even withheld her name from the book jacket. Given the recurring concern in her work with the search for identity and with the significance of names for black people, this is probably one of the most interesting biographical details about her for the novels themselves are concerned. It highlights her conviction that black people at the level of the personal self, have the capacity to 'invent themselves' and this is a significant trope in most of her novels.

Toni Morrison's efficiency and competence won her a position of Senior Editor Random House, New York in 1968. As an in-charge of black literature, she edited *The Black Book* (1974), a

compendium of news clippings and advertisements, chronicling the life of African people in the United States from slavery to the Civils Rights Movement. She published many forgotten African-American writers like Gayl Jones, Toni Cade Bambara, Angela Davis, Mohammad Ali, Ivan Van, Sertima, Andrew Young, Henry Dumas and John McCluskey.

After her three novels *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973) and *Song of Solomon*(1978), Morrison got "Main Selection of Book-of-the-Month-Club" award. The success of *Sula* earned Morrison an appointment as Lecturer at Yale University, and *Song of Solomon* won her the National Book Critics Circle award. She was also named the distinguished writer of 1978 by the American Academy of Arts and Letters and was appointed by President Carter to the National Councils on the Arts. In 1984, with the publication of *Tar Baby* more honours came her way. A journey now from publishing to teaching started with her acceptance of the Albert Schweitzer Professorship of the Humanities at the State University of New York at Albany .

Beloved (1988), her fifth novel shot her into fame with the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, Robert F.Kennedy Book Award and the Melcher Book Award from the Unitarian Universalist Association. In 1989, she accepted Robert Goheen Professorship at Princeton University and won the Modern Language Association of America's Commonwealth Award in Literature. In 1990, she was honoured with the Chianti Ruffino Antico Fattore International Award in Literature. In 1992, *Jazz*, her sixth novel was published. *Paradise* (1997) her seventh novel, is the first that Morrison wrote after getting Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. She was the first black person and only the eighth woman to receive the recognition. In its statement the Swedish Academy praised her as one "who in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of American reality."

13.2 Prelude to African-American Literature

African-American literature is literature written by, about, and sometimes specifically for African-Americans. The genre began during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with writers such as poet Phillis Wheatley and Orator Frederick Douglass, reached an early high point with the Harlem Renaissance. The writings by Americans of African ancestry, mirror the dilemmas and responses of the creative imagination to the Negro's social experience in America. From the early folk tradition based mainly upon Southern rural material to the tradition of racial protest, the African-American novel has indeed come of age in its portrayal of the absurdities and terrors of the American and twentieth century life, and also depiction of the bitter truths about Negroes, that white America still needs to know. A cursory glance at the breadth of African-American literature reveals two facts:

First, African-American experiences have varied widely from the point that Africans were forcibly brought to the America: second, these experiences are bound by the eternal desires of African-Americans to continue surviving and thriving in America. This desire stems primarily from the long and extremely difficult period of indentured servitude and chattel slavery, the systems under which most African-Americans lived and struggled until the abolition of slavery in the U.S in 1865 after the Civil War.

Beginning with the nineteenth century slave narratives (1830-1861), the African-American text established itself as a medium of propaganda. A substantial portion of African-American folklore not only contains dominant themes found throughout African-American literature but in every bit as politically, socially and culturally important as any other literary form. The popularity of these narratives was based more upon Americans' insatiable desire for Cooper like, western tales of long and perilous journeys than upon genuine abolitionist sympathies. Thus, from its inception, the African-American text developed

unwittingly as a literary institution that generated the values of the dominant culture. Thousands of slave narratives were published, ranging from short anecdotes to long, formal autobiographies, a few authors had an indelible impact upon American politics. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* is almost universally hailed as one of the most powerful and well crafted of the slave narratives, as is Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. The antebellum slave narratives' primary purposes were to expose the truths and horrors of American slavery in order to speed along its abolition, whereas postbellum narratives such as Washington's *Up from Slavery* were indeed to posit economic and social programs for the formerly enslaved and their descendants.

African-American folklore yields further insights into African-American thought in as much as folk culture is an integral base of African-American culture. Folklore serves numerous purposes, but its primary uses were and are for subtly socializing its audience and for criticizing and easing the personal or social tensions that slavery and racism engender. The different versions of the "Br'er Rabbit" tales provide ironic insights into American historical events and period, life styles that only folklore can provide. Neither fiction nor poetry, was ignored during slavery. Phillis Wheatley is generally considered one of the first important American poets. Though Wheatley's contemporaries, including Thomas Jefferson, criticized her verses as being derivative and overtly sentimental, they were also a beacon and foundation for burgeoning early American literary aspirations, in as much as she achieved national and international recognition despite the predominant biases against the fact of the ingenuity of the black people in general. Novelists and short story writers as William Wells Brown, Harriet Wilson, Victor Sejour and Francis E.W.Harper, were noted pioneers of prose fiction. Most significant of this group are Brown, the author of *Clotell*, published in England, and the first novel written by an African-American, centered mainly on the image of the tragic mulatto.

The mulatto, a product of a black slave mother and a white slave master, denied the long-time philosophical concept that blacks were subhuman. Barbara Christian in her work, *Black Feminist Criticism* accepted and accommodated, the mulatto novels by misreading them: "The existence of the mulatto, who combined the physical characteristics of both races, denied their claims that blacks were not human, while allowing them the argument that they were lifting up the race by lightening it." She goes on to say, "Woman in white culture is not as powerful as man, so to pose the existence of a mulatto slave man who embodies the qualities of the master is so great a threat, so dangerous an idea, even in fiction, that it is seldom tried."

Antebellum works were the natural forebears of the literary tradition that emerged during Reconstruction and subsequent years. The 1880's and 1890's witnessed the rise of Charles W. Chesnutt, whose highly successful "Conjure Woman" stories blended the conventions of the "local color" genre. Chesnutt's contemporary, Paul Laurence Dunbar, is considered the most significant poet in the African-American tradition after Wheatley and before the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's and 1930's. His novelistic output *Sport of the Gods* deals with the problem of black migration from the South to the North.

James Weldon Johnson's remarkable *The Autobiography of an Ex- Coloured Man*, published anonymously in 1913, deals directly with the problems of racial classification, racism and intraracial politics that Chestnutt attempted to delineate with limited success in his novels. It had a deep influence upon younger writers of later Harlem Renaissance. The era's most prominent political voices were Booker T. Washington, founder and president of Tuskegee Institute in Albama and one of the most powerful African leaders ever, W.E.B. DuBois, the "father of sociology" and the most prolific African-American activist, essayist, and scholar of the twentieth century; and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, an investigative journalist and

activist.

The Harlem Renaissance from 1920 to 1940 brought new attention to African-American literature. While Harlem Renaissance, based in the African-American community in Harlem in New York City, existed as a larger flowering of social thought and culture—with numerous Black artists, musicians, and others producing classic works in fields from jazz to theatre—the renaissance is perhaps best known for the literature that came out of it. Alain Locke's literary and critical anthology. *The New Negro* (1925) was one of the first Harlem Renaissance texts to attempt to navigate the complicated terrain of African-American and Harlem's location upon its map. The most famous writer of the renaissance is poet Langston Hughes, wrote in 1922, poetry collection *The Book of American Negro Poetry*. Another famous writer of the renaissance is novelist Zora Neale Hurston, author of the classic novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Because of Hurston's gender and the fact that her work was not seen as politically active—her writings fell into obscurity for decades. Hurston's work was rediscovered in the 1970's in a famous essay by Alice Walker, who found in Hurston a role model for all female African-American writers.

Other writers of this period include Jean Toomer who wrote *Cane*, a famous collection of stories, poems, and sketches about rural and urban black life, and Dorothy West, author of the novel *The Living is Easy*, which examined the life of an Upper-class black family. Another popular renaissance writer is Countee Cullen, who described everyday Black life in his poems. Cullen's books include the poetry collection *Color* (1925), *Copper Sun* (1927) and *The Ballad of the Brown Girl* (1927). With the renaissance, African-American writings along with Black art and music such as Jazz, began to be absorbed into mainstream American culture.

13.3 Toni Morrison: A Committed Writer

Race has always mattered a lot in Morriaon's fiction. In six previous novels, including "*Beloved*", "*Song of Solomon*" and "*Jazz*" she has focused on the particular joys and sorrows in black American women's lives. As both a writer and editor- Morrison was at Random House for 18 years. She has made it her mission of get African-American voices into American literature.

Like fellow Noble winner Gabriel Garcia Marquez, she can recount the most atrocious tale and give horror a charming veneer. She grew up as Chole Anthony Wofford, in the rust-belt town of Lorgin, Ohio. Her father, George, was a ship welder; her mother, Ramah, a homemaker. At Howard University, where she did undergraduate work in English, Chloe Anthony became known as Toni. When her marriage ended in 1964, Morrison moved to Syracuse and then to New York with her two sons, Harold Ford, and Slade. She supported the family as a book editor.

Evenings, after putting her children to bed, she worked on a novel about a sad black adolescent who dreams of changing the color of her eyes. *The Bluest Eye* was published in 1970, inspiring a whole generation of African-American women to tell their own stories- women like Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor and Toni Cade Bambara. She felt she represented a whole world of women who either were silenced or who had never received the imprimature of the established literary world.

The authors that influenced her when she began writing were, first James Baldwin who could say something in a phrase that clarified all sorts of conflicting feelings. Before Baldwin she got titillated by fiction through reading the African novelists men and women- Chinua Achebe, Camara Laye. White writers had always taken white centrality for granted. They inhabited their world in a central position and everything nonwhite was other. These African writers took their blackness as central and the whites were

the other.

When she began, there was just one thing that she wanted to write about, which was the true devastation of racism on the most vulnerable, the most helpless unit in the society- a black female and a child. She wanted to write about what it was like to be the subject of racism.

13.4 Introduction To *The Bluest Eye*

The Bluest Eye depicts the tragic life of a young black girl, Pecola Breedlove, who wants nothing more than to be loved by her family and her schoolmates. She surmises that the reason she is despised and ridiculed is that she is black and (actually, her skin is a lot darker than most other black people, which is the main reason that she gets ridiculed), therefore, ugly. Consequently, Pecola sublimates her desire to be loved into a desire to have blue eyes and blond hair; in other words, to basically look like Shirley Temple, who Pecola thinks is adored by all. Pecola, soon after entering young womanhood, is raped and impregnated by her father, Cholly. Her mother, Pauline finds haven, hope, life and meaning as a servant to the white, blond, blue-eyed, clean, rich family to which she dedicates her love and her respect for an orderly life that poverty does not afford. Unable to endure the brutality toward her frail self-image, Pecola goes quietly insane and withdraws into a fantasy world in which she is the most beloved little girl because she ends up having the bluest eyes of all.

Morrison's argument is how influential society can be on an individual and how strongly its ideas and views are impressed upon that individual. The ideas and views that she speaks of mostly pertain to beauty and what makes an individual beautiful. This idea of beauty can turn someone's life upside down and in the end lead him/her to madness.

Throughout the novel, the reader mostly sees Pecola as others see her. People see her as an ugly child and this one label is the most significant aspect of her life. Pecola also sees herself as others have seen her, and for this reason thinks of herself as being ugly. "It is the overriding factor that pushes her fantasy of blue eyes from a black girl's wish to have things white to a neurotic fantasy to make things right." The implication is that Pecola, like so many other African-Americans, never had a chance to grow and succeed because she lived in a society that was inherently racist, and would not nurture her.

Claudia narrates the story of her friend, Pecola Breedlove in the backdrop of Cleveland suburb of Lorain in 1941, overshadowed by four seasonal divisions of the book. From her, the narratives branch out to assorted portraits and events throughout the black community of Lorain, Ohio, with Pecola whose story this eventually is, too often playing a secondary role until Morrison zeroes in on her for the ending.

13.4.1 Plot Summary

Claudia MacTeer recounts the events of the year that lead up to her best friend's, Pecola Breedlove's, rape and the death of her baby. The year is 1941, and Claudia remembers that no marigolds bloomed that year. She thought at the time that it was because of Pecola's rape by her father, Cholly Breedlove, that no marigolds bloomed.

Her memories go back to the fall of 1940 (one year before the marigolds did not bloom). Claudia and her older sister, Frieda, live in a home that takes in borders. Mr Henry moves in and flatters the young girls by telling them they look like Ginger Rogers and Greta Garbo. Soon after that, a young girl named Pecola moves in with them, as ordered by the county. She will live there until the county can find a better home for her, as her father, Cholly, burnt down her old home. Pecola and the two girls become friends and

go through many experiences together, including Pecola getting her first period.

Pecola's family background is then described. Her parents, Pauline and Cholly Breedlove, have a bad marriage. Her mother is always working hard and nagging Cholly, while Cholly is always coming home drunk and beating Pauline. They yell and fight, and Pecola and her brother, Sammy, each look for an escape in their own ways. Sammy will frequently run away to get away from his family. Pecola meanwhile, prays that her eyes will turn into a beautiful blue color. She thinks that if her eyes were blue, things would be different - they would be pretty, and more than that, she would be pretty. Pecola becomes obsessed in her quest for blue eyes.

Winter arrives and Claudia tells of a new girl, named Maureen Peal, who comes to their school. Maureen is revered for her "white" looks. She has long hair, green eyes, light skin, and nice clothes. She is very popular with teachers and other classmates. However, Claudia is disgusted with her. Claudia is very turned off from the part of her culture that seems to favor "white" things, or things that resemble white people. Pecola, on the other hand, is obsessed with white ways, and wants to look white herself. She wishes she had blonde hair and blue eyes, and is frequently found admiring Shirley Temple's picture on the cups in Claudia's house.

The next section describes Geraldine, her son Junior, and their blue-eyed black cat. Junior has Pecola come over one day. He meanly throws the cat on Pecola and it scratches her. Pecola goes to leave Junior's house, but he does not let her. The cat rubs against her leg and she is taken with its beautiful blue eyes. Junior then takes the cat and starts swinging it around. Pecola goes to save the cat by grabbing Junior, but Junior throws the cat and it lands against the window. Geraldine walks in and Junior blames the cat's death on poor Pecola.

Spring arrives and Claudia tells of how Mr Henry touched Frieda's breasts and then was beaten by their father. The two girls go to visit Pecola in her new house, a downstairs apartment. Above, there are three prostitutes, Marie, China, and Poland, whom Pecola often visits and talks with.

Pauline Breedlove's younger years are described. It explains how she would often go to the movies, and because of this eventually became fascinated with Hollywood ideals of beauty. She saw famous movie stars like Jean Harlow as true representations of beauty, and anything straying from that was not deemed beautiful. She even thought her own daughter, Pecola, was ugly. This is why Pauline treated the daughter of the people she worked for, the Fishers, like she was her own daughter. She had blonde curls and blue eyes, and Pauline became absorbed with their white lifestyle. It was the closest she could get to having it herself.

Cholly Breedlove's background is then explained. He is abandoned by his mother and father and is raised by his great Aunt Jimmy, who later dies. Cholly has his first sexual experience with Darlene. They are caught in the woods by two white men and Cholly is humiliated. He thinks Darlene might be pregnant so he runs away to Macon, Georgia to try and find his real father. He finds him, but discovers that his father is a drunk and a gambler who wants nothing to do with Cholly. Cholly runs to Kentucky where he meets and marries Pauline. They eventually have two children, Sammy and Pecola.

The rape of Pecola by her father is then described. Cholly comes home drunk one afternoon and sees Pecola in the kitchen washing dishes. She reminds him for a moment of his wife, Pauline, and in a fit of confusion and love, he rapes his daughter. He leaves her on the kitchen floor feeling ashamed and alone.

The character of Elihue Micah Whitcomb (Soaphead Church) is introduced. He is a psychic

healer of sorts, who hates people. He comes from a racially mixed family; he is part white and part Chinese, which accounts for his attitude of superiority over others. Pecola visits him one day, and asks him to make her wish come true of having blue eyes. He tricks her into poisoning an old, sick dog that he hates. He tells Pecola that if the dog behaves strangely, then that was a sign from God that her eyes would turn blue the next day. After Pecola feeds the dog the strange meat (which had poison on it), she sees that the dog chokes, falls down and dies. Horrified, she runs out of the house.

Summer comes and Claudia tells of how she and Frieda learned from rumors and gossip that Pecola was pregnant by her father. Claudia feels so badly for Pecola that she decides to not sell the marigold seeds she was planning on selling for money for a bicycle. Instead, she and Frieda bury the seeds and say that if the marigolds bloom, then everything would be fine. And if not, then things would be bad.

Pecola is left to talk to her only friend, an imaginary friend about the new blue eyes that she thinks she now has. She is only concerned that they are the bluest eyes in the world. She has driven herself into a state of madness over these blue eyes, and she is all alone. Claudia says that she saw Pecola after the baby was born and then died. Pecola walks up and down the street flapping her arms, as if she was a bird that could not fly. Pauline still works for white folks, Sammy ran away, and Cholly died in a workhouse. Claudia finally says that the marigolds did not bloom because some soil is just not meant for certain flowers.

13.4.2 Characters in the Novel

Pecola Breedlove- The protagonist of the novel, black girl who believes she is ugly because she and her community base their ideals of beauty on whiteness. The title *The Bluest Eye* is based on Pecola's fervent wishes for beautiful blue eyes. She is rarely developed during the story, which is purposely done to underscore the actions of the other characters. Her insanity at the end of the novel is her only way to escape the worlds where she cannot be beautiful and to get the blue eyes she desires from the beginning of the novel. Pecola is the protagonist of *The Bluest Eye*, but despite this central role she is passive and remains a mysterious character. Morrison explains in her novel's afterword that she purposely tells Pecola's story from other points of view to keep Pecola's dignity and, to some extent, her mystery intact. She wishes to prevent us from labeling Pecola or prematurely believing that we understand her. Pecola is a fragile and delicate child when the novel begins, and by the novel's close, she has been almost completely destroyed by violence. At the beginning of the novel, two desires form the basis of her emotional life: first, she wants to learn how to get people to love her; second, when forced to witness her parents' brutal fights, she simply wants to disappear. Neither wish is granted, and Pecola is forced further and further into her fantasy world, which is her only defense against the pain of her existence. She believes that being granted the blue eyes that she wishes for would change both how others see her and what she is forced to see. At the novel's end, she delusively believes that her wish has been granted, but only at the cost of her sanity. Pecola's fate is a fate worse than death because she is not allowed any release from her world—she simply moves to "the edge of town, where you can see her even now."

Pecola is also a symbol of the black community's self-hatred and belief in its own ugliness. Others in the community, including her mother, father, and Geraldine, act out their own self-hatred by expressing hatred toward her. At the end of the novel, we are told that Pecola has been a scapegoat for the entire community. Her ugliness has made them feel beautiful, her suffering has made them

feel comparatively lucky, and her silence has given them the opportunity for speaking. But because she continues to live after she has lost her mind, Pecola's aimless wandering at the edge of town haunts the community, reminding them of the ugliness and hatred that they have tried to repress. She becomes a reminder of human cruelty and an emblem of human suffering.

Cholly Breedlove- Pecola's abusive father, an alcoholic man who rapes his daughter at the end of the novel. Rejected by his father and discarded by his mother as a fore day old baby, Cholly was raised by his Great Aunt Jimmy. After she dies, Cholly runs away and pursues the life of a free man, yet he is never able to escape his painful past, nor can he live with the mistake of his present. Tragically, he rapes his daughter in a gesture of mangled with affection. He realizes he loves her, but the only way he can express it is to rape her. By all rights, we should hate Cholly Breedlove, given that he rapes his daughter. But Morrison explains in her afterword that she did not want to dehumanize her characters, even those who dehumanize one another, and she succeeds in making Cholly a sympathetic figure. He has experienced genuine suffering, having been abandoned in a junk heap as a baby and having suffered humiliation at the hands of white men. He is also capable of pleasure and even joy, in the experience of eating a watermelon or touching a girl for the first time. He is capable of violence, but he is also vulnerable, as when two white men violate him by forcing him to perform sexually for their amusement and when he defecates in his pants after encountering his father. Cholly represents a negative form of freedom. He is not free to love and be loved or to enjoy full dignity, but he is free to have sex and fight and even kill; he is free to be indifferent to death. He falls apart when this freedom becomes a complete lack of interest in life, and he reaches for his daughter to remind himself that he is alive.

Pauline Breedlove- Pecola's mother Mrs Breedlove is married to Cholly and lives the selfrighteous life of a martyr, enduring her drunk husband and raising her two awkward children as best she can. Mrs Breedlove is a bit of an outcast herself with her shriveled foot and Southern background. Mrs Breedlove lives the life of a lonely and isolated character who escapes into a world of dreams, hopes and fantasy that turns into the motion pictures she enjoys viewing. Like Cholly, Pauline inflicts a great deal of pain on her daughter but Morrison nevertheless renders her sympathetically. She experiences more subtle forms of humiliation than Cholly does—her lame foot convinces her that she is doomed to isolation, and the snobbery of the city women in Lorain condemns her to loneliness. In this state, she is especially vulnerable to the messages conveyed by white culture—that white beauty and possessions are the way to happiness. Once, at the movies, she fixes her hair like the white sex symbol Jean Harlow and loses her tooth while eating candy. Though her fantasy of being like Harlow is a failure, Pauline finds another fantasy world—the white household for which she cares. This fantasy world is more practical than her imitation of Hollywood actresses and is more socially sanctioned than the madness of Pecola's fantasy world, but it is just as effective in separating her from the people—her family—she should love. In a sense, Pauline's existence is just as haunted and delusional as her daughter's.

Sam Breedlove- Pecols's elder brother. Sammy is Cholly and Mrs Breedlove's only son. Sam's part in this novel is relatively low key. Like his sister Pecola, he is affected by the disharmony in their home and deals with his anger by running away from home.

Claudia Macteer- Much of the novel is told from the perspective of Claudia. She is primary narrator in the book. Claudia is Pecola's friend and the younger sister of Frieda MacTeer. The MacTeer family serves as a foil for the Breedloves, and although both families are poor, Mr and Mrs MacTeer

are strict but loving parents towards their children- a sharp contrast to the dysfunctional home of the Breedloves. Claudia narrates parts of *The Bluest Eye*, sometimes from a child's perspective and sometimes from the perspective of an adult looking back. Like Pecola, Claudia suffers from racist beauty standards and material insecurity, but she has a loving and stable family, which makes all the difference for her. Whereas Pecola is passive when she is abused, Claudia is a fighter. When Claudia is given a white doll she does not want, she dissects and destroys it. When she finds a group of boys harassing Pecola, she attacks them. When she learns that Pecola is pregnant, she and her sister come up with a plan to save Pecola's baby from the community's rejection. Claudia explains that she is brave because she has not yet learned her limitations—most important, she has not learned the self-hatred that plagues so many adults in the community.

Claudia is a valuable guide to the events that unfold in Lorain because her life is stable enough to permit her to see clearly. Her vision is not blurred by the pain that eventually drives Pecola into madness. Her presence in the novel reminds us that most black families are not like Pecola's; most black families pull together in the face of hardship instead of fall apart. Claudia's perspective is also valuable because it melds the child's and the adult's points of view. Her childish viewpoint makes her uniquely qualified to register what Pecola experiences, but her adult viewpoint can correct the childish one when it is incomplete. She is a messenger of suffering but also of hope.

Frieda MacTeer- Claudia's elder sister and close companion. The two MacTerr girls are often seen together and while most of the story is told through Claudia's eyes, her sister Frieda plays a large role in the novel.

Henry Washington- a man who comes to live with the MacTeer family and is subsequently thrown out by Claudia's father when he inappropriately touches Frieda.

Soaphead Church- A pedophile and mystic fortune teller who grants Pecola her wish for blue eyes. The character is somewhat based on Morrison's Jamaican ex-husband.

Great Aunt Jimmy-Cholly's aunt who takes into raising him after his parents abandon him. She dies when he is a young boy.

Rosemary Villanucci: Claudia and Frieda's white next-door neighbor. She lives above her father's café and has many things, including arrogance, good food, a nice car, and a sense of ownership that make Claudia and Frieda jealous.

Mrs MacTeer: Mother of Claudia and Frieda. She is a strong woman who sometimes comes off as cold, but she loves her children dearly, and they know it. She works hard to keep their house nice. She hates American ideals of beauty and tries to teach her children that they have to have self-respect and self-worth.

Della Jones: Mr Henry's former landlady. Her husband supposedly ran off with a woman named Peggy, because Della was too clean for him. After having suffered a stroke, Della seems a bit crazy and Mr Henry looks elsewhere to live.

Peggy: A woman from Elyria. She is the woman whom Della Jones' husband supposedly ran off with.

Old Slack Bessie: Peggy's mother.

Hattie: Della Jones' sister. She is often made fun of, as she frequently grins absent-mindedly.

Aunt Julia: Della Jones' aunt. She is often made fun of for walking up and down the streets talking to herself.

Mr Yacobowski: The owner of the vegetable and meat store Pecola goes to for candy. She buys Mary Janes there, and realizes that Mr Yacobowski does not even want to touch her hand when she reaches out to give him the money for the candy. Pecola thinks he dislikes her because she is black and ugly.

China, Poland, and Miss Marie: The three black prostitutes that live in the apartment above the Breedloves. Pecola often goes up there and talks to these women. They adore Pecola and make her feel comfortable.

Dewey Prince: Marie's ex-boyfriend. She ran away with him when she was younger and she tells Pecola all about him. From this, Pecola wonders about love and what it must feel like.

Maureen Peal: New girl in school, she is a light-skinned black girl with long brown hair in two braids and dark green eyes. Classmates and teachers admire her, as her features are lighter than the average black person's. Claudia and Frieda are very jealous of her beauty, wealth, and charm. They even go so far as to search for and point out flaws that Maureen has to make her look bad, and make them feel good.

Bay Boy, Woodrow Cain, Buddy Wilson, and Junie Bug: Young black school children that torment Pecola by calling her names and harassing her. They are ashamed of their own blackness, and thus take it out on Pecola, whom they see as ugly as themselves.

Geraldine: A socially conscious middle-class black. She is concerned only with white things, and does everything possible to disconnect herself from her African roots. She mistreats her son, Louis Junior, as she prefers to give love and affection to her black cat with blue eyes.

Louis Junior: Son of Geraldine. He is neglected by his mother, who shows affection only to her blue-eyed black cat. Louis Junior is strongly affected by this neglect and takes it out on others, specifically Pecola.

The Fishers: The well-to-do white family that Pauline Breedlove works for down by Lake Shore Park. She is their maid, and she idolizes everything they have and do, including their perfect little daughter. Pauline even shows their daughter more affection than her own daughter, Pecola.

Chicken and Pie: Pauline Breedlove's two younger twin brothers. She took care of them while growing up, as their mother and father both worked.

Samson Fuller: Cholly's birth father. He was never around, even when Cholly was born.

Blue Jack: Older black man whom Cholly meets at one of his first jobs. They become great friends, and Blue even becomes a sort of father figure to Cholly. Cholly loves and respects Blue, and enjoys listening to Blue tell stories.

M'Dear: An older woman who lived in shack near the woods, near Cholly's house, while growing up with Aunt Jimmy. M'Dear was a midwife and was known for her knowledge of herbal medicine. She was called in to diagnose Aunt Jimmy when she became sick.

Jake: Cholly's fifteen-year old cousin. Cholly meets Jake for the first time at Aunt Jimmy's funeral. They fool around together and meet girls.

Darlene: Cholly's first girlfriend and sexual partner. Their first sexual experience is tarnished when they are caught having sex in the woods by two white men.

13.4.3 Pecola's Search for Identity

With the mass exodus of the blacks from the agrarian South to the industrialized North, race riots, limited housing resulting in slum housing, and restricted job opportunities were only a few of the many hardships that the African-American people had to face at this time. Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* takes place during this time period. One of the main themes in the novel is the "quest for individual identity." This theme is present throughout the novel and evident in many of the characters. Pecola Breedlove, Cholly Breedlove, and Pauline Breedlove are all embodiments of this quest for identity. We will focus only on Pecola, the protagonist of the novel.

Through her portrayal of Pecola, Morrison tries "to show a little girl as a total and complete victim of whatever was around her." She is a little black girl with low self esteem. The world has led her to believe that she is ugly and that the epitome of "beautiful" requires blue eyes. Therefore, every night she prays that she will wake up with blue eyes. Brought up as a poor unwanted girl, Pecola desires the acceptance and love of society. The image of "Shirley Temple" surrounds her. She harbours the notion that if she is beautiful, people would finally love and accept her, instead of despising and ridiculing her for her ugliness. A pair of blue eyes becomes an obsession with her. An incident in the novel centres on the insensitivity of the white folks toward the coloured persons. Pecola has three pennies in her shoe which she has been saving to buy Mary Janes from the store. The white owner ignores her presence because she is **invisible** to him, as he busies himself attending to other white girls. The total absence of human recognition is not new to her. She has seen it lurking in the eyes of all white people. So, the distaste must be for her, her blackness. This is what torments her as her human dignity is undermined because of racial prejudice.

As a result of the indifference of her teachers and schoolmates and the whites in general, she suffers from a sense of isolation. She has to sit all alone on the desk while her classmates shared seats with one another. Her teachers treat her this way. They do not glance at her, and call on her only when the situation warrants. In the racially segregated school, Pecola's pitiable predicament gets into sharp focus.

Without eliciting any loving response either from her rapist father and her indifferent mother, the little girl in Pecola desperately seeks love, and her search for identity is defined by her everlasting desire to be loved. Her purpose in life is to be beautiful and as a result of that to be loved. But her family, community and the white society make it impossible for her to be ever sanely content. Pecola finds herself only by going insane. Although Pecola is not accepted by society for reasons she does not understand, she puts her exclusion from society into terms she can comprehend. In fact, society influences her identity.

13.4.4 Pecola Breedlove: A Traumatized Child

Morrison addresses white American racial dominance in the 1930s. She is concerned with the relation between social power and individual psychology and tries to give voice to those who are traumatized by oppressive social and familial forces. The novel introduces a new element into colonialist discourse: it features as protagonist young subaltern girl not previously represented in the Western literary tradition. For the writer, traumatized children provide not merely poignant metaphors but also concrete examples of the neglect, exploitation, disempowerment and disavowal of certain communities and even entire cultures. We shall see how the writer challenges the subordination of women and children by testifying to their experience

and by engaging their readers in that experience.

Trauma is an event in an individual's life which is defined by its intensity, by the subject's incapacity to respond adequately to it, and by the upheaval and long-lasting effects that it brings about in the psychical organization. Prolonged exposure to threats of violence and ongoing abuse are particularly characteristic of oppressed groups and constitute a pernicious form of trauma, because the constant stress and humiliation are associated with being a person of low socioeconomic status

In *The Bluest Eye* several of Morrison's characters experience the gradual psychic erosion representing the weakening of whole communities living under an oppressive white cultural dominance. Morrison depicts an imposing white culture whose values are enforced through a variety of means (violent, economic, psychological, etc.). *The Bluest Eye* explores how the traumatic experience of social powerlessness and devalued racial identity prevents the African American community from joining together and truthfully evaluating the similarity of their circumstances, much less finding ways to oppose dominant forces.

The epitome of this devalued community, the Breedlove family suffers from trauma caused by single, startling events, but also in the form of daily, grinding oppression, whereby the parents pass their suffering on to their children. The Breedlove's daughter, Pecola, is especially sensitive to the fearful, repetitively ritualized violence that her parents direct toward each other and their children. Her further devaluation by the world, with little relief except from her playmates and the whores who befriend her, includes constant ridicule from other school children because of her dark skin, poverty and ugliness. The black boys who torment her fail to recognize a fellow member of their community. Pecola's parents, furthermore, are often powerless themselves, subject to the whites who employ them, victims of their poverty and the culture which invalidates them. In addition, they themselves have been physically or emotionally abandoned by their families- Cholly was rejected by both of his parents, Pauline was made an outsider because of a limp. Traumatized children themselves, they continue the trauma by denying their own weakness in their abuse of parental power, by instilling their own fears of impotence, and by calling upon their children to fulfill their own unmet needs.

Never valued as an individual when she was a child, Pauline continues throughout her life to seek approval in others' eyes, particularly in her position as a servant for whites. In the one place that she feels powerful- the kitchen of the white family for whom she works- she attacks her daughter (who has spilled a cobbler), and in turn denies her own place in the world when she not only fails to acknowledge Pecola but also comforts the white family's child. Pecola's desire for blue eyes is in fact an inheritance from Pauline herself; based on idealized white images- images of acceptance and beauty completely disconnected from herself and her blackness- Pauline's desire is to look like Jean Harlow.

Pauline and Pecola, like the rest of the black community, have internalized the pervasive standard of whiteness: in the white dolls they buy their children, in the movies they watch and emulate, and in their privileging of the light-skinned black child, Maureen Peal, over the darker children.

Cholly's traumatized past ultimately leads to consequences that are even more devastating for his daughter. After being abandoned by his parents, the most formatively brutalizing incident in Cholly's youth was the interruption of his first sexual encounter by armed whites. The experience of being forced by the white hunters to continue relations with his partner constitutes a trauma not only in its humiliating intensity, but also in the impossibility of his being able to react to the situation. The displacement of his anger onto his fellow victim Darlene, reveals the extent and depth of his psychic wound: "Never did he once consider

directing his hatred toward the hunters. Such an emotion would have destroyed him. They were big, white, armed men. He was small, black, helpless" . Cholly, in short, cannot assimilate the truth of his subjugation without being annihilated by a sense of his own powerlessness.

When the environment sustains him, i.e., when his marriage and work are stable, Cholly copes well, but when these sources of support and stability are taken away his past returns to plague his present actions.

When Pecola makes a gesture which reminds him of the tender feelings he once had for Pauline, Pecola's sadness and helplessness and his own inability to make her happy provoke a repetition of the violent impotence and the helpless fear that he and Darlene felt with the white men. His angry response toward Darlene returns and becomes confounded with feelings of love for Pauline and Pecola, and also with self hatred, because Pecola is like Cholly once was, small and impotent. His pessimistic attitudes toward life, himself and his capacity to love return to this traumatic context, and he loses the ability to approach life or his daughter positively. One way for him to rid himself of his fears is to project them onto Pecola, and in part he tries to destroy those fears by raping her.

Pecola's desire for blue eyes becomes obsessive after her rape, and her conviction that she has been given them by Soaphead Church (the man who promises her a miracle) indicates a complete psychic disintegration. Her own negative reflection in others' eyes has been the continual source of her pain, and her main wish is that her reflection be desirable. The extent of Pecola's obsession and pathology at this stage is presented through hallucinations, through her resistance to blinking, and her delusional view that others envy her gift. "Look. I can look right at the sun..." she says, "I don't even have to blink...He really did a good job. Everybody's jealous. Every time I look at somebody, they look off"). Her obsessive return to the mirror for reassurance that her "blue eyes" are the bluest and the nicest- "How many times a minute are you going to look?" her "friend" asks) - also represents a textual repetition of the destructive power of judgment based solely on appearance and prejudice.

Pecola's belief that she has blue eyes represents her pitiable attempt to take power, for she is now the one who looks, but they more importantly symbolize the trauma of not being loved. She defends against her pain by reexperiencing others' gazes with what she believes is an acceptable, if not loveable, appearance. Ironically, this delusion makes her more of an outcast because her madness spooks everyone, including her mother. In our last glimpse of Pecola, her wandering in a regressive animal-like state is punctuated by useless, repetitive movements:

The damage done was total. She spent her days, her tendril, sap-green days, walking up and down, up and down, her head jerking to the beat of a drummer so distant only she could hear. Elbows bent, hands on shoulders, she flailed her arms like a bird in an eternal, grotesquely futile effort to fly. Beating the air, a winged but grounded bird, intent on the blue void it could not reach- could not even see- but which filled the valleys of the mind.

When the baby does not survive, the future is cut off; so the loss of the child is a powerful symbol of an ultimate loss of the future. As the narrator of *The Bluest Eye* says, "I felt a need for someone to want the black baby [Pecola's] to live- just to counteract the universal love of white baby dolls..." .

In the novel there is an attempt to speak for victims virtually silenced by the process of trauma. First, this takes the form of trying to articulate the victims' own words, suggesting their traumatized condition through the narratively dissociative yet emotionally overdetermined quality of these words.

Pecola seeks comfort in words. In part she seeks understanding of what her father has done to her, but her conflicted dialogue with a split-off persona of herself also illustrates how much she has been isolated and how her pain and need to speak are ignored by her community and even her family. To characterize this self-splitting, Morrison utilizes an interchange of roman type and italics: "How come you don't talk to anybody? I talk to you....I just wondered. You don't talk to anybody. You don't go to school. And nobody talks to you. How do you know nobody talks to me? They don't. When you're in the house with me, even Mrs Breedlove doesn't say anything to you. Ever. Sometimes I wonder if she even sees you" . Hence, the writer is faced with two important issues when speaking for the protagonist: first, there is the necessity of communicating her experience so that it will be known; second, there is the question of how this can be done when the characters are cut off from linguistic connections or from dialogue with others. Morrison tells Pecola's story in part through an omniscient narrator and primarily through the sympathetic eyes of Claudia, who has been Pecola's friend and who realizes the harm done to Pecola by the community, including herself in that complicity: "She seemed to fold into herself, like a pleated wing. Her pain antagonized me" ; "We tried to see her without looking at her...because we had failed her" . Not only is Claudia sympathetic toward Pecola, but she is also self-conscious and self-critical about her own complicity. In this way, through her narrative we are doubly exposed to the dynamics and effects of racism. Similarly, if Claudia is an insider in the way she experiences some of the same pain as Pecola, she is also an outsider and privileged in the sense that having been loved, she possesses the strength to have her own desires. Outsider and insider at the same time, she is sympathetically aware of the need to recognize her community's role and their own defeat in Pecola's disintegration.

Morrison acknowledge that the inarticulate victims of abuse can be spoken for only inadequately, can be understood only partially, and yet that they need such interpretation from outside because they cannot do it alone. In giving their characters the opportunity to speak or to act in his or her own right, however briefly, Morrison gives us a sense of the victim's limited ability to communicate and act, and his or her need to find empathetic ears.

13.5 Let Us Sum Up

In this unit we have had a overview of the Afro-American literature and a general idea of Morrison's Fiction with special reference to her first novel *The Bluest Eye*.

13.6 Review Question

1. Write a note on predicament of the African-American in American society.
2. Discuss the problem of incest in African-American fiction.
3. Discuss the Element of pathos in *The Bluest Eye*.
4. What are the main themes in *The Bluest Eye*. Discusss.

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UNIT-14

TONI MORRISON: *THE BLUEST EYE* (II)

Structures

14.0 Objectives

In this unit we shall further analysis critically the novel *The Bluest Eyes* bringing ou various aspects of the novel and judge it as representive of the African-American literature.

14.1 Critical Analysis of the Novel

Autumn: Chapter 1

This chapter introduces the various forms of powerlessness that Claudia faces and the challenges that she will encounter as she grows up. First of all, she experiences the universal powerlessness of being a child. Raised in an era when children are to be seen, not heard, she and her sister view adults as

unpredictable forces that must be watched and handled carefully. Next, Claudia experiences the powerlessness of being black and poor in the 1940s. She and her family cling to the margins of society, with the dangerous threat of homelessness looming. Finally, Claudia experiences the powerlessness of being female in a world in which the position of women is precarious. Indeed, being a child, being black, and being a girl are conditions of powerlessness that reinforce one another so much that for Claudia they become impossible to separate.

Though Claudia is careful to point out that fear of poverty and homelessness was a more prevalent day-to-day worry in her community than fear of discrimination, racism does affect her life in subtle yet profound ways, especially in the sense that it distorts her beauty standards. Morrison most notably uses the cultural icon of Shirley Temple (a hugely popular child actress of the day) and the popular children's dolls of the 1940s to illustrate mass culture's influence on young black girls. When Claudia states that, unlike Frieda, she has not reached the point in her psychological "development" when her hatred of Shirley Temple and dolls will turn to love, the irony of the statement is clear. Claudia naïvely assumes that the beauty others see in the doll must inhere physically **inside** it, and so she takes apart the doll to search for its beauty. She has not yet learned that beauty is a matter of cultural norms and that the doll is beautiful not in and of itself but rather because the culture she lives in believes whiteness is superior.

Claudia's hatred of white dolls extends to white girls, and -Morrison uses this process as a starting point to study the complex love-hate relationship between blacks and whites. What horrifies Claudia most about her own treatment of white girls is the disinterested nature of her hatred. Claudia hates them for their whiteness, not for more defensible personal reasons. Ultimately, her shame of her own hatred hides itself in pretended love. By describing the sequence of hating whiteness but then coming to embrace it, Claudia diagnoses the black community's worship of white images (as well as cleanliness and denial of the body's desires) as a complicated kind of self-hatred. It is not simply that black people learn to believe that whiteness is beautiful because they are surrounded by white America's advertisements and movies; Claudia suggests that black children start with a healthy hatred of the claims to white superiority but that their guilt at their own anger then transforms hatred into a false love to compensate for that hatred.

Unlike Claudia, Pecola does not undergo a process of first rejecting then accepting America's white beauty standards. Pecola adores Shirley Temple and loves playing with dolls. Her excessive and expensive milk-drinking from the Shirley Temple is part of her desire to internalize the values of white culture—a symbolic moment that foreshadows her desire to possess blue eyes. While these desires illustrate that Pecola mentally and emotionally remains a child, her menstruation shows that she is experiencing a physical coming-of-age. Claudia and Frieda envy Pecola's menstruation, but implicit in this scene is the threat that Pecola can now become pregnant, an adult reality that turns out to be quite troubling.

The pressures that Claudia faces as a girl becoming a woman are perhaps subtler than the pressures of race, but in some ways, more prevalent. There are continual references to the fate of women done wrong by men: Della Jones is thought to be senile in part because her husband left her; Pecola is homeless because her father has beaten his wife and burned down their home; Mrs MacTeer sings blues songs about men leaving their women; and the onset of Pecola's first period is cause for fear, confusion, and accusations of "nastiness" before becoming cause for muted celebration. The chapter ends with speculation about the connection between men, love, and babies. For Claudia, issues of racism, poverty, and standards of beauty are intimately connected to her inevitable entrance into womanhood. The same is true for Pecola, though her eventual initiation into the world of men, love, and babies is much too soon and much too violent.

Autumn: Chapter 2

This chapter, which focuses solely on describing the Breedlove apartment, reads like a playwright's instructions for a set. Morrison produces a great deal of meaning from small details. Almost every object in the scene can be interpreted symbolically. The ugliness of the abandoned storefront and its refusal to blend in with the other buildings that surround it symbolize the ugliness of the Breedloves' story—a story not only about the ugliness they create but also about the ugliness perpetrated against them. Just as the storefront has now been abandoned, they have been abandoned by one another and by the world around them. This sad isolation is somewhat lightened by the description of the other inhabitants of the storefront: the teenage boys who hang out in front of the pizza parlor are filled with a youthful restlessness more attractive than menacing, and their inexperience at smoking expresses their vulnerability. The Hungarian bakery conjures up sensual satisfaction and comfort, and the description of the Gypsy family suggests that people living on the margins can sometimes look and be looked at without fear. The Gypsy girls sit in the windows, sometimes winking or beckoning to passersby, but mostly watching the world go by. This flow of everyday life reminds us that, as desperate as the Breedloves' circumstances are, is just one among many neighborhood stories.

Even though the Breedloves live in a dwelling so depressing that it borders on hyperbole, we are reminded that each member of the family still draws meaning from the home they make together. Although there is frightfully little material for the imagination to work with, Morrison suggests that human beings always invest meaning in objects, no matter how tawdry they may be. Morrison writes that each member of the Breedlove family pieces together a quilt based upon "fragments of experience" and "tiny impressions," salvaging the best of what they have. In her vision of what the Breedlove family lacks, Morrison imagines a world in which a sofa is defined by what has been lost or found in it, what comfort it has provided or what loving has been conducted upon it. A bed is defined by someone giving birth in it, a Christmas tree by the young girl who looks at it. The Breedlove home lacks these kinds of positive symbols. Just as their family name is ironic (they do the opposite of their name), the few household objects they do possess—a ripped couch, a cold stove—are symbolic of suffering and degradation rather than of home.

This chapter also makes a point that the novel continually reinforces: giving life meaning is an essential, universal, and relentless human activity. While we might understand Morrison's insistence on the symbolic meaning of the couch or stove as a mark of her gifts as a novelist, her point is that the Breedloves *themselves* understand these objects as symbolic. Each character in the novel is, in a sense, a storyteller, making order out of his or her unordered experiences, sometimes in ways that are constructive and sometimes in ways that are destructive.

Autumn: Chapter 3

This chapter portrays victimhood as a complex phenomenon rather than a simple, direct relationship between oppressor and oppressed. The Breedloves' ugliness is one of the central mysteries of the novel. It cannot be attributed to their literal appearance (we are told that their ugliness "did not belong to them"), nor simply to the cultural images that indicate that only whiteness is beautiful. Instead, the narrator suggests, it seems

as though some mysterious all-knowing master had said, âYou are ugly people.' . . . and they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it.

While the use of the word "master" suggests a connection to the history of slavery, the Breedloves' ugliness has been both foisted on them and chosen, an identity that is destructive but that still gives a sense

of meaning to their existence. Mrs Breedlove's sense of martyrdom is similar. While it is clear that in some sense she consents to, and even chooses, the abuse she takes from her husband, it is also clear that this abuse damages her. The violence gives her life meaning, gives her days dramatic shape, and gives her the opportunity to exercise her imagination, but it is clear that these things are deeply wrong. The meaning she finds is senseless violence, the dramatic shape is tragic, and this exercise of her imagination is self—destructive. It appears that the will to make meaning out of one's life can be a negative power as well as a positive one, especially if one's life has been damaged by mistreatment.

This chapter also introduces the symbolic story that Pecola fantasizes for her own life. She decides that if she had beautiful blue eyes, her life would magically right itself. She wants blue eyes for two reasons—so that she can change what she sees, and so that she can change how others see her. For Pecola, these reasons are interchangeable because she believes that how people see her (as ugly) creates what she sees (hurtful behavior). While her brother has the option of running away from these terrible domestic scenes, Pecola, a young girl with fewer choices, believes she can change what she sees only by changing herself. There are moments when she temporarily succeeds in breaking the destructive connection between what she sees and how people see her. When she considers that dandelions might be beautiful, she implicitly recognizes that beauty can be created by seeing rather than by being seen. By the same logic, she could redefine herself as beautiful even without blue eyes. But her humiliation at the grocer's store reinforces the old idea that ugliness is inherent and cannot be changed by a different way of perceiving the world. When the grocer looks at her with a blankness tinged with distaste, she does not consider that he is ugly—she only considers herself to be so. After she leaves the grocery store, she briefly experiences a healthy anger, but it gives way to shame. Pecola interprets poor treatment and abuse as her own fault. She believes that the way people observe her is more real than what she herself observes.

Winter: Chapter 4

The introduction of the light-skinned black girl Maureen reinforces the novel's earlier message of the Shirley Temple cup—whiteness is beautiful and blackness is ugly. Maureen also reinforces the connection between race and class—lighter-skinned than the other black children, she is also wealthier. At first, Claudia responds to Maureen with jealousy—she simply wants the pretty things Maureen has. But this jealousy gives way to a more destructive envy, as Claudia begins to suspect that in order to have the things that Maureen has, she must look like Maureen. She remains puzzled, however, by what Maureen has and what she lacks. She explains that, at this point, she and her sister were still in love with themselves and enjoyed their own bodies. They had not yet learned self-hatred. But Maureen is the harbinger of the self-hatred that will come with the onset of womanhood, when physical beauty becomes more important and the body becomes easier to shame. Claudia is perceptive enough to understand at this point that it is not Maureen she hates and fears, but whatever it is that makes Maureen cute and the MacTeer girls ugly.

As with the Shirley Temple cup in the first chapter, the use of popular culture in this chapter provides commentary on the mass media's preference for whiteness—and the effect this preference has on the lives of young girls. In a revealing moment, Maureen recounts the plot of a movie she has seen in which the light-skinned daughter of a white man rejects her black mother but then cries at her mother's funeral. It is clear that Maureen revels in the melodramatic, without recognizing that it may be a reflection of her own assumption of superiority and perhaps her own relationship with her mother (who has seen the movie four times). Racist messages are so prevalent that they are difficult to see. They are as commonplace as drinking milk from a cup or enjoying a movie.

This chapter also gives a brief portrait of the cultural pressures that black boys experience. We are

told that their meanness to Pecola is an expression of their own self-hatred. They can taunt her for being black—"Black e mo Black e mo"—because they hate their own blackness. This self-hatred, along with their "cultivated ignorance" and "designed hopelessness," is, like Pecola's ugliness, a state of being that is both forced upon them and chosen. At this point, the boys are still vulnerable. Claudia and Frieda can stop them in their tracks, and Frieda threatens to reveal that one of the boys still wets his bed. But we can anticipate that the children's even playing field will not last when the boys become men and the girls become women. All the players in this scene are experiencing their last moments of childhood before sex changes everything.

The mystery and fear of sex hangs over this chapter. Maureen introduces the subjects of menstruation, babies, and naked men, and though Claudia and Frieda try to silence her, their fear reveals that this topic has a power over them too. Claudia remembers her father's nakedness as both disturbing and oddly "friendly," and Pecola's defensiveness about her own father's nakedness foreshadows the sexual intimacy he forces upon her later in the novel. When Claudia sees Henry entertaining the prostitutes, even though she does not understand what is happening, she feels "terror and obscure longing." There is a hint that sex makes adults behave like something other than responsible caregivers. Sex will disrupt the order that, even though it sometimes galls Claudia, gives her a sense of stability and comfort.

Winter: Chapter 5

From what we have seen of the squalor of Pecola's home life, we might imagine that a more orderly life in a middle-class home would give her a happier existence. But in this chapter, it becomes clear that material comfort, neatness, and quiet can become deadly themselves if not accompanied by genuine human warmth. The chapter opens with a deceptively positive description of the kind of woman that we will learn to hate by the chapter's close. Her hometown has a beautiful name, and her girlhood involves a close relationship to the beauties of nature. She is soft and sweet, not shrill and hard like some of her urban sisters. She smells good and sings in church. But all these details exist only to drive home the point that such surface traits say little about a person's inner goodness, and, in fact, can be misleading.

The narrator suggests that this emphasis on propriety and cleanliness actually functions as a deep form of self-betrayal. These women are educated but seem so only to be more submissive to white men. They are trained, above all, "to get rid of the funkiness"—the disorderliness of human passion and personality. Though they take good care of their husbands' clothes and feed them well, they do these chores out of a sense of propriety, not a feeling of love. Their well-kept homes must be defended against human dirt and mess. They have experienced sexual pleasure by accident on their own but seem incapable of taking pleasure in their husbands' bodies. They expect their children to be as emotionally repressed as they are.

Geraldine's emphasis on decorum and cleanliness also represents Morrison's critique of a particular kind of internalized racism and a middle-class contempt for the poor. Throughout the book, the worship of whiteness has been associated with the worship of cleanliness, and the MacTeer girls' pleasure in their own dirt has been a mark of their self-esteem and physical confidence. Geraldine's hatred of dirt and disorder is fundamentally linked to her hatred of "niggers" and is, of course, a kind of self-hatred. She scapegoats poor, dark-skinned black children—in this instance, Pecola—because she hates her own blackness. This scapegoating is intensified by fear: the fear that it is not so easy to distinguish between respectable "colored" people and "niggers" after all, and the fear of the suffering she sees in the eyes of black girls like Pecola.

This chapter also demonstrates how those who hate most often misdirect both their feelings of love and their feelings of hatred, multiplying the suffering of the oppressed. Geraldine, instead of directing her

hatred toward the subtle racism that requires her to repress the disorderly parts of herself, expresses hatred toward her own family through her coldness. Meanwhile, she misdirects her capacity for affection toward the family pet. Junior, who hates his mother for her coldness, redirects his hatred toward the cat and Pecola. The extremity of Junior's sadism suggests that children suffer from emotional neglect and misplaced hatred in particularly intense ways. Pecola and the cat (which, it is important to note, resembles Pecola in its blackness and possesses the blue eyes she desires) then become Junior's scapegoats, suffering the effects of a hatred that has nothing to do with them. Pecola's father will repeat this pattern when he takes out his hatred of everyone who has hurt him upon his daughter.

Spring: Chapter 6

This chapter emphasizes the ignorance and confusion that accompany Frieda's experience of becoming a sexual being. Frieda is not given the chance to step gradually into her sexual identity; instead, this identity is forced upon her by an adult. Frieda is uncertain how to describe what has happened to her. She knows that Henry's actions are inappropriate, but she does not understand what they mean. Claudia wonders, almost enviously, how being touched in this way feels, but Frieda rejects this question—what is important is not how she feels but what has been done to her and how her parents react. She depends upon their interpretation of what has taken place in order to understand it herself. But they still do not know what "ruined" means, and not understanding what makes the prostitute distasteful to their mother, they focus on what makes the prostitute distasteful to them—her fatness. The Maginot Line's nickname comes from the bulky defensive fortifications built before World War II to protect the border of France from Germany. The thinness of her companions is then connected to whisky (again based on something that they have heard their mother say, but which they misunderstood), and so they undertake a quest to procure whisky for Frieda. In a sense, the way the MacTeer girls read and misread the adult world echoes the Dick-and-Jane reader at the beginning of the novel.

This logical but mistaken chain of reasoning adds a rare note of humor to the story that is unfolding. Frieda's experience is frightening and confusing, but she is quickly defended by her protective parents, and Henry is a foolish rather than a threatening figure. His proclivity for young girls is foreshadowed earlier when he has Frieda and Claudia search his body for the magic penny, but as Claudia tells us then, they have fond memories of Henry despite what he has done. Frieda is angered by her experience and ready to take action rather than remain ashamed and defeated. Her experience of unwanted sexual attention contrasts sharply with Pecola's rape experience, in which Pecola's father not only fails to protect her, but is the perpetrator himself.

The messages the girls hear about white superiority do not come only from the white media or light-skinned blacks like Geraldine. More scarring and memorable than any prior source in the novel, Pecola's own mother reinforces the message the girls have been receiving about the superiority of whites. The white neighborhood in which Mrs Breedlove works is beautiful and well kept, demonstrating the connection between race and class. The kitchen is spotless, with white porcelain and white woodwork. The little white girl is dressed in delicate pink and has yellow hair. In contrast, Pecola spills "blackish blueberries" all over the floor, underlining the connection between blackness and mess. Her mother reinforces this connection as well. Instead of worrying that her own daughter has been burned by the hot berries, she pushes Pecola down into the pie juice. She then comforts the little white girl and begins to clean the black stain off of her pink dress. When she speaks to Pecola and her friends, her voice is like "rotten pieces of apple," but when she speaks to the white girl, her voice is like honey. Her desire to disavow her daughter is proved when the white girl asks who the black children were and Mrs Breedlove avoids answering her.

She has renounced her own black family for the family of her white employer.

Spring: Chapter 7

Morrison uses the technique of shifting perspectives to allow us different ways of judging characters. In this chapter, we are given a new take on the story that is unfolding, the perspective of Pecola's mother. In the previous chapter, she behaved terribly toward her daughter, and we are ready to condemn her. But now we learn why she behaves the way she does, and our perception of what took place becomes complicated by her past. Like every other character in the book, Pauline is partly a victim of circumstances and has partly chosen her own fate. Though we may condemn some of her choices, we now sympathize with the experiences that have made these choices seem necessary.

Stylistically, Pauline's story is told in the most sympathetic terms. The majority of it is told by an omniscient narrator, with the more poignant moments of her story narrated by Pauline herself and set off in italics. Our sympathy for Pauline comes in part because of the difficult circumstances she has faced—a deformed foot, loneliness, poverty, racism, and an alternately cruel and tender husband. The sections she narrates herself deal with even more personal subjects: her love for Cholly, her experience of pregnancy, and the mistreatment she receives from others. As well as mixing third-person and first-person narration, Morrison uses color to emphasize the beauty of Pauline and Cholly's relationship. Pauline describes the green flash of the june bugs that she misses from her hometown. When she falls in love with Cholly, this green imagery merges with a memory of having her hips stained purple while picking berries and the yellow of her mother's lemonade. When she remembers her and Cholly's lovemaking, these colors reappear and form a rainbow. This repetition gives a lyricism to Pauline's memories.

Like the other characters in the novel, Pauline creates narratives to explain her life. These stories provide her life with meaning, but the meanings she creates are frequently damaging. She imagines that she is isolated because of her deformed foot, and accepts this isolation as her fate, when in fact she might have countered her isolation by being more outgoing. She falls in love with Cholly in part because he fits the story she has been telling herself about the stranger who will come to her. Without this story, she might have noticed sooner that they are not perfect for each other. Her addiction to the movies is most damaging in this regard; she comes to believe the stories that imply that love is about beauty and possession rather than about "lust and simple caring for." According to the narrator, romantic love and physical beauty are "[p]robably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought." The movies Pauline sees are destructive because they are imposed from the outside rather than created from her own experiences and needs. Finally, she considers the story she tells herself about her position in the Fisher family as more meaningful than the story of her relationship to her own family, causing her daughter great suffering.

But Pauline is also able to tell stories that reinforce her rightful self-confidence and the genuine pleasure she has been able to find in her life. She clearly sees the foolishness of her first employer and the wrongs of the doctor who claims that black women feel no pain. She creates a narrative of love for Pecola before Pecola is born. Finally, she weaves the lyrical story of her love with Cholly, creating a brief oasis of beauty and joy in the midst of bleakness.

Spring: Chapter 8

The novel's prologue warns us that Cholly will do something unthinkable—impregnate his own eleven-year-old daughter. If this event were told from Claudia's or Pecola's point of view, it would likely remain a senseless act of violence, something impossible to understand. But Morrison chooses to explain the rape from Cholly's point of view. Understanding how it was possible for Cholly to commit incest does

not change our knowledge that he has caused tremendous suffering to his daughter but does change the nature of our horror. Cholly's violence is not frightening because it is senseless; it is frightening because it makes all too much sense, given the kind of life he has lived. Knowing Cholly's story may not change the horror of what he does, but it does make his action more bearable to us.

As with Pauline's story in the previous chapter, we sympathize with Cholly not only because he has suffered abandonment, sexual humiliation, and racism, but because there was once real beauty and joy in his life. We are given a long celebratory description about the breaking and eating of the watermelon, as if it were "the nasty-sweet guts of the earth." Cholly's childlike joy in sharing the heart of the watermelon with Blue Jack is vividly rendered. Also, the pleasure of Cholly's flirtation with Darlene is narrated at length. Their bodies are compared to those of the muscadine berries. The comparison suggests that both are new and tight, not yet ripe enough to yield full pleasure, but as exciting in their promise as their full ripeness would be. The staining of Darlene's dress with berry juice recalls Pauline's memory of a similar, joyful stain. Rather than dirtiness that must be scrubbed away, here a stain is cause for celebration. In the innocence of their coming-of-age, Cholly is shy and naïve, and he tenderly helps Darlene tie her ribbon in her hair. It is she who makes the first overture, and their touching is presented as fully consensual and completely natural. When their experience is brutally interrupted by the white men, it is clear that white power deforms black lives, rather than some kind of inherent black "dirt" that must be cleaned (as Geraldine, for example, seems to believe).

This chapter demonstrates Morrison's ability to move seamlessly between compelling, individual characters and a more generalized portrait of black life. Aunt Jimmy is an individual but is also a representative of elderly black women. She has suffered racism and abuse at the hands of her man, but she has also felt the joy of sexual love and motherhood; she has suffered violence and committed violence. Now that she is old, she is at last free—free to feel what she feels and go where she wants to go without fear.

At first glance, Aunt Jimmy's freedom seems similar to the dangerous freedom that Cholly finds, which is marked by an indifference that makes him fearless. But the novel makes a distinction: the black women understand the difference between grinding work and making love, and "the difference was all the difference there was." Cholly's depression comes when his indifference becomes a total lack of interest in life, when freedom becomes a premature desire for oblivion.

Spring: Chapter 9

Like Geraldine and Pauline, Soaphead Church is another example of how the worship of whiteness and cleanliness can deform a black life. His mixed blood gives him a false sense of superiority, which he maintains with delusions of grandeur. Indeed, he half-convinces himself that he can work miracles and that he has a direct line to God. His disgust at human physicality leaves him isolated and lonely and leads him to direct his sexual impulses toward young girls. The narrator ironically describes him as "a very clean old man" instead of a dirty old man, and the implication is clear: his obsession with bodily purity has made him more perverted than simple lust would have.

While Pauline and Cholly are described with sympathy despite their many flaws, Soaphead Church is more of a parody than a -multidimensional character. He is labeled as a type, a misanthrope (or people-hater) who prefers objects to people. The narrator comments ironically that like many misanthropes, Soaphead chooses a career that puts him in direct, intimate contact with people. When Soaphead is given the chance to narrate his own story, in his letter to God, he is not made more sympathetic, as Pauline is when she narrates her story. Instead, he becomes still more absurd, using pretentious and frequently

melodramatic language, blaming God for his own failings, and justifying himself with hypocritical claims of good and pure intentions. He writes in ridiculously precise and detailed prose, saying of his claim to possess God's power that "it was not a complete *lie*; but it was a *complete* lie," as if there were a meaningful difference between the two.

Soaphead's hypocrisy is made all the more venomous by the fact that he is well-educated. Labeling himself a "misanthrope" and reading the writings of other misanthropes make him feel as if his behavior is somehow acceptable and even intellectually justified. When he reads works of literature, he remembers the parts that reinforce his own predilections and ignores the parts that challenge them. His hypocrisy is also associated with his religious pretension—his false claim to know God's will even though it is clear to those in the ministry that he does not have a genuine spiritual calling. Much like Pauline's religious sense of martyrdom, Soaphead's relationship with God is an indirect way to express frustration with his life. As a general rule, the religious characters in this novel tend to be the least loving. Soaphead Church is the most extreme example of loveless religiosity.

Soaphead is made into a parody not only to make obvious to us that he is a bad person. Through his character, Morrison also wishes to critique yet another deceptive method of dealing with racial self-hatred. While education may seem to be an escape, the Western education that Soaphead's family has received reinforces and even exaggerates their self-denial and perversity. While religion may be an escape, it also promotes self-denial and encourages a dangerous, delusional self-righteousness. True freedom and happiness, Morrison suggests, come from a feeling of connectedness with one's own body, not a denial of it.

Summer: Chapter 10

This chapter juxtaposes a variety of different ways of understanding and telling stories. In Claudia's opening discussion of storms, she distinguishes "public fact" from "private reality." It is a public fact that a tornado destroyed part of Lorain in the summer of 1929, but Claudia's image of her mother floating in this storm is a dream image cast by the complexity of her private reality. Storms to her are not simple facts; they are connected in her mind to the texture of strawberries, dust, darkness, and the sticky feeling of humidity. Paradoxically, they are both frightening and satisfying. Her memory of a summer storm gets mixed up with the story her mother has told about the tornado, demonstrating that "public facts" are made private not only because of the personal connotations they hold for individuals, but also because they are distorted by memory. The image of her mother she conjures—strong, smiling, unconcerned by the storm even when it lifts her into the air—has less to do with the reality of storms than with her own admiration for her mother's beauty, toughness, and independence. Her mother is a source of stability in the midst of metaphorical and real storms.

At the same time, Pecola's story is both a matter of public fact and private reality. No one tells Claudia and Frieda the story directly or explains to them what it means. They are given the burden and the freedom of deciding for themselves what it means. They resist what they understand from the adults' narrative, which implicates Pecola in Cholly's "nastiness" and dismisses the entire family as crazy and ugly. Claudia and Frieda listen carefully, but they never hear sympathy or concern in the adults' dialogue. Claudia tells herself a separate story that will include the sympathy she feels: the baby is beautiful inside the womb, much more beautiful than white dolls. She and Frieda, fearless at that age, cast themselves as heroines in a story that looks toward the baby's future instead of back at the ugliness of its creation. Pecola's baby must live, and they must save it.

They decide that, to save the baby, they must make a miracle. This miracle is to work by metaphorical rather than practical logic. First, they will petition God, but they suspect that a petition is powerful only if it is accompanied by the genuine sacrifice of their hard-earned money and seeds. Claudia and Frieda's plan is not practical, of course, and it does not work. But their plan permits them to imagine a world in which human beings are connected to one another and to nature. They imagine that their sacrifice can earn Pecola's safety and that the fruitfulness of the earth will parallel the fruitfulness of Pecola. Most of all, they imagine that words and song can be healing. Their hopefulness is a symbol of the hopefulness of the novel as a whole, which attempts to heal the terribly disjointed community it describes by lyrically telling its story.

Summer: Chapter 11

When Pecola is finally granted her wish for blue eyes, she receives it in a perverse and darkly ironic form. She is able to obtain blue eyes only by losing her mind. Rather than granting Pecola insight into the world around her and providing a redeeming connection with other people, these eyes are a form of blindness. Pecola can no longer accurately perceive the outside world, and she has become even more invisible to others. Pecola has managed to write a new narrative about her life, an act that is sometimes healing for other characters in the novel, but this narrative reinforces her isolation from the world rather than reconnects her to it. Her new friendship is only imagined and does not protect her from old suffering or insecurity. She is worried by the fact that others will not look at her, and she has not escaped her jealousy of what others possess—she worries that someone has bluer eyes than she. Her belief in her blue eyes is not enough, and she requires constant reassurance. As is made abundantly clear when the imaginary friend brings up the painful subject of Cholly, Pecola has not escaped her demons. She has merely recast them in a new form.

The closing section of the novel is written in the first person plural, and Claudia does not permit herself any escape from her vivid and total criticism of the community. This is somewhat surprising, given Claudia and Frieda's efforts to save Pecola's baby by sacrificing money and marigold seeds. Nevertheless, looking back, Claudia understands that Pecola has been a scapegoat—someone the community could use to exorcise its own self-hatred by expressing that hatred toward her. She explains that Pecola's ugliness gave the community, herself included, a false sense of beauty: "We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness." Moreover, Pecola's suffering made the community feel comparatively happy, and her failure to speak for herself allowed them to feel articulate. This last criticism leads us to question Claudia's reliability as a narrator. It is possible that her version of Pecola's story is secretly self-serving and that the true meaning of Pecola's life remains unexplained.

Just as the novel begins with two prologues, perhaps the best way to think of the ending of *The Bluest Eye* is to understand it as two endings. The first ending, the close of the previous chapter, is a hopeful one: Claudia and Frieda selflessly sacrifice their own desires to help Pecola, planting seeds to suggest that nature always promises rebirth, saying magic words and singing to suggest that lyrical language can redeem a fractured life. The second ending is a despairing one: Claudia too is capable of selfishly using Pecola to reinforce her own sense of worth, the earth is cruel, and, in any case, nature cannot redeem human failings. The book closes on this second, bleak vision. But the lyric beauty of Morrison's language, which picks up momentum in this final section, suggests that there may be a kind of redemption in remembering, in telling stories, and in singing, after all.

14.2 Themes

14.2.1 Whiteness as the the Standard of Beauty

The Bluest Eye provides an extended depiction of the ways in which internalized white beauty standards deform the lives of black girls and women. Implicit messages that whiteness is superior are everywhere, including the white baby doll given to Claudia, the idealization of Shirley Temple, the consensus that light-skinned Maureen is cuter than the other black girls, the idealization of white beauty in the movies, and Pauline Breedlove's preference for the little white girl she works for over her daughter. Adult women, having learned to hate the blackness of their own bodies, take this hatred out on their children—Mrs Breedlove shares the conviction that Pecola is ugly, and lighter-skinned Geraldine curses Pecola's blackness. Claudia remains free from this worship of whiteness, imagining Pecola's unborn baby as beautiful in its blackness. But it is hinted that once Claudia reaches adolescence, she too will learn to hate herself, as if racial self-loathing were a necessary part of maturation.

The person who suffers most from white beauty standards is, of course, Pecola. She connects beauty with being loved and believes that if she possesses blue eyes, the cruelty in her life will be replaced by affection and respect. This hopeless desire leads ultimately to madness, suggesting that the fulfillment of the wish for white beauty may be even more tragic than the wish impulse itself.

Pecola's desire for blue eyes, while highly unrealistic, is based on one correct insight into her world: she believes that the cruelty she witnesses and experiences is connected to how she is seen. If she had beautiful blue eyes, Pecola imagines, people would not want to do ugly things in front of her or to her. The accuracy of this insight is affirmed by her experience of being teased by the boys—when Maureen comes to her rescue, it seems that they no longer want to behave badly under Maureen's attractive gaze. In a more basic sense, Pecola and her family are mistreated in part because they happen to have black skin. By wishing for blue eyes rather than lighter skin, Pecola indicates that she wishes to see things differently as much as she wishes to be seen differently. She can only receive this wish, in effect, by blinding herself. Pecola is then able to see herself as beautiful, but only at the cost of her ability to see accurately both herself and the world around her. The connection between how one is seen and what one sees has a uniquely tragic outcome for her.

14.2.2 The Power of Stories

The Bluest Eye is not one story, but multiple, sometimes contradictory, interlocking stories. Characters tell stories to make sense of their lives, and these stories have tremendous power for both good and evil. Claudia's stories, in particular, stand out for their affirmative power. First and foremost, she tells Pecola's story, and though she questions the accuracy and meaning of her version, to some degree her attention and care redeem the ugliness of Pecola's life. Furthermore, when the adults describe Pecola's pregnancy and hope that the baby dies, Claudia and Frieda attempt to rewrite this story as a hopeful one, casting themselves as saviors. Finally, Claudia resists the premise of white superiority, writing her own story about the beauty of blackness. Stories by other characters are often destructive to themselves and others. The story Pauline Breedlove tells herself about her own ugliness reinforces her self-hatred, and the story she tells herself about her own martyrdom reinforces her cruelty toward her family. Soaphead Church's personal narratives about his good intentions and his special relationship with God are pure hypocrisy. Stories are as likely to distort the truth as they are to reveal it. While Morrison apparently believes that stories can be redeeming, she is no blind optimist and refuses to let us rest comfortably in any one version

of what happens.

14.2.3 Sexual Invitation and Abuse

To a large degree, *The Bluest Eye* is about both the pleasures and the perils of sexual initiation. Early in the novel, Pecola has her first menstrual period, and toward the novel's end she has her first sexual experience, which is violent. Frieda knows about and anticipates menstruating, and she is initiated into sexual experience when she is fondled by Henry Washington. We are told the story of Cholly's first sexual experience, which ends when two white men force him to finish having sex while they watch. The fact that all of these experiences are humiliating and hurtful indicates that sexual coming-of-age is fraught with peril, especially in an abusive environment.

In the novel, parents carry much of the blame for their children's often traumatic sexual coming-of-age. The most blatant case is Cholly's rape of his own daughter, Pecola, which is, in a sense, a repetition of the sexual humiliation Cholly experienced under the gaze of two racist whites. Frieda's experience is less painful than Pecola's because her parents immediately come to her rescue, playing the appropriate protector and underlining, by way of contrast, the extent of Cholly's crime against his daughter. But Frieda is not given information that lets her understand what has happened to her. Instead, she lives with a vague fear of being "ruined" like the local prostitutes. The prevalence of sexual violence in the novel suggests that racism is not the only thing that distorts black girlhoods. There is also a pervasive assumption that women's bodies are available for abuse. The refusal on the part of parents to teach their girls about sexuality makes the girls' transition into sexual maturity difficult.

A number of characters in *The Bluest Eye* define their lives through a denial of their bodily needs. Geraldine prefers cleanliness and order to the messiness of sex, and she is emotionally frigid as a result. Similarly, Pauline prefers cleaning and organizing the home of her white employers to expressing physical affection toward her family. Soaphead Church finds physicality distasteful, and this peculiarity leads to his preference for objects over humans and to his perverse attraction to little girls. In contrast, when characters experience happiness, it is generally in viscerally physical terms. Claudia prefers to have her senses indulged by wonderful scents, sounds, and tastes than to be given a hard white doll. Cholly's greatest moments of happinesses are eating the best part of a watermelon and touching a girl for the first time. Pauline's happiest memory is of sexual fulfillment with her husband. The novel suggests that, no matter how messy and sometimes violent human desire is, it is also the source of happiness: denial of the body begets hatred and violence, not redemption.

14.3 Mofits

14.3.1 The Dick and Jane Narrative

The novel opens with a narrative from a Dick-and-Jane reading primer, a narrative that is distorted when Morrison runs its sentences and then its words together. The gap between the idealized, sanitized, upper-middle-class world of Dick and Jane (who we *assume* to be white, though we are never told so) and the often dark and ugly world of the novel is emphasized by the chapter headings excerpted from the primer. But Morrison does not mean for us to think that the Dick-and-Jane world is better—in fact, it is largely because the black characters have internalized white Dick-and-Jane values that they are unhappy. In this way, the Dick and Jane narrative and the novel provide ironic commentary on each other.

14.3.2 Seasons and Nature

The novel is divided into the four seasons, but it pointedly refuses to meet the expectations of these seasons. For example, spring, the traditional time of rebirth and renewal, reminds Claudia of being whipped with new switches, and it is the season when Pecola's is raped. Pecola's baby dies in autumn, the season of harvesting. Morrison uses natural cycles to underline the unnaturalness and misery of her characters' experiences. To some degree, she also questions the benevolence of nature, as when Claudia wonders whether "the earth itself might have been unyielding" to someone like Pecola.

14.3.3 Whiteness and Colour

In the novel, whiteness is associated with beauty and cleanliness (particularly according to Geraldine and Mrs Breedlove), but also with sterility. In contrast, color is associated with happiness, most clearly in the rainbow of yellow, green, and purple memories Pauline Breedlove sees when making love with Cholly. Morrison uses this imagery to emphasize the destructiveness of the black community's privileging of whiteness and to suggest that vibrant color, rather than the pure absence of color, is a stronger image of happiness and freedom.

14.3.4 Eyes and Vision

Pecola is obsessed with having blue eyes because she believes that this mark of conventional, white beauty will change the way that she is seen and therefore the way that she sees the world. There are continual references to other characters' eyes as well—for example, Mr Yacobowski's hostility to Pecola resides in the blankness in his own eyes, as well as in his inability to see a black girl. This motif underlines the novel's repeated concern for the difference between how we see and how we are seen, and the difference between superficial sight and true insight.

14.3.5 Dirtiness and Cleanliness

The black characters in the novel who have internalized white, -middle-class values are obsessed with cleanliness. Geraldine and Mrs Breedlove are excessively concerned with housecleaning—though Mrs Breedlove cleans only the house of her white employers, as if the Breedlove apartment is beyond her help. This fixation on cleanliness extends into the women's moral and emotional quests for purity, but the obsession with domestic and moral sanitation leads them to cruel coldness. In contrast, one mark of Claudia's strength of character is her pleasure in her own dirt, a pleasure that represents self-confidence and a correct understanding of the nature of happiness

14.4 Symbols

14.4.1 The House

The novel begins with a sentence from a Dick-and-Jane narrative: "Here is the house." Homes not only indicate socioeconomic status in this novel, but they also symbolize the emotional situations and values of the characters who inhabit them. The Breedlove -apartment is miserable and decrepit, suffering from Mrs. Breedlove's preference for her employer's home over her own and symbolizing the misery of the Breedlove family. The MacTeer house is drafty and dark, but it is carefully tended by Mrs. MacTeer and, according to Claudia, filled with love, symbolizing that family's comparative cohesion.

14.4.2 Bluest Eyes

To Pecola, blue eyes symbolize the beauty and happiness that she associates with the white, middle-class world. They also come to symbolize her own blindness, for she gains blue eyes only at the cost of her sanity. The "bluest" eye could also mean the saddest eye. Furthermore, *eye* puns on *I,* in the sense that the novel's title uses the singular form of the noun (instead of The Bluest Eyes) to express many of the characters' sad isolation.

14.4.3 The Marigolds

Claudia and Frieda associate marigolds with the safety and well-being of Pecola's baby. Their ceremonial offering of money and the remaining unsold marigold seeds represents an honest sacrifice on their part. They believe that if the marigolds they have planted grow, then Pecola's baby will be all right. More generally, marigolds represent the constant renewal of nature. In Pecola's case, this cycle of renewal is perverted by her father's rape of her.

14.5 Some Quotations Explained

1. "It never occurred to either of us that the earth itself might have been unyielding. We had dropped our seeds in our own little plot of black dirt just as Pecola's father had dropped his seeds in his own plot of black dirt. Our innocence and faith were no more productive than his lust or despair."

   This quotation is from the second prologue to the novel, in which Claudia anticipates the events that the novel will recount, most notably Pecola's pregnancy by incest. Here, she remembers that she and Frieda blamed each other for the failure of the marigolds to grow one summer, but now she wonders if the earth itself was hostile to them—a darker, more radical possibility. The idea of blame is important because the book continually raises the question of who is to blame for Pecola's suffering. Are Claudia and Frieda at fault for not doing more to help Pecola? To some degree, we can blame Pecola's suffering on her parents and on racism; but Cholly and Pauline have themselves suffered, and the causes of suffering seem so diffuse and prevalent that it seems possible that life on earth itself is hostile to human happiness. This hostility is what the earth's hostility to the marigolds represents. The complexity of the question of blame increases when Claudia makes the stunning parallel between the healing action of their planting of the marigold seeds and Cholly's hurtful action of raping Pecola. Claudia suggests that the impulse that drove her and her sister and the impulse that drove Cholly might not be so different after all. Motives of innocence and faith seem to be no more effective than motives of lust and despair in the universe of the novel.

2. "It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different."

   These lines, which introduce Pecola's desire for blue eyes, are found in Chapter 3 of the "Autumn" section of the novel. They demonstrate the complexity of Pecola's desire—she does not want blue eyes simply because they conform to white beauty standards, but because she wishes to possess different sights and pictures, as if changing eye color will change reality. Pecola has just been forced to witness a violent fight between her parents, and the only solution she can imagine to her passive suffering is to witness something different. She believes that if she had blue eyes, their beauty would inspire beautiful and kindly behavior on the part of others. Pecola's desire has its

own logic even if it is naïve. To Pecola, the color of one's skin and eyes do influence how one is treated and what one is forced to witness.

3. "We had defended ourselves since memory against everything and everybody, considered all speech a code to be broken by us, and all gestures subject to careful analysis; we had become headstrong, devious, and arrogant. Nobody paid us any attention, so we paid very good attention to ourselves. Our limitations were not known to us—not then."

   This quotation is from Claudia, and it occurs in the second-to-last chapter of the novel. It can be read as a concise description of Claudia and Frieda's ethos as a whole. The MacTeer girls take an active stance against whatever they perceive threatens them, whether it is a white doll, boys making fun of Pecola, Henry's molestation of Frieda, or the community's rejection of Pecola. Their active and energetic responses contrast sharply with Pecola's passive suffering. Though Claudia and Frieda's actions are childish and often doomed to failure, they are still examples of vigorous responses to oppression. Claudia hints here, however, that this willingness to take action no matter who defies them disappears with adulthood. Frieda and Claudia are able to be active in part because they are protected by their parents, and in part because they do not confront the life-or-death problems that Pecola does. As adults, they will learn to respond to antagonism in more indirect and perhaps more self-destructive ways.

4. "The birdlike gestures are worn away to a mere picking and plucking her way between the tire rims and the sunflowers, between Coke bottles and milkweed, among all the waste and beauty of the world—which is what she herself was. All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed. And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to us."

   This quotation, from the last chapter of the novel, sums up Claudia's impressions of Pecola's madness. Here, she transforms Pecola into a symbol of the beauty and suffering that marks all human life and into a more specific symbol of the hopes and fears of her community. The community has dumped all of its "waste" on Pecola because she is a convenient scapegoat. The blackness and ugliness that the other members of the community fear reside in themselves can instead be attributed to her. But Claudia also describes Pecola as the paragon of beauty, a startling claim after all the emphasis on Pecola's ugliness. Pecola is beautiful because she is human, but this beauty is invisible to the members of the community who have identified beauty with whiteness. She gives others beauty because their assumptions about her ugliness make them feel beautiful in comparison. In this sense, Pecola's gift of beauty is ironic—she gives people beauty because they think she is ugly, not because they perceive her true beauty as a human being.

5. "Love is never any better than the lover. Wicked people love wickedly, violent people love violently, weak people love weakly, stupid people love stupidly, but the love of a free man is never safe. There is no gift for the beloved. The lover alone possesses his gift of love. The loved one is shorn, neutralized, frozen in the glare of the lover's inward eye."

   This quotation is from the last chapter of the novel, in which Claudia attempts to tell us what her story means. It describes love as a potentially damaging force, following the suggestion that Cholly was the only person who loved Pecola "enough to touch her." If love and rape cannot be distinguished, then we have entered a world in which love itself is ambiguous. Against the usual idea that love is inherently healing and redemptive, Claudia suggests that love is only as good as the lover. This is why the broken, warped human beings in this novel fail to love one another well.

In fact, Claudia suggests, love may even be damaging, because it locks the loved one in a potentially destructive gaze. Romantic love creates a damaging demand for beauty—the kind of beauty that black girls, by definition, may never be able to possess because of the racist standards of their society. But the pessimism of this passage is offset by the inherent hopefulness of the idea of love. If we can understand Cholly's behavior as driven by love as well as anger (and his rape of Pecola is in fact described in these terms), then there is still some good in him, however deformed. We are left to hope for a kind of love that is a genuine gift for the beloved.

14.6 Let Us Sum Up

Hopefully a critically analysis of Morrison's *The Bluest Eyes* has aroused among the scholars a genuine interest in the class of literature called Afro-American literature.

14.7 Review Questions

1. How does nature function in the novel? Do you consider it a benevolent presence against which the events of the novel are contrasted, or a potentially malevolent force? Is Morrison's use of natural imagery hopeful or ironic?
2. Which is a greater threat to the children in *The Bluest Eye*: racism or sexism?
3. At the end of the novel, Claudia questions her own right or ability to tell the truth about Pecola's experience. How seriously are we to take her questioning? Is she a reliable narrator?
4. To what extent is Cholly to blame for his violence against his family? Which other people or circumstances may also be to blame? What is the novel's position on blame?
5. The novel includes a number of secondary story lines, such as Geraldine's and Soaphead Church's histories, with the main story line of the Breedlove family. Select one of these secondary stories and explain how it relates to or comments upon the main story line.

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UNIT-15

ARTHUR MILLER : A MODERN AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHT

Structure

15.0 Objectives

- To introduce Arthur Miller as a modern American playwright
- To highlight his American dream of success in the commercialized society
- To trace the anatomy of failure of Willy Loman w.r.t. *The Death of A Salesman*

15.1 Introduction

Arthur Miller came from humble origins. His father used to run a shop of women's coats. He lived in New York and had been inconspicuous as a student in his school days. Arthur Miller grew up during the years of the Depression of America. The milieu of Depression gave him a passionate understanding of man's insecurity in modern industrial civilization. He had a deep-rooted faith in moral earnestness and social responsibility. He rose meteorically to the fame of a dramatist though he had led an obscure life as a truck-driver, waiter, crewman on a tanker, etc. In March 1954, the State Department refused him a passport to attend the opening of *The Crucible* in Brussels, on the ground that he was supporting the communist movement- a charge which he categorically denied. In 1940, he married Mary Slattery but the union ended in a divorce in June 1956. Later on, Miller married the glamorous Hollywood Actress Marilyn Munroe. The marriage of beauty and intellect created a big sensation in the United States of America. This marriage lasted only for four years. When Miller went abroad he met an Austrian photographer Miss Ingeborg Morath whom he married in 1962. Miller was not a prolific and voluminous writer. But whatever he has written is excellent- there is an excess of self-criticism coupled with restless intellect. His major dramatic works are:

1. *The Man Who had all the Luck* (1944)
2. *All My sons* (1947)
3. *Death of a Salesman* (1949)

4. *The Crucible* (1953)

5. *A View from the Bridge* (1955)

6. *A Memory of Two Mondays* (1955)

7. *After the Fall* (1964)

8. *Incident at Vichy* (1964)

9. *The Price* (1968)

***The Man Who Hall all the Luck* (1944)**

The play is about young David Beeves who had lucrative business, is happily married and is a successful father. Looking at frustrated and unhappy wretches in the small town in which he lives, he develops an obsession with the idea that some disaster awaits him, too. He tries to precipitate it. Finally he comes to realise that he is far superior to others and has the golden touch of success.

***All My sons* (1947)**

It is a play about crime and responsibility. The security of Chris Keller's existence becomes nightmarish when she discovers that his father (Joe Keller) was responsible for it ,the death of 21 pilots, through supplying defective equipment to the Air Force. He had made his partner a scapeggat for this dire offence. Confronted with Chris Keller's revulsion and the revelation that his second son Larry, a pilot long-listed as missing in action, killed himself to expiate his father's crime. Joe Keller commits suicide.

***The Crucible* (1953)**

When the daughter of Salem's unpopular minister falls mysteriously ill, rumours of witchcraft spread throughout the town. The girl had been engaged clandestinely in forbidden dancing and cavorting with a group of friends. When the minister accused Abigail Williams, the kingpin of the racket, she manipulated the accusation as plea for help. She remarked that her soul had been bewitched. Abigail saw the opportunity of getting rid of one Elizabeth Proctor, wife of John Proctor. Abigail had once seduced her. Deflecting the charges from themselves, the girls, led by Abigail, made hysterical accusations of witchcraft against many innocent townsmen whom they dislike. Abigail accuses Elizabeth Proctor. In an effort to expose Abigail's vindictive motives, John Proctor (husband of Elizabeth) discloses his past lechery. Elizabeth, unaware of his confession, does not confirm his testimony. Just to protect him, she testifies falsely that her husband hasn't been intimate with Abigail. John Proctor is accused of witchcraft. Arrested and condemned to death, he refuses to save his life by confession- his traffic with the devil- and court death.

***A View from the Bridge* (1955)**

The play deals with the tragic consequences of Eddie Carbone's incestuous love for his adolescent niece Catherine, whom he adopted after her mother's death. Beatrice, the wife of Eddie, hides her cousins Marco and Rodolpho- illegal immigrants- in Carbone's apartment while they wait for forged papers. Young and handsome, Rodolpho falls in love with Catherine. Eddie's unconscious jealousy drives him to violent outbursts of temper and to sneering comments about Rodolpho's lack of masculinity. He betrays the two men to immigration authorities. Although the young couple's hasty marriage prevents Rodolpho's deportation, Marco must must return to support his family.Enraged by Eddie's violation of trust, Marco demands vengeance for Eddie's cowardly betrayal. Catherine and Rodolpho, apprehending bloodshed, plead with Eddie not to retaliate. But Eddie would not be restrained. Beatrice, then, hysterically blurts out

Eddie's real motive for the betrayal- his repressed love for Catherine. Eddie, unable to face the truth, runs into the street to die at Marco's hands.

***A Memory of Two Mondays* (1955)**

The play examines a group of factory workers trapped without hope of relief in their mechanical jobs and dreary lives. Through two Mondays- separated by a span of years- the humdrum existence of the workers is revealed. On the first Monday, Bert, starts work as a factory worker to procure some money for his college education. On the second Monday, he takes leave of his friends. He leaves the other factory workers to go on working without hope or possibility of improvement.

***After the Fall* (1964)**

It is a stream of consciousness play in which Quentin- a lawyer- addresses an unseen listner. In his subtle flashbacks, he expresses his ideas. He makes an anguished and heart searching observations on his relationships with three women. His wife Louise is a difficult woman with uncompromising earnestness. Another woman is Maggie- a pop singer- seemingly unprincipled. She becomes an alcoholic and takes overdoes of sleeping pills. Her life is a mode of self-destruction and death. The third woman is Holga- a German concentration camp refugee. He hopes to love her. Holga discovers that there can be no innocence after the Nazi's slaughter.

***Incident at Vichy* (1964)**

The plays examines the problem of personal guilt in the context of political and social atrocities. At Vichy, several men and a boy suspected all of being Jews, wait in a barren room to be interrogated. There is a lengthy discussion on the meaning of life and the desire of living. Various points of view crystallize in the conflict between Prince Von Berg- an Austrian aristocrat frantically trying to maintain indifference and the Jewish psychiatrist Leduc- who is a very articulate individual- convinces the Prince (Von Berg) of his self knowledge. He allows him to escape.

***The Price* (1968)**

It is a play in which two brothers meet many years after their father's death to dispose of the family furniture. Victor Franz is a disgrunted police officer. Walter is a successful physician. Before Walter comes, Victor has already accepted the bid from Gregory Solomon, a furniture dealer, whose appetite for life is contrasted with the dissatisfaction of the two brothers. Victor accuses his Walter of having abandoned his filial responsibilities. Victor has sacrificed his scientific career to take care of his father. Walter calls Victor's sacrifice unnecessary. The two brother part in anger.

15.2 Some Observations on Modern American Drama and Theatre

In the United States of America, the progress of Drama as a genre has been rather slow. By the end of the nineteenth century, it was quite mediocre. Henry James felt that the audience wanted nothing different from melodrama. But American drama smarted under the impact of Shaw, Strindberg and Ibsen from the trans Atlantic side. Clyde Fitch and Langden became popular American playwrights. Then came Eugene O'Neill. The American theatre in the lime light with Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and O'Neill. The Nineteen Twenties was a period of experimentation for the American theatre. Expressionism was imported from across the Atlantic (i.e. from Europe). The major playwrights of the thirties were Maxwell Anderson, S.N. Behraman, Robert E. Sherwood, Philip Barry, Clifford Odits and Lillian Heltman. The Post-war scenario of American drama has been dominated by Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller. Both

of them have voiced the ills of American life: They have concentrated on frustration and despair of their fellow Americans. Williams is like Lorca and D.H. Lawrence- sensuous, and verbally luxuriant. While Miller is like Henrik Ibsen. He sympathises were with the anguished American conscience. The contribution of Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller can never be underestimated.

15.3 Arthur Miller's Rationale of his Plays

Arthur Miller is a self-conscious artist. He knows the art of Drama inside out. He shares with all specialists a suspicion of generalities of this art. He has introduced certain terms in the context of drama but he has neither the scholarly patience nor the zeal to define them convincingly. He says that looking to the fundamental nature of theatre and its function is such that it is getting increasingly expensive to produce a play. It is especially striking that the theatre has managed to survive in spite of devouring mechanization of the modern age. Drama must represent a well-defined expression of profound social needs. Therefore really it is remarkable for Arthur Miller to say that there can be no drama 'without mimicry, conflict, tale or speech'. His approach to drama is **organic**. It is aesthetically delightful as audio-visual illusion on the stage. He talks in a workaday language about the problem of the playwright as to how he should write a play so that one's changing vision of the people in the world may be most accurately represented. A playwright does have his **aesthetic commitments**. While writing a play, he has the assumption that it is to be acted on the stage. The actor happens to be a person in flesh and blood and he plays his role on the stage. His dramatic role has nothing to do with his profession, means of earning his bread and butter, his family background, his individual ideas or philosophy etc. He acts according to the role assigned to him. His gestures, body movements, utterances are all programmed and ordered. An actor may be a professional such as an engineer, medical doctor or a teacher or a student or a cop but he is not expected to appear in the costume of his trade, class or profession. He acts whatever a well defined role is assigned to him. His adherence to the speech and action is determined by the playwright and the producer. He represents the reality of life by proxy through his acting. Arthur Miller says that his plays *The Crucible, A Memory of Two Mondays,* and *A View from the Bridge* were not designed on a realistic style and they are rather a mode of departure from realism. Time characters and other elements are treated differently from play to play. According to Arthur Miller one decisive influence upon the style of drama is "the conception and manipulation of time." Events are always "collapsed and drawn together." "His play *All My Sons* attempts to account for time in terms of months, days and hours. *Death of A Salesman* explodes the watch and the calender.*The Crucible* is bound by natural time." By collapsing time, one destroys realism. According to Miller "the Greek 'unity' of time imposed upon the drama was not arbitrary. " A great play "can be mimed and still issue forth its essential actions and their rudiments of symbolic meaning. The word, in drama, is the transformation into speech of what is happening and the fiat for intense language is intensity of happening." Arthur Miller prizes the poetic above all else in the theatre.

The assumption- or presumption- behind Miller's plays is that life has meaning. Therefore every play means something: "the idea of a play is its measure of value and importance and beauty." It is not an aesthetic nullity. Idea is very important to Miller. Playwrights do invent ideas just as scientists and philosophers do. Plays could be based on ideas known already. For example "no social concept in Shaw's plays could have been much of a surprise to Webb" and thousands of other socialists of the time nor can Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekhov, Strindberg or O'Neill be credited with in inventing exclusive new thoughts. A new idea, says Miller appears to be very close to insanity. It takes time for a new idea to be institutionalized. The people require proofs to believe it. 'As a matter of fact, it is highly unlikely that a new idea could be successfully launched throgh a play." "Tremendous energy must go into destroying the validity of the an-

cient proposition," and destroying it "is a genuine humiliation for the majority of the people; "it is an affront not only to their deeper convictions but it also offends their finer sensibilities and the things they worship whether God or science or money. The conflict between a new idea and the very notion of drama is not resolvable because plays are always performed before the people sitting en masse and not alone. A playwright reacts with the surrounding crowd/audience rather than against it. The response of the audience cannot be underestimated. A person's response to an event in isolation is different from that in public. A person visualises things differently when alone and when in a crowd. The audience psychology while watching a theatrical performance is collective rather than personal. His response to right or wrong, good or bad taste, is different when he is in a crowd. An idea ought to become "a feeling, a sensation, an emotion," since a play cannot create a new belief. Arthur Miller confesses that his perception of life has been constantly undergoing a change from play to play but every play is more or less a revelation of ***Truth*** or ***Reality.***

When Miller's *All My Sons* opened on Broadway it was called ***Ibsenesque***. He liked Ibsen for his articulation of ideas and transformed the intellectual content into **poetic drama.** Henry Miller raised the million dollar question whether a play was meant to teach morality. A play could not be judged by the validity of his didactic purpose. He, however, pointed out that there was no 'conflict between art and the philosophically or socially meaningful theme.' Arthur Miller wrote *All My Sons* in the mid-forties and by this time he had acquired maturity as a playwright and adopted Ibsenism as a technique. He had regarded a play as an organism: He had his idea of form. The fortress which *All My Sons* laid siege to was "the fortress of unrelatedness." How was surprised to see that *Death of a Salesman* spawned several doctoral theses explaining its Freudian symbolism and many sexegenerians from as far away as California visited him that their lives were more or less like Willy Loman's. Some women wrote letters to him stating that Linda was the central character. The production of the play *All My Sons* was an introduction to the art of acting and its awful potentials. Arthur Miller visualized the dramatic stage as inventive as the human mind itself. Though straight forward and rather unstrategic, *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* clicked for their organic wholeness. Willy's tragic tension between 'now' and 'then'- the orientations of time- clicked. The friction between his past and present was at the heart of the composition of the play. *Death of a Salesman* was regarded as a "time bomb placed under the edifice of Americanism" though the *Daily Worker* thought it entirely **decadent**. The Spanish Press, thoroughly controlled by Roman Catholic orthodoxy, the play as commendable proof of the spirit of death where there was no God. It was regarded as a piece of Communist propaganda. One organization of salesmen raised Miller up nearly to the status of Patron-Sainthood. Miller regarded *Death of a Salesman* a heroic play and the charge of the critics that Willy Loman lacked the stature for the tragic hero seemed incredible to him. He did not approve of the critics' notions of Elizabethan and Greek drama and Aristotlean conception of tragedy. The visions seen through the portals of Delphi were anachronistic as they hardly dealt with the vision of modern life consisting of insurance payments, front porches of the houses, refrigerators, steering knuckles, Chevrolets, under employed sons,..... Aristotle having spoken of the fall from the heights, it goes without saying that some one of the common mould cannot be fit for a tragic hero. But much has changed in the world since Aristotle's time. Miller was aware of the fact that attempts were made to justify *Death of a Salesman* as a left-wing piece or as a right-wing manifestation of decadence. The presumption underlying both views was that a work or art was the sum total of the author's political outlook and that its political implications were valid elements in its aesthetic evaluation. Arthur Miller did not agree with this critical approach.

According to Arthur Miller "the very impulse to write springs from an inner chaos crying for order, for meaning and that meaning must be discovered in the process of wriring or the work lies dead as it is

finished." When he watched the play, he saw tears in the eyes of the audience, he felt rather embarrassed at having convinced the people that life was not worthliving for so the play *Death of a Salesman* was interpreted. Actually Miller was optimist enough not to believe in the philosophy of pessimism. He stated that the play was not a document about pessimism. The play broke the bounds of a long convention of realism. He had employed the technique of expressionism in it. It was in *Death of a Salesman* and *All My sons* that America discovered itself anew. This play was written in a mood of friendly partnership with the audience while *The Crucible* meant that the playwright had not come to terms with his audience. He wrote the play *A View From The Bridge* which was impervious to all interpretation. It was written experimentally not only as a form but also as an exercise in interpretation. In its first appearance on the stage, it was a failure.

Not only in the drama but also in sociology, psychology, psychiatry and religion, the past century has created an almost overwhelming documentation of man as a nearly passive creation of environment and family-created drives. In this way Arthur Miller has expressed himself with conviction about his plays and intellectual perception of what the drama must be in contemporary theatre.

15.4 Philosophical Strands in Miller's Dramatics Works

In most of Miller's writings the fact that emerges as a dominant and running theme throughout is that the ultimate end of a normal human being's endeavours is the assumption of his rightful place in a world that is bound by love, and a universal sense of responsibility. A defeatist attitude on the part of man generally leads to heart-rending individual tragedies. When a man stumbles and fails to recognise his place in society or when he gives it up in favour of false values, he is bound to end up in tragedy. Miller's ideal of the world is that in which the individual is a naturally political, naturally private, naturally engaged emerged person. Miller had in mind the Greek **Polis**: The Greek drama was preoccupied with ultimate law, with the Grand Design, and was an expression of the basic assumption that the individual could not prosper unless his **Polis** prospered. The individual was an integral part of society. Miller's tragedies are about those who are not at home with society. They have either sinned against it or they have failed to accept their place in it or they have been refused what they expected from society. They are apparently misfits- the square pegs in round holes. To live a proper healthy life, it is a must for an individual to lead guilt-free conscience. This constituted the background of his plays like *All My sons, Death of a Salesman, The Crucible* and *A View from the Bridge*. *Death of a Salesman* is the story of a man who is sandwiched between the values of society and his personal norms. What he essentially is and what he genuinely desires is diametrically opposite to what society expects him to be. Willy Loman is a victim of his own dreams which are beyond his reach. He is victim of a conscience which he has tried to barter for his place in the society that fed him with wrong values.

Standing on the periphery of success, an aged Willy Loman watches his brother to go out into the jungle as a poor man who comes into fabulous wealth. Ben has reached 'from rags to riches' because he has been true to himself. Thus, the imprints of the ideas that dominated the Gatsbys and Babbits are reflected in Willy Loman's loss of conscience in his frantic pursuit of success. In his bewilderment, in his confusion and in his lonely estrangement from his self, he needs an optimist's and a pragmatist's advice. His brother Ben is ideally suitable for advising him. In the world of commercialism, competition and utilitarianism, the individual cannot live on bread alone. Emotional fulfilment is equally essential. Even the affluent persons are complacent but not happy. Success lies in one's attractive personality.

15.5 Willy Loman : A Portrait of Failure

Willy Loman doesn't find himself. It is Biff who really discovers Willy. Miller's plays show his serious preoccupation with problems facing his society. He focuses on the predicament on the common man in a rapidly advancing commercial society- the conflict between the ethics of business and the emotional relationship of the family. *Death of a Salesman* illustrates it so well that has become the most severe indictment of the values of the American commercial civilization. Miller doesn't indulge in the open diatribe of social malaise. He diagnoses the malady which afflicts the American civilization by dramatising what happens to an individual psyche. The best Americans are able to keep abreast in the race to survive and even become prosperous. The words expose the ugliness and sickness benealth the glamor and polish of the veneer of the commercial society in which nothing succeeds like success. Willy's own values project the hollowness of the civilization of which he happens to be an integral part. He has an incorrigible faith in the charisma of salesmanship. He wonders why he has failed to achieve his ideal. He is powerless to perceive that the ideal is unsuitable for him. Willy has false ideals and illusions to live by. His success myth of Business is hollow. Willy is conviced that success depends upon handsome personality, contacts, a quick smile, sartorial grace etc. His magic formula of mundane success is seemingly woven by the extremely popular figure Dale Carnegie the author of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Much of the pathos in the play *Death of a Salesman* is precipitated by the American business machine. Willy Loman symbolizes the conflict between man and salesman. Willy's world is peopled by aspirins, saccharin, chevrolets, shaving lotions, refrigerators, silk stockings and washing machines.

15.6 Let Us Sum Up

1. Arthur Miller rose from very humbles origins.
2. He wrote several plays and dwelt on various themes related to modern life.
3. The American theatre came in the lime light with the playwrights like Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and Eugene O'Neill.
4. The Post-war scenario of American drama was to a large extent dominated by Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller.
5. Arthur Miller's approach to drama was **organic**: it was to present an audio-visual illusion on the stage.
6. He treated the essential elements of drama differently in different plays.
7. As a playwright, he had his aesthetic commitments to the theatre. He wrote his plays to engender poetic.
8. He grasped the audience's psychology and presented his plays in accordance with their tastes and sensibilities.
9. *Death of a Salesman* by Miller was a grand success on the stage.
10. He employed the technique of expressionism and symbolism in his plays.
11. The individual was an integral part of society.
12. Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* is a victim of his dreams and wrong values. **He does not**

find himself.

13. Willy Loman is convinced that success depends upon one's handsome personality, contacts, a quick smile sartorial grace etc. One should be 'well-liked': this is the magic formula to success.

15.7 Review Questions

1. Comment briefly on modern American drama and theatre.
2. How does Miller rationalise his art of drama? Elaborate.
3. What is Miller's philosophy as a creative artist? Discuss.
4. What makes Willy Loman fail as a salesman? How is his dream of success shattered?
5. Write a note on modern American society and commercialized outlook

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UNIT-16

ARTHUR MILLER : *DEATH OF A SALESMAN*

Structure

16.0 Objectives

The very purpose of this study unit is to interprest Arthur Miller's masterpiece *Death of a Salesman*. The play, as an eye-opener, presents an awful predicament of the individual in a society where the institutions of marriage and family are consistently losing their meaning and existence. Attempt has been made to show how these institutions anchor the lost soul of the individual. The plight of Willy Loman is the plight of everyman in the modern industrialized and sophisticated society. It is high time the advanced students of literature grasped what a man would do when he had lost the grip on the social forces which cramped and broke him. In this unit, I have endeavoured how the modern man is traversing an extremely narrow precipice of faith, hope, ideal and despair beyond which there is nothing but death.

16.1 Warps and Woofs of the Play *Death of a Salesman*

When Willy Loman came home, the same day he left an a trip to New England territory. His wife, Linda, knew that he was a very desperate and broken man. Lately, he had been talking about the days gone by. Even while driving he had run off the road two or three times. He just did not know what he was doing. He bottled up gloom and despair, and he had now turned sixty three. He had devoted all his life to the company of which he has a salesman. He wanted a place for him in the New York- home office. Travelling all week and covering futile miles was rather too much for him now. His age had begun to speak and he felt somewhat exhausted. He desired a non-travelling assignment but travelling was essential for him as a salesman.

His son Biff who was his favorite though Happy- his another son- was more settled and successful than Biff. Biff was thirty-four but he was yet to find himself. He would take time to settle down. Biff had been an extra-ordinary football player at school. He had been a hero at Ebbets Field tournaments. Looking to his popularity, three colleges had offered him scholarships for further studies. Biff had not joined any college but toured around the West never making more than twenty eight dollars a week. He was a 'lazy

bum'. It was an exercise to understand the boy and it caused frustration in Willy Loman's heart. He regretted that his sons were non-entities. It was a pity that Biff could not find himself 'at the age of thirty four' : it was 'a disgrace' 0During the next two days, Willy fell into reminiscences and his whole life was unrolled before him like a scroll. His present life got mingled with half-forgotten events and episodes of yesterday. His last thirty years could be known through his sick broodings. His, very first blunder in his life was in not following the advice of his brother Ben to go to Alaska or Africa. Ben wanted him to join his business. Willy as a salesman made only two hundred dollars a week. He did not take Ben seriously and stayed in New York. Ben left as a pauper but within four years he was an affluent entrepreneur of diamond mines. He was a multi-millionaire. It is important to note that Willy's sons were "well liked : they were both built like Adonises" As chance would have it, Biff's class fellow Bernard, who carried Biff's shoulder pads to Ebbets Field, prospered. Willy Loman was extremely worried about his sons. Biff happened to steal a whole carton of footballs from the sports-goods store where he worked. Willy did not take it seriously. The boys stole some stock of lumber from a construction site. Willy Loman and the boys used the stolen wooden planks to make the front stoop. Biff, in spite of his personal attractiveness, wasted about ten years doing nothing worthwhile. Biff's performance at Ebbets Field had been the last great day in his life. Willy left for Boston after seeing his game. While he was at Boston hotel, Biff once noticed a naked woman in his apartment but Biff was not a fault-finding sort of son. Will Loman really felt guilty.

Biff was very weak as a student: he failed in mathematics. Willy's another son Happy was a smart guy. All young women were attracted to his handsome personality. He was working as an assistant merchandising manager and he was sure to rise. He was a resourceful man. Biff was yet to discover his potentialities and abilities to establish himself in some lucrative job. He tells Happy, "To suffer fifty weeks of the year for the sake of two week vacation..... And always to have to get ahead of the next fella..... that's how you build your future." When Willy came back home, he had big dreams: Biff would go back to work at Sports-goods store and get a loan sanctioned from the boss to establish himself. Willy had a soft corner for Biff. Will had made up his mind to see young Howard Wagner, his boss's son and would request him to get a place in the New York office of the company. He was fed up with extensive travelling. If he was transferred to New York, he would celebrate his new posting with Biff and Happy as they would host magnificent dinner at a restaurant. This was how things were planned but both the sons deserted their father. The proposed treat was almost forgotten. Biff did not get any loan either. Biff indulged in small thefts from the sports-goods store. He even stole a fountain pen and climbed down eleven flights with the small booty.

Willy consulted Charley- his old friend- to borrow some amount. Charley offered Willy a job but he declined saying that he was already a salesman and that they loved him in New England and he would still show his worth as a salesman. "They don't need me in NewYork. I am the New England man. I am vital in England" and that "I can park my car in any street in New England the cops protect it as their own."

Willy stumbled into dinner which the boys now arranged. Though he considered himself a failure yet he hoped against hope that Biff would succeed. After the dinner, Willy morose and depressed, came to his house. At the restaurant Happy had picked up two girls- Letta and Forsythe. Biff and Happy had disappointed Willy by neglecting him. When Biff and Happy came home, Linda told them to go out of the house by the next morning.

Linda apprehended the danger that Willy Loman could act desperately as a man of anguished soul. He had made an attempt to commit suicide earlier also. Giving vent to his anger and sense of failure, Biff cursed and abused Willy and called him, "You, fake, you phony little fake." Linda told Biff about Willy

"He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog..... you called him crazy." Willy came to know that Biff, who was a mere clerk and not a salesman in the sports-goods store, and had been failed in Kansas city for stealing; and that Happy was more or less a child delinquent who was a 'philandering' debauch and 'a woman-chasing bum': He could floor any girl. Willy had miserably failed as father. Seeing his father in utter despair, Biff began to weep. Willy did realise for the first time that Biff did not hate him. He did not want to depend on his sons. "I can't throw myself on my sons. I am not a cripple."

Willy, left alone after the others had gone upstairs tried to contact Ben again to tell him his plan. Willy had twenty thousand dollars in insurance. Biff could live satisfactorily with this handsome amount. Willy took his car out of the garage and drove crazily away. This was his fatal drive as he died in the road accident. His funeral was attended by Linda- his wife- Happy, Biff and his friend Charley. Charley was all praise for Willy Loman and Biff listened aptly to his father's appraisal. Charley observed that a salesman had to dream and that he was nothing without dreams. When the dreams were shattered, a salesman would be finished. Sobbing quietly, Linda stooped and placed a wreath of flowers on the grave of Willy Loman, the salesman. Willy had died a frustrated soul: His was the death of an unhappy salesman.

16.2 Critical Perspectives of *Death of a Salesman*

The performance of Miller's *Death of a Salesman* received a standing ovation in 1949. It brought Pulitzer Prize to Arthur Miller. It had a deep impact on the New Yorkers and revealed their inner depression in a subtle way. He had given expression to that gloom which his contemporary Americans bottled up in their hearts. He succeeded admirably in two hours' performance of the play. He highlighted the existence and identity through the life of a salesman in Brooklyn. Miller could read the audience psychology as a playwright. The self-identification of the Americans with Willy Loman clicked. He exposed the hollowness and the lack lustre ideals the Americans lived by and suffered from. Willy Loman's ideal of success is based on his physical fitness, hectic outdoor life, games and sports, tonics and vitamin pills. When the audience wept at the *Death of a Salesman*, it was not so much over the fate of Willy Loman- Miller's pitiable hero- but over the millions of such people who were co suffers. Willy's tragedy is brought upon him by his wrong dreams mesmerized by the two romantic images of success- one is his brother Ben who could amass millions in his enterprise of diamond mines. The second is Deve Singleman- the eighty four year old successful salesman who died in his "green velvet slippers" in the smoker of New York..... Willy wishes that his name should be recognised in the community with the success of his sons. No American could blame Willy for his dreams. His is the dream of the American citizen who wants to flourish in the materialistic, commercialized, civilization of the United States of America. It is the world of aspirin, saccharin, chevrolets, shaving lotion, washing machines, refrigerator, TV, and electronic gadgetry. The American notion of success constitutes the very alpha and omega of the play. *Death of a Salesman* is a challenge to the American dream of prosperity and happiness. Ben represents the American dream of success in adventurous exploration of new undiscovered territories full of gold and diamonds whereas Deve Singleman stands for the golden age of salesmanship during the inter-war period i.e. the nineteen twenties and the nineteen thirties. Willy is a middle-class American who has a dream of prosperous future- his son's good education, lucrative jobs, and high standard of living. Willy is failed by his whimsical nature and good for nothing sons. Willy regrets how he missed the boat in which he was to travel and accompany Ben to try his luck. Ben had told him that the jungle was "dark but full of diamond"[11]

Ben constantly reminded him to go to Alaska. "Why I didn't go with my brother to Alaska that time. Ben that man was a genius, that man was success incarnate" Willy regretted "Time, Willy, Time!..... The boat We'll be late."

Willy was rather Hamletic in temperament. He missed the boat which could lead him to a world of new opportunities, new adventures and new explorations. "The world is an oyster. But you don't crack it on mattress."[15] Laziness is a curse if a man happens to be ambitious. Willy Loman's stubborn refusal to compromise is his **hamartia** that leads him to self-destruction. He aspires to rise above his peers but he mismanages the lives of his two sons who enter the wrong avenues of life: He doesn't snub them when they steal wooden planks from a construction site but only laughs, as the act has gone unnoticed. What evokes one's pity for Willy is his awareness of his shortcomings and failures from the very beginning. He endeavours to realise his dream of success but things never improve for him. Willy wistfully yeans for the fragrance of lilacs, daffodils, peonies, wistareas. He hopes "the beets would grow out there" in the barren backyard. The street has no fresh air. "Grass doesn't grow and you cannot raise a carrot in the backyard." He is an anguished soul- desperate and broken. He confronts a vast abyss of confusion and rambling insanity. He is rather alzhemerish. In the perturbed state of mind his present and his past overlap when he falls into reminiscences. The very chaotic structure of *Death of a Salesman* corresponds to Willy's mind in which dream and reality are confused. He has effaced the boundaries of "now" and "then"- the present and the past being two distinct orientations of Time. Willy is day dreaming with mobile concurrenery of his past and present. He tells his sons about Ben, "You guys! There was a man who started with clothes on his back and ended up with gold mines." He regards Ben as the model of success: he had started with the scratch. The questions asked by Ben- What are building? Where is it?- haunt his memory. His life is an empty and futile attempt to live. He tells his wife Linda, "I am fat. They laugh at me....." Knowing that he is a total failure, he heads for self destruction. He is failed by his sons-Biff and Happy. It is a painful reality of his personal experience. His 'fragile-seeming' home is a skeleton of walls surround by a menacing 'solid vault of concrete apartment houses against the orange glow' of New York city and its skyscrapers. The towering structures make him feel dwarf. He feels suffocated in spite of open windows of his apartment. His illusion of future success is shattered. His life is like an empty shell. Like Miller's heroes, Willy sacrifices everything- even his life. He wishes to be recognised as a successful and prosperous American. His last discovery of Biff's love and forgiveness for him overpowers his whole being: he loses all sense in his exultation. He creis out, "That boy- is going to be magnificent....." In his frenzy, he rushes out to the inevitable end called death. He is sure that Biff would get 20,000 dollars from his insurance to live magnificently. Willy Loman's search for self-fulfilment ends here.

16.3 The Anatomy of Willy Loman's Failure

Willy Loman has courage to die to reaffirm his identity. It is 'heroic' : A person acquires a heroic stature in proportion to the extent he can sacrifice. Linda remarks, " Life is casting off. It's always that way." Willy tells Linda, "Figure it out. Work a life-time to pay off a house. You finally own it, and there is no body to live in it. The statement echoes the popular proverb: fools build the houses and wise men live in them. Life is not romantic or a bed of roses but a grim reality. Willy Loman should have been vital to New England as a New-England man but he couldn't be so. His old employer Wagner is dead and his son Howard doesn't "appreciate" his services to the company. He regrets this callousness of the corporate world in which the worth of a person is judged by the amount of money he generates for the owner.

Having watched the performance of *Death of a Salesman* the American audience shockingly realised that they were living like Willy. They sympathised with him earnestly because his aspiration towards self-fulfilment was turned into self-denial, self-destruction, existential despair and suicide. The truth of Willy Loman's life is not alien to his American contemporaries. Willy recollects how enthusiatically he had driven his red chevrolet (Shevvy) in 1928 but now he is cramped into loneliness and ennui. Multi

centric circles of vacuity are being formed as time passes.

Shall we state that old age is respectable. In India every boy is taught right from childhood to respect the parents and other elderly relatives, teachers and friends. An average Indian fails to understand why Willy Loman is rather neglected by his sons for whom has devoted his whole life. Willy mocks at Biff who doesn't like his tone: "Why does Dad mock at me all the time." It is not only 'generation gap' but "the concrete jungle" of New York. Loneliness of Willy is caused by alienation by his fair feather friends and relatives. It eats into his vitality and will to live. It is the inner enemy that is tormenting and fatal. "Business is bad, it's murderous" Business friendships are no remedy. The attitude of callousness and ingratitude of the employer towards the loyal salesman is really shocking. "Population is getting out of control. The competition is maddening" says Willy's wife. Willy's abject sense of failure is rooted in the tremendous waste of human resources in the corporate world of business in which misdirected energies involve the futility of labour. Willy is horrified to see how the employer discards the employee like a fruit-peel when he had squeezed all the juice out of it. Willy does not have the Buddhistic perception that his desires and passions are the causes of his suffering. Buddha's concept of **Nirwana** (self emancipation) is the extinction of self through annihilation of mundane desires but Willy's dreams, desires, and passions augment his suffering. He would have attained happiness if he had discarded his individuality. But he could not belittle his ambitions and desires of his and his son's well-being failing which his life was a mode of suicide. Willy's failure is rooted in his Americanism- his dream of an affluent life style. Willy has high-pitched aspirations. To an Indian, his life is an investment in self-destruction, and death by suicide. The play higlights how the force of highly commercialized society destroys the people ungratefully and callously. This is going to happen in other countries which are endeavouring to be technologically advanced in the near future.

16.4 Some Specimen Passages with Explanations

1. "Well, I spent six or seven years after high school trying work myself up. Shipping clerk, salesman, business of one kind or another. And it's a measly manner of existence. To get on that subway on the hot mornings in summer. To devote your whole life to keeping stock, or making phone calls, or selling or buying. To suffer fifty weeks of the year for the sake of a two-week vacation, when all you really desire to be outdoors, with your shirt off. And always get ahead of the next fella. And still- that's how you build a future."

   Willy Loman's son Biff speaks to his brother Happy that after passing his high school, he had tried his hand at various petty jobs. He became a shipping clerk and a salesman for sometime. But he was not going to devote his life to keeping stock of things or making phone calls or doing the business of buying or selling by way of dull routine. It meant an uninteresting harness for fifty weeks a year. But a person desired freedom when he could have all the time to himself- loafing outdoors in a relaxing mood in shorts and sandos. But business means cut throat competition. One had to outdistance the man ahead of one. One had to leave him far behind and not far ahead. That's how one could succeed in the world of trade and commerce. A routine bound concentrated hard work was a key to success.

2. "You and Hap and I, and I'll show you all the towns. America is full of beautiful towns and fine upstanding people. And they know me, boys, they know me up and down England. The finest people. And when I bring you fellas up, There will be open sesame for all of us, 'cause one thing, boys: I have friends. I can park my car in any street in New England, and the cops protect it like their own."

Willy Loman is speaking to his sons about his successful occupation of a salesman. He tells them he is a popular salesman in all the towns of New England. His customers are fine. They are strong guards for him. He says he has contacts with them. They are quite friendly to him. It is the 'contacts' which could be a formula for success. He says that his car could be parked in any street in England with the least apprehension of any harm. His customers would keep a protective watch on it. He could show it to them this very summer.

3. "That's why I thank Almighty God you're both build like Adonises. Because a man who makes appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want. You take me....."

Willy Loman speaks to his sons Happy and Biff. He admires their handsomeness which is an extra feather in the business world to succeed. A person who creates personal interest does excel all others as a business man. He wishes them to be well-liked by others. Willy is proud of his success as salesman. He was well liked by the buyers. He was quite popular with them. Willy is under a serious misconception that it is one's handsomeness, or smartness or sartorial grace which clicks. This is Willy's magic formula of success.

4. "What's the mystery? The man knew what he wanted and went out and got it! Walked into a jungle and comes out, the age of twenty one, and he's rich! The world is an oyster, but you don't crack it open on a mattress."

Willy Loman rationalises the admirable success of his brother Ben who had his clear objective regarding his pre occupation. He entered the jungle of Africa and became the proprietor of diamond mines. He came into money and amassed fabulous wealth as a parvenu. It was his leap into the unknown- the mystique of his success. Willy Loman uses a metaphor of an "oyster" which is cracked open with determined hard work. A couch-potato- a slothful man- cannot crack it open on a mattress. A lazyman cannot achieve success. Ben succeeded at the young age of twenty one only. Willy Loman desires to embue his sons with Ben's spirit.

5. "I don't say he is a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He is not to be allowed to fall into his grave like a dog. Attention must be finally paid to such a person. You called him crazy."

Linda, Willy Loman's wife, snubs Biff for calling his father crazy. Her heart goes for Willy because she is aware of his depressed and desperate state of mind. She has pity for him. She knows that he is not a heroic character or a genius but he is a human being with his aspirations, ambitions and the dream of success. Unfortunately he is failed by his sons who are good for nothing. They have no lucrative jobs and no fat salaries. They are idling away their time of youth. They do not care for the feelings of the ageing father. Much attention must be paid- the oldman should not be allowed to die as a neglected compromised and marginalised individual in the family. He deserves to live in a dignified manner. He should not be left to die unceremoniously towards the fag end of his life. Linda has a soft corner for her husband and tells her sons to behave themselves well since father is more than a man: he is an institution.

6. "There were promises made across this desk! You mustn't tell me you've got people to see- I put thirty four years into the firm, Howard, and now I can't pay my insurance. You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away- a man is not a fruit!"

Willy Loman has been a very hardworking and sincere salesman in the company of Howard's father. Willy Loman enhanced the business of the company as he averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in commissions. Howard's father had made certain promises to him across the desk. But Howard only exploited the veteran salesman. Willy Loman felt as if Howard would only eat the orange and throw the peel away. It is a routine in private enterprises as the theory of "use and throw" is in vogue. Willy was shocked that even after putting in thirty four years' service in the firm, Howard had little consideration for him. It simply disappointed him

7. "Nobody dast blame this man. You don't understand: Willy was a salesman. And for a salesman, there is no rock bottom to the life. He don't put a bolt to a nut, he don't tell you the law or give you medicine. He's a man out there in the blue, riding on a smile and shoe shine. And they start not smiling back- That's an earthquake."

At the funeral of Willy Loman, Charley, Biff's friend, makes serious observations about him. He says that Willy was not understood by his sons as a professional salesman. His job demanded hard work and single-minded devotion. He was neither an engineer nor a medical doctor nor an advocate. He was a salesman who was most impecably dressed in his blue suit and who was all smiles. He expected reciprocal smiles from those around him. When he realised that his sons, his boss's son Howard etc were indifferent to him, he was heart broken. Man does not live by bread alone. The cheque book alone doesn't remedy one's psychological problems.

16.5 A Pointwise Summing Up

1. Willy Loman was a salesman who toured extensively in New England and developed 'contacts' to make his job a flourishing business.
2. He was disappointed by his sons- Biff and Happy. Biff was a good sportman- a player of football but he was a failure as a professional. Happy was an Epicurean who idled away his time.
3. Willy's brother Ben had admirably succeeded in the jungles of Africa. He had amassed fabulous wealth in his enterprise of diamond mines.
4. He was Willy's icon of success.
5. It was Biff who discovered Willy. He tried to understand his father and respected him.
6. Linda-Willy's wife- was faithful to him and appreciated his aspirations, ambitions and values.
7. Willy Loman's American dream of success was shattered. He committed suicide as he could not endure the existential despair.
8. Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* succeeded admirably on the stage. Miller could grasp the audience psychology. He did point out the malaise of American civilization which was out and out materialistic.
9. *Death of a Salesman* was a shoking challenge to American dream of prosperity and happy and false values.
10. Willy called the world 'an oyster'. One didn't crack it on the mattress. In other words, sloth was a deadly sin the world of business.
11. *Death of a Salesman* is a tragedy. It has tragic tension in its texture. He is disillusioned with the

callous world of business: His boss's son Howard makes him a non-entity in spite of his service as salesman in his father's firm.

16.6 Let Us Sum Up

The major theme of *Death of a Salesman* is to depict the individual's struggle for attaining a rightful place in his society and family. Arthur Miller's protagonists assert themselves to hostile society: it is their obsession and Willy Loman is no exception. He desires to keep up his identity in the dehumanizing, indifferent and callous environment of the corporate world. He is out and out an ego-centric individual. His exclusiveness or privateness is his self-styled idiosyncrasy. The complexity of society seems to militate against him. Miller strikes a balance between the morass of subjective emotional life and socially cogent and meaningful themes. *Death of a Salesman* is not an Aristotlean tragedy. Willy Loman doesn't rise to the stature of Aristotlean tragic hero: he doesn't have moral integrity. He partially deranged. This is the anatomy of his failure. He is torn between American social values and his personal life style. Though he is a dedicated salesman in his own right but he doesn't apply subtle tactics to his business. He is growing ineffectually old. *Death of a Salesman* is a question mark on the American dream of success in the world of cut throat competition and business. The salesman, having shattered his dream, has no alternative but to die. Willy Loman wavers under the strain of his apparent failure. His wife Linda, who is loving and loyal, always stands in his defence and explains the character of Willy to Biff and Happy with heart-wringing reality. Loman is a victim of American **Depression**, a financial crisis which engulfed many firms, corporations and business enterprises in big loss.

16.7 Review Questions

1. Discuss Miller's *Death of a Salesman* as an indictment of the American values.
2. Is Willy a victim of society or his own victim? Discuss.
3. Is *Death of a Salesman* a tragedy with an unheroic hero? Make your observations.
4. Discuss how far can *Death of a Salesman* be regarded as a family drama.
5. Does Miller succeed in presenting Willy Loman as a Modern Everyman? Make your own comments.
6. Discuss Miller's *Death of a Salesman* as a tragedy.

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UNIT-17

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS AND THE AMERICAN DRAMA

Structure

17.0 Objectives

The primary objectives of this study unit is to highlight the dramatic craft of Tennessee Williams who objectified his personal experiences through the personalities of his characters. He had poetic sensibility which enveloped his drama. He wove dexterously his philosophy and poetry into the dialogues of his plays. He is an existentialist intellectual who discovered himself in Drama and made it a vehicle of his romantic vision. This study unit unrevels the mystery and enigma of William's poetic creativity. He is a playwright with a difference. He is a romantic artist in an unromantic and unheroic age. Attempts has been made in this study unit to rationalise and interpret his response to the mundane realities of the present age.

17.1 The American Drama: A Perspective Upto Tennessee Williams

In the historical perspective, the twentieth century drama presents a host of playwrights who have brought the genre of American drama on a par with the English drama. It is rather astonishing that in the midst of the television and the movie, the American drama is getting increasingly popular. It has been subjected to newer experiments and technical innovations by talented playwrights: it swings between the realms of reality and illusion as the imagination of the playwright is at work. Eugene Walter in the psychological perspective discussed the frailty of character in the *The Easiest Way* in which a young girl with a comely face and questionable future shows herself unfit for the task of mending her ways. Clyde Fitch treated jealousy as the theme of *The Girl with the Green Eyes*.

With Augustus Thomas'a play *The Witching Hour* (1908) American drama entered the realm of psychology. This was a court-room melodrama in which telepathy determined action. *The Faith Healer* by William Vaughan Moody showed that a character's powers were related to his self confidence rather than to magic. In *The Great Divide* he combined psychology with social reality. He narrated the story of a New England woman who was once the victim of the bestial passion of a man of 'Wild West'. Shaking off her puritanic sentiments she realised that she loved him. Social tensions created out of the conflicts between labour and capital were depicted by Charles Klein in *The Lion and The Mouse* while political corruption was the central theme in Clyde Fitchte's play *The City.*

American theatre won recognition with Edward Sheldon's play *The Nigger*(1909). A Southerner learns to his dismay that he is not a pure blooded Anglo-Saxon as he thought himself to be. These plays could not be branded modern because they were pseudo-realistic. American drama suffered from colloquial humour until the advent of Eugene O'Neill with his short plays presented by Province town players after 1914. Early American drama had 'forced optimism' and 'happy endings' of the plays. Thus, early American realism was intellectually confined, inconsistent and critically lax. Philip Barry and Behrman did produce in the 1920s the plays *Holidays, Paris Bound, The Animal Kingdom* and *The Philadelphia Story*. These plays showed a civilized writer's vehement protest to conventional wealth, social position and righteousness in moral concerns. The characters arrived at a point of reasonableness and tolerance superceding their arrogance. The heroine of *Paris Bound* realised that even she, the marmorial American upper class matron, is vulnerable to seduction.

Behrman's play *The Second Mass* (1927) is an interesting play. The story is that a middle-aged writer feels himself at home in the company of a middle-aged woman. The writer does not pay any attention to young women as he may fail to live upto their expectations. He prefers the middle aged woman who has no expectations from him. In *Biography* (1932) both the spouses have essential incompatibility. Behrman has experimented with various themes. He had keen insight into the realities of character, he had well-sustained wit and urbane dialogue. In *The Philadelphia Story*, a young radical exclaims that he is not a communist to which his mistress quips that he is just a 'pin-feather on the left wing'. Rarely did American playwrights equal Barry's and Behrman's vital sense of humour.

Post 1918 American playwrights showed a zeal for blunt- edged realism which was characteristically American. In collaboration with Lawrence Shallings, Maxwell Anderson produced *What Price Glory* in 1924 invigorating American comedy. One cannot fail to exclude Robert Sherwood's *Reunion in Vienna* and *Life with Father* jointly produced by Haward Lindsay and Russel Crouse, and *Both Your Houses* (1933) also. Garson Kanin's hilarious picturesque comedy *Born Yesterday* appeared in (1946). Howard Lindsay and Russal Crouse produced *States Union* exposing the compromises involved in choosing candidates for the Presidency of the United States. The same theme was taken up by Gare Vidal in *The Best Man* (1960). Sidney Howard came out with his attractive regional comedy. He was a craftsman of comic drama with a fine ear for colloquial speech. His comedy *They Knew What They Wanted* was a comedy based on the wine-brewing Italian population of California. It relates to the marriage between an affluent elderly Italian and a young waitress who settle for what they want most. Quite distinct American comic writings appeared in the works of Charles Mac Arther, Bon Hecht, George S. Kaufman, Moss Hart etc. They amused their audience with the imperfections and extravagances of American life. *Meston of the Movies* and *Once in a Lifetime* reduced the Hollywood motion picture industry to absurdity. Kaufman and Hart's *You Can't Take It With You* illustrated how the problems of serious nature could be reduced to fantastic extravaganza. George Kelly's *Craig's Wife* is an example of low grade realism.

One of the most illustrious names in American drama is that of Eugene O'Neill. He was the most genuine imaginative American realist. He presented the credentials of his art through his plays-*Anna Christie, Beyond The Horizon, Desire Under The Elms, Mourning Becomes Electra, The Iceman Cometh, A Moon for the Misbegotten* and *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. He wrote for the stage unhampered by the conventions and sought to explore the unexplored regions of the human mind. His exclusive purpose was neither to please nor to entertain. He could handle both comedy and tragedy with equal dexterity. Naturalistic and expressionistic currents happily co-mingle in the plays of O'Neill. The likeness of an O'Neill play to that of Ibsen, Strindberg, or Antony Chekhov gives sufficient evidence of the influences of these playwrights on the personality of Eugene O'Neill. Yank, the hero of *The Hairy Ape* is a modern

Everyman who denies the moral security of his life as a stoker and sets out to rediscover where he belongs to. Rejected by both the upper class and the lower class he reverts. The beast in him is awakened. He can tolerate neither the upper class nor the lower class. He releases a hairy ape from its cage to help him pull down his enemies: the ape kisses him and crushes him to death. The playwright shows how Yank was oppressed by the capitalistic and technological society and the crux of the story is psychological rather than sociological.

The development of modern American drama is not exclusively realistic in its orientation. Paul Green made drama poetic and fantastic in *Hymn to the Rising Sun* and *Tread the Green Grass*.

Arthur Miller was preoccupied with moral passion and a strong sense of social responsibility. His plays *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* were remarkable. Willy Loman endeavours to overcome his littleness with unrealistic claims. *Death of a Salesman* is a bourgeois tragedy the essence of which is realism and pathos. Willy Loman is thrown out-of-work. He is broken as a non-productive salesman. Miller is aware of his deep indebtness to Henrik Ibsen- the great Norwegian playwright and he adopts one of his plays to the American stage. His version of *Enemies of the People* is replete with proletarian sentiments of the American drama of the nineteen-thirties. *The Crucible* was another remarkable play. In *A View From the Bridge* (1955), Arthur Miller turned, like many of his contemporaries, to the classical Greek stage. He admitted kings and heroes on the American stage under the umbrella of Freudian symbolism. His play *Incident at Vichy* described the deportation of suspected Jews from Nazi dominated Vichy. Lillian Hellman came out with *Toys in the Attic*. She embraced the realistic outlook which binds the husband to the wife, brother to sister, child to mother, etc. It is a sense of belonging ensuring security, and respect for the individual . Hellman pursued her themes indirectly but uncompromisingly. The younger sister in *Toys in the Attic* is the embodiment of evil.

Tennessee Williams showed exceptional skill in the writing of dialogue which was at once poetical and colloquial. *The Glass Menagerie* is a memory play which presents a subdued nostalgic family portrait. A young man Tom endeavours to bring back into memory the efforts made by his mother to recreate the atmosphere and graceful formality of the Old South to trap her daughter's 'gentleman caller'. The character of Tom's mother combines the ludicrous and the noble elements. In the play *A Street Car Named Desire* (1947), the heroine is a young woman who learns to live the mystic life of the South. To her utter despair and frustration, she is thrown into the life of New Orleans-Molested by her brother-in-law, she retreats to the security of a lunatic asylum. Each scene of the play is in itself a miniature play. William Inge is a playwright who depicts the middle class people and their problems. He visualises the middle class in search of a goal with the help of which it can escape insecurity and make frustration and failure tolerable. In *Come Back Little Sheba* (1950), Inge selects his hero- a victim of the demon of drink. He is not a mere tipsy fellow: he is a total failure. *Picnic* (1953) has a football champion as its hero whose love affair was the basis of a good number of movies in which the marriage of the muscles and glamour became the image of happiness. Both the hero and the heroine are good dreamers but they have no capacity to realise their dreams. *Bus Stop*(1955) has half a dozen well-drawn characters: a cowboy, a night club singer, a green girl, a professor, a wordly wise widow, a small-town sheriff and a bus driver. Brought together by an accident during the journey all these characters leave the bus-stop at the end of the play with their interpersonal relationships recast. The play speaks volumes of the reality of American society.

Despite the growing craze for the movie and the T.V. each show of the Broadway theatre is attended by a large number of people.

17.2 Tennessee Williams: A Playwright with a Difference

Tennessee Williams, in sharp contrast to Hellman, Odets and Arthur Miller, is essentially a dramatist of the individual. His primary concern, like Eugene O'Neill's is not how one gets along with others, but with himself. The fundamental premise of his creative impulse is, in his words, "the need for understanding and tenderness and fortitude among individuals trapped by circumstances."[1] He disowns his acquaintance with political and social diatectics and prefers to call himself a "Humanitarian"[2] He observed, "I have never met one that I couldn't love if I completely knew him and understood him."[3] Tennessee Williams knows, understands and loves certain type of characters. He describes these types of characters in his "Introduction" to Carson McCuller's novel *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, "It appears to me, sometimes, that there are only two kinds of people who live outside what E.E.Cummings has defined as "this so-called world of ours"- the artists and the insane. Tennessee Williams calls them outsiders because they fail to achieve an adjustment with the world. They do not feel at home and are nearly always afflicted, frustrated or desperate. They are focussed in Tennessee Williams's plays. These characters are unwilling to face the music of life. They sustain illusions. The heroine of *The Portrait of a Madonna* imagines herself being violated by one of her beaux. Tennessee Williams's characters live in the world of make believe rather than in the world of mundane and down-to-the-earth realities. Laura, unable to continue with the Business College and to manage the typing lessons, takes refuge into fabrication and fantasy. A crippled girl, who thinks that she is different from others, pretty much the way her favorite unicorn is among her glass animals. Blanche DuBois in *A Street Car Named Desire* abhors light lest it should reveal things as they are and takes care to wrap up a naked bulb in coloured shades. Popkin draws her attention to her desire to indulge in self deception in the bathroom song-

It's only paper moon, just as phony as it can be

But it wouldn't be make believe if you believed in me.

These characters are tough guys and follow a different system of values. Seraphima in *The Rose Tattoo* fears that her fragile dream world will not be able to survive the shock of exposure to truth. Therefore, she doesn't listen wilfully and deliberately, persistent rumours about her demised husband's extra marital relationships, and devoutly worships the vase containing his ashes. Brick in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* pretends to be unaware of a kind of attachment that Skipper declares on the phone and tries to find the solace of oblivion in alcohol. Facts of earthly life and experience are rather too much for them. Maggie, while talking to her husband, really puts her finger on what ails him, "Oh, you weak, beautiful people who give up with such grace. What you need is some one to take a hold of you- gently, with love and hand back your life to you, like some gold you let go of". That is why, Tennessee Williams is indulgent, rather than indignant, towards them.

His characters are seen struggling in two kinds of prisons- the one is of their own making and the other is created by social forces. William Sharp observes that the particular conflict with which Williams is concerned is "the struggle between what man feels he is or ought to be and what society thinks what he is or ought to be."[5] The characters are condemned to their self-styled isolation and alienation contributing little to society. There is an unfailing element of pathos in their lives. Alma in *Summer and Smoke*, daughter of a clergyman, attempts to emulate the example of the stone angel of the fountain by denying her flesh-and-blood reality, by supposedly preserving her chastity. Although she is clandestinely in love with John, she spurns his invitation to retire to the rooms over the Casino while the people are excitedly shouting about the cock fight. Eventually, she consents to pick up a travelling salesman. "At foot of steps she faces

the stone angel and raises her hand in a sort of valedictory salute."[6] Laura blames herself for being a dropout and a failure in *The Glass Menagerie*. Henna Jelkes in *The Night of the Iguana* suffers due to her own inhibitions and built in constraints. But society cannot be completely exonerated as the internalised social mores hinder the self-fulfilment of these characters. These characters are the very authors of their woeful existence, with the caveat that those who have brought them up are responsible for building into them life-denying attitudes. It is more of less unworkable Puritanic orientation. The tyranny of society can be seen at its worst in *Orpheus Descending* where Val Xavier and Lady who are in death-defying love are destroyed as a result of the unholy alliance among Jabe Torrance, the sheriff and the mob of the town. The descent of the artist into the world of the prudent people proves disastrous. Boss Finley gets chance Wayne castrated. He has remained at least one critic of the medieval cleric "who fell in love with Heloise and who in consquence was castrated by the command of her uncle, the Canon of Notre Dame Cathedral.[7] Similarly, Sebastian, the poet with a vision, and Catherine are destroyed by Mrs Venable, a representative of the establishment. The very name of this woman engaged in sordid bargain comes from the Latin root meaning vendible - "that which is sold for sale."[8]

Williams in the case of Blanche in *A Street Car Named Desire* dramatizes how the Philistines put a strait jacket on an outsider and pressurized him into dead and meaningless conformity. Blanche who has the sensibility of a poet is finally shunted off to a lunatic asylun. Williams is reported to have remarked on this distressed fragile and febrile woman, "If you don't watch out the apes will take over."[9] When one sees Blanche standing at the threshold of a crucial change in an uneasy life, ecstatically declaring "Sometimes there's God so quickly", our feelings are terribly outraged by Stanley's blasting all her prospects of a happy married life. It is the gentle creatures- the broken and the misfits- and not the brutal ones, the victims and not the victimisers, who set the pattern and genesis of a characteristic Williams play.[10] Surely these alienated and fugitive kind of characters cannot be made an integral part of the humdrun and mundane life. This is the recurring theme of William's plays. It should be more than fortuitous accident that writers like Leo Tolstoy, D.H. Lawrence, Jean Jaques Rousseau, Ernest Hemingway, Rilke, and Tennessee Williams exhort man to return to his promitive self to restore the radiance and vitality that he has lost during the growth of civilization. It is Rousseauque romanticism when William writes in his Preface to *I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix*; Lawrence felt the mystery and the power of sex as the primeval life urge, and was the life long adversary of those who wanted to keep the subject locked away in the cellars of prudery." In Greek mythology Antaeus remained invincible so long as he preserved his ties with Terra- the Earth/his mother. Only by uproting him from the earth could his rival Hercules succeed in strangling him in mid-air. A fear haunts the wise that mankind may annihilate itself through sophistication and refinement. A strong need is felt by a number of writers to help man assert his elemental self against the inroads of wholesale mechanization, technological advancement and urbanization. According to Tennessee Williams this insidious and ubiquitous menace can possibly be met through a release of libidinal forces which have long been anathema to prudery and hypocrisy. Williams protests the rejection of life. He celebrates the body and looks approving at those characters who seek fulfilment through it like Big Daddy, Serafin Della Rose and her daughter in *The Rose Tattoo*, Maggy in *Cat*, Stella in *A Street Car Named Desire* and Nellie in *Summer and Smoke*. He is critical of those characters who deny genuine human nature like Alma, Brick, and Miss Fellows in *The Night of the Iguana*. Sometimes Tennessee Williams suggests that **deviant sexual behavior like homosexuality, lesbianism,..... etc shouldn't be frowned upon if it facilitates escape from loneliness**. In *Cat*, Brick's broken ankle symbolizes his castration produced by the deseration of his friend. It was at the suggestion of Elia Kazan that the play was made to end with the resumption of the normal relationship between Maggy and Brick.[11] Tennessee Williams makes too much

of sex: it has become a ***fetish***. It affords pleasure in the momentary and evenescent world which is extremely inhospitable and callous. Sex happens to be an island of felicity in the turbulent and stormy oceans of existence.

17.3 Predicament of Tennessee's Characters

Tennessee Williams, a playwright of most delicate dreams, remains an enigma to his admirers and critics. He has been hailed as the most poetic of all American playwrights but he often shocks his audiences with unpleasant and unsavoury truths. His dramatic art lies in transforming the painful and commonplace experiences into a thing of beauty. He is a playwright in the romantic tradition.[12] Since he was not satisfied with a mere realistic portrayal of human life, he experimented with "the objectification of subjective vision, with its transformation into concrete symbols."[13] Williams believed that his art could reconcile the poetic paradoxes of darkness and light, good and evil, body and soul. Jarkson comments on Williamd "like the objective expressionists, the playwright regards art as one of the great life forms, as an instrument of reconcilition no less important than religion, philosophy, politics or human love."[14] One of the prominent images in the plays of Williams is that of a romantic wanderer in search of beauty and purity. Val Xamier is a restless visionary in the play *Battle of Angels*. C.C. Matthew compares him to medieval knights and shows that in such romances as Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, the episodes fall into a streamlined pattern of a knight leaving his home in quest of adventure, serving a lady, and meeting challenges on her behalf.[15] Since Val Xamier does not come from a royal court, his adventures are hardly in the tradition of courtly romances. He is no St. George of Percival but a modern knight.[16] Matthew examines Val Xamier's character and shows that "clearly Williams is using the device of the romantic quest and embuing his knight errant with the attributes of an ancient deity and a modern self exploring artist."[17]

Many characteristics of Val Xamier are dramatised in the character of Tom Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie*. Tennessee Williams was influenced by the poet Hart Crane. According to Gilbert Debuscherm, Tom Wingfield is rather a "shady portrait.....of Hart Crane himself."[18] Tischler points out that Williams must have felt a kinship with this lonely, Dionysian poet- a homeless wanderer like himself.[19] The characters Williams sympathized with were those who had visionary and sensitive spirits and wished to search something deeper in life. Their quest was part of the perennial quest of mankind to assign meaning to existence. Tennessee Williams was of the opinion that there was something more mysteriously sublime than life and death but hardly anybody was aware of it. He remarked that the theatre was a perpetual search "for that something."[20] He had full faith in this romantic quest and his plays were manifestations of that human longing for something better, higher and purer in the existence of man. In all his great plays, Williams tried to recreate his personal life. His works are "metaphors for his own life."[21] He tried to translate his personal anguish into exciting climatic events and his formidable critic Stanton rightly observes that in one sense his plays are "a literary device, a camouflage" and in another, "a confession."[22] Williams was fully aware of the close connection between the personality of the artist and his creative work. He tried his best to master the trick of transcending the singular concern in favour of the plural concern i.e. he endeavoured to move "from personal to general import."[23] Williams could not help being subjective and autobiographical . He looked within to comprehend the problems of the people around him. His world of drama "is the symbolization of a personal vision of reality, the concretization of the singular imagination of a poet."[24] His plays objectify his own inner conflicts: He dramatizes self-confrontation. We understand that producing a play is a public activity and theatre is definitely the objective form of art and that there is little scope of personal lyricism. But Williams as a playwright succeeded in distancing himself from his deeper concerns and yet portrayed deep anguish on the stage. It is a remarkable achievement on his part. The theatre

offered him "the opportunity of acting out" his "anxieties and fears" born out of "the conflict between private needs and public values."[25] Looking to the conditions in America after World War II, Bigsley points out that when 'dispossession and alienation characterized' the United States of America in general and the south in particular, Tennessee Williams was reaching out not into cultural ideology, but into the perilous tensions of his own life, creating out of them symbolic characters representing loneliless, dislocation and despair.[26] Even as a teenager, he had discovered writing as an escape from the world of reality in which he nearly always felt uncomfortable. Writing became for him, to quote him, "my place of retreat, my cave, my refuge."[27] When his first play was staged by a small theatre group in 1935, it was warmly applauded and young Wiliiams realised the attractiveness of this genre and to quote his own words, he 'discovered the thrill of the people reacting to my work before my eyes"[28] This experience gave him a chance of "publicly sharing a work created in solitude." Since then, he never looked back, though he had to plod very hard for a decade to create his niche in the American theatre. His friend Clark Mills has observed, "**Tom had a fanatical and inexhaustible energy in his writing. His persistence was almost grotesque. It was dionysion, demonaic.**"[29] Williams felt a ***fatal*** need to write and he did write with deep dedication and determination all his life.

17.3 Let Us Sum Up

Skloot expresses the opinion that Tennessee Williams's special contribution to American drama is "his intuition of, and insistence on the value, significance and necessity of the broken pieces of humanity."[30] In depicting the terrifying loneliness of individuals and their persistence struggle "to communicate meaningfully to each other, he often attains heights of poetic beauty"[31] His sympathetic and powerful depiction of "the plight of Wingfields, the destruction of Blanche Dubois and the struggle of Margarate and Big Daddy for Brick Pollitt are presented with a compassion, perception and intensity which are characteristic of William's finest efforts"[32] in American Drama.

When his play *The Glass Menagerie* triumphed on the stage in 1945, Williams was taken by surprise. He realised the worth of his earlier struggle and tried to run away from "the casastrophe of success."[33] He described his earlier career as " a life of clawing and scratching along a sheer surface and holding on tight with raw fingers to every inch of rock higher than the one caught hold of before."[34] In the image of the incessant struggle, as referred to above, I find that his life is a constant battle "against those mighty forces which would tear man from his innate nobility and break his desire for truth"[35] Williams knew the predicament of the artist in the modern world because it is the sensibility of artists which enables them to "undertake the challenge of answering the crucial question of life"[36] Many of his characters in his plays are artists, poets and writers, and they are compassionate. They search for beauty and thus engage themselves in the noblest human endeavour. Williams has given a nobler sense of values to the poets and a compassion for humanity. The premise of his art has been the need for understanding and tenderness and fortitude among individuals trapped by hostile and unfavourable circumstances. It is the visionaries and the artists who speak to us of man's obligation to seek Truth and struggle to create a humane and congenial environment to live peacefully and meaningfully. It is only human contact and warmth that can console lonely individuals. The idea of togetherness is very recurrent in Williams's works. Alienation, isolation, and indifference are the key words of his moral vision. Self effacement and self sacrifice are essential. In other words, abnegation of self is paradoxically enough, the only avenue of fulfilment of self. One has to transcend one's self to seek fulfilment.[37] Human dignity, self respect, purity of heart and commitment to one's vision of truth are meaningful to him and to his characters. Williams shows that without the artists to dream and without the audience to share the artist's dream, humanity will go over to the beasts. As a romantic

visionary in a prosaic age, Tennessee Williams tried his best to dramatise his own tensions in the plays. He is a romantic visionary in the unromantic world.[38] His characters have a courage of conviction.

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17.7 Review Qiestions

1. Write a note on American drama before Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams came upon the scene.

2. Discuss the salient features of Eugene O'Neill's and Tennessee Williams's dramas.

3. Write an essay on the characters of Tennessee Williams.

4. How far do you agree that Tennessee Williams was a romantic visionary poet who plundered into American Drama? Discuss.

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UNIT-18

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *THE GLASS MENAGERIE*

Structure

18.0 Objectives

Tennessee Williams's play *The Glass Menagerie* is unique in the post-war American drama. The playwright has employed sophisticated techniques of the theatre in its composition. Attempt has been made in this study unit to point out the remarkable qualities of this play with reference to characterization, stage-craft, plot construction etc. The play articulates an unfailing tragic tension in the deep structure but on the surface it is humdrum human existence. The play has illustrated existential despair seemingly evaded by the characters' dream world. The play, thematically swings between reality and illusion like the pedulum of a watch.

18.1 Introduction

In the modern age man is caught in a net of illusions which he fabricates himself. Under hostile circumstances he imagines that is far different from others and from what he really is, and adopts an attitude of escape from the stark realities of his humdrum existrence. He may be addicted to alcohol to forget the unendurable present. He may take to smoking. In *The Glass Menagerie,* Tennessee Williams traces the effect of illusion upon the individual by exploring the physical, mental and spiritual condition of the Wingfield family. There are three members in the family: Amanda Wingfield- the mother, Tom Wingfield- her son and Laura Wingfield- her daughter. They are extremely poor, and suffer from ill-health and tension. The father of Tom deserted his wife and children to escape from the responsibility of the family. The harsh realities of life haunt every member in the family though they harbour comforting illusions. The truth shatters their illusions and all the three members plunge themselves into a crisis. Laura- the grown up and marriageable daughter- is crippled. One of her legs is shorter than the other. This physical defect resulted in various complications. She is rather shy to face the people, and she withdraws into a state of self-styled isolation. She has however created a small artificial world of her own which Amanda calls 'The Glass Menagerie'- a collection of small glass animals. She feels she is one of these animals living in their beautiful but **fragile** world. Tom is unable and unwilling to take the burden of the family on his shoulders. He hates the apart-

ment and apparently treads the old path of his father. This makes Amanda miserable and tense. Tom doesn't like his petty job in the warehouse because of its dull routine. He remarks that for sixty-five dollars a week I "give up all that I dream of doing and being ever....." "Man is by instinct a lover, a hunter, a fighter, and none of those instincts are given much play at warehouse"[1]

The true condition of Amand as the mother of two children, who are social failures, stares her in the faces all the time. She had sent Laura to a college but it proved to be a dismal failure. Then, Laura was taken to the Young People's League at the church which proved to be a fiasco. Amanda is worried for Laura who is preoccupied with **her glass menagerie** and listens to old songs. She thinks of her marriage though she is crippled. Laura knows it well. "But mother..... I crippled"[2] Amanda's predicament is that she lives in her past. She is "a little woman of great but confused vitality clinging frantically to another time and place." and is constantly irked by the hostile present. She persistently strives to escape into a world of illusion. In her allusion, she underestimates her daughter's physical drawback: "Don't say crippled: You know that I never allow that word to be used!"[3] She remarks euphemistically that Laura is different from other girls.

Amanda- as a woman belonging to the world of the illusory past- creates an artificial Thespian world of her own, to tide over the desperate state of affairs. She thinks that the slight disadvantage in Laura could be counter balanced and overcome, if she could develop charm and vivacity: "When people have some slight disadvantage like that, they cultivate other things to make up for it- develop charm and vivacity....."[4] She entertains the notion that it is possible for her to transform her crippled daughter into an irresistible one by artificial means. Amanda works "like a Turk" in the preparation to receive **the gentleman caller**. The whole apartment is given a shining new appearance. Laura herself is transformed into "a piece of transluscent glass touched by light, given a momentary radiance, not actual, not lasting."[5] Thus in her attempt to save Laura from those pieces of glass animals, she makes her daughter a fragile artifact of her own desire and the process renders her into a piece of glass,

The preparation for the gentleman caller reaches its zenith when Amanda has succeeded in making her daughter look like an angel. She has made use of the so-called 'gay deceivers'[6] because she remarks:....." to be painfully honest your chest is flat." This makes Laura feel that her mother is trying to trap the gentleman caller. Amanda admits, "All girls are a pretty trap, a pretty trap, and men expect them to be."[7] Amanda's plan is to trap Jim- the gentleman caller- for Laura. Amanda is over confident of her powers of manipulation. She fancies "when he sees how lovely and sweet and pretty she is, he'll thank his lucky stars he was asked to dinner." Jim the practical- minded person, "an emissary from a world of reality" with tramendous Irish good humour takes little time to understand that the trap is prepared for him. The first words he utters when he sees Laura are indicative of his suspicions: "I didn't know that Shakespeare had a sister."[8] He could see the ulterior motives behind Tom's calling him to dinner, Jim discovers that Laura is unable to face the world, being too shy for it. Jim is intelligent enough to shatter her illusions. He makes advances to her and drives off her shyness. Laura shows him 'the glass menagerie' and her favourite creature the unicorn. The unicorn is an extinct and mythological animal. It exists in the world of unreality and illusion. Its single elongated horn is its abnormality. It is representative of Laura herself. The unicorn's horn gets broken at the hands of Jim, it has become a normal animal- an ordinary horse. By making Laura dance with him, he tries to bring her into the rhythm of normal life as the unicorn becomes a normal horse by losing its abnormality. Jim appreciates her performance and creates a kind of self-confidence in her: "In all respects- believe me! Yours eyes- your hair- are pretty" and "all the nicer because of the difference too." In all respects you are pretty, "your hands are pretty."[9] Jim teaches Laura how to overcome her illusions, but what for? In the end, to her dismay and despair, Jim reveals that he is in love with a Betty. The

hope which had kindled in the heart of Laura, died out with a shock. Amanda is stunned as the whole truth dawns upon her. She imagines the whole thing was a joke played upon her by Tom. She says to him "What a wonderful trick you upon us."[10] Tom, being what he is, continues to go to the moveis: "You don't know things anywhere! You live in a dream; you manufacture illusions!"[11] She is unaware of the fact that accusation boomrings on herself. Amanda, Laura and Tom see the truth about themselves for a moment and then quickly relapse into their world of illusion again: Tom goes to the movies, Laura blows out the candles and goes back to her glass menegerie, Amanda throws the foregrounded truth into the background saying that Tom had played a cruel jike upon her. Tom, Laura and Amanda cannot endure the truth as insiders.

18.2 The Contents of The Play

The apartment in which is the Wingfields live has a larger than life size photograph over the mantelpiece. It is the photograph of the father of Tom and Laura. It is the face of a very handsome youngman donning a doughboy's first World War cap. "He is gallantly smiling..... as if to say, "I will be smiling forever." The man deserted the family a long time ago. He was a telephone man who fell in love with long distances. He gave up the job and left the town for good. The last the family heard of him was a picture-postcard Mazatlan, situated on the Pacific coast of Mexico, contaning a message of two words "Hello-Goodbye!" There was no address on it. Amanda and Laura- the mother and daughter are at the dining table and Tom is about to join them. Amanda instructs the son to masticate the food rather than swallow it down. He should eat leisurely to really enjoy it. "A well-cooked meal has lots of delicate flavors that have to be held in the mouth for appreciation. Therefore, Tom should chew his food and give his salivary glands a chance to function."[13] Tom is addicted to smoking. Since Laura is grown up, Amanda advises her to look fresh and pretty in case there are gentlemen callers. Amanda- the deserted woman- remembers one Sunday afternoon in Blue Moon when she had as many as seventeen gentleman callers. There were no enough chairs to accommodate them all. They had to manage some folding chairs from the nearby parish house. Amanda added that she entertained them with her art of conversation. She told that it "wasn't enough for a girl to be possessed of a pretty face and a graceful figure", she was expected to have "a nimble wit and a tongue to meet all occasions"[14] She recollected that all her gentleman callers were "most prominent young planters of the Mississippi Delta" - Camp Laughlin, Bates, Wesley, Fitzhue etc. She elaborates their particulars to Tom and Laura. She was worried about Laura who did not perform well at Rubican's Business college. She dropped out of school. The girl also suffered from cold and pneumonia which got aggravated into pleurisy. Amanda thinks that Laura is going to waste away her life amusing herself 'with the glass menagerie' and playing 'worn-out' phonograph records which her 'father left as a painful reminder of him.'[15] She knew what happened to unmarried girls who were not prepared to occupy a position. They grew into 'barely tolerated spinsters living upon the grudging patronage of sister's husband or brother's wife- stuck away in some little mouse trap of a room- ..... little bird without any nest- eating the crust of humility"[16] all their lives. Amanda just asked Laura informally if she had ever liked a boy. She told her about one boy Jim she had liked during her school days. He had a wonderful voice and was a debater.He used to call her "Blue Roses."[17] Actually she had told him that she had "pleurois" which he heard as "Blue Roses" Laura also told her in the same breath that he went out with Emily Meisenbach- who was the most well-dressed girl at Solden. They were engaged then. They must have been married by now.

Amanda was a woman of action. "Realising that extra money would be needed to properly feather the nest and plume the bird," she conducted a vigorous compaign on the phone roping in subscribers to one of the women's magazines- The Home Maker' Companion- which featured the serialized sublimations of ladies of letters who thought in terms of delicate cup-like breasts, slim, tapering waisters, rich,

creamy thighs, eyes like wood-smoke in autumn, fingers that soothe and caress like strains of music, bodies as powerful as Etruscan sculpture.[18]

Amanda has a little brush with Tom who goes to the movies night after night and comes back home with a stumbling and staggering gait at 2 A.M. like a maniac. He has only three hours' sleep and goes to work. He has been moping and doping till late at night. Looking to his addiction, his job seems to be jeopardized. He says that he doesn't have his heart in the warehouse job. If Amanda troubles him, he might go aways as his father did. Tom says he is going to 'opium dens'- dens of vice and criminal's hang-outs and that he has joined the Hogan gang. He is a hired assassin and carries a Tommy-gun is a violin case. He has been running a string of cat-houses in the Valley. He is called Killer Wingfield who leads a double-life. He is a simple warehouse by day and a dynamic czar of the underworld by night.. He goes to gambling casinos to spin away fortunes on the roulette table. He occasionally wears a patch over one eye and a false moustache, sometimes puts on green whiskers. He is called El Diablo. His enemies can blow up their apartment with daynamite any time. He abuses his mother as "ugly- babbling old-witch"[19] While going out he hurls his coat against the shelf of Laura's glass menagerie. There is a tinkle of shattering glass and Laura cries out as if wounded.

The very next morning when he is up, Laura insists on him to aplogize to Amanda for what had transpired last night. While he has had the first sip of coffee, he apologizes to Amanda "I'm sorry for what I said, for everything that I said, I didn't mean it."[20] Amanda wept in tears saying "I've had to put up a solitary all these years. But you're my right hand bower! Don't fall down Don't fail"[21] Amanda offers him endearingly a bowl of Purina' or 'shredded wheat biscuit' but he has only dark coffee. Amanda wants to talk about Laura to Tom in confidence saying that 'still water runs deep,' What she means is that Laura is not a child now: "She notices things and.....broods about them"[22] Amanda knows that Tom is ambitious and he cannot serve for long in the warehouse. But one has to make sacrifices in life because 'life's not easy, it calls for Spartan endurance"[23] Amanda objects to his going to the movies but he tries to justify his stand saying that he likes adventure and that Man by instinct is a lover, a hunter, a fighter and none of these instincts are given any play at the warehouse. But Amanda would not be convinced.

The discussion shifts to Laura again. Tom calls her a home girl but according to Amanda it is a pity that she doesn't have her home "with a husband" Amanda tells him to look for a match for her- a clean-living youngman who doesn't drink. She recollects that Tom's father never allowed himself to look untidy.

Tom says that he has invited Jim, who works in the warehouse, to dinner. He has consented to oblige them the very next evening. Amanda had hardly any time to make necessary preparations for "the gentleman caller" She wants "things nice not sloppy." She wants 'chintz covers' to make things brighten up. "We can't have a gentleman caller in a pig sty. All my wedding silver has to be polished, the monogrammed table linen ought to be laundered,windows are to be washed."[24] She wants to know whether the fellow drinks or not. Tom tells her he works as a shipping clerk and earns eighty five dollars a month, just twenty dollars more than he gets himself. Amanda told him that his father used to drink but she made a 'tragic mistake' to marry him as his innocent look disarmed every one: "He smiled the world was enchanted! No girl can do worse than herself at the mercy of a handsome appearance!"[25] Tom tells Amanda that James D.O'Connor (Jim) was not too good looking, he had freckled face, and hadn't too much of a nose but he was, hopefully enough, "the type that'up and coming"[26] He was studying radio-engineering and public speaking. Amanda was delighted to guess that the gentleman caller was sure to be advanced in the future. Her ulterior dark motive was to trap the youngman for Laura. She didn't call her "crippled" but thought of her "different from other girls." She even showed her "a little silver slipper of a moon" as an omen of good

luck and conjugal bliss.

Jim came with Tom to dinner at Amanda's. He had graduated from Soldan. Laura was a drop out from there. Jim also knew that Tom was a poet and called him Shakespeare. Tom was not popular with the workers of the warehouse but Jim had cordial friendship with him. Amanda had worked like a Turk tidying up the apartment. Laura looked like an angel with unearthly prettiness. She looked like "a piece of translucent glass touched by light, given a momentary radiance....."[27] Laura was rather nervous. Amanda was smartly dressed in 'a girlish frock of yellowed voile with a blue silk sash'. This was the dress in which she had 'led the cotillion, won the catwalk twice at Sunset Hill, wore one spring to the Governor's ball in Jackson.'[28] Her youthful image had revived to welcome the gentleman caller for her daughter.

When Laura was told that Jim O'Connor was coming to dinner, she told that she had known him at school. When Jim entered, he was introduced to Laura. he remarked, "I didn't know that Shakespeare had a sister." Laura was nervous "like a frightened deer" and went to the kitchenette. Amanda admired her as domestic and homely girl. When the dinner is ready, lights are out. Candless are lit. Jim sits on the floor and Laura follows suit. Jim offers her "a little dandelion wine" to warm up. Jim has judged her to be an old-fashioned type of girl. He wants to drive out her shyness. He tells her that he knew her and not as Shakespeare's sister. Jim advised her to overcome her shyness. He added that the people were not so dreadful when one knew them and that every body had some problem. No body was a paragon. Laura became interested in Jim's remarks. Her shyness gets dissolved in his warmth as they sit hundled together. Jim talks about many things which Laura finds interesting. Jim happens to ask her what she has been doing these days. She talks about her glass menagerie. But Jim tells her that she suffers from inferiority complex and that she lacks confdence and faith in herself. Jim points out that because of a clump, which was practically non-existent, she had to discontinue her education. She dreaded to walk into the class-room. Jim told her that a little physical defect which was hardly noticeable, was magnified thousands of times by her imagination. He motivated her to believe herself superior to others in some way or the other. Seeing Jim convincingly dynamic, her shyness eclipsed in her absolute wonder. She realised that it was her inferiority complex which kept her from feeling comfortable with other people. With her shyness gone, she shows him an article of glass menagerie- a Unicorn which is now extinct. As Jim stretches his hand to catch hold of it, it falls down and its horn is broken. With its horn broken, it gives the look of a normal horse. The unicorn with its single horn- an abnormal growth- stands in symbolic relation to Laura.

Now Jim spoke slowly and gingerly "Laura you know, if I had a sister like you, I'd do the same thing as Tom. I'd bring out fellows and introduce her to them..... The right type of boys..... to appreciate her. Only-well- he made a mistake about me."[29] What he meant was that he had been dating with a girl called Betty- Catholic and Irish and he had fallen in with her and they are going to be married shortly. While Jim was putting his cards plainly on the table, Amanda was cooped up in the kitchen preparing choicest dishes for the gentleman caller. Amanda finally comes to realise that Romeo had already found her Juliet though she had left no stone unturned to perform her Southern hospitality. With cheerful remarks, Jim ducked jauntily out.Amanda asked Tom if he did not even know that Jim was engaged to be married. Tom actually had no information of this kind though Jim happened to be his friend and both of them worked at the warehouse. Amanda's remark about Tom was absolutely true, "You live in a dream; You manufacture dreams!" Actually Amanda, Tom and Laura live in a world of their self-styled illusions, by way of selfish pleasure. Amanda frowned upon Tom, "Go to the movies, go! Don't think about us, a mother deserted, an unmarried sister who's crippled and has no job! Don't let anything interfere with your selfish pleasure!"[30]

Finally Tom speaks as a poet ".....for now-a-days the world is lit by lighting! Blow out your candles, Laura-....."[31] Laura's silliness is gone and she has diginity and tragic beauty. She smiles at her mother. Amanda glances at the father's picture for a moment and goes inside. Laura blows the candles out one by one.

18.3 *The Glass Menagrie* on the Stage

The Glass Menagrie being "memory play", was presented with unusal freedom on the stage. Since its substance was subtle and delicate, the atmospheric touches of direction played a significant role in its performance. Its expressionism was also a sophisticted dramatic technique when it was presented on the stage. When in a play like *The Glass Menagrie* unconventional techniques were employed, the playwright was not trying to escape his responsbility of dealing with reality, or interpreting experience, but he was actually attempting to find a closer approach by way of vivid expression of things as they were. The play was presented with photographic exactness. Tennessee Williams transformed the exhausted theatre of realistic conventions and rejuvenated it.

Music played in the background made it poetic with literary emphasis. A single recurring tune *in The Glass Menagerie* was employed to enhance the emotional effect of certain passages. The tune sounded like circus music. It had a deep effect on the audience. It had a tragic appeal to one's consciousness. The audience did realise how beautiful glass menegerie was and how easily it could be broken. The tune- the glass menagerie- returned over and over again between the episodes like the emotion of nostalgia threading through the events. The music was very articulate when the play focussed on Laura and her fragile and lovely glass menagerie.

The arrangement of the shades of light and darkness was wonderful. It was based on the principle of **Chiaroscuro** as illustrated in the paintings of Rembrendt and El Greko where the figures were radiant in the relatively dark and dusky atmosphere. When there was the quarrel scene between Tom and Amand, in which Laura had no active role, the clearest pool of light concentrated on her figure. Also, in the supper scene, the focus of light was on her silent figure on the sofa. She was centre of attraction. The light upon Laura was distinct from the other characters, having a peculiar pristine clarity such as light used in early religious portraits of female saints or madonnas.[32]

18.4 A Note on Characters

There are very few characters in the play. Jim O'Connor is an Irish American. He is the paragon of American pragmatic philosophy. He is very smart and impressive. His observation is very sharp. He is progressive minded. He has been studying a course of 'Public Speaking.' He had been a hero in the high school at Soldan. he was a star in basketball and captain of the debating club, president of the senior class. He could sing in Operas. He was nearly always "running or bounding, never just walking. He seemed always at a point of defeating the law of gravity."[33] He was shooting with such velocity throgh his adolescence that one would logically expect him to arrive at nothing short of the White House by the time he was thirty. But Jim appaerently ran into more interference after his graduation from Soldam. His speed had definitely slowed. He was rather under employed. Tom was on friendly terms with him at the warehouse. Jim knew Tom as some one who could remember his former glory. Jim also knew that Tom was a poet and nicknamed him "Shakespeare." Other boys in the warehouse regarded Tom with suspicious hostility but Jim took a humorous attitude towards him. In course of time, the sense of hostility of the other boys wore off and they also began to smile at Tom as people smile at an oddly fashioned dog that trotted across their

path at some distance. Tom knew that Laura and Jim were acquaintances right from the school days , and Laura spoke admiringly of his voice. "In high school Laura had been as unobtrusive as Jim had been astonishing."

Amanda, having failed to establish her rapport with reality, continues to live in her illusions, but Laura's situation is more serious. A childhood illness has left her crippled, one leg slightly shorter than the other, and held in a brace. Amanda tried to drive out Laura's shyness and nervousness hut she fails. It is Jim who admirably succeeds to drive out her shyness and makes her articulately eloquent within minutes of his arrival. Amanda is riding two horses- 'now' and 'then'- the two orientations of time. She falls into reminiscences of her earlier days; she thinks of her husband who has deserted her. Tom shows many traits of his father's character. Amanda has two consciousnesses- one correspoding to her youthful days and the other is her frustrating present. "She is not **paranoiac** but her life is **paranoia**." There is much to admire in her personality just as there is much to laugh at. There is tenderness in her slight person. Amanda, Laura and Tom constitute a prism of illusions and fantasies.

18.5 Let Us Sum up

1. In *The Glass Menagerie*, Tennessee Williams traces the effect of illusion upon the individual by exploring the physical, mental and spiritual condition of Tom, Laura and Amanda Wingfield.
2. Amanda has been deserted by her husband.
3. Laura is her grown up daughter but she is crippled- she is very shy. Her inferiority complex is caused by her physical defect.
4. Tom- the brother of Laura- works in the warehouse. He is addicted to drinking. He goes to the movies very often. He doesn't like his warehouse job.
5. Laura is preoccupied with her glass menagerie.
6. When Amanda is told that a gentleman caller- Jim- is coming to dinner, she works like a Turk in tidying up the apartment.
7. When Jim comes, Laura feels shy but he drives out her shyness within minutes and makes her articulate. He appreciates her beauty.
8. Tom is a poet and Jim calls him Shakespeare.
9. Jim is a progressive minded youngman. He is surely to make meteoric rise in life.
10. Jim discloses frankly that he loves Betty and that they are going to marry shortly.
11. The ulterior motive of the Wingfeilds to invite Jim to dinner as a gentleman caller fails.
12. Tom, Laura and Amanda relapse into their self-styled illusion as if nothing had happened.
13. *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams was a grand success on the stage. With the sophisticed technique of light and shade on the stage on the stage it succeded admirably.
14. *The Glass Menagerie* is 'memory' play. It swings between the two orientations of time- now and then. The lived past surfaces in the speeches of Amanda rather too much.

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18.7 Review Questions

1. Portray the character sketches of the following

   (a) Amanda Wingfield

   (b) Laura Wingfield

   (c) Jim O'Connor

   (d) Tom Wingfield

2. "The Wingfields are momentarily disilluioned but they relapse into the world of their self-styled illusions." Justify the statement.

3. How does Jim drive out Laura's shyness and stand-offish attitude ? How far does he succeed ?

4. Justify the title of the play *'The Glass Menagerie*'. What is its symbolic significance?

5. Discuss *The Glass Menagerie* as a memory play and point out how it swings between **now** and **then**?

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UNIT-19

EUGENE O'NEILL : A MODERN AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHT

Structure

19.0 Objectives

Eugene O'Neill is not only a modern American playwright but he also ranks with the greatest European playwrights of the twentieth century. The objectives of his study unit is to highlight the pioneering efforts of Eugene O'Neill to modernize the American theatre. He introduced new techniques of drama deviating sharply from his predecessors. In *The Emperor Jones*, he takes resort to impressionistic technique which comes closest to the stream-of-consciousness technique. He thrives on depth psychology. Though drama as a literary genre is supposed to be objective, Eugene O'Neill makes it a suitable vehicle of intensive subjective experience.

19.1 Introduction

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill was born in New York in 1888. His father was a renowned American actor and earned a lot of fame for his performance in *Monte Cristo*. Eugene O'Neill accompanied his father and saw his father's dramatic performances. He attended various Catholic and non-sectarian schools and studied for four years at Betts Academy at Stamford. From there he went to Princeton where his career suffered a setback. He clandestinely married Kathleen Jenkins in 1909. Though he was blessed with a son, the marriage didn't last long and the divorce was obtained in 1912. His father sent him on an expedition to Honduras in search of gold. From this expedition he acquired a wealth of knowledge which he utilized in *The Emperor Jones*. The expedition produced no gold and O'Neill came back to New

York. He was so depressed that he even tried to commit suicide. He assisted his father and tried petty occasional jobs. The period of destitution at Buenos Aires ended when he became a worker on a British ship sailing to New York. He also became a reporter to *The Telegraph* and later began to write poems and plays. His ailment was diagnosed as tuberculosis and for five months was in a T.B. Sanatorium at Wallingford Connecticut. He studied Drama in Professor Baker's classes. He studied the Greeks, the Elizabethans, Ibsen and especially Strindberg. He took writing seriously. He repudiated the kind of theatre his father stood for. He was no longer a Catholic. He came in contact with The Princetown Players. It is through them that he found himself in the theatre. He was associated with the experimental theatre. Earlier he had been the popular theatre that his father knew. The first theatre used by the Provincetown Players was a converted fish house at Provincetown, Massachusetts. They moved to New York in 1916. In 1918, O'Neill married Agnes Boulton and they lived together. The couple had two children before the spouses separated in 1927. His third wife was Carlotta Montercy. They were frequently on the move during the rest of their lives. The playwright's son from the first wife committed suicide. In his last days, Eugene O'Neill's hands were paralysed. Consequently he could not write. He breathed his last in 1953. He was the recipient of Pultizer Prize for *Beyond the Horizon*. He was awarded the Nobel prize for literature. He was a voluminous writer of plays. In his plays, there is richness of life. There is a note of wildness which human civilization accentuates. He has realistic acceptance of life and rejects romantic illusions and dreams. There is deep probing into the sub-conscious psyche of his characters and the inner springs of human action are revealed. In *The Emperor Jones*, the playwright has used expressionistic technique for the externalization of the fears and terrors of Brutus Jones. The psychology of fear and its effects have been realistically, convincingly and forcefully depicted. Brutus Jones is not an individual negro but a symbol of everyman obsessed with a feeling of insecurity: He is looking for identity or a sense of belonging to ensure security.

O'Neill's psychological realism is clear in his treatment of Freud's and Jung's theories. His plays *The Desire Under the Elms, The Strange Interlude, Mourning Becomes Electra* are based on a psychological theory each. There is the theory "Totem and Taboo" in his *Desire Under the Elms*. The theory of 'Oedipus Complex' is the thematic base of *Mourning Becomes Electra. The Strange Interlude* is a powerful study of inhibition and repression leading to neurosis, insanity and morbidity.

O'Neill did not, complacently and uncomplainingly, accept the romantic illusion of the perfection of a commercialised contemporary society. It was rather brutalising, callous and dehumanizing. He was neither a sociologist nor a political agitator but he knew the malaise of modern society inside out. His plays are studies in the tension between illusion and reality. His objective is to illustrate that man's salvation lies in the acceptance of reality. O' Neill was a great tecnician of the genre of drama. He began as realist but soon he fused realism with symbolic and suggestive modes. He employed expressionistic technique to communicate inner reality. He used the poetic devices of aside, soliloquy, masks. Myths and legends are in the background of his drama. *The Emperor Jones* is a pantomime.

19.2 O'Neill's Dramatic Technique of Expressionism

Expressionism as an art form was a movement which began in Germany before World War I. It was a revolt against realism by distorting objects and breaking up time sequences. Strindberg struck keynote of the expressionistic theory of the theatre. "Anything may happen; everything is probable. Time and space do not exist. On an insignificant background of reality, imagination designs and embroiders novel patterns: a medley of memories, experiences, free fantasies, absurdities, and improvisation."1 O'Neill also remarked, 'As I understand it, expressionism tries to minimize everything on the stage that stands

between the author and the audience. It strives to get the author talking directly to the audience....." Expressionism is a dramatic technique which enables a dramatist to depict inner reality- the very psyche of the character. The playwright's emphasis shifts from the external reality to the inner reality. The action moves backward and forward in space and time in harmony with the thought processes of the character. There is a deeper probing into the sub-conscious, and action is increasingly internalised. Instead of dramatic sequence of events, there is a concentration on the stream of consciousness. Scenes alternate between reality and fantasy. O'Neill's employed Expressionistic technique in *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape*. The tom-tom effect is an integral part of psychological action in *The Emperor Jones.*

19.3 O'Neill's Philosophic Perception

O'Neill's was a critic of the whole structure of contemporary American society. He visualises the individual in a social order in which he is tortured, starved, thwarted, and driven to disaster. O'Neill's has been accused of being a pessimist but his is not the pessimism of Schopenhauver and Hardy: He does not trace the human predicament to some malignant deity, destiny or fate. His pessimism cannot be attributed to any divine agency.The wrong ideals- romantic and puritanic- are the cause of human suffering. He rejects Puritanism as a denial or negation of life's positive values. It is inhibition of natural instincts. The will to live to its fullest can avert the sense of failure. There is hope if man recognises the ground realities and disowns romantic illusions. There are potetialities of happeness in one's life. Man's predicament is essentially his own making and, therefore, amelioration of his lot is possible. The plays of O'Neill are tragedies in that they depict the malaise in human life caused by the erosion of faith and the feeling of insecurity causes unbearable spiritual anguish, fear and torture. It is this terrible obsession of Brutus Jones in *The Emperor Jones* that drives him to his doom. O'Neill's tragic protagonists are all drawn from humble ranks of society. Yank is a stoker, Brutus Jones is a poor negro. His protagonists are ineffectual egoists whining for opportunities but they are powerless to take advantage of them. O'Neill's tragedy is more or less an apotheosis of the human spirit. Yank and Brutus Jones are genuine human beings. O'Neill gives the impression that life, in spite of its ordeals and sordidness, is worth living. His tragedies soothe, console and strengthen us and make us aware life's grandeur, dignity and heroism. He was a playwright of integrity. He did not surrender to the box-office demands. He invented his own form of drama.He extended the scope of the theatre by making it a vehicle of experience and psycho-analysis.

19.4 O'Neill and the American Theatre

The stature of Eugene O'Neill casts a long shadow on the America theatre. The height and breadth of it is measured by Eugene O'Neill's art of drama. Find fault with O'Neill and you find fault with the entire American stage; find merit in him and you appreciate the American drama. It is not impossible to single out American playwrights endowed with greater refinement and facility which can be attributed to him but no one who made a comparable impression on the twentieth century drama. He modernized American drama. Like other pioneers, he had the proper temprament for the adventure.He was too restive to be content with the familiar terraine of the commercial American theatre of private management and production for profit. Its literary pretensions were Victorian and genteel. Its popular performances were farces with and pre-fabricated melodramas with mindless joviality and one sided moralism. Eugene O'Neill looked to the Greek tragic poets rather than to his American predecessors. He felt, however, much closer to the visionary scenic artist Robert Edmund Jones ,the critic Kenneth Macgowan, the playwright Susan Glaspell, and George Cram Cook, the founder of Provincetown Players. In collaboration with them in 1915, Eugene O'Neill established the Provincetown Players- one of the two important experimental groups located in

Greenwich village that revolutionized the American theatre. He wrote his plays for his groups. He also wrote for the flourishing Theatre Guild- an offshoot of the Washington Square Players. In this way O'Neill became the foremost American playwright by getting organizational support and acquired international reputation that brought him the Noble Prize. Several factors operated in favour of O'Neill's career. One of the factors was his being the some of the successful actor-manager James O'Neill. He directed his energies into playwriting after his early endeavours in journalism and poetry. Dramatic action, pictorial composition, and sound effects such as the beating of tom-toms in *The Emperor Jones* sustained his intense dramatic intentions. His chosen medium- the theatre- which had enough of Victorian complacency was not ready for the social and aesthetic rebellion which. Eugene O'Neill brought about. The growing vogue in the United States about Freudian views on sex, Jungian concepts of racial memory, anti-Puritanism in morals and mores, reactions against middle class materialism and post war disillusionment etc. needed to be expressed in the theatre.He evolved his talent of dramatization. Along with his associates of the Princetown and Washington Squire Companies he made use of the two overlapping developments of dramatic art without which modernism was inconceivable. The naturalism of Strindberg was relatively new to American public.

Eugene O'Neill brought to a head the naturalistic trend in the American drama, flavouring it with colloquial speech of the sea and the land. It was the kind of experiment J.M.Singe of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin had been conducting. He introduced an anti-genteel reality to the American stage with his plays- *Beyond the Horizon, Anna Christie,* and *The Desire Under the Elms*. His experiment phase began in 1920. Successive productions of *The Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape,* and *The Great God Brown* led to his being identified with the avant garde Art-theatre movement which had been initiated by Strindberg. His introspective and ruminative temperament was his great strength. O'Neill was the artist of integrity: he enriched the art of drama with his insights and with the techniques of projecting his plays.

19.5 O'Neill's Outlook and his Drama

O'Neill 's outlook on life no less subjected to praise and blame. He was insufficiently spiritual for religious critics and too metaphysical and passive for Marxist critics while both could deplore his pessimism. In his play *The Iceman Cometh,* he succumbed to nihilism. He derived his inspiration from Nietzsche, Fydor Dostoevsky and Strindberg. He was a great innovator or rather a renovator of Elizabethan stage devices when he introduced disguises, masks, asides and soliloquies in *Monte Cristo*.

O'Neill's relationship with words is a curious phenomenon. He had a touch of the poet. He even arranged Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* for the Province town Players. Dramatic inventiveness is his surest claim to fame. *The Emperor Jones* remains one of O'Neill's most impressive plays. When Brutus Jones, the former Pullman porter, who has made himself emperor of an island in the West Indies, is faced with rebellion. He starts immediately on an escape he has planned through the great forest to coast, where he is to embark on a ship. But what was planned as an escape turns into a retreat into fantasies of primitive terrors which lie deep in his unconscious self. His flight through the forest is symbolic of psychological regression brought about by panic as he loses his way in the darkness and hears the crescendo of drum beats by the rebelling natives. The use of tom-tom beat beating initially as a monotone becomes gradually faster and louder is an effective device to dramatize fear.

O'Neill switched over to expressionism with his powerful play *The Emperor Jones*. This is an experimental play. While O'Neill's exploration of expressionistic technique can probably be attributed to various factors, one of them is that it permitted him present inner conflicts with greater clarity and flexibility.

The essential realism of earlier plays allowed him the use of symbolism. The visions of *The Emperor Jones* which are neither hallucinations nor projections of Jones's thoughts, reveal the inner springs of his nature as they come in conflict with his outward character. The play has unusual dramatic devices such as inanimate characters. The pulsating rhythm of the natives' drum beat, which dominates the action, rapidly becomes a tangible projection of Jones's panic. Brutus Jones loses himself in the darkness of the forest to find himself. The primeval and elemental forces of nature strip him of the superficialities of civilization. His panic is simply an acid test which reduces Jones to his essential nature of man. In other words, The negro's journey from ignoble savagery to civilization has been talescoped in *The Emperor Jones*. *The Hairy Ape* follows *The Emperor Jones.* There is an unfailing sense of doon and futility that pervades O'Neill's drama. He explores a philosophy which would reconcile a rationalistic view of the universe with man's need for something beyond rationalism- a sense of the infinite beyond what is mundane, humdrum and finite.

Eugene O'Neill recognized that the playwright must dig at the roots of malaise in the modern life to find a meaning. Power was to be found in the scientific laws which ruled the universe. Nature was a tragic force. O'Neill's great master Henrik Ibsen visualized heredity as a tragic force in *Ghosts* and *A Doll's House*. O'Neill turned to the theme of man's struggle against nature. He attempted to rephrase the motivations of classical tragedy so as to relate it to the doubts, fears, desires of the modern man and highlight faith in the creative life force. O'Neill holds that man's spirit is greater than his body. He is spiritually inclined. He also knows that man is involved in a web of circumstances and it is not his own weaving. He pinned his faith on human love and warmth to give meaning to life. He dwelt on modern psychology to probe deeply into the nature of life. He regarded that human love was in itself divine. He was closer to Catholic fatalism than to scientific determinism. He had occasional mystical experiences beyond men's lousy, pitiful and greedy fears and hopes. He had experienced a saint's like vision of beatitude. But it was a momentary and evenescent state of mind. As his faith in theological doctrine dwindled, he substituted it with human love: he evolved an unorthodox approach to divinity in his dark autobiographical plays.

19.6 Illusion and Reality in O'Neill's Plays

Illusion and reality are the two poles between which action of most of the plays of Eugene O'Neill moves. Illusion is that state of mind when one as fugitive from reality can view the present safely from a distance. Illusion is an attempt to conquer time as it is anchored in the past or future. Reality is associated with the present. O'Neill's plays seek to deliver the meaning of existence through the oscillations which this spatial-temporal polarity sets in motions. Nina Leeds thinks "the only living life is in the past and future..... the present is an interlude..... strange interlude in which we call past and future to bear witness we are living." In his last play *Marco Millions*, Kublai Kaan thinks, "My hideous suspicion is that God is only an infinite, insane energy which creates and destroys" and misbegotten men and women inhabit the world superintended by natural, and not divine forces. The men are "poor nuts" and "things happen" to confuse, frustrate, despair and depress them. According to O'Neill the modern man lived in a world without theistic purpose. Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection threatened the very concept of a universe the design of which was divinely sanctioned. American pragmatism accepting this theory as valid, solved the dilemma postulating that in a world which did not posses any theistic purpose, human purpose could be said to exist. It was eventually John Dewey who highlighted the instinct in animals and consciousness in man. In the pragmatic dialectic the human intelligence was supposed to have supplanted the divine will. Meaningful action is possible when man strips himself of his illusions and faces the present.

19.7 Eugene O'Neill as a Culture Critic of America

Eugene O'Neill is a critic of American society. According to him a work of art which is divorced from man's struggle with the hostile and indifferent universe and with a perverted and corrupt social order loses its abiding appeal. O'Neill's success as a playwright depends largely upon the fact that has much to say what is worth saying about the modern social order. His drama is a suitable vehicle for an interpretation of the conflict which arises out of circumstances of the world in which we happen to live. O'Neill makes himself articulate on this point in *Fog*. It is not the individual alone that concerns O'Neill, it is the individual in a social order. He is tortured, starved, disillusioned, thwarted, ruined by the forces if social systems. He depicts his characters against the background of social forces. The social implication of the greed for empire is boldly set forth in *The Fountain* and the direct criticism of modern business ideals is the theme of *Marco Millions*. There are social implications in fantastic drama *The Emperor Jones*. When Brutus Jones has lost his nerve in the forest, the grim shadows of the past come to haunt him. What are those shadows? These are the projections of the vicious modern industrial world referring to slavery, crime, and injustice. It is the corrupt social order which drives the people to poverty and crime. Criminals are punished without taking into consideration the deep-rooted causes which instigated the wretches to crime. Jones escaped the direct punishment but he could not escape the scars of the sinister system. In the pantomime of prison scene and at the auction mart the character of Brutus Jones is revealed. *The Hairy Ape* presents a negative view of the state, of mechanized United States where the workers are victims of dehumanized and callous capitalists class.

O'Neill seems to hold the opinion that both government and religion are devices for maintaining the status quo of a given social order. The Church stands for dogmatic tradition and government, for political conservatism. On the whole the state as depicted in *The Hairy Ape* is a device for dehumanizing its citizens and for disallowing change. *The Hairy Ape* underlines the malaise of the heartless industrial and mechanical civilization. Yank symbolizes a protest against the success of the machine age. The importance of O'Neill as a social critic lies in the fact that he projects the psychological aspect of the modern social order. He underlines the malaise of America's acquisitive society in which the workers are exploited to create wealth for the few. Though work is an integral part of life yet the conditions under which the labourers work irritates, bores and dissatisfies them.

The American Negro is apparently free but psychologically he is still in bondage. *Macro Millions* marks the ideal of American business. Business means the skill of buying cheap and selling dear. Profit motive, which constitutes the soul of business, destroys what is noblest in human nature, making human beings incapable of great passions and the love of the beautiful and the good. O'Neill's most bitter condemnation of the status quo is based on Nietzschean philosophy. Both Eugene O'Neill and Nietzsche believe that the state produces soulless conformity and that those who seek power and wealth do so out of their inner weakness or impotence. The world revealed by O'Neill is tragic because ignorance, brutality, selfishness, greed and hatred are the dominant forces in it. He believes that the social order thwarts every effort of man to seek happiness and discourages all finer values.

19.8 A Note on his Characters

O'Neill characters show courage and fortitude to face the unfavourable and hostile circumstances of the world in which they live. They are out to give meaning to life in defiance of the callous, impersonal and rather indifferent world. They have dreamy eyes: They live in two worlds- the external world of

physical reality and the world of unfulfilled desire. They are brought to tragic end because they cannot ultimately reconcile with the immediate circumstances which irk them rather too much. They are powerless to ride the two horses- the real world of tensions and strife and the world of desire, ambition and passion. In the midst of their sophisticated schemings, O'Neill's characters are yearning for the state in which there is no knowledge of sin, where man is not irked or tormented by dreams of greed and power. This retreat to innocence is thwarted by the spirit of scepticism. They become neurotic, morbid and sinister. They need grace: they are sinners who want to redeem themselves with unconditional faith.

19.9 His Symbolism

An important aspect of O'Neill dramatic technique is his conscious and studied use of symbolism. It extends the meaning of the play beyond realistic plane. It enhances the imaginative quality of his drama. Fog is symbolic of a state of mind: it is suggestive. The use of symbolism yields a poetic quality to his language and emotionalises his realism. It leads to a little mystical quality too. His first great success was *The Emperor Jones*. It was his use of symbolism in setting, in action and in plot construction that stirred his audience with wonder and admiration. It is the symbol that matters in an O'Neill's play. He makes the symbol a vehicle of saying beyond the words.

19.10 A Pointwise Summary

1. Though the genre of drama is objective, Eugene O'Neill made it a vehicle of subjective experience.
2. He was influenced by the Greek and the Elizabethan dramatists. Henrik Ibsen and Strindberg were his modern masters.
3. He was associated with the Princetown Players.
4. He wrote *The Emperor Jones* as a play based on impressionistic technique. It was a successful pantomime.
5. O'Neill was philosophically inclined. He was regarded as a pessimist and anti-Puritan. His vision of life was tragic.
6. He modernized the American theatre with sophisticated dramatic techniques and imaginative approach.
7. He introduced the elements of symbolism, mysticism and methaphysics in his drama.
8. As his faith in theological doctrine dwindled, he substituted it with human love. He evolved an unorthodox approach to divinity.
9. He was perceptive enough to see beyond mundane reality.
10. He was a critic of American society and mercenary culture. He could visualize the malaise of the social order which victimized the people.
11. He was a bitter critic of die-hard conformity and condemned the status quo of social order.
12. His drama is a protest against Victorian gentility, Puritanism and the dollar idolatory.
13. He was a pioneer in the field of American drama. He introduced the dimensions of psychology, philosophy and metaphysis in his drama and enriched it.

19.11 Let Us Sum Up

Comprehensive interests and intensive exploration of human experience distinguish Eugene O'Neill as a remarkable playwright of the fifties in the United States of America with the off-Broadway revival of *The Ice Man Cometh* he earned his reputation of an established playwright. Then, followed *Long Day's Journey into Night* -an equally impressive play. Eugene O'Neill modernized American theatre. He did it by resorting to experimentation in new techniques and by evolving new ideas. As a leading playwright of the progressive Broadway professionals, he sparked a revolt against middle class complacency and commonplace realism on the American stage. He rejected Victorian gentility, puritanic prissiness, dollar idolatory, and the entire cult of go-getting opportunism. He modernized the content of American drama no less than its form. He responded to depth psychology while attempting to manifest the subconscious strains of man. This led him to indulge in experimentation of new techniques as a daring pioneer. Psychological pressures take the place of fate and the dialogue of his plagued characters is adorned. Pessimism and the tragic spirit do not go hand in hand in O'Neill's plays: they are at war. O'Neill was an introspective thinker-born and reared as a Roman Catholic- who had lost his faith. He gives evidence of having lived a traumatic youth Brutus Jones has the egocentricity and romantic sensibility to make the world a reflection of his condition. In *The Emperor Jones*, Brutus Jones succumbs to his primal fears in the jungle. The play "reenacts the whole drama of atavism, of humanity's inability to abolish the ghosts of the racial past."

19.12 Review Questions

1. What are the dramatic techniques employed by Eugene O'Neill is his plays? Discuss.
2. What is Eugene O'Neill's philosophy of life? Elaborate.
3. What are the hallucinations of Brutus Jones and what to they indicate?
4. Discuss Eugene O'Neill as a culture critic of the United States. How does he respond to the social order?
5. What in Eugene O'Neill's contribution to American drama and theatre? Elaborate.

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UNIT-20

EUGENE O'NEILL' : *THE EMPEROR JONES*

Structure

20.0 Objectives

- Eugene O'Neill's play *The Emperor Jones* is artistically very subtle. It incorporates the sophisticated techniques of symbolism, expressionism, light and sound to cause desired effect on the audience.
- The play involves the transformation of reality into fantasy and dramatization of events.
- Eugene O'Neill manipulates the sequence of events imaginatively relating to the Negro's experience. The objective is to probe into the psyche of Brutus Jones. Though he has become an emperor and amassed fabulous wealth by trickery, loot and fraud, he is a Negro. His racial ***samskar*** of negritude alone defines him.
- Attempt has been made to rationalise how the playwright succeeds in *The Emperor Jones* with his new technique and method. This study unit will definitely enlighten the students of American literature.

20.1 Introduction

The production of *The Emperor Jones* in 1920 established O'Neill as a playwright. This play, effectively mounted, well directed, and imaginatively acted by the "coloured" actor John Gilpin, was a grand success. It is one of the best actable plays in the American theatre. It is more or less an elaborate monologue unfolding in the reverse order tragic, an epic of the American Negro. Eugene O'Neill himself speaks of the origin of the play. "The idea of *The Emperor Jones* came from an old circus man I knew. This man told me a story current in Hayti concerning the late President Sam. This was to the effect that Sam had said they'd never get him with a lead bullet; that he would get himself with a silver one..... This

notion about the silver bullet struck me and I made a note of the story. About six months later I got the idea of the woods, but I couldn't see how it could be done on the stage, and I passed it up there. A year elapsed. One day I was reading of the religious feasts in Congo and the uses to which the drum is put there, how it starts as a normal pulse and is slowly intensified until the heartbeat of everyone present corresponds to the frenzied beat of the drum. There was an idea and an experiment. How would this sort of a thing work on an audience in a theatre? The effect of the tropical forest on the human imagination was honestly come by? It was the result of my experience while prospecting for gold in Spanish Honduras."

The Emperor Jones is composed of a few simple elements- a hunted man, a series of sharply defined pictures, and a monstrous rhythmical drum beat. It is a magnificent presentation of panic in the heart of a half-civilized Negro. It is centred on a single theme and is stated directly. The play reveals itself directly at once *The Emperor Jones* was one of the most successful plays of Eugene O'Neill on the stage. The sense of pride is one of the dominating themes of *The Emperor Jones* and *Lazarus Laughed*. *The Emperor Jones* is one of his early plays. The protagonist- a Negro- undergoes his spiritual journey progressing to the beat of the tom tom starting at the rate of the human pulse beat and rising steadily as a fevered pulse would rise, with the visual images created in the jungle by a fevered brain to express an emotional crisis. The story is about a Pullman porter who was arrested for killing a Negro in a "crap" game, and who broke away from jail by killing a white foreman of a chain gang and escaped to a small island of the East Indies where applying the tricks of a Whiteman, he made himself "Emperor" of the superstitious natives. He is not, as one might suspect, a seeker for power and glory.

He has contrived with Smithers, the local cockney trader and cook, to rob the natives. He is like a slave to whom Prometheus has suddenly brought fire to make use of. His very first instinct is to despise all those who are still in bondage: He turns a traitor to his own self. He is out to enslave the native islanders by trickery though he has been a slave himself. He is symbolic of those slaves who have lost their chains and use their freedom to make others their slaves. The play begins when the native islanders are planning to get rid of the emperor. Brutus Jones makes them believe that he has had a charmed life and only a silver bullet could kill him. It also means that the neo-rich are overconfident that their wealth would safe guard them. Secondly, the silver bullet is ***white:*** it is superior symbolizing the whiteman. If the Emperor's game is up, he would escape to Martinique. His money is safe in a foreign bank. His plans are underway to board a ship which is ready to sail.

20.2 The Texture of *The Emperor Jones*

Henry Smithers, a cockney adventurer learnt from an old negress that the followers of Brutus Jones- the self styled emperor of a West-Indian island- were about to desert their ruler. With Smither's help, Jones, a former pullman porter and jail-bird had duped the natives of the island into believing that he was an enchanter. The credulous and incorrigibly superstitious natives of the island made him emperor. Henry Smithers disclosed to the emperor the dislike of the subjects who had been heavily taxed. Jones had calculated that he had six months more to go as emperor before the natives caught on his skull duggery.[1] He succeeded amassing fabulous wealth by hook or by crook. He had got it deposited in a foreign bank: he wished to live in luxury with the help of the cheque-book. He had a silver bullet cast for good luck and charm. Besides, it could be useful if he were ever caught by his subjects. He might commit suicide with it in unavoidably perilous circumstances. At Smithers's suggestion, Jones sounded a bell which he kept under the throne to call his attendants but there was no response. Jones realised that he had been deserted by the natives. Jones relinquished his position of emperor on the spot and planned immediately to escape through the forest to the coast of the island. He thought French gun-boat would be waiting to take

him to Martinique (French port). He began to hear the drums being beaten in the hills nearby. The emperor left the palace. Smithers could take care of it. He put on jauntily his white Panama hat and walked boldly out.

In the forest, he searched unsuccessfully for tinned victuals he had cached for such emergency. He couldn't just locate the exact spot- the white rock- where he had preserved them. The drums continued to beat, louder and louder still. Night approached and "formless fears" came out of forest to beset Jones. He fired at them and they vanished. The moon rose. He had a revolver with five leaden bullets and one silver bullet in the magazine. In moonlit night, he saw Jeff, a Pullman porter he had killed in a duel. Jeff appeared to throw dice in the attitude of dice. Actually he shot him when he disinclined to respond. The phantom vanished immediately. The drums thuded in the distance. James had lost the track and plunged into the forest. He started running speedily to save his life as the natives chased him. After some time, he saw a dusty road and paused a little. A guarded gang of labourers with picks and shawls came out of the forest. The guard motioned to Jones to join the gang. When the guard whipped him, Jones gestured to lift his shovel as if to strike him on his head but he had no shovel with him. In his rage, he yanked out his revolver and fired at the guard. The road, the guard, and the gang of labourers instantly disappeared. It was pitch dark. The forest closed in upon him. The louder and louder drum beats drove Jones to run frantically in a circle. As he was scared for life, he repented as a Christian sinner for the murders he had committed and the way he had duped the natives of the island. His heart was full of remorse. Next, he came upon a spectacle of slave-auction attended by white belles and dandies dressed in rich costumes of the eighteen-fifties. An auctioneer placed Jones forcibly on the auction block.[2] The auctioneer, in a business like way, admired the slave as tractable, hardy-handsome and laborious. Unnerved and frightened, Jones fired one shot at the auctioneer and another at the planter who had apperently bought him by his highest bid. He dashed into the forest in a frenzied and crazy state of mind. Drums continued to beat rhythmically faster and faster in the background. At 3 o'clock Jones reached that part of a forest which looked like a hold of a slave ship about to sail to a white country.

He imagined himself as one of the Negro slaves who were swaying with the swinging motion of the ship upon waves of the sea. Jones and other prisoners groaned and moaned at being taken away from their homeland. It was the hallucination of a horrifying racial memory. His tortured and terrified conscience epitomised the Negro race.

Since one silver bullet was still left in the magazine of his revolver, a symbol of luck and defence mechanism Jones did not fire it and dashed into the forest. His clothes were soiled; his shoes were torn. He unlaced them and threw away. His emperor's uniform was ragged. He removed the royal insignia and was functionally dressed. Next, he came upon an altar like arrangement of boulders beside a river. He knelt down in the posture of prayer. A Congo witch-doctor appeared from behind a large tree and began a primitive tribal dance. Joned was hypnotised by this hallucination of a ritual of dance. He snapped a bone-rattle and indulged into occultic worship. The witch-doctor indicated to Jones in his pantomime that the former emperor ought to offer himself as a sacrifice in order to overcome the diabolic forces. As the witch-doctor invoked the deity to propitiate, a green-eyed crocodile emerged from the river staring at Jones. The witch-doctor pulled it from the river bed.Jones fired the silver bullet at the monster. The witch-doctor disappeared behind the tree leaving Jones lying prostrate on the ground.

At dawn, Lem- the guerilla leader of the rebel islanders- came with Smithers and a group of natives stood at the edge of the forest from where Jones had entered it last night. Lem was actually held up from chasing Jones because the minting of silver bullets consumed a lot of time. Lem, being superstitious like other islanders, believed that silver bullets alone could kill Emperor Jones. Several natives and Lem

surrounded Jones as they found him lying prostate. He was dog tired for he had been running in circles all thorough the night. One of the rebels shot him through the chest with a silver bullet. Jones's dead body lay before them. They saw his fear contorted face. This was the inevitable end of an upstart Negro emperor. Smithers felt pity for the dead and cursed the Negro commanders who had chased and killed Emperor Jones. The play comes to an end here abruptly.

20.3 A Critique of *The Emperor Jones*

Heredity and environment are the two significant forces which define the individual's pursuit of happiness and identity. A man may try his best to transcend his environmental forces, it is really difficult to dispel primitive fears and conquer racial prejudices and superstitions. Eugene O'Neill remarked, "We are all ghost-oriented" The Blacks and the Whites seem to have almost eternal animosity and hostility: Apartheid on the trans- Atlantic side is more fierce and dangerous than the stigma of untouchability in India.[3] In *The Emperor Jones* And *All God's Chillun Got Wings,* O'Neill dealt with the forces of heredity and environment in a manner that suggests the Greek ideas of fate and destiny. The *Emperor Jones* is a study of a Negro retrogressing into his aboriginal fears in moments of anxiety and fear. As a former Pullman porter he tries to escape brooding through the dark forest, his primitive fears begin to haunt him like phantoms. Step by step he retreats from the present into the prenatal stages of his race and relives the history of his tribe. The play presents the spectacle of the human soul fighting not so much against one's own deeds as against the misfortunes of one's ancestors. It represents the scenario of persecution of the Negroes over the centuries. The Negro's consciousness is meaningfully surveyed in *The Emperor Jones* by a white American playwright. The policy of apartheid has been a stigma on American culture and civilization. Jones broods over not only what has happened to him but also what has happened to his race. "Tom-Tom" beats signify impending disaster. Tom-Tom beats correspond to Jones's pulse-beat or heart beat. It beats into his veins and arteries. It stops when he dies.

The Emperor Jones is very close to the stream of consciousness technique of fiction. The play is more or less a monologue. The poetic dramatization of the Negro's self is viewed as a backward journey. The apparitions emerge from the consciousness of Brutus Jones just as Good and Bad angels come out of Dr. Faustus's consciousness. Brutus Jones is an ignorant and coceited Negro who has picked up some smart devices of the Whites. Certainly he hasn't learnt his lessons well. For killing a Negro, who had cheated him at dice, Jones had been imprisoned and he had managed to escape by killing a prison guard and found his way to an island in the West Indies- not yet conquered by White mariners. He became emperor there: he rules the native islanders high handedly. He had the premonition that they could revolt against him someday. His reign was very short. He is informed by Henry Smithers that his subjects have deserted him. He hears Tom-Tom beats getting accelerated rhythmically. Jones escapes confidently thinking that a ship will be waiting to take him. The play consists of eight scenes. Except the first and the last, the six middle scenes are monologues by Brutus Jones: There are either the sounds of drum-beat or those of the revolver. Brutus Jones defends himself by firing bullets from his revolver. But the magazine contains only six bullets- five leaden and one silver. He has impressed upon the credulous native islanders that only a silver bullet could kill him. It is an eyewash. He has a silver bullet with him. He would shoot himself with it in case anything went wrong with his plans. If he is to die, he would live up to his legend. In the six middle scenes, he loses his self confidence gradually. He retreats step by step into the condition of an African native. The scenes (2 to 7) can be telescoped in the following way.

Sc.2 Nightfall: Brutus Jones fails to find the food he had hidden in the forest. The 'little formless fears' creep out from the forest and he fires at them. As they vanish instantly, he 'plunges boldly into the

forest.'

Sc.3 9 P.M.: Brutus Jones notices Jeff- the Negro he had murdered for cheating him at dice. He fires the second bullet. The vision disappears.

Sc.4 11 P.M.: Jones notices his fellow-prisoners and the prison guard he had killed. He fires and the vision disappears.

Sc. 5 1 P.M.: He finds himself in a slave-market of mid nineteenth century. He fires and the hallucination vanishes.

Sc.6 3 A.M.: He is on a slave ship. He fires and the vision disappears.

Sc.7 5 A.M.: He is in Congo where he notices a sacrificial altar, a witch-doctor and a crocodile-god. He fires his silver bullet which is the last bullet in the magazine of his revolver.

Thus, Brutus Jones plunges himself into the horrors of his past. The killing of the white prison guard and that of Jeff are his most terrifying memories. The succession of scenes takes Jones backwards into his personal history, and then into the history of his race. The last scene is outside the forest at dawn. Jones's hostile subjects are waiting for him. Actually he had been running in a circle during the night. The rebels killed him with a silver bullet. Brutus Jones is the victim of his horrible memories. The effect of Tom-Tom has enhanced panic in his heart. His death with a silver bullet shows how he has lived up to his legend.

20.4 O'Neill's Incorporation of Jung's Theory

The Emperor Jones expresses the polarity between free will and determinism. Freewill is side tracked and marginalised in *The Emperor Jones*: Fatalism is inherent in Eugene O'Neill's tragedy. Man is inevitably a victim of circumstances over which he has no control. An overwhelming power acts arbitrarily against man. From the determinist point of view, freedom is myth. O'Neill's strength lies in his determinist philosophy. It makes his tragedies logically sound and emotionally convincing. *The Emperor Jones* is therefore, very convincing. Brutus Jones traces in his imagination the heritage of slave tradition, lowly work of the Negro, white man's servitude, racial superstitions etc. They were transmuted into the beatings of his heart by the native tom-tom as it echoed in the depth of the forest. The forces of heredity and environment crowd in the consciousness of the emperor until he loses his regal nature and tears away the trappings of his assumed grandeur. One by one the phantoms disappear and he becomes more and more a Negro- a criminal getting scared of his primitive fears and the darkness of the forest. He was destroyed by his past telescoped fantastically. He meets the man he had killed and kills him again.

The central scenes of *The Emperor Jones* combine the reality of the jungle with the fantasy of Brutus Jones's mind. The scenes are illumined by the moon which casts its dubious light on hallucinations enacted in his memory-partly from his own life and partly from the racial past of the Negro. He meets a foreman of a chain gang whom he has killed. He sees a dead stump of wood bearing resemblance to the foot of a large tree by the edge of a river, he sees a rough structure of boulders like an altar. It seems to him that he has been there a bit earlier. A witch-doctor appears and dances and a monstrous crocodile crawls from the river towards Brutus Jones who shoots the monster. The scene suddenly shifts to broad day light. The native islanders have shot him dead. O'Neill had studied the psychologists like Jung and Freud. It was Jung who interested him most. He wrote, "Some of his suggestions I find extraordinarily illuminating in the light of my experience with hidden motives."

The suggestion which stimulated O'Neill in *The Emperor Jones* was Jung's fundamental premise-

the existence and power of the collective Unconscious. The mind of a given man contains ideas from the collective unconscious which come to him by virtue of his being a member of the human race as well as his own specific race, tribe or family. Nowhere in Eugene O'Neill's work is his theatrical skill more evident than in the flight of Brutus Jones through the jungle to the drum beat which grows louder and louder, faster and faster. Towards the end, Brutus Jones shoots the crocodile summoned by the dwitch-doctor. Evil represented by the crocodile is the evil of his own self and in killing it, he kills himself just as Dorian Gray in stabbing the portrait, kills himself. Jung's theory that great literature strikes a responsive chord in all men because its central metaphors can be traced to archetypal images buried in the collective Unconscious of humanity. In *The Emperor Jones*, O'Neill achieves a dynamic synthesis of symbol and dramatic action. It is a play on psycho-analysis and O'Neill's exploration of a sinister-minded Negro who becomes an emperor by trickery, fraud and foul means.

20.5 Expressionism in *The Emperor Jones*

Overlapping with his realistic plays, O'Neill engaged himself in a series of experimentation in American theatre. He became an expressionist playwright. *The Hairy Ape* and *The Emperor Jones* are expressionistic plays. Eugene O'Neill had been deeply influenced by the technique of the German dramatist Kaiser as employed in the play *From Moon to Midnight.* O'Neill has watched its performance in New York in 1922. Another great influence on him was Strindberg. He wanted to dramatise the American citizen in the context of his contemporary society. He marginalised elaborate conversation and dialogue and depersonalized character. He probed into the Unconscious self of men. *The Emperor Jones* is an excellent expressionistic play. Brutus Jones is expressionistically portrayed: He is tall, squarely-built, full-blooded Negro of middle age. His features are articulate: He wears a light blue uniform coat, sprayed with brass buttons, heavy gold chevrons on his shoulders, gold braid on the collar, cuffs etc. The palace is indicated through pillars and the throne. There is dazzling scarlet colour on the stage. Brutus Jones has taken necessary precautions in case there is a revolt against him. He has created a myth that only a silver bullet can kill him. He has deposited his robbed fortune in a foreign bank. All he needs to do is to cross a plain and a forest to search a waiting ship. In case anything goes wrong, he has six bullets in his revolver. The last one to be used is made of silver. There are six forest scenes. The silver bullet is used in the last of those scenes. But the pendulum of circumstances swings from his over-confidence to panic. Eugene O'Neill assumes that the audience would share the visions and fancies of Brutus Jones. The "little formless fears" or nightmares make *The Emperor Jones* an expressionistic play. As the play progresses, Jones stripped of his emperor's uniform. He recapitulates his sinister past. His racial memories obsess him. He visualizes Southern planters in an auction where they are going to sell him. The next glimpse transforms the claustrophobic forest setting into the interior of a slave ship. He is now functionally dressed. While the witch-doctor performs an incantation, Jones is to be sacrificed to the crocodile god. Brutus Jones is constraimed to fire the silver bullet. The tom tom reaches its rhythmic crescendo. The play ends with Smither's remark "Jones has met the death he chose for himself."

In a memorandum to the director of *Dynamo,* O'Neill commented on the importance of sound effects: "I have always used sound in plays as a structural part of them." He wrote primarily by the ear for the ear. In his play *Bound East for Cardiff*, the sound of whistle is significant. It anticipates tom-tom in *The Emperor Jones*. The beating of drums is part of the war dance which the insurgent native islanders perform to muster up courage to pursue their Emperors since he has charmed life and magical powers. By beating the tom-tom they work out a counter rhythm. It corresponds to Brutus Jones's heart beat. When Jones's heart stops beating, the tom-tom abruptly ceases. By firing bullets, he has exposed himself to the

insurgents. Thus, the sound effects are very significant in *The Emperor Jones*.

20.6 A Note on Colour Symbolism *The Emperor Jones*

O'Neill has a great fascination for colour symbolism. The colour symbolism is very subtle in *The Emperor Jones*. The emperor's throne is dazzlingly scarlet against the white washed palatial room and pillars. The floor has white-tiles. There is a brilliant orange cushion on the seat. There is prominence of whiteness while the protagonist is a Negro. It is Black which dominates: The emperor is gradually stripped of his "White" imperial veneers and realises his negritude. Scarlet colour is associated with sinfulness, worldliness and blood. The words 'bloody' and 'bleeding' occur many times in the play. The forest is dark. It corresponds to the darkness of the psyche of Brutus Jones.

20.7 A Pointwise Resume

1. Eugene O'Neill was one of the pioneers of American drama. He established the 'Off-Broadway' theatre and thrilled the New-York audience.

2. Henrik Ibsen, Strindberg, Maxim Gorky..... etc. were his masters.

3. O'Neill was a craftman of drama. He experimented with new techniques.

4. He created Tragic drama which was rather different from Sophoclean plays and Aristotelean theory. He admired the Greek drama.

5. 'Exaltation' is a keyword in O'Neill's aesthetics.

6. According to O'Neill life is an eternal conflict with powers beyond human control.

7. O'Neill's characters are victims of circumstances and prisoners of experience. *The Emperor Jones* illustrates it in the best possible manner.

8. Brutus Jones is not an Aristotelean hero: He is a sinner and criminal. He is not morally upright and righteous. He is ignoble.

9. *The Emperor Jones* is a pantomime and the technique of impressionism is employed by the playwright.

10. O'Neill in this plays probes into the Unconscious of the Negro. Brutus Jones stands in symbolic relations of his race.

11. Though the silver bullet is his defence mechanism, the islanders are smarting under his tyranny.

12. He is a lily-livered man. He feels panicky and insecure and his hallucinations are an outcome of his panic and insecurity.

13. Eugene O'Neill concentrates on subjective emotional experience rather than impirical objective experience. *The Emperor Jones* is an impressionistic dramatization of Negro's anguished psyche.

14. Under the grip of panic, the memory of Brutus Jones is sharpened. His racial memories return. His hallucinations show- a southern slave auction in which for sale, a slave ship carrying Negroes away from home, the witch doctor demanding sacrifice,..... etc.

15. Brutue Jones is like Macbeth who becomes hyper sensitive to sound and sight. He sees a dagger with blood stains in pitch dark immediately before the gruesome murder of king Duncan.

16. The forest stands for his unconscious self. Jones's silver bullet stands for his vanity, superstition and occult faith. Thus, there are symbolic strands in *The Emperor Jones*.

17. Eugene O'Neill modernized the American theatre in form and content.

20.8 Bibliographical Annotations

3. Since Jones was an enchanter, he indulged in occult practices and mysterious tricks. Prosper is also a magician in Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*

4. The auction block was a wooden stump on which the Negro slave was made to stand and the participating pronounced the bid one by one.

5. With Bara Hussain's pyrrhic victory as President of the United States of America is an eye opener. It hightlights that apartheid stands mitigated and it is dying its natural death. Obama mania of the Americans speaks volumes about the stigma of apartheid in their culture.

20.9 Review Questions

1. Write a note on the supernatural element in the hallucinations of Jones.

2. Discuss *The Emperor Jones* as a pantomime and an expressionistic play.

3. What is the technique of Eugene O'Neill in *The Emperor Jones* ? Discuss.

4. How does Eugene O'Neill respond to the social orders through the play *The Emperor Jones* ? Discuss.

5. Comment upon the character and personality of Brutus Jones.

Or

Justify *The Emperor Jones* as a one-man play.

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UNIT-21

RALPF WALDO EMERSON: *THE OVER SOUL*

Structure

21.0 Objectives

This unit will introduce you to the American writer, R W Emerson and give a brief overview of his life and work. We will also discuss his essay, *The Oversoul* in which Emerson set out his spiritual and philosophical beliefs. By the end of this unit, you would be in a position to understand Emerson's views on transcendentalism and also view his work from the perspective of his times.

21.1 Introduction

Make the most of yourself, for that is all there is of you.

- R W Emerson.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 – 1882) American essayist, philosopher, poet, and leader of the Transcendentalist movement in the early 19th century was born in Boston, Massachusetts to Ruth Haskins and the Rev. William Emerson, a Unitarian minister who came from a reputed family of ministers. His father died of stomach cancer when Emerson was barely eight years old and the boy was brought up by his mother and other women in the family who were spiritually and intellectually strong including his aunt, Mary Moody Emerson, who had a profound impact on him.

Emerson studied at the Boston Latin School and Harvard where he started maintaining a list of books that he had read and began writing a journal in a series of notebooks that would later be called *The Wide World*. He worked part-time as waiter and as teacher in order to meet his expenses at that time. He was not an outstanding student but as a Class Poet, he presented an original poem on Harvard's Class Day, a month before his official graduation.

Having graduated from Harvard, Emerson assisted his brother at a school for young ladies that had been set up in their mother's house. Later, when his brother went away to study divinity, Emerson took charge. After earning his living as a school master for several years, Emerson then went to Harvard Divinity School.

He was ordained in 1829 and joined Boston's Second Church as a junior pastor. He met and married his first wife, Ellen Louisa Tucker in Concord, New Hampshire when she was eighteen years old. A couple of years later, Ellen died of tuberculosis. Her death affected Emerson deeply and he often visited the place where she was laid to rest. After this tragic event, Emerson gradually began to disagree with the methods of the church which finally led to his resignation in 1832.

In the same year, he went on a tour of Europe and met William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Stuart Mill, and Thomas Carlyle. The last influenced Emerson greatly and he later became the US literary agent for Carlyle. The two of them kept up their correspondence till Carlyle's death in 1881. Emerson later wrote about his European travels in *English Traits*.

In 1835, Emerson bought a house on the Cambridge and Concord Turnpike in Concord, Massachusetts, now open to the public as the Ralph Waldo Emerson House. He soon established himself as one of the leading lights of the town. He married his second wife, Lydia Jackson in 1835 and the couple had four children.

His writing had a profound influence on the New Thought Movement that developed during the middle of the 19th century. According to him, his central doctrine was "the infinitude of the private man." In his essay, *Nature*, written in 1836, Emerson can be seen to have moved away from the religious and social ideas subscribed to by his contemporaries and instead, formulating and postulating the philosophy of Transcendentalism.

Emerson was regarded as a great orator of his time and his speeches, imbued with passion and respect for his audience always captivated the listeners. When he delivered a speech titled *The American Scholar*, Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. hailed it as America's "Intellectual Declaration of Independence". Emerson became the leading voice of intellectual culture in the United States and became noted for his ability to influence and inspire others.

Along with other intellectuals with similar ideas, Emerson founded the Transcendental Club in 1836. The group published its flagship journal, *The Dial* that was once described as the most original and thoughtful periodical ever published in that country, from 1840 to 1844.

His friendship with Henry David Thoreau, another American literary giant began in 1837 and Emerson proved to be an inspiration for life.

After giving a radically revolutionary speech at Harvard in which he declared Christ was a great man and not a god and for which he was denounced as an atheist, he was not invited to speak at Harvard again for another thirty years.

Emerson was introduced to Indian philosophy when reading the works of French philosopher Victor Cousin. And he read the *Bhagavad Gita* and Henry Thomas Colebrooke's *Essays on the Vedas***.** The Vedas influenced him greatly and many of his works exhibit shades of non-dualism, specially The *Over-Soul*.

Emerson died of pneumonia in 1882 and was buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, Concord, Massachusetts.Emerson was staunchly against slavery and his religious views went against the popular grain. He believed that all things are connected to God and, therefore, all things are divine. His ideas were influenced by both German philosophy and Biblical criticism according to him, truth does not need to be revealed to us by God but can be directly experienced from nature through intuition. His views were the cornerstone of Transcendentalist belief.

21.2 Discussion on *The Oversoul*

The Over-Soul appeared in the1841 edition of Emerson's Essays and it can be said to be the most detailed and comprehensive account of the author's faith. There is, in this essay, an exposition of his faith in a god who dwells in each one of us and to communicate with whom, we do not need to become members of a particular church or rope in the services of a 'middleman' – priests etc.

The first poetic epigraph that Emerson prefaces his essay with is from English philosopher, Henry More's "Psychozoia, or, the Life of Soul" (1647). He must have chosen this piece as it directly addresses each individual soul as well as the all-encompassing soul of God. More expresses his belief that the multiplicity of souls on earth – each belonging to one being – also merges with God's or what Emerson calls "the eternal One."

But souls that of his own good life partake,

He loves as his own self; dear as his eye

They are to Him: He'll never them forsake:

When they shall die, then God himself shall die:

They live, they live in blest eternity.

- Henry More

This passage may be said to introduce the leitmotif of the whole essay – the theme of 'the many' and 'the one'. While in this essay Emerson focuses on the human soul, in his other essays he speaks about the participation of humanity in the processes of nature. He declares that human souls are at one and the same time individual as well as part of nature's whole. Hence, without the many, there could never be the one and conversely, without the one, there could never be the many either.

The second poem that forms the epigraph to the essay is Emerson's own poem, later published separately and titled "Unity". This poem delineates firstly, the notion of duality, the idea that certain things contrast naturally with certain others. For instance, Emerson cites "east and west," "sod and stone," and "Night and Day" in his poem. Even if the pairs are opposites, one cannot exist without the other; both are required for a condition of wholeness to come into being.

The second theme that Emerson focuses on in the poem is that there is a force that energizes creation "a power / That works its will on age and hour." It is this power that he refers to by the name of the "Over-Soul". It is the same power that More alludes to in his poem but without naming it. For Emerson, this force represents the presence of God in every animate and inanimate object in the universe.

Space is ample, east and west,

But two cannot go abreast,

Cannot travel in it two:

Yonder masterful cuckoo

Crowds every egg out of the nest,

Quick or dead, except its own;

A spell is laid on sod and stone,

Night and Day ‘ve been tampered with,

Every quality and pith

Surcharged and sultry with a power

That works its will on age and hour.

Emerson first gives a general introduction to his theme and informs the reader of his intention to define the Over-Soul. He talks about the accessibility of God to all. In an acknowledgement of More’ assertion that moral ideas are innate to the human mind, Emerson affirms his belief in the existence of a “spirit of prophecy which is innate in every man.” According to him, the spirit of God is in every soul and this reveres God back in return.

There is a difference between one and another hour of life, in their authority and subsequent effect. Our faith comes in moments; our vice is habitual. Yet there is a depth in those brief moments which constrains us to ascribe more reality to them than to all other experiences. For this reason, the argument which is always forthcoming to silence those who conceive extraordinary hopes of man, namely, the appeal to experience, is for ever invalid and vain. We give up the past to the objector, and yet we hope. He must explain this hope. We grant that human life is mean; but how did we find out that it was mean? What is the ground of this uneasiness of ours; of this old discontent? What is the universal sense of want and ignorance, but the fine innuendo by which the soul makes its enormous claim? Why do men feel that the natural history of man has never been written, but he is always leaving behind what you have said of him, and it becomes old, and books of metaphysics worthless? The philosophy of six thousand years has not searched the chambers and magazines of the soul. In its experiments there has always remained, in the last analysis, a residuum it could not resolve. Man is a stream whose source is hidden. Our being is descending into us from we know not whence. The most exact calculator has no prescience that somewhat incalculable may not balk the very next moment. I am constrained every moment to acknowledge a higher origin for events than the will I call mine.

As with events, so is it with thoughts. When I watch that flowing river, which, out of regions I see not, pours for a season its streams into me, I see that I am a pensioner; not a cause, but a surprised spectator of this ethereal water; that I desire and look up, and put myself in the attitude of reception, but from some alien energy the visions come.

Emerson also argues, taking the idea of the many and the one further, that because each one of us has a soul that is a part of God, so each one of us is actually a representative of all the other souls in this world:

The Supreme Critic on the errors of the past and the present, and the only prophet of that which must be, is that great nature in which we rest, as the earth lies in the soft arms of the atmosphere; that Unity, that Over-soul, within which every man’s particular being is contained and made one with all other; that common heart, of which all sincere conversation is the worship, to which all right action is submission; that overpowering reality which confutes our tricks and talents, and constrains every one to pass for what he is, and to speak from his character, and not from his tongue, and which evermore tends to pass into our

thought and hand, and become wisdom, and virtue, and power, and beauty. We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE. And this deep power in which we exist, and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, but the act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one. We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul. Only by the vision of that Wisdom can the horoscope of the ages be read, and by falling back on our better thoughts, by yielding to the spirit of prophecy which is innate in every man, we can know what it saith. Every man's words, who speaks from that life, must sound vain to those who do not dwell in the same thought on their own part. I dare not speak for it. My words do not carry its august sense; they fall short and cold. Only itself can inspire whom it will, and behold! their speech shall be lyrical, and sweet, and universal as the rising of the wind. Yet I desire, even by profane words, if I may not use sacred, to indicate the heaven of this deity, and to report what hints I have collected of the transcendent simplicity and energy of the Highest Law.

Emerson speaks about the need for moral action to demonstrate what language cannot. It is these actions that take us on the way to understanding the energizing power of the universe that Emerson refers to. He knows and confesses that he cannot possibly describe this power in words: "My words do not carry its august sense; they fall short and cold." And because it is not possible to understand this power or this God that resides within us with the instrument of words, what we can do is to demonstrate his presence by living in ways that do so – demonstrating it through our actions and our character. Our leading morally upright lives is the route to understanding and "right action" is our submission to the Over-Soul and to the "common heart" that is our collective inheritance.

In spite of the difficulties that he envisions in the task he has set for himself, Emerson declares that he will attempt to arrive at a definition of the Over-Soul and he will, in addition, "report what hints" he has received about this mysterious, all-permeating force in his own life and experience as well as in society.

If we consider what happens in conversation, in reveries, in remorse, in times of passion, in surprises, in the instructions of dreams, wherein often we see ourselves in masquerade, the droll disguises only magnifying and enhancing a real element, and forcing it on our distinct notice, we shall catch many hints that will broaden and lighten into knowledge of the secret of nature.

Since he has already admitted that this force, the over-Soul, cannot be understood through words, Emerson now attempts to clarify what it is by saying what it is not:

All goes to show that the soul in man is not an organ, but animates and exercises all the organs; is not a function, like the power of memory, of calculation, of comparison, but uses these as hands and feet; is not a faculty, but a light; is not the intellect or the will, but the master of the intellect and the will; is the background of our being, in which they lie, an immensity not possessed and that cannot be possessed. From within or from behind, a light shines through us upon things, and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all. A man is the facade of a temple wherein all wisdom and all good abide.

The soul is none of the things he has listed yet it utilized them for its own purposes. So it is then that although the soul is not an organ, it animates all the organs; although it is not a faculty, it makes use of them; it is not the intellect, neither is it the will but it is the master of both. Hence, the soul can be said to be the power that uses all these things for right action but it cannot be said that it is these things.

Further, the soul erases all notions of time and space – the major banes of human existence which

circumscribe the opportunities for us to live fully. By depending too much on our physical senses rather than on our spiritual resources, we have rendered the faculty of intuition useless, our minds being too overpowered to make use of this significant spiritual tool. However, Emerson holds out a ray of hope that some thoughts, like our love of beauty still have the power to transcend time. Even if the notion of beauty might vary with ach era and each succeeding generation, there is still a seeking for whatever is considered beautiful by the individual or society. It is this seeking – and not the objects of beauty – that is eternal and goes beyond the limits of time and space.

We are often made to feel that there is another youth and age than that which is measured from the year of our natural birth. Some thoughts always find us young, and keep us so. Such a thought is the love of the universal and eternal beauty. Every man parts from that contemplation with the feeling that it rather belongs to ages than to mortal life. The least activity of the intellectual powers redeems us in a degree from the conditions of time. In sickness, in languor, give us a strain of poetry, or a profound sentence, and we are refreshed; or produce a volume of Plato, or Shakespeare, or remind us of their names, and instantly we come into a feeling of longevity. See how the deep, divine thought reduces centuries, and millenniums, and makes itself present through all ages. Is the teaching of Christ less effective now than it was when first his mouth was opened? The emphasis of facts and persons in my thought has nothing to do with time. And so, always, the soul's scale is one; the scale of the senses and the understanding is another. Before the revelations of the soul, Time, Space, and Nature shrink away. In common speech, we refer all things to time, as we habitually refer the immensely sundered stars to one concave sphere. And so we say that the Judgment is distant or near, that the Millennium approaches, that a day of certain political, moral, social reforms is at hand, and the like, when we mean, that, in the nature of things, one of the facts we contemplate is external and fugitive, and the other is permanent and connate with the soul. The things we now esteem fixed shall, one by one, detach themselves, like ripe fruit, from our experience, and fall. The wind shall blow them none knows whither. The landscape, the figures, Boston, London, are facts as fugitive as any institution past, or any whiff of mist or smoke, and so is society, and so is the world. The soul looketh steadily forwards, creating a world before her, leaving worlds behind her. She has no dates, nor rites, nor persons, nor specialties, nor men. The soul knows only the soul; the web of events is the flowing robe in which she is clothed.

How does an idea transcend time? Since the soul proceeds by an "ascension of state", it is through the mind that we acquire an understanding of the truth. The greater the insight we achieve regarding the nature of the spirit that binds everything together – "the law of moral and of mental gain"- the nearer we approach the over-Soul.

After its own law and not by arithmetic is the rate of its progress to be computed. The soul's advances are not made by gradation, such as can be represented by motion in a straight line; but rather by ascension of state, such as can be represented by metamorphosis, — from the egg to the worm, from the worm to the fly…

Emerson also presents the duality of the universe in his representation of what the Over-Soul is and what it is not and in the conflict between the Over-Soul and the physical senses.

Emerson goes on to show how the over-Soul establishes a bond between everything and how it manifests itself. He believes that all our conversations feature the spirit of God: "In all conversation between two persons, tacit reference is made as to a third party, to a common nature. That third party is not social; it is impersonal; is God." In groups, this presence is noticeable and makes the people of that group act in a nobler manner once they recognize its presence. The central element in this common bond between

everyone is accessibility. The soul acts as the mediator but perhaps because it cannot be adequately defined or described in words, we do not speak of this bond.

Within the same sentiment is the germ of intellectual growth, which obeys the same law. Those who are capable of humility, of justice, of love, of aspiration, stand already on a platform that commands the sciences and arts, speech and poetry, action and grace. For whoso dwells in this moral beatitude already anticipates those special powers which men prize so highly. The lover has no talent, no skill, which passes for quite nothing with his enamoured maiden, however little she may possess of related faculty; and the heart which abandons itself to the Supreme Mind finds itself related to all its works, and will travel a royal road to particular knowledges and powers. In ascending to this primary and aboriginal sentiment, we have come from our remote station on the circumference instantaneously to the centre of the world, where, as in the closet of God, we see causes, and anticipate the universe, which is but a slow effect.

One mode of the divine teaching is the incarnation of the spirit in a form, in forms, like my own. I live in society; with persons who answer to thoughts in my own mind, or express a certain obedience to the great instincts to which I live. I see its presence to them. I am certified of a common nature; and these other souls, these separated selves, draw me as nothing else can. They stir in me the new emotions we call passion; of love, hatred, fear, admiration, pity; thence comes conversation, competition, persuasion, cities, and war. Persons are supplementary to the primary teaching of the soul. In youth we are mad for persons. Childhood and youth see all the world in them. But the larger experience of man discovers the identical nature appearing through them all. Persons themselves acquaint us with the impersonal. In all conversation between two persons, tacit reference is made, as to a third party, to a common nature. That third party or common nature is not social; it is impersonal; is God. And so in groups where debate is earnest, and especially on high questions, the company become aware that the thought rises to an equal level in all bosoms, that all have a spiritual property in what was said, as well as the sayer. They all become wiser than they were. It arches over them like a temple, this unity of thought, in which every heart beats with nobler sense of power and duty, and thinks and acts with unusual solemnity. All are conscious of attaining to a higher self-possession. It shines for all. There is a certain wisdom of humanity which is common to the greatest men with the lowest, and which our ordinary education often labors to silence and obstruct. The mind is one, and the best minds, who love truth for its own sake, think much less of property in truth. They accept it thankfully everywhere, and do not label or stamp it with any man's name, for it is theirs long beforehand, and from eternity. The learned and the studious of thought have no monopoly of wisdom. Their violence of direction in some degree disqualifies them to think truly. We owe many valuable observations to people who are not very acute or profound, and who say the thing without effort, which we want and have long been hunting in vain. The action of the soul is oftener in that which is felt and left unsaid, than in that which is said in any conversation. It broods over every society, and they unconsciously seek for it in each other. We know better than we do. We do not yet possess ourselves, and we know at the same time that we are much more. I feel the same truth how often in my trivial conversation with my neighbours, that somewhat higher in each of us overlooks this by-play, and Jove nods to Jove from behind each of us…

As it is present in all persons, so it is in every period of life. It is adult already in the infant man. In my dealing with my child, my Latin and Greek, my accomplishments and my money stead me nothing; but as much soul as I have avails. If I am wilful, he sets his will against mine, one for one, and leaves me, if I please, the degradation of beating him by my superiority of strength. But if I renounce my will, and act for the soul, setting that up as umpire between us two, out of his young eyes looks the same soul; he reveres and loves with me.

The soul is the perceiver and revealer of truth. We know truth when we see it, let skeptic and scoffer say what they choose. Foolish people ask you, when you have spoken what they do not wish to hear, 'How do you know it is truth, and not an error of your own?' We know truth when we see it, from opinion, as we know when we are awake that we are awake. It was a grand sentence of Emanuel Swedenborg, which would alone indicate the greatness of that man's perception, —"It is no proof of a man's understanding to be able to confirm whatever he pleases; but to be able to discern that what is true is true, and that what is false is false, this is the mark and character of intelligence." In the book I read, the good thought returns to me, as every truth will, the image of the whole soul. To the bad thought which I find in it, the same soul becomes a discerning, separating sword, and lops it away. We are wiser than we know. If we will not interfere with our thought, but will act entirely, or see how the thing stands in God, we know the particular thing, and every thing, and every man. For the Maker of all things and all persons stands behind us, and casts his dread omniscience through us over things.

Emerson would like everyone to "act entirely," to act on our thoughts before passing them through the filter of society's notions of normalcy and consistency. The demands of society make us behave differently and against ways in which God would have us act and this creates a schism between our souls and the Over-Soul. Unlike an individual afraid of inconsistency who gives of himself only partly, the Over-Soul gives of itself completely.

When Emerson takes up the issue of the relationship between the Over-Soul and society, although according to him God is present in every one of us, there is the difficulty of putting into plain words exactly how we are able to recognize this presence. He does so through the concept of 'Revelation': "an influx of the Divine mind into our mind", using 'mind' to denote the singularity of our collective thinking that is linked one to the other by the common bond. He bolsters this argument with several examples from various religions such as Calvinism, Moravianism and Methodism to show how, in spite of their diverse nature, they all believe that "the individual soul always mingles with the universal soul" to reach an ecstatic state of understanding.

We distinguish the announcements of the soul, its manifestations of its own nature, by the term - Revelation. These are always attended by the emotion of the sublime. For this communication is an influx of the Divine mind into our mind. It is an ebb of the individual rivulet before the flowing surges of the sea of life. Every distinct apprehension of this central commandment agitates men with awe and delight. A thrill passes through all men at the reception of new truth, or at the performance of a great action, which comes out of the heart of nature. In these communications, the power to see is not separated from the will to do, but the insight proceeds from obedience, and the obedience proceeds from a joyful perception. Every moment when the individual feels himself invaded by it is memorable. By the necessity of our constitution, a certain enthusiasm attends the individual's consciousness of that divine presence. The character and duration of this enthusiasm varies with the state of the individual, from an ecstasy and trance and prophetic inspiration, — which is its rarer appearance, — to the faintest glow of virtuous emotion, in which form it warms, like our household fires, all the families and associations of men, and makes society possible. A certain tendency to insanity has always attended the opening of the religious sense in men, as if they had been "blasted with excess of light." The trances of Socrates, the "union" of Plotinus, the vision of Porphyry, the conversion of Paul, the aurora of Behmen, the convulsions of George Fox and his Quakers, the illumination of Swedenborg, are of this kind. What was in the case of these remarkable persons a ravishment has, in innumerable instances in common life, been exhibited in less striking manner. Everywhere the history of religion betrays a tendency to enthusiasm. The rapture of the Moravian and Quietist; the opening

of the internal sense of the Word, in the language of the New Jerusalem Church; the _revival_ of the Calvinistic churches; the experiences of the Methodists, are varying forms of that shudder of awe and delight with which the individual soul always mingles with the universal soul.

Emerson talks of action and language by saying that although we may question the why's of the nature of this world or what happen to the individual soul after death, the Over-Soul does not give us the answers in words. He tells us that the disciples of Jesus Christ demonstrated God's divine plan through action and not merely through words. Even if we may assume as natural our wish to ask such questions related to the spiritual, it is ultimately futile because the answers do not involve any language that we can recognize or understand:

The nature of these revelations is the same; they are perceptions of the absolute law. They are solutions of the soul's own questions. They do not answer the questions which the understanding asks. The soul answers never by words, but by the thing itself that is inquired after.

Revelation is the disclosure of the soul. The popular notion of a revelation is, that it is a telling of fortunes. In past oracles of the soul, the understanding seeks to find answers to sensual questions, and undertakes to tell from God how long men shall exist, what their hands shall do, and who shall be their company, adding names, and dates, and places. But we must pick no locks. We must check this low curiosity. An answer in words is delusive; it is really no answer to the questions you ask. Do not require a description of the countries towards which you sail. The description does not describe them to you, and to-morrow you arrive there, and know them by inhabiting them. Men ask concerning the immortality of the soul, the employments of heaven, the state of the sinner, and so forth. They even dream that Jesus has left replies to precisely these interrogatories. Never a moment did that sublime spirit speak in their patois. To truth, justice, love, the attributes of the soul, the idea of immutableness is essentially associated. Jesus, living in these moral sentiments, heedless of sensual fortunes, heeding only the manifestations of these, never made the separation of the idea of duration from the essence of these attributes, nor uttered a syllable concerning the duration of the soul. It was left to his disciples to sever duration from the moral elements, and to teach the immortality of the soul as a doctrine, and maintain it by evidences. The moment the doctrine of the immortality is separately taught, man is already fallen. In the flowing of love, in the adoration of humility, there is no question of continuance. No inspired man ever asks this question, or condescends to these evidences. For the soul is true to itself, and the man in whom it is shed abroad cannot wander from the present, which is infinite, to a future which would be finite.

These questions which we lust to ask about the future are a confession of sin. God has no answer for them. No answer in words can reply to a question of things. It is not in an arbitrary "decree of God," but in the nature of man, that a veil shuts down on the facts of to-morrow; for the soul will not have us read any other cipher than that of cause and effect. By this veil, which curtains events, it instructs the children of men to live in to-day. The only mode of obtaining an answer to these questions of the senses is to forego all low curiosity, and, accepting the tide of being which floats us into the secret of nature, work and live, work and live, and all unawares the advancing soul has built and forged for itself a new condition, and the question and the answer are one.

So, instead of making such inquiries, we should "work and live, work and live," as it only responsible actions that will assure us of immortality.

In addition to refrain from worrying about the future, we should also refrain from worrying about the actions of others as each one of us is responsible for the actions that will or conversely, will not assure

us of salvation. Emerson criticizes the Calvinistic credo obliquely for asserting that God decides which souls are to be saved even before those people, the 'elect' are born. According to Calvinism, we are born sinful and our redemption does not depend on our earthly actions but lies solely with God can redeem. Emerson declares that no one has the authority to judge another and contrasts his Unitarian belief with the tenets of Calvinism.

By the same fire, vital, consecrating, celestial, which burns until it shall dissolve all things into the waves and surges of an ocean of light, we see and know each other, and what spirit each is of. Who can tell the grounds of his knowledge of the character of the several individuals in his circle of friends? No man. Yet their acts and words do not disappoint him. In that man, though he knew no ill of him, he put no trust. In that other, though they had seldom met, authentic signs had yet passed, to signify that he might be trusted as one who had an interest in his own character. We know each other very well, — which of us has been just to himself, and whether that which we teach or behold is only an aspiration, or is our honest effort also.

We are all discerners of spirits. That diagnosis lies aloft in our life or unconscious power…But who judges? and what? Not our understanding. We do not read them by learning or craft. No; the wisdom of the wise man consists herein, that he does not judge them; he lets them judge themselves, and merely reads and records their own verdict.

After discussing how the Over-Soul is revealed to us, Emerson concludes the essay by explaining how it reveals itself in individuals and emphasizes the significance of individual character vis-à-vis its relation to the Over-Soul. Anyone who is close, spiritually, to the over-Soul would possess virtuousness and act nobly because of its influence: "If he have found his centre, the Deity will shine through him, through all the disguises of ignorance, of ungenial temperament, of unfavorable circumstance."

That which we are, we shall teach, not voluntarily, but involuntarily. Thoughts come into our minds by avenues which we never left open, and thoughts go out of our minds through avenues which we never voluntarily opened. Character teaches over our head. The infallible index of true progress is found in the tone the man takes…

The same Omniscience flows into the intellect, and makes what we call genius. Much of the wisdom of the world is not wisdom, and the most illuminated class of men are no doubt superior to literary fame, and are not writers. Among the multitude of scholars and authors, we feel no hallowing presence; we are sensible of a knack and skill rather than of inspiration; they have a light, and know not whence it comes, and call it their own; their talent is some exaggerated faculty, some overgrown member, so that their strength is a disease. In these instances the intellectual gifts do not make the impression of virtue, but almost of vice; and we feel that a man's talents stand in the way of his advancement in truth. But genius is religious. It is a larger imbibing of the common heart. It is not anomalous, but more like, and not less like other men. There is, in all great poets, a wisdom of humanity which is superior to any talents they exercise. The author, the wit, the partisan, the fine gentleman, does not take place of the man. Humanity shines in Homer, in Chaucer, in Spenser, in Shakspeare, in Milton. They are content with truth. They use the positive degree. They seem frigid and phlegmatic to those who have been spiced with the frantic passion and violent coloring of inferior, but popular writers. For they are poets by the free course which they allow to the informing soul, which through their eyes beholds again, and blesses the things which it hath made. The soul is superior to its knowledge; wiser than any of its works. The great poet makes us feel our own wealth, and then we think less of his compositions. His best communication to our mind is to teach us to despise all he has done…

Ineffable is the union of man and God in every act of the soul. The simplest person, who in his integrity worships God, becomes God; yet for ever and ever the influx of this better and universal self is new and unsearchable. It inspires awe and astonishment…It inspires in man an infallible trust. He has not the conviction, but the sight, that the best is the true, and may in that thought easily dismiss all particular uncertainties and fears, and adjourn to the sure revelation of time, the solution of his private riddles. He is sure that his welfare is dear to the heart of being. In the presence of law to his mind, he is overflowed with a reliance so universal, that it sweeps away all cherished hopes and the most stable projects of mortal condition in its flood…

Let man, then, learn the revelation of all nature and all thought to his heart; this, namely; that the Highest dwells with him; that the sources of nature are in his own mind, if the sentiment of duty is there…God will not make himself manifest to cowards. He must greatly listen to himself, withdrawing himself from all the accents of other men's devotion…

It makes no difference whether the appeal is to numbers or to one. The faith that stands on authority is not faith...Great is the soul, and plain. It is no flatterer, it is no follower; it never appeals from itself. It believes in itself. Before the immense possibilities of man, all mere experience, all past biography, however spotless and sainted, shrinks away...The soul gives itself, alone, original, and pure, to the Lonely, Original, and Pure, who, on that condition, gladly inhabits, leads, and speaks through it. Then is it glad, young, and nimble. It is not wise, but it sees through all things. It is not called religious, but it is innocent. It calls the light its own, and feels that the grass grows and the stone falls by a law inferior to, and dependent on, its nature. Behold, it saith, I am born into the great, the universal mind. I, the imperfect, adore my own Perfect. I am somehow receptive of the great soul, and thereby I do overlook the sun and the stars, and feel them to be the fair accidents and effects which change and pass...Thus revering the soul, and learning, as the ancient said, that "its beauty is immense," man will come to see that the world is the perennial miracle which the soul worketh, and be less astonished at particular wonders; he will learn that there is no profane history; that all history is sacred; that the universe is represented in an atom, in a moment of time. He will weave no longer a spotted life of shreds and patches, but he will live with a divine unity. He will cease from what is base and frivolous in his life, and be content with all places and with any service he can render. He will calmly front the morrow in the negligency of that trust which carries God with it, and so hath already the whole future in the bottom of the heart.

While making a distinction between 'proper' and 'improper' learning, Emerson declares that the scholar or poet who whose opinions are generated by his own experience is one who speaks "from within," but the scholar or poet who imitates instead of creating is one speaks "from without." When the import of anything that we read transcends time, the divine feeling that it engenders is akin to the divine spirit that we can perceive in our souls:

The great distinction between teachers sacred or literary, between poets like Herbert, and poets like Pope, between philosophers like Spinoza, Kant, and Coleridge, and philosophers like Locke, Paley, Mackintosh, and Stewart, between men of the world, who are reckoned accomplished talkers, and here and there a fervent mystic, prophesying, half insane under the infinitude of his thought, is, that one class speak from within, or from experience, as parties and possessors of the fact; and the other class, from without, as spectators merely, or perhaps as acquainted with the fact on the evidence of third persons. It is of no use to preach to me from without. I can do that too easily myself. Jesus speaks always from within, and in a degree that transcends all others. In that is the miracle. I believe beforehand that it ought so to be. All men stand continually in the expectation of the appearance of such a teacher. But if a man do not speak

from within the veil, where the word is one with that it tells of, let him lowly confess it.

Emerson considers a life unfettered by clutter to be the true route to immortality. In true democratic fashion, he subscribes to the unflinching belief that everyone has the right to reap the rewards of a life honestly lived: "But the soul that ascends to worship the great God, is plain and true; has no rose-color, no fine friends, no chivalry, no adventures; does not want admiration; dwells in the hour that now is, in the earnest experience of the common day."

21.3 Glossary

"blasted with excess of light": Spoken about the English poet John Milton in "The Progress of Poesy" (1757), by the English romantic poet Thomas Gray (1716—71).

"Can crowd . . . to eternity": Spoken by Lucifer in Cain (1821), by the English romantic poet Lord George Byron (1788-1824).

Arrian: Second-century Greek historian.

Behmen, Jacob (1575-1624): German mystic.

Charles II (1630-85): King of England.

Chaucer, Geoffrey (d. 1400): The English poet who wrote The Canterbury Tales.

Christina (1626-89): Queen of Sweden.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor (1772-1834): A British poet and critic, his works include "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

Cromwell, Oliver (1599-1658): Cromwell was the Lord Protector of England (1653-58).

Fox, George (1624-91): The founder of the Society of Friends (1647), popularly called the Quakers, Fox preached equality between men and women, and pacifism. The Quaker doctrine of inner enlightenment belongs in the religious tradition called quietism; the emphasis on inner enlightenment is similar to transcendentalists' emphasis on intuitive knowledge.

Herbert, George (1593-1633): An English metaphysical poet, he wrote The Temple (1633), a famous posthumous collection of religious poems.

Homer (eighth century B.C.): The reputed author of the earliest surviving epic poems in the European tradition, the Iliad and the Odyssey.

James I (1566-1625): King of England.

Kant, Immanuel (1724-1804): The German philosopher who greatly influenced Emerson.

Locke, John (1632-1704): An English philosopher, Locke developed a theory of cognition that denied the existence of innate ideas and asserted that all thought is based on our senses. His works influenced American Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards, who modified Puritan doctrine to allow for more play of reason and intellect, building a foundation for Unitarianism and, eventually, transcendentalism.

Mackintosh, Sir James (1765-1832): Scottish political philosopher.

Milton, John (1608-74): An English poet, he is renowned for his religious epic poem Paradise Lost 1667), which sought to "justify the ways of God to men."

Moravian and Quietist: Eighteenth- and seventeenth-century religious sects, respectively.

Paley, William (1743-1805): English theologian.

Plato (c. 427-347 B.C.): A Greek philosopher, he formulated the philosophy of idealism, which holds that the concepts or ideas of things are more perfect—and, therefore, more real—than the material things themselves.

Plotinus (205-270): An Egyptian-born Roman philosopher, he gave a mystical and symbolic interpretation of the doctrines of Plato.

Pope, Alexander (1688-1744): English poet and translator.

Porphyry (c. 232-304): Roman philosopher.

Socrates (d. 399 B.C.): A Greek philosopher, he initiated a question-and-answer method of teaching—called the Socratic method—as a means of achieving self-knowledge; opponents of Socrates' method felt that he was undermining the authority of the state by teaching youths to question received knowledge. He was brought to trial, convicted of corrupting youth, and condemned to die; he carried out the sentence by drinking poison.

Spenser, Edmund (1552-99): An English poet whose major work is The Faerie Queene.

Spinoza, Baruch (1632-77): Dutch theologian and philosopher.

Stewart, Douglas (1753-1828): Scottish philosopher.

Swedenborg, Emanuel (1688-1772): A Swedish scientist, mystic, and philosopher, he insisted that the scriptures are the immediate word of God; his teachings became the nucleus of the Church of the New Jerusalem.

The Grand Turk: The Sultan of Turkey.

the Pacha: A variation of "pasha," a Turkish government official of high rank.

Zeno (335-263 B.C.): Greek philosopher and founder of the Stoic school of philosophy.

21.4 Let Us Sum Up

Thus we see that though Emerson was not, technically speaking a philosopher, nonetheless he did say wise things about most of the problems with which philosophers are concerned. He was the American Carlyle, the American Plato, and the American Solomon. He dealt almost enterely in metaphysical questions, the relation of the visible world to the soul of the individual, the reality of the spiritual element in nature, the sacred character of moral obligation, and the power of ideas. Yet he has offered no systmatic philosophy. He is rather an eclectic.

21.5 Review Questions

1. " The great poet makes us feel our own wealth, and then we think less of his compositions. His best communication to our mind is to teach us to despise all he has done." Elucidate.

2. How does Emerson define the soul ?

3. What are Emerson's views regarding time in the context of the soul?

4. How, according to Emerson, does the over-Soul manifest itself?

5. What is the distinction that Emerson makes between the two kinds of philosophers, poets and teachers?

21.6 Brief Answers to Selected Questions

Q.1 In this comment, Emerson captures our attention through exaggeration. According to him, if the best work of writers teaches us to despise their whole work, then we will also, by the same token, despise our own scanty output and that of the whole world. It is when we feel our 'own wealth' that we love the Over-Soul as well as the spirit of the world including humanity, and, by extension, love the works of writers like Shakespeare.

Emerson's use of hyperbole forces us to act in one of two ways – we may either reject what he says or accept the paradoxical nature of his comment. If we choose to follow the latter path, we thereby choose to eschew normal, logical paths of thinking and go above them. The exaggeration serves to bring about an alteration in the rational thinking of the reader.

It is possible that, in order to discover the Over-Soul that is within us, it is necessary to hate or feel contempt. If we feel that a writer's brilliance is some force that is not of ourselves, that means that we are at the same time also belittling the brilliance of our own soul when we interact with a work of genius. It is only if we have the same brilliance in ourselves that we would be able to recognize and be sensitive to its presence in others. When we are presented with a literary work, it is only half the story. The other half which complements it comes from within our own self – the imagination which completes what the writer has set forth. In that sense, it is a partnership between the writer and the reader as the latter's imagination infuses life into the work by creating images and concepts.

When we think less of the compositions of a great writer, we are actually increasingly loving those works which have been vitalised by our own interaction with them. What we despise is the uni-dimensional experience of thinking that we are inferior to the great works of art placed before us. This type of thinking limits our imagination and perception.

Q3. Although Emerson accepts the necessity of evolution, his view is that it does not necessarily involve time but is an "ascension of state". The ordinary state of consciousness perceives every stage of evolution as a succession of temporal changes. However, at the level of higher thought, these various stages merge into a cohesive whole. While things seem to unfold in time, the reality is that changes take place gradually and are not frozen moments of time like photographs. That is why we are able to connect the egg with the worm and the insect and realize that they are all stages of the evolution of one being.

Time has no effect on the import of words or events. The teachings of Christ have not lost their significance even with the passage of time. As far as the soul is concerned, there is no concept of time, it knows only the soul. While distance or time define boundaries for an event and present it as such to our consciousness, the soul only looks forward and is in a world that is not circumscribed by either time or space.

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UNIT-22

RALPF WALDO EMERSON: *THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR*

Structure

22.0 Objectives

This unit will focus on Emerson's style and themes. There will also be a discussion on *The American Scholar*. By the end of this unit, you will know what Emerson thought about certain issues and how he put those thoughts into words so as to reach and persuade his listeners and readers.

22.1 Introduction

A man contains all that is needful to his government within himself...

In his essays, Emerson questions and looks into the recognized modes that characterize writings in religion and philosophy and asserts his commitment to the merging and blending of the real with the ideal as well as of the material with the spiritual. His writing frequently takes up positions that may run counter to established cultural traditions and are expressed through the technique of having imaginary poets speaking them in the form of metaphors or fables. Emerson tries to convey, in these pieces, what the limitations or boundaries are of a practical world of 'a notion' as opposed to the views of a poet. They are therefore, in a sense, a dramatic portrayal of this argument.

Most of Emerson's essays are a collection of his lectures. His manner of developing a theme was to think of a topic and wait for ideas and examples to come into his mind in much the same way that birds and insects come to a plant or flower. And when he got an idea, he gave chase to it "as a boy might hunt a butterfly" and pinned it down in his "Thought Book" like a specimen in his collection. He utilized other people's writings as a stimulus for his thoughts rather than for guidance. According to him, books were meant for the idle times of a scholar: "I value them to make my top spin." He loved poetry and mystical philosophy and was specially fond of Shakespeare, Dante, George Herbert, Goethe, Berkeley, Coleridge, Swedenborg, Jakob Boehme, Plato, the new Platonists, and also the translated versions of the religious books of the East. He also liked biographies and anecdotal texts but declared that he did not value writing by Aristophanes, Cervantes, Shelley, Sir Walter Scott, Jane Austen or even Charles Dickens.

He wrote in an epigrammatic style infused with the glow of a steady but moderate optimism and, not being a consistent observer, expressed himself in flashes of gem-like clarity but could be somewhat obscure in his long paragraphs.

What constituted the greatness of Emerson's oratory or writing? It was his sublime imagination; his spirit that was so idealistic but which, at the same time so loved reality as well as the quickness of his gift of perception.

His writing was passionate and originated from his conviction that words, if they were to be strong, should be highly charged, dynamic and tangible. For him, nature was like a book and everything newly learnt was like a new word.

He felt that both oral and written language had a significant role to play in the creation of an evolving culture that would be different from that of Europe and would break away from existing European modes and influences. This was, however, not a revolutionary thought during that time. He was an important figure in the evolution of a national, American literature due to his emphasis on the creation of something new as well as his concern about the influence of the past, of books and monuments.

The American Scholar was delivered as the Phi Beta Kappa oration at Harvard in 1837. It was an impassioned prayer for a realistic, sincere and independent American intellectual thought. It was an appeal to make the scholarly life of America a distinctively American one shorn of all European influences and models. Emerson began by criticizing American and particularly New England culture, saying that Americans were "a people too busy to give to letters any more." In spite of being extraordinarily well-read and erudite, he also criticized excessive bookishness as is to be found in Wordsworth and English Romanticism and declared his commitment to practical experience as opposed to knowledge purely gleaned from books: "Only so much do I know, as I have lived."

According to him, Nature is the most important influence on the mind and influences both written and read thought as both tasks are performed by the same mind. And, he said further that both writing and reading should be 'creative' as the development of the individual is essential if there is to be a meaningful interaction between the mind that reads and the mind that is in the book. Learning does not mean being a book worm but become a "Man Thinking" – someone whose intellectual life is independent, active and whose mind is in touch with Mind and the "Divine Soul." It is only through this process, declared Emerson, that "A nation of men will for the first time exist" in America.

22.2 Discussion On *The American Scholar*

After extending his greetings to the gathering, Emerson begins by focusing on the differences between this event and others in ancient Greece, the Middle Ages or nineteenth century Europe and goes on to a theme that was so dear to his heart: the hope that American intellectuals will cease to depend so heavily on their European past and will forge an independent mind frame for themselves.

We do not meet for games of strength or skill, for the recitation of histories, tragedies, and odes, like the ancient Greeks; for parliaments of love and poesy, like the Troubadours; nor for the advancement of science, like our cotemporaries in the British and European capitals. Thus far, our holiday has been simply a friendly sign of the survival of the love of letters amongst a people too busy to give to letters any more. As such, it is precious as the sign of an indestructible instinct. Perhaps the time is already come, when it ought to be, and will be, something else; when the sluggard intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids, and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertions

of mechanical skill. Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions, that around us are rushing into life, cannot always be fed on the sere remains of foreign harvests. Events, actions arise, that must be sung, that will sing themselves. Who can doubt, that poetry will revive and lead in a new age, as the star in the constellation Harp, which now flames in our zenith, astronomers announce, shall one day be the pole-star for a thousand years?

A critic declared that this was "the first clarion of an American literary renaissance," insofar as it was a plea to Americans to seek America as their source of creative inspiration. This was what Walt Whitman did many years later in his *Leaves of Grass*. Emerson then goes on to clarify that the theme, 'The American Scholar' is an abstract ideal and not a specific person as such.

In this hope, I accept the topic which not only usage, but the nature of our association, seem to prescribe to this day, — the AMERICAN SCHOLAR. Year by year, we come up hither to read one more chapter of his biography. Let us inquire what light new days and events have thrown on his character, and his hopes.

He tells the allegorical tale, an ancient fable that talks of the "One Man" who originally existed and then was divided into many men according to the different functions they could perform in order for society to flourish.

It is one of those fables, which, out of an unknown antiquity, convey an unlooked-for wisdom, that the gods, in the beginning, divided Man into men, that he might be more helpful to himself; just as the hand was divided into fingers, the better to answer its end.

This story forms the underpinning to the elaboration of the theme. In an ideal society, the work is all done together with each person doing his/her job to contribute to the efficiency of the whole setup. But unfortunately, there has been so much subdivision now that society can no longer cater to the good of its members.

The old fable covers a doctrine ever new and sublime; that there is One Man, — present to all particular men only partially, or through one faculty; and that you must take the whole society to find the whole man. Man is not a farmer, or a professor, or an engineer, but he is all. Man is priest, and scholar, and statesman, and producer, and soldier. In the divided or social state, these functions are parcelled out to individuals, each of whom aims to do his stint of the joint work, whilst each other performs his. The fable implies, that the individual, to possess himself, must sometimes return from his own labor to embrace all the other laborers. But unfortunately, this original unit, this fountain of power, has been so distributed to multitudes, has been so minutely subdivided and peddled out, that it is spilled into drops, and cannot be gathered. The state of society is one in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk, and strut about so many walking monsters, — a good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man.

Man is thus metamorphosed into a thing, into many things. The planter, who is Man sent out into the field to gather food, is seldom cheered by any idea of the true dignity of his ministry. He sees his bushel and his cart, and nothing beyond, and sinks into the farmer, instead of Man on the farm. The tradesman scarcely ever gives an ideal worth to his work, but is ridden by the routine of his craft, and the soul is subject to dollars. The priest becomes a form; the attorney, a statute-book; the mechanic, a machine; the sailor, a rope of a ship.

Since the scholar is as much a part of society as anyone else, he has not escaped the degeneration that has set in and from being a "Man Thinking," he has become a "mere thinker". Emerson wishes to

reacquaint his audience with the duties of a scholar and how he should be educated. By doing this, he hopes to stem the rot and reverse the downward slide.

In this distribution of functions, the scholar is the delegated intellect. In the right state, he is, Man Thinking. In the degenerate state, when the victim of society, he tends to become a mere thinker, or, still worse, the parrot of other men's thinking.

In this view of him, as Man Thinking, the theory of his office is contained. Him nature solicits with all her placid, all her monitory pictures; him the past instructs; him the future invites. Is not, indeed, every man a student, and do not all things exist for the student's behoof? And, finally, is not the true scholar the only true master? But the old oracle said, 'All things have two handles: beware of the wrong one.' In life, too often, the scholar errs with mankind and forfeits his privilege. Let us see him in his school, and consider him in reference to the main influences he receives.

Regarding the manner in which a scholar should be educated, Emerson's view is that nature is a teacher which instructs those who are observant, about the natural world. They are then able to eventually see that their minds and nature are very similar. The first resemblance between nature and the scholar's spirit, the two "whose beginning, whose ending he never can find—so entire, so boundless," is that they are both eternal. Implicit in this belief is the idea of a circular power which he had explicated upon in his essay, *Nature*.

The first in time and the first in importance of the influences upon the mind is that of nature. Every day, the sun; and, after sunset, night and her stars. Ever the winds blow; ever the grass grows. Every day, men and women, conversing, beholding and beholden. The scholar is he of all men whom this spectacle most engages. He must settle its value in his mind. What is nature to him? There is never a beginning, there is never an end, to the inexplicable continuity of this web of God, but always circular power returning into itself. Therein it resembles his own spirit, whose beginning, whose ending, he never can find, — so entire, so boundless. Far, too, as her splendors shine, system on system shooting like rays, upward, downward, without centre, without circumference, — in the mass and in the particle, nature hastens to render account of herself to the mind…

The second similarity between the two is Order. While at first all that the mind can see is a jumbled up and endlessly stretching reality made up of singular facts, all put together chaotically, gradually it orders, categorizes and classifies these facts, compares and differentiates. The laws of nature are slowly discovered and comprehended because they are like the working of the intellect.

…Classification begins. To the young mind, every thing is individual, stands by itself. By and by, it finds how to join two things, and see in them one nature; then three, then three thousand; and so, tyrannized over by its own unifying instinct, it goes on tying things together, diminishing anomalies, discovering roots running under ground, whereby contrary and remote things cohere, and flower out from one stem. It presently learns, that, since the dawn of history, there has been a constant accumulation and classifying of facts. But what is classification but the perceiving that these objects are not chaotic, and are not foreign, but have a law which is also a law of the human mind? The astronomer discovers that geometry, a pure abstraction of the human mind, is the measure of planetary motion. The chemist finds proportions and intelligible method throughout matter; and science is nothing but the finding of analogy, identity, in the most remote parts. The ambitious soul sits down before each refractory fact; one after another, reduces all strange constitutions, all new powers, to their class and their law, and goes on for ever to animate the last fibre of organization, the outskirts of nature, by insight.

Finally, one comes to the realization that the soul and nature are but reflections of each other in a parallel structure and both advance from "one root". When Emerson says that nature is the 'opposite' of the soul, we could take it to mean that one mirrors the other. Therefore, the greater the understanding of nature, the greater is the understanding of oneself, with the reverse holding just as true. So "Know thyself" is the same as saying "Study nature".

Thus to him, to this school-boy under the bending dome of day, is suggested, that he and it proceed from one root; one is leaf and one is flower; relation, sympathy, stirring in every vein. And what is that Root? Is not that the soul of his soul? — A thought too bold, — a dream too wild. Yet when this spiritual light shall have revealed the law of more earthly natures, — when he has learned to worship the soul, and to see that the natural philosophy that now is, is only the first gropings of its gigantic hand, he shall look forward to an ever expanding knowledge as to a becoming creator. He shall see, that nature is the opposite of the soul, answering to it part for part. One is seal, and one is print. Its beauty is the beauty of his own mind. Its laws are the laws of his own mind. Nature then becomes to him the measure of his attainments. So much of nature as he is ignorant of, so much of his own mind does he not yet possess. And, in fine, the ancient precept, "Know thyself," and the modern precept, "Study nature," become at last one maxim.

Emerson now talks of the other influence on the mind - that of the past - more specifically, books. In books is contained all past scholarship but while they serve to convert ordinary facts into profound truths – "short-lived actions…"immortal thoughts" – there is also an inherent danger. Since every book arises out of a particular milieu and modes of thought, it would inevitably reflect the society of the age in which it was written and would thus only be a partial truth. Hence it is vital for every age to write its own books and discover its own truths.

The next great influence into the spirit of the scholar, is, the mind of the Past, — in whatever form, whether of literature, of art, of institutions, that mind is inscribed. Books are the best type of the influence of the past, and perhaps we shall get at the truth, — learn the amount of this influence more conveniently, — by considering their value alone.

The theory of books is noble. The scholar of the first age received into him the world around; brooded thereon; gave it the new arrangement of his own mind, and uttered it again. It came into him, life; it went out from him, truth. It came to him, short-lived actions; it went out from him, immortal thoughts. It came to him, business; it went from him, poetry. It was dead fact; now, it is quick thought. It can stand, and it can go. It now endures, it now flies, it now inspires. Precisely in proportion to the depth of mind from which it issued, so high does it soar, so long does it sing.

…But none is quite perfect. As no air-pump can by any means make a perfect vacuum, so neither can any artist entirely exclude the conventional, the local, the perishable from his book, or write a book of pure thought, that shall be as efficient, in all respects, to a remote posterity, as to cotemporaries, or rather to the second age. Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding. The books of an older period will not fit this.

There are other dangers as well. If we indulge in over-zealous appreciation of the thoughts and ideas expressed by past thinkers in books, it can take us away from formulating our own, original thoughts. Being dazzled by the brilliance of the past, we are no longer able to see our way clearly enough to forge new paths and explore for ourselves and thus come to a discovery of individual truths.

If one were to look for an example of this sort of unquestioning obsequiousness to past proponents

of ideas, it would be found in the person of a bookworm who immerses himself pedantically in superficial matters of scholarship and is blind to the larger, universal truths. The bookworm is passive and does not create and is contrary to Emerson's notion of the creative imagination. As such, the bookworm, through his non-creativeness, is farther away from the Divine than someone who is an original thinker.

Yet hence arises a grave mischief. The sacredness which attaches to the act of creation, — the act of thought, — is transferred to the record. The poet chanting, was felt to be a divine man: henceforth the chant is divine also. The writer was a just and wise spirit: henceforward it is settled, the book is perfect; as love of the hero corrupts into worship of his statue. Instantly, the book becomes noxious: the guide is a tyrant. The sluggish and perverted mind of the multitude, slow to open to the incursions of Reason, having once so opened, having once received this book, stands upon it, and makes an outcry, if it is disparaged. Colleges are built on it. Books are written on it by thinkers, not by Man Thinking; by men of talent, that is, who start wrong, who set out from accepted dogmas, not from their own sight of principles. Meek young men grow up in libraries, believing it their duty to accept the views, which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon, have given, forgetful that Cicero, Locke, and Bacon were only young men in libraries, when they wrote these books.

Hence, instead of Man Thinking, we have the bookworm. Hence, the book-learned class, who value books, as such; not as related to nature and the human constitution, but as making a sort of Third Estate with the world and the soul…

Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst. What is the right use? What is the one end, which all means go to effect? They are for nothing but to inspire. I had better never see a book, than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system. The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul. This every man is entitled to; this every man contains within him, although, in almost all men, obstructed, and as yet unborn. The soul active sees absolute truth; and utters truth, or creates. In this action, it is genius; not the privilege of here and there a favorite, but the sound estate of every man. In its essence, it is progressive. The book, the college, the school of art, the institution of any kind, stop with some past utterance of genius. This is good, say they, — let us hold by this. They pin me down. They look backward and not forward. But genius looks forward: the eyes of man are set in his forehead, not in his hindhead: man hopes: genius creates. Whatever talents may be, if the man create not, the pure efflux of the Deity is not his; — cinders and smoke there may be, but not yet flame. There are creative manners, there are creative actions, and creative words; manners, actions, words, that is, indicative of no custom or authority, but springing spontaneous from the mind's own sense of good and fair.

Even a brilliant mind can be influenced by books, to its detriment. Emerson offers the example of the English poets who have been "Shakespearized" for over two hundred years in the sense that they imitate Shakespeare rather than evolve their own thoughts and style. He refers to an Arab saying - one fig tree fertilizes another – to illustrate how one author can provide inspiration to another, and suggests that a true scholar should go to books only when his own creativity is going through a lean phase and he needs to be inspired by the writings of others.

On the other part, instead of being its own seer, let it receive from another mind its truth, though it were in torrents of light, without periods of solitude, inquest, and self-recovery, and a fatal disservice is done. Genius is always sufficiently the enemy of genius by over influence. The literature of every nation bear me witness. The English dramatic poets have Shakspearized now for two hundred years.

Undoubtedly there is a right way of reading, so it be sternly subordinated. Man Thinking must not be subdued by his instruments. Books are for the scholar's idle times. When he can read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other men's transcripts of their readings. But when the intervals of darkness come, as come they must, — when the sun is hid, and the stars withdraw their shining, — we repair to the lamps which were kindled by their ray, to guide our steps to the East again, where the dawn is. We hear, that we may speak. The Arabian proverb says, "A fig tree, looking on a fig tree, becometh fruitful."

Emerson now goes on to talk about the pleasure and advantages of reading in a proper manner. The unique pleasure that reading gives is derived in part from the fact that books transcend time as they reflect the ideas of people of earlier eras who however, thought in much the same way as people do today. This, according to Emerson, is proof of the transcendental unity of the human mind.

It is remarkable, the character of the pleasure we derive from the best books. They impress us with the conviction, that one nature wrote and the same reads. We read the verses of one of the great English poets, of Chaucer, of Marvell, of Dryden, with the most modern joy, — with a pleasure, I mean, which is in great part caused by the abstraction of all time from their verses. There is some awe mixed with the joy of our surprise, when this poet, who lived in some past world, two or three hundred years ago, says that which lies close to my own soul, that which I also had wellnigh thought and said. But for the evidence thence afforded to the philosophical doctrine of the identity of all minds, we should suppose some preestablished harmony, some foresight of souls that were to be, and some preparation of stores for their future wants, like the fact observed in insects, who lay up food before death for the young grub they shall never see.

In spite of having declared that 'books are for the scholar's idle times', he qualifies it by saying that he does not undervalue books as they provide nourishment to great minds which draw sustenance from all knowledge. What is needed is an independent critical ability that can separate the chaff of triviality from the grain of truth and use it for its own purposes and development.

Readings that are essential to educate the mind, according to Emerson, should comprise history, science and other such subjects that require intensive research and labour. Schools, he says, should encourage creative endeavour rather than memorization: ". . . [schools] can only highly serve us, when they aim not to drill, but to create."

I would not be hurried by any love of system, by any exaggeration of instincts, to underrate the Book. We all know, that, as the human body can be nourished on any food, though it were boiled grass and the broth of shoes, so the human mind can be fed by any knowledge. And great and heroic men have existed, who had almost no other information than by the printed page. I only would say, that it needs a strong head to bear that diet. One must be an inventor to read well. As the proverb says, "He that would bring home the wealth of the Indies, must carry out the wealth of the Indies." There is then creative reading as well as creative writing. When the mind is braced by labor and invention, the page of whatever book we read becomes luminous with manifold allusion. Every sentence is doubly significant, and the sense of our author is as broad as the world. We then see, what is always true, that, as the seer's hour of vision is short and rare among heavy days and months, so is its record, perchance, the least part of his volume. The discerning will read, in his Plato or Shakespeare, only that least part, — only the authentic utterances of the oracle; — all the rest he rejects, were it never so many times Plato's and Shakspeare's.

Of course, there is a portion of reading quite indispensable to a wise man. History and exact

science he must learn by laborious reading. Colleges, in like manner, have their indispensable office, — to teach elements. But they can only highly serve us, when they aim not to drill, but to create; when they gather from far every ray of various genius to their hospitable halls, and, by the concentrated fires, set the hearts of their youth on flame. Thought and knowledge are natures in which apparatus and pretension avail nothing. Gowns, and pecuniary foundations, though of towns of gold, can never countervail the least sentence or syllable of wit. Forget this, and our American colleges will recede in their public importance, whilst they grow richer every year.

Emerson now gives his views regarding whether or not a scholar should engage in physical labour. He feels that action, though it may be secondary to thought for a scholar, is still essential.

There goes in the world a notion, that the scholar should be a recluse, a valetudinarian, — as unfit for any handiwork or public labor, as a penknife for an axe. The so-called 'practical men' sneer at speculative men, as if, because they speculate or see, they could do nothing. I have heard it said that the clergy, — who are always, more universally than any other class, the scholars of their day, — are addressed as women; that the rough, spontaneous conversation of men they do not hear, but only a mincing and diluted speech. They are often virtually disfranchised; and, indeed, there are advocates for their celibacy. As far as this is true of the studious classes, it is not just and wise. Action is with the scholar subordinate, but it is essential. Without it, he is not yet man. Without it, thought can never ripen into truth. Whilst the world hangs before the eye as a cloud of beauty, we cannot even see its beauty. Inaction is cowardice, but there can be no scholar without the heroic mind. The preamble of thought, the transition through which it passes from the unconscious to the conscious, is action. Only so much do I know, as I have lived. Instantly we know whose words are loaded with life, and whose not.

Moreover, if there is this disinclination to act and to put principle into practice, it could be construed as a cowardly act. If we believe in the transcendental concept that this world is an expression of ourselves, then action is a natural responsibility for a scholar.

The world, — this shadow of the soul, or other me, lies wide around. Its attractions are the keys which unlock my thoughts and make me acquainted with myself. I run eagerly into this resounding tumult. I grasp the hands of those next me, and take my place in the ring to suffer and to work, taught by an instinct, that so shall the dumb abyss be vocal with speech. I pierce its order; I dissipate its fear; I dispose of it within the circuit of my expanding life. So much only of life as I know by experience, so much of the wilderness have I vanquished and planted, or so far have I extended my being, my dominion. I do not see how any man can afford, for the sake of his nerves and his nap, to spare any action in which he can partake. It is pearls and rubies to his discourse. Drudgery, calamity, exasperation, want, are instructers in eloquence and wisdom. The true scholar grudges every opportunity of action past by, as a loss of power.

It is the raw material out of which the intellect moulds her splendid products. A strange process too, this, by which experience is converted into thought, as a mulberry leaf is converted into satin. The manufacture goes forward at all hours.

Commenting on the difference between recent and past actions, Emerson says that while past actions are transmuted to thought with the passing of time, recent actions cannot go through this process because they are too intertwined with recent emotions. He says, in a vivid comparison, that "the recent act" is like an insect larva that is gradually transformed into a butterfly – action changing to thought.

The actions and events of our childhood and youth, are now matters of calmest observation. They lie like fair pictures in the air. Not so with our recent actions, — with the business which we now have in

hand. On this we are quite unable to speculate. Our affections as yet circulate through it. We no more feel or know it, than we feel the feet, or the hand, or the brain of our body. The new deed is yet a part of life, — remains for a time immersed in our unconscious life. In some contemplative hour, it detaches itself from the life like a ripe fruit, to become a thought of the mind. Instantly, it is raised, transfigured; the corruptible has put on incorruption. Henceforth it is an object of beauty, however base its origin and neighborhood. Observe, too, the impossibility of antedating this act. In its grub state, it cannot fly, it cannot shine, it is a dull grub. But suddenly, without observation, the selfsame thing unfurls beautiful wings, and is an angel of wisdom. So is there no fact, no event, in our private history, which shall not, sooner or later, lose its adhesive, inert form, and astonish us by soaring from our body into the empyrean. Cradle and infancy, school and playground, the fear of boys, and dogs, and ferules, the love of little maids and berries, and many another fact that once filled the whole sky, are gone already; friend and relative, profession and party, town and country, nation and world, must also soar and sing.

He then lavishes praise on labour as being something valuable in itself because it is the material that is made creative use of by the scholar. A person who is active, indulges in physical labour has a life that is richer in comparison to a scholar who leads a sedentary life and partakes vicariously of life's variety through the writing of others. The ideal life is one which strikes a balance between the two – thought and action, labour and contemplation, in an undulating rhythm of its own. It is only in this recurring cycle that a superior type of character is forged, one that is higher than fame or honour that accrues from mere display of learning.

Of course, he who has put forth his total strength in fit actions, has the richest return of wisdom. I will not shut myself out of this globe of action, and transplant an oak into a flower-pot, there to hunger and pine; nor trust the revenue of some single faculty, and exhaust one vein of thought, much like those Savoyards, who, getting their livelihood by carving shepherds, shepherdesses, and smoking Dutchmen, for all Europe, went out one day to the mountain to find stock, and discovered that they had whittled up the last of their pine-trees. Authors we have, in numbers, who have written out their vein, and who, moved by a commendable prudence, sail for Greece or Palestine, follow the trapper into the prairie, or ramble round Algiers, to replenish their merchantable stock.

If it were only for a vocabulary, the scholar would be covetous of action. Life is our dictionary. Years are well spent in country labors; in town, — in the insight into trades and manufactures; in frank intercourse with many men and women; in science; in art; to the one end of mastering in all their facts a language by which to illustrate and embody our perceptions. I learn immediately from any speaker how much he has already lived, through the poverty or the splendor of his speech. Life lies behind us as the quarry from whence we get tiles and copestones for the masonry of to-day. This is the way to learn grammar. Colleges and books only copy the language which the field and the work-yard made.

But the final value of action, like that of books, and better than books, is, that it is a resource. That great principle of Undulation in nature, that shows itself in the inspiring and expiring of the breath; in desire and satiety; in the ebb and flow of the sea; in day and night; in heat and cold; and as yet more deeply ingrained in every atom and every fluid, is known to us under the name of Polarity, — these "fits of easy transmission and reflection," as Newton called them, are the law of nature because they are the law of spirit.

. . .Character is higher than intellect. Thinking is the function. Living is the functionary. The stream retreats to its source. A great soul will be strong to live, as well as strong to think. . . Those 'far from fame,' who dwell and act with him, will feel the force of his constitution in the doings and passages of the day

better than it can be measured by any public and designed display. Time shall teach him, that the scholar loses no hour which the man lives.

Having expressed his views on the influence of nooks, nature and action on the mind of a scholar, Emerson turns to a scholar's duties towards society. There are some general obligations that would apply anywhere and then he focuses specifically on the American scholar.

. . .The office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances. He plies the slow, unhonored, and unpaid task of observation. Flamsteed and Herschel, in their glazed observatories, may catalogue the stars with the praise of all men, and, the results being splendid and useful, honor is sure. But he, in his private observatory, cataloguing obscure and nebulous stars of the human mind, which as yet no man has thought of as such, — watching days and months, sometimes, for a few facts; correcting still his old records; — must relinquish display and immediate fame. In the long period of his preparation, he must betray often an ignorance and shiftlessness in popular arts, incurring the disdain of the able who shoulder him aside. Long he must stammer in his speech; often forego the living for the dead. Worse yet, he must accept, — how often! poverty and solitude. For the ease and pleasure of treading the old road, accepting the fashions, the education, the religion of society, he takes the cross of making his own, and, of course, the self-accusation, the faint heart, the frequent uncertainty and loss of time, which are the nettles and tangling vines in the way of the self-relying and self-directed; and the state of virtual hostility in which he seems to stand to society, and especially to educated society. For all this loss and scorn, what offset? He is to find consolation in exercising the highest functions of human nature. He is one, who raises himself from private considerations, and breathes and lives on public and illustrious thoughts. He is the world's eye. He is the world's heart. He is to resist the vulgar prosperity that retrogrades ever to barbarism, by preserving and communicating heroic sentiments, noble biographies, melodious verse, and the conclusions of history. Whatsoever oracles the human heart, in all emergencies, in all solemn hours, has uttered as its commentary on the world of actions, — these he shall receive and impart. And whatsoever new verdict Reason from her inviolable seat pronounces on the passing men and events of to-day, — this he shall hear and promulgate.

These being his functions, it becomes him to feel all confidence in himself, and to defer never to the popular cry. He and he only knows the world. The world of any moment is the merest appearance. Some great decorum, some fetish of a government, some ephemeral trade, or war, or man, is cried up by half mankind and cried down by the other half, as if all depended on this particular up or down. The odds are that the whole question is not worth the poorest thought which the scholar has lost in listening to the controversy. Let him not quit his belief that a popgun is a popgun, though the ancient and honorable of the earth affirm it to be the crack of doom. In silence, in steadiness, in severe abstraction, let him hold by himself; add observation to observation, patient of neglect, patient of reproach; and bide his own time, — happy enough, if he can satisfy himself alone, that this day he has seen something truly. Success treads on every right step. For the instinct is sure, that prompts him to tell his brother what he thinks. He then learns, that in going down into the secrets of his own mind, he has descended into the secrets of all minds. He learns that he who has mastered any law in his private thoughts, is master to that extent of all men whose language he speaks, and of all into whose language his own can be translated. The poet, in utter solitude remembering his spontaneous thoughts and recording them, is found to have recorded that, which men in crowded cities find true for them also. The orator distrusts at first the fitness of his frank confessions, — his want of knowledge of the persons he addresses, — until he finds that he is the complement of his hearers; — that they drink his words because he fulfils for them their own nature; the deeper he dives into his

privatest, secretest presentiment, to his wonder he finds, this is the most acceptable, most public, and universally true. The people delight in it; the better part of every man feels, This is my music; this is myself.

The prime duty of a scholar is to foster resolute self-trust and a mind that others can access as a treasure house of knowledge and wisdom. The road to this goal of self-awareness is undoubtedly stony and the scholar aspiring to this must be prepared to face difficulties, monotonous labour, sacrifice, poverty and loneliness. He gives the example of two astronomers who spent hours in the solitude of their laboratories observing the phenomena in space so that they could make discoveries beneficial to human civilization. It may seem to be a thankless, unrewarding task as Emerson says that the scholar "is to find consolation in exercising the highest functions of human nature."

In self-trust, all the virtues are comprehended. Free should the scholar be, — free and brave. Free even to the definition of freedom, "without any hindrance that does not arise out of his own constitution." Brave; for fear is a thing, which a scholar by his very function puts behind him. Fear always springs from ignorance. It is a shame to him if his tranquillity, amid dangerous times, arise from the presumption, that, like children and women, his is a protected class; or if he seek a temporary peace by the diversion of his thoughts from politics or vexed questions, hiding his head like an ostrich in the flowering bushes, peeping into microscopes, and turning rhymes, as a boy whistles to keep his courage up. So is the danger a danger still; so is the fear worse. Manlike let him turn and face it. Let him look into its eye and search its nature, inspect its origin, — see the whelping of this lion, — which lies no great way back; he will then find in himself a perfect comprehension of its nature and extent; he will have made his hands meet on the other side, and can henceforth defy it, and pass on superior. The world is his, who can see through its pretension. What deafness, what stone-blind custom, what overgrown error you behold, is there only by sufferance, — by your sufferance. See it to be a lie, and you have already dealt it its mortal blow.

Yes, we are the cowed, — we the trustless. It is a mischievous notion that we are come late into nature; that the world was finished a long time ago. As the world was plastic and fluid in the hands of God, so it is ever to so much of his attributes as we bring to it. To ignorance and sin, it is flint. They adapt themselves to it as they may; but in proportion as a man has any thing in him divine, the firmament flows before him and takes his signet and form. Not he is great who can alter matter, but he who can alter my state of mind. They are the kings of the world who give the color of their present thought to all nature and all art, and persuade men by the cheerful serenity of their carrying the matter, that this thing which they do, is the apple which the ages have desired to pluck, now at last ripe, and inviting nations to the harvest. The great man makes the great thing. Wherever Macdonald sits, there is the head of the table. Linnaeus makes botany the most alluring of studies, and wins it from the farmer and the herb-woman; Davy, chemistry; and Cuvier, fossils. The day is always his, who works in it with serenity and great aims. The unstable estimates of men crowd to him whose mind is filled with a truth, as the heaped waves of the Atlantic follow the moon.

Even if it seems that a scholar's life is gentle, mild and secluded, he needs to be brave because he is constantly dabbling in the most dangerous area of all – that of ideas. Where then must he look to for courage? He must seek it in self-trust which stems from the transcendental belief that, for the genuine scholar, all thoughts are one and that the universal truth resides in everyone whether or not they are conscious of it. Unfortunately, we do not think independently for ourselves but are content to follow the thoughts of others and lead vicarious intellectual lives. We look for self-worth through others instead of looking for it within ourselves. The best thing anyone can do is to fulfill his or her own nature for this would mean that human nature at large would be elevated.

For this self-trust, the reason is deeper than can be fathomed, — darker than can be enlightened.

I might not carry with me the feeling of my audience in stating my own belief. But I have already shown the ground of my hope, in adverting to the doctrine that man is one. I believe man has been wronged; he has wronged himself. He has almost lost the light, that can lead him back to his prerogatives. Men are become of no account. Men in history, men in the world of to-day are bugs, are spawn, and are called 'the mass' and 'the herd.' In a century, in a millennium, one or two men; that is to say, — one or two approximations to the right state of every man. All the rest behold in the hero or the poet their own green and crude being, — ripened; yes, and are content to be less, so that may attain to its full stature. What a testimony, — full of grandeur, full of pity, is borne to the demands of his own nature, by the poor clansman, the poor partisan, who rejoices in the glory of his chief. The poor and the low find some amends to their immense moral capacity, for their acquiescence in a political and social inferiority. They are content to be brushed like flies from the path of a great person, so that justice shall be done by him to that common nature which it is the dearest desire of all to see enlarged and glorified. They sun themselves in the great man's light, and feel it to be their own element. They cast the dignity of man from their downtrod selves upon the shoulders of a hero, and will perish to add one drop of blood to make that great heart beat, those giant sinews combat and conquer. He lives for us, and we live in him.

The real thinker sees as his duty, the conservation of the learning of the past and a communication of the most sublime thoughts and emotions to his audience. This would necessarily mean that the scholar should preserve his intellectual independence and judgement and remain unbiased even in the face of popular opinion or trends of thought or his own convenience and comfort. And because the true thinker discerns truths of a universal nature that are common to the universal human mind, he is able to go beyond age and class when he communicates with people: "He is the world's eye. He is the world's heart."

Men such as they are, very naturally seek money or power; and power because it is as good as money, — the "spoils," so called, "of office." And why not? for they aspire to the highest, and this, in their sleep-walking, they dream is highest. Wake them, and they shall quit the false good, and leap to the true, and leave governments to clerks and desks. This revolution is to be wrought by the gradual domestication of the idea of Culture. The main enterprise of the world for splendor, for extent, is the upbuilding of a man. Here are the materials strown along the ground. The private life of one man shall be a more illustrious monarchy, — more formidable to its enemy, more sweet and serene in its influence to its friend, than any kingdom in history. For a man, rightly viewed, comprehendeth the particular natures of all men. Each philosopher, each bard, each actor, has only done for me, as by a delegate, what one day I can do for myself. The books which once we valued more than the apple of the eye, we have quite exhausted. What is that but saying, that we have come up with the point of view which the universal mind took through the eyes of one scribe; we have been that man, and have passed on. First, one; then, another; we drain all cisterns, and, waxing greater by all these supplies, we crave a better and more abundant food. The man has never lived that can feed us ever. The human mind cannot be enshrined in a person, who shall set a barrier on any one side to this unbounded, unboundable empire. It is one central fire, which, flaming now out of the lips of Etna, lightens the capes of Sicily; and, now out of the throat of Vesuvius, illuminates the towers and vineyards of Naples. It is one light which beams out of a thousand stars. It is one soul which animates all men.

Emerson goes on to comment upon the different epochs in Western civilization - the Classic, the Romantic, and the Reflective (or the Philosophical) eras, that are distinguished by the thoughts and ideas that predominated during that time. While talking about the transcendental unity of human thought, he realizes that he has ignored the differences in the ages that are equally important in shaping human thought.

Historically, there is thought to be a difference in the ideas which predominate over successive epochs, and there are data for marking the genius of the Classic, of the Romantic, and now of the Reflective or Philosophical age. With the views I have intimated of the oneness or the identity of the mind through all individuals, I do not much dwell on these differences. In fact, I believe each individual passes through all three. The boy is a Greek; the youth, romantic; the adult, reflective. I deny not, however, that a revolution in the leading idea may be distinctly enough traced.

He compares the evolution of civilization to the growth of a person from a child to an adult. The early years of the 1800s was one of criticism - especially self-criticism – which many thought of as a lesser discipline. Emerson however is of the view that it is both valid and essential. Posing rhetorical questions, he comments that dissatisfaction with current trends and value of literature is not a bad thing at all for discontent is the motivating factor for growth and exploration of new avenues to fresh knowledge. Dissatisfaction can be seen as a period of change: . . . This [present] time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it."

Our age is bewailed as the age of Introversion. Must that needs be evil? We, it seems, are critical; we are embarrassed with second thoughts; we cannot enjoy any thing for hankering to know whereof the pleasure consists; we are lined with eyes; we see with our feet; the time is infected with Hamlet's unhappiness, —

"Sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought."

Is it so bad then? Sight is the last thing to be pitied. Would we be blind? Do we fear lest we should outsee nature and God, and drink truth dry? I look upon the discontent of the literary class, as a mere announcement of the fact, that they find themselves not in the state of mind of their fathers, and regret the coming state as untried; as a boy dreads the water before he has learned that he can swim. If there is any period one would desire to be born in, — is it not the age of Revolution; when the old and the new stand side by side, and admit of being compared; when the energies of all men are searched by fear and by hope; when the historic glories of the old, can be compensated by the rich possibilities of the new era?

Emerson is full of appreciation for poets like Wordsworth and Goethe for their ability to be inspired by the lives of ordinary people. The writers of the Romantic school did not focus their attention only on the royal or aristocratic class as appropriate subjects for great or philosophical literature but chose to dwell on the moving, poetic aspects in the life and work of the lower or working class. The resultant literature is vibrant and lively and truly illustrates the transcendental conviction that everyone is united in thought.

Although Emerson had, at the beginning, made an appeal to his countrymen to move away from the shadow of European influence, he is here making a distinction between that European tradition which honors the common man, and the one that glorifies royalty and the courtly order: "We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe."

Instead of the sublime and beautiful; the near, the low, the common, was explored and poetized. That, which had been negligently trodden under foot by those who were harnessing and provisioning themselves for long journeys into far countries, is suddenly found to be richer than all foreign parts. The literature of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life, are the topics of the time. It is a great stride. It is a sign, — is it not? of new vigor, when the extremities are made active, when currents of warm life run into the hands and the feet. I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic; what is doing in Italy or Arabia; what is Greek art, or Provencal minstrelsy; I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low. Give me insight into to-day, and you may have

the antique and future worlds. What would we really know the meaning of? The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street; the news of the boat; the glance of the eye; the form and the gait of the body; — show me the ultimate reason of these matters; show me the sublime presence of the highest spiritual cause lurking, as always it does lurk, in these suburbs and extremities of nature; let me see every trifle bristling with the polarity that ranges it instantly on an eternal law; and the shop, the plough, and the leger, referred to the like cause by which light undulates and poets sing; — and the world lies no longer a dull miscellany and lumber-room, but has form and order; there is no trifle; there is no puzzle; but one design unites and animates the farthest pinnacle and the lowest trench.

This idea has inspired the genius of Goldsmith, Burns, Cowper, and, in a newer time, of Goethe, Wordsworth, and Carlyle. This idea they have differently followed and with various success. In contrast with their writing, the style of Pope, of Johnson, of Gibbon, looks cold and pedantic. This writing is blood-warm. Man is surprised to find that things near are not less beautiful and wondrous than things remote. The near explains the far. The drop is a small ocean. A man is related to all nature. This perception of the worth of the vulgar is fruitful in discoveries. Goethe, in this very thing the most modern of the moderns, has shown us, as none ever did, the genius of the ancients.

Emerson now refers to the Swedish philosopher and mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, who, he regrets has not been given the credit that is his due for his revelation of the fundamental bond between the human mind and the natural world and for saying that humans and nature are essentially one. He confesses that he owes a great deal to Swedenborg for many of his own ideas.

There is one man of genius, who has done much for this philosophy of life, whose literary value has never yet been rightly estimated; — I mean Emanuel Swedenborg. The most imaginative of men, yet writing with the precision of a mathematician, he endeavored to engraft a purely philosophical Ethics on the popular Christianity of his time. Such an attempt, of course, must have difficulty, which no genius could surmount. But he saw and showed the connection between nature and the affections of the soul. He pierced the emblematic or spiritual character of the visible, audible, tangible world. Especially did his shade-loving muse hover over and interpret the lower parts of nature; he showed the mysterious bond that allies moral evil to the foul material forms, and has given in epical parables a theory of insanity, of beasts, of unclean and fearful things.

The conclusion of the essay deals with the romantic ideal of the individual. This could be called as the American contribution to the world of ideas. This basically American concept propounds the ideal of a scholar who is independent, brave and original and who, both in word and deed, makes evident that America is not the timid nation that others think it to be. This the American Scholars can achieve by forging their own path and by refusing to be passive conveyors of the wisdom of the past. This would then result in a truly original, native American culture.

Another sign of our times, also marked by an analogous political movement, is, the new importance given to the single person. Every thing that tends to insulate the individual, — to surround him with barriers of natural respect, so that each man shall feel the world is his, and man shall treat with man as a sovereign state with a sovereign state; — tends to true union as well as greatness. “I learned,” said the melancholy Pestalozzi, “that no man in God’s wide earth is either willing or able to help any other man.” Help must come from the bosom alone. The scholar is that man who must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future. He must be an university of knowledges. If there be one lesson more than another, which should pierce his ear, it is, The world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature, and you know not yet how a globule of sap ascends; in yourself

slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all, it is for you to dare all. Mr. President and Gentlemen, this confidence in the unsearched might of man belongs, by all motives, by all prophecy, by all preparation, to the American Scholar. We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. The spirit of the American freeman is already suspected to be timid, imitative, tame. Public and private avarice make the air we breathe thick and fat. The scholar is decent, indolent, complaisant. See already the tragic consequence. The mind of this country, taught to aim at low objects, eats upon itself. There is no work for any but the decorous and the complaisant. Young men of the fairest promise, who begin life upon our shores, inflated by the mountain winds, shined upon by all the stars of God, find the earth below not in unison with these, — but are hindered from action by the disgust which the principles on which business is managed inspire, and turn drudges, or die of disgust, — some of them suicides. What is the remedy? They did not yet see, and thousands of young men as hopeful now crowding to the barriers for the career, do not yet see, that, if the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come round to him. Patience, — patience; — with the shades of all the good and great for company; and for solace, the perspective of your own infinite life; and for work, the study and the communication of principles, the making those instincts prevalent, the conversion of the world. Is it not the chief disgrace in the world, not to be an unit; — not to be reckoned one character; — not to yield that peculiar fruit which each man was created to bear, but to be reckoned in the gross, in the hundred, or the thousand, of the party, the section, to which we belong; and our opinion predicted geographically, as the north, or the south? Not so, brothers and friends, — please God, ours shall not be so. We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds. The study of letters shall be no longer a name for pity, for doubt, and for sensual indulgence. The dread of man and the love of man shall be a wall of defence and a wreath of joy around all. A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men.

22.3 Glossary

Alfred (d. 899): Alfred was the king (871-99) of what was then called West Saxony, in southwest England.

Algiers: Capital of Algeria.

Bacon, Francis (1561-1626): English essayist, statesman, and philosopher

Berserkirs: Savage warriors of Norse mythology.

Burns, Robert (1759-96): Scottish poet.

Carlyle, Thomas (1795-1881): English historian, philosopher, and essayist.

Chaucer, Geoffrey (d. 1400): English poet.

Cicero, Marcus Tullius (106-43 B.C.): Roman statesman and Stoic philosopher.

Cowper, William (1731-1800): English poet.

Cuvier, Georges (1769-1832): French naturalist considered to be the founder of comparative anatomy.

Davy, Sir Humphry (1778-1829): English chemist.

Druids: Prehistoric Celtic priests.

Dryden, John (1631-1700): English poet, dramatist, and essayist.

Flamsteed, John (1646-1719): English astronomer.

Gibbon, Edward (1737-94): Considered to be one of the greatest English historians,

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von (1749-1832): German writer who greatly influenced literary romanticism.

Goldsmith, Oliver (d. 1774): English poet, playwright, and novelist.

Herschel, Sir William (1738-1822): English astronomer.

Johnson, Samuel (1709-84): English writer and critic.

Linnaeus, Carolus (1707-78): Swedish botanist.

Locke, John (1632-1704): English philosopher who developed a theory of cognition that denied the existence of innate ideas and asserted that all thought is based on our senses. His works influenced American Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards, who modified Puritan doctrine to allow for more play of reason and intellect, building a foundation for Unitarianism and, eventually, transcendentalism.

Macdonald: Emerson substitutes this typical name of a Scottish chief in the old proverb, "Where Macgregor sits, there is the head of the table."

Marvell, Andrew (1621-78): English metaphysical poet.

Newton, Sir Isaac (1642-1727): English mathematician and scientist.

Pestalozzi, Johann Heinrich (1746-1827): Swiss educator.

Plato (c. 427-347 B.C.): Greek philosopher who formulated the philosophy of idealism.

Pope, Alexander (1688-1744): English poet and translator.

Provencal Minstrelsy: Provence, an ancient province in southeast France, a center for troubadours.

Savoyards: Inhabitants of Savoy, now a province of southeast France.

Swedenborg, Emanuel (1688-1772): Swedish scientist, mystic, philosopher.

Third Estate: The "common people" under the French monarchy; the clergy and nobles formed the first two estates.

Wordsworth, William (1770-1850): English poet.

22.4 Let Us Sum Up

Thus we see that *The American Scholar* represents Emerson at the exuberent beginning of his career as a Transcedental spokesman to assess the essay in the words of L.Luding it has been referred to as a declaration of independence from literary colonialism.

22.5 Review Questions

1. What are the characteristics of Emerson's age as he sees them?

2. What, according to Emerson, is the area and aim of art and what ideas about art or poetry does he criticize?

3. What does Emerson say are the dangers of reading books? What are the gains to be had

from reading?

4. What is the portrait of a true thinker and scholar that Emerson draws?

5. What is the importance of the past?

22.6 Brief Answers To Select Questions

1. Emerson's age was characterized by the importance given to each individual. He thought that if everyone treated everyone else like single, sovereign states, then that would lead to true union and greatness.

   He felt that America was still shackled to the ideas of Europe and needed to free itself from these chains if it were to forge its own identity. America was perceived to be intellectually unoriginal, imitative and timid.

   Both in private and in public life, there was greed which made the atmosphere inappropriate for noble, original thinking, suffocating the citizens.

   The American scholar though honest and morally upright was submissive and indolent and did nothing to rectify the situation. The mind of America was consuming itself because of the low nature of its focus and inspiration.

   Young people flocked to the shores of America seeing it as a land of opportunity but found that their path was hindered by the manner in which business was conducted and so many succumbed to despair and even committed suicide.

   American society was divided and there was no sense of unity among the people and they were split up into geographical and other groups and did not consider themselves as a single unit.

4. The true scholar is independent, unbiased and original. Although he may draw inspiration from books and gather knowledge, he does not depend purely on them for his own thoughts but strives to explore new worlds of ideas. He thinks for himself without being influenced by contemporary fads, public opinion or controversy. He is one who envisions as his duty, the conservation of past wisdom and learning and who strives to communicate to the public, the noblest feelings and ideas. He is courageous and encapsulates within himself, past, present and future by being the conduit of past learning and building hopes of the future. He is like a whole university of knowledge in the plurality of the word. He is one in whom Reason resides and he understands that the world means nothing for it is only man who is all and man is but an extension of the universe.

   A scholar is a Man Thinking who cheers, raises and guides society by the sheer strength of his thoughts. The true scholar is also a man of action and labour who fosters self-trust that leads to confidence and the belief that everything is one and that all minds are united.

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UNIT-23

RAYMOND CARVER: *VITAMINS*

Structure

23.0 Objectives

In this unit you will be introduced to Raymond Carver, one of the major American writers of modern times. You will be given a brief background of his life and works so that you may see how it influenced his writing. You will also read an analysis of Raymond Carver's short story, *Vitamins*. By the end of this unit you should be able to place his work in proper perspective and look at his stories from the standpoint of an informed mind.

23.1 Introduction

Raymond Carver (1938-1988) was an American poet and writer of short stories who played a significant role in the reemergence of the short story genre in the 1980's. He was born in Clatskanie, a mill town on the Columbia River in Oregon and must have had a difficult childhood as his father Clevie Carter, a sawmill worker, was an alcoholic. Carver's mother took up stray jobs or stayed at home. As a boy, Carver would listen to his dad telling him stories about his own experiences in hunting and fishing as well as about his grandfather who had been a soldier during the Civil War. In one of his best stories, *Elephant*, Carver evokes images of his father in a touchingly nostalgic way. Another story, *Nobody Said Anything*, gives the other side of the picture when it talks about a young boy who becomes the butt of his father's frustration.

Carver went to a local school in Yakima, Washington and liked to read racy Mickey Spillane novels or immerse himself in *Sports Afield* and *Outdoor Life*. After finishing high school in 1956, he married his high school sweetheart, Maryann Burk who was sixteen years old and expecting their first child. She had their second child when she was eighteen. Carver supported his family by working as a janitor, laborer at a sawmill and salesman. Maryann too worked at a variety of jobs, managing to earn more than Carver. While their children had tough childhoods, they managed to get a good education and graduate from college.

At one point of time, Carver attended a creative-writing course, where he was taught by John Gardner. Recalling the profound influence of Gardner on him, he once said that throughout the creative,

writing periods of his life, "he had felt Gardner looking over his shoulder when he wrote, approving or disapproving of certain words, phrases and strategies." He also attended Chico State University, the University of Iowa and Humboldt State College in California where he received his B.A. in 1963 and during which time he published his first story, *Pastoral*' and his first poem, *The Brass Ring.* He taught for many years at Universities across the United States and was, for a few years, Professor of English at the University of Syracuse.

In the difficult years when Carver worked at a variety of jobs trying to support his family, bring up his children and also trying to write, he took to drinking, something which was to become a major problem in his life, something that recalled his father's propensity for alcohol. He said at one point, "Alcohol became a problem. I more or less gave up, threw in the towel, and took to full-time drinking as a serious pursuit." He and John Cheever were drinking buddies and though Cheever checked into a treatment center later in order to get over his addiction, Carver continued to drink. In fact, alcohol plays a significant part in many of his stories like *Chef's House, A Serious Talk, What We Talk About When We Talk About Love, Vitamins* and *Where I'm Calling From.*

However, after a warning from his doctor that he would die if he continued his affair with alcohol, Carver stopped drinking in 1977. This change did seem to reflect in his stories as well. Carver had been living with the poet Tess Gallagher since 1979 and having obtained a divorce from Maryann in 1982, he married Tess in 1988. Two months after the wedding, Carver died of lung cancer on August 2, 1988.

Carver's first collection of short stories, *Put Yourself in My Shoes*, appeared in 1974 and was followed by *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* (1976). These two collections ensured his place in the literary world and introduced his central themes. His stories appeared in a number of volumes of *Best American Short Stories* and *The O. Henry Prize Stories*. He was the recipient of several awards, among them The National Endowment for the Arts award in fiction (1980) and Guggenheim fellowship (1979-80). In 1983 he was recipient of the "Mildred and Harold Strauss Livings", which was conferred by a special panel of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

His fiction, often recalling the realistic tradition of Stephen Crane and Ernest Hemingway, continued to enrich his reputation even after his death when a volume of selected short stories appeared posthumously in 1988 as *Where I'm Calling From.*

Kirk Nesset, commenting on the themes to be seen in Carver's work, said in *The Stories of Raymond Carver* (1995) that "Most prevalent among these constants is the issue of love," "or, more precisely, the issue of love and its absence, and the bearing of love's absence on marriage and individual identity." And Michael Wood wrote in *The New York Times Books Review* that Carver "has done what many of the most gifted writers fail to do,". "He has invented a country of his own, like no other except that very world, as Wordsworth said, which is the world to all of us."

23.1.1 Works of Raymond Carver

Carnations, 1962

Near Klamath, 1968

Winter Insomnia, 1970

Put Yourself In My Shoes, 1974

Will You Please Be Quiet, Please? 1976

At Night The Salmon Move, 1976

Furious Seasons And Other Stories, 1977

At Night The Salmon Move, 1978

What We Talk About When We Talk About Love, 1981

The Pheasant, 1982

Cathedral, 1983

Fires: Essays, Poems, Stories, 1966-82, 1983

If It Please You, 1984

The Stories Of Raymond Carver, 1985

Dostoevsky: A Screenplay, 1985 (With Tess Gallagher)

Where Water Comes Together With Other Water, 1985

Ultramarine, 1986

We Are Not In This Together, 1987 (With W. Kittredge)

Elephant And Other Stories, 1988

When I'm Calling From, 1988

In A Marine Light, 1988

A New Path To The Waterfall, 1989

Carver Country, 1991 (With B. Adelman)

No Heroics, Please, 1991

Short Cuts, 1993

Where I'm Calling From. The Selected Stories, 1998

Call If You Need Me, 2000

23.2 Discussion on *Vitamins*

The narrator of the story is a man with a menial hospital job who lives with Patti.

> I had a job and Patti didn't. I worked a few hours a night for the hospital. It was a nothing job. I did some work, signed the card for eight hours, went drinking with the nurses. After a while Patti wanted a job. She said she needed a job for her self-respect. So she started selling multiple vitamins and minerals door-to-door.

The core group is made up of three women – Patti, Donna and Sheila. But the buyers are so few that Patti seems to be her own best customer and the dismal condition of their life makes the women depressed. Although Patti is soon given a promotion and has her own crew working under her, things don't seem to be going well.

> But the names and faces of the girls who worked for her were always changing. Some girls would quit after a few days, after a few hours sometimes. One or two of the girls were good at it. They could sell vitamins. These girls stuck with Patti. They formed the core of the crew. But there were girls who couldn't give away vitamins.
>
> The girls who couldn't cut it would last a week or so and then quit. Just not show for work. If they had a phone they'd take it off the hook. They wouldn't answer their door. At first Patti took these losses to heart, like the girls were new converts who had lost their way. She blamed herself. But she got over that. Too many girls quit. Once in a while a girl would quit on her first day in the field. She'd freeze and not be able to push the doorbell. Or maybe she'd get to the door and something would happen to her voice. Or she'd get the opening remarks mixed up with something she shouldn't be saying until she got inside. Maybe it was then the girl would decide to bunch it, take the sample case, and head for the car where she hung around until Patti and the others had finished. There'd be a hasty one-on-one conference. Then they'd all ride back to the office. They'd say things to buck themselves up. 'When the going gets tough, the tough get going.' And, 'Do the right things and the right things will happen.' Stuff like that. Now and then a girl disappeared in the field, sample case and all. She'd hitch a ride into town, then beat it. Just disappear.

Patti criticizes the narrator for being a person who does not care about anything. This seems to be borne out when they have a Christmas party at which Sheila passes out drunk. She is carried out to lie in the porch and everyone forgets about her. She then wakes up, comes in and creates a scene. The narrator does not have too much sympathy for Sheila because she had once made a lesbian pass at Patti. But it still seems a little callous to let her go off in the early morning, injured and alone, without being allowed to say goodbye to Patti.

> Everybody got drunk and went home. Patti went to bed. I wanted to keep on, so I sat at the table with a drink until it started to get light out. Then Sheila came in from the porch and began complaining. She said she had this headache that was so bad it was like somebody was sticking hot wires into her temples. It was such a headache, she said, she was afraid it might leave her with a permanent squint. And she was sure her little finger was broken. She showed it to me. It looked purple. She bitched that we'd let her sleep all night with her contacts in. She wanted to know didn't anybody give a shit. She brought the finger up close and looked at it. She shook her head. She held the finger as far away as she could and looked some more. It was as if she couldn't believe the things that must have happened to her that night. Her face was puffy, and her hair was all over. She looked hateful and half-crazy. She ran cold water over her finger. 'God, oh God,' she said and cried some over the sink.
>
> But she'd made a serious pass at Patti, a declaration of love, and I didn't have any sympathy.

Sheila is planning to quit her job and shift to another city. She wishes to say goodbye to Patti whom she loves in her own fashion although Patti has explicitly told her that she does not 'swing that way'.

> …She went back to telling me how bad she felt. She said she needed to see a doctor. She said she was going to wake Patti. She said she was quitting, leaving the state, going to Portland, and she had to say goodbye to Patti. She kept on…She was holding the wrist of her bad hand with her good hand, the little finger as big as a pocket flashlight. 'Besides,

we need to talk. I want to tell her I'm leaving. I need to tell her I'm going to Portland. I need to say goodbye.'

I said, 'I guess I'll have to tell her for you. She's asleep.'

She turned mean. 'We're friends,' she said. 'I have to talk to her. I have to tell her myself.'

I shook my head. 'She's asleep. I just said so.'

'We're friends and we love each other,' she said. 'I have to say goodbye to her.' She made to leave the kitchen.

I started to get up. I said, 'I told you I'll drive you.'

'You're drunk! You haven't even been to bed yet.' She looked at her finger again and said, 'Goddamn, why'd this have to happen?'

'Not too drunk to drive you to the hospital,' I said.

'I won't ride with you, you bastard!' Sheila yelled.

'Suit yourself. But you're not going to wake Patti. Lesbo bitch,' I said.

'F***er bastard,' she said. She said that and then she went out of the kitchen and out the front door without using the bathroom or even washing her face. I got up and looked out the window. She was walking down the road toward Fulton Avenue. Nobody else was up. It was too early.

Things get to be so bad that Patti wants to leave too and go to Arizona. She is so frustrated and anxious that she even dreams about selling vitamins.

Patti was tired. She was down in the dumps and on to her third drink. Nobody was buying vitamins. She was reduced to Donna, core, and Sandy, a semi-new girl and a kleptomaniac. We were talking about things like negative weather and the number of parking tickets Patti had accumulated and let go. Finally, how maybe we'd be better off if we moved to Arizona, some place like that.

I fixed us another one. I looked out the window. Arizona wasn't a bad idea.

Patti said, 'Vitamins.' She picked up her glass and swirled the ice. 'For shit sake! I mean, when I was a girl this is the last thing I ever saw myself doing. Jesus, I never thought I'd grow up to sell vitamins. Door-to-door vitamins. This beats everything. This blows my mind.'

…She seemed to think things over for a minute. She shook her head. Then she finished her drink. She said, 'I even dream of vitamins when I'm asleep. I don't have any relief. There's no relief! At least you can walk away from your job after work and leave it behind. Forget about it. I'll bet you haven't had one dream about your job. You don't come home dead tired and fall asleep and dream you're waxing floors or whatever you do down there. Do you? After you've left the f***ing place, you don't come home and dream about the f***ing job!' she screamed.

I said, 'I can't remember what I dream. Maybe I don't dream. I don't remember anything

when I wake up.' I shrugged. I didn't keep track of what went on in my head when I was asleep. I didn't care.

'You dream!' Patti said. 'Even if you don't remember. Everybody dreams. If you didn't dream, you'd go crazy. I read about it. It's an outlet. People dream when they're asleep. Or else they'd go nuts. But when I dream I dream of vitamins. Do you see what I'm saying?'

The narrator is attracted to Donna and at the Christmas party, he makes a move and finds that she is not averse to his advances.

I had the hots for Donna, the other member of the core group. We'd danced to some Duke Ellington records that night. I'd held her pretty tight, smelled her hair, and kept a hand at the small of her back as I guided her over the rug. I got turned on dancing with her. I was the only guy at the party and there were six or seven girls dancing with each other. It was a turn-on to look around the living room. I was in the kitchen when Donna came in with her empty glass. We were alone for a minute. I got her into a little embrace. She hugged me back. We stood there and hugged.

Then she said, 'Don't. Not now.' When I heard that 'not now' I let go and figured it was money in the bank.

He is a regular visitor at a club, the Off-Broadway, to drink and listen to music and this is where he takes Donna on a date, their first and only one.

There is no genuine friendship in the story. Although Donna says Patti is her good friend, she does not have any qualms about going on a date or perhaps sleeping with Patti's live-in partner.

"…I guess one drink can't hurt. Patti's my friend,' she said. 'You know that.'

'She's my friend too,' I said. Then I said, 'Let's go.'

'Just so you know,' she said.

Donna starts talking about how the bottom has fallen out of the market and that she is thinking of quitting the job. She hasn't said anything to Patti about her plans though and ironically, is more concerned about how she is letting Patti down on the job front than with the fact that she is going on a date with Patti's partner.

Donna said, 'I hate to do this to Patti. She's my best friend, and she's trying to build things up for us. But I may have to quit. This is between us. Swear it! But I have to eat. I have to pay rent. I need new shoes and a new coat. Vitamins can't cut it,' she said. 'I don't think vitamins is where it's at any more. I haven't said anything to Patti. Like I said, I'm still just thinking about it.'

Donna's hand lay next to my leg. I reached down and squeezed her fingers. She squeezed back. Then she took her hand away and pushed in the lighter. After she had her cigarette going, she put the hand back on the seat next to my leg. 'Worse than anything, I hate to let Patti down. You know what I'm saying? We were a team.'

In the club, Benny and Nelson who've had a little too much to drink, join them at their table. The

latter has just returned from Vietnam and proudly displays a grisly 'keepsake' – the severed ear of a Vietnamese man attached to a key chain. He understands right away that the narrator and Donna are engaged in amorous activity and makes lewd suggestions about what the narrator's partner must be doing while he is away with another woman. He is vulgar and brazenly makes a lewd proposition to Donna.

Having turned Nelson down, Donna later confesses that she could have used the money that Nelson had offered in return for her sexual favours.

> 'Maybe I should have taken his money,' Donna said. 'That's what I was thinking.'
>
> I kept driving and didn't look at her. I couldn't say anything that would help.
>
> 'It's true,' she said. 'Maybe I should've taken the money.' She shook her head. 'I don't know. I don't know what I'm saying. I just shouldn't have been there.' Donna began to cry. She put her chin down and cried.

The incident in the bar changes everything and the narrator and Donna no longer feel romantic. They simply want to end the experience and go their separate ways.

> I pulled in beside my car and killed the engine. I scanned the rear-view, half expecting to see that old Chrysler drive into the lot with Nelson in the front seat. I kept my hands on the wheel for a minute, and then dropped them to my lap. I didn't want to touch Donna. She knew it. She didn't want to be touched either. The hug we'd given each other in my kitchen that night, the kissing we'd done at the Off-Broadway, it seemed to belong in somebody else's life now, not my life.
>
> I said, 'What are you going to do?' But right then I didn't care. Right then she could have died of a heart attack and it wouldn't have meant anything.

When the narrator returns home after the date, he finds Patti in the throes of a nightmare. He ransacks the medicine cabinet in the bathroom for some aspirin, in the process dislodging a lot of its contents but he does not care. The story ends at this point.

> ...Patti yelled something from the bedroom that I couldn't understand. She opened the bathroom door. She was still dressed. She'd fallen asleep with her clothes on.
>
> 'What time is it?' she screamed. 'I've overslept! Jesus, oh my God! You've let me oversleep, goddamn you!'
>
> She was wild. She stood in the doorway with her clothes on. She could have been fixing to go to work. But there was no sample case, no vitamins. She was having a bad dream, that's all. She began shaking her head back and forth.
>
> I couldn't take any more tonight. 'Go back to sleep, honey. I'm looking for something,' I said. I knocked stuff out of the medicine cabinet. Things rolled into the sink. 'Where's the aspirin?' I said. I knocked down more things. I didn't care. 'Goddamn it,' I said. Things kept falling.

It is not too difficult to see that the things falling here are an apt symbol of all that's going wrong in their lives and how things –jobs, relationships - are actually not only falling but also falling apart.

Too enthusiastic an imbibing of alcohol can have grievous consequences and this story amply

demonstrates this fact. Vitamins itself become a powerful symbol underpinning the story that zeroes in on failure and disappointment as its leitmotif. They are viewed by some as the panacea for all ills while others regard them as elements that restore lost energy and power.

Dreams of all kinds – the ones that come during sleep and those that are determinedly chased in the waking state – form the central concept of the story. Patti and others like her who work really hard still find the Great American Dream out of their reach. Yet, Patti feels that it is important to continue to dream, to hope: "If you didn't dream, you'd go crazy". She also knows that even an ordinary life is full of challenges: "This life is not easy, any way you cut it".

It is expected that short stories have clear moments of illumination, of epiphany at moments of revelation but Carver goes against this by downplaying the moment, by giving us what we might call a moment of 'anti epiphany. In *Vitamins* for instance, when Patti discovers her partner's attraction to Donna, instead of a crackling intensity of emotion, there is only a description of him drunk, rummaging in the medicine cabinet for aspirin.

It can be seen that in his stories, Carver practically uses no similes or metaphors at all but does use everyday objects, imbuing them with a seemingly symbolic significance in the lives of his characters. This could be said to be a 'metonymic' method. Vitamins, for example, acquire symbolic hues as the story progresses, from being something that Patti sells to becoming an all-pervasive element in her life - not always positive - as illustrated by the ironic question that Patti asks: "Does my skin look okay to you? Can a person get overdosed on vitamins?" It is ironic because vitamins are supposed to ensure good health. The vitamins in the story affect Patti both physically and mentally as she even dreams of "pitching" and "selling" vitamins whereas the reality is that she can barely sell any. Also, she loses her best friend, Donna due to the vitamins business.

In a metaphorising sort of way, alcohol and aspirin – the elements that are present at the conclusion of the story, are both which banish pain at least temporarily.

There is also the allusion to rootlessness, the bane of the modern man. Carver's characters seem to believe that real life is somewhere other than where they are at the present moment. Sheila, we hear, has packed up and gone off to Portland; Patti and the narrator talk about relocating; Donna thinks of moving away too even though she suspects that all places are ultimately, similar: "Portland's as good a place as any. It's all the same."

23.2.1 The Role of the Alcohol and Vitamins

Carver's stories all seem to share a common element: alcohol. It is linked to the vacuity of modern life as for instance, the narrator's drinking in *Vitamins* seems to be a response to his 'nothing' job and his hollow relationship with Patti. The chief characters all seem to take to the bottle at various times, for various reasons, with various consequences. Usually, it is to escape from painful memories and forget, if only for a while, the tiresomeness of their daily lives. It is not only men, but women too attempt to drown their cares in drink. This results either in someone blurting out the truth, or talking nonsense, feeling a sense of relief or just getting angry. It lowers the inhibitions and makes the characters act in ways they perhaps would not if they were sober. It obviously has a negative effect on the personality of all the characters. For instance, in *Vitamins,* Sheila passes out, injures herself and then engages in an abusive, undignified quarrel with the narrator. Nelson also makes an indecent advance towards Donna while he is drunk and the tone and atmosphere itself is set for the incident by their being in a bar.

Although Patti does not seem to drink all the time as the narrator does, for her, vitamins seem to play the same negative role that alcohol does in the lives of the other characters. We can even say that it is a metaphor for alcohol. The manner in which Patti is always thinking about vitamins is akin to an alcoholic's obsession with drink. She tells the narrator that vitamins are suffocating her, she dreams about them and she wants to be rid of them. These are familiar feelings to an alcoholic as well.

23.2.2 Character of the Narrator

The story has been put down in a narrative style and flows through a series of connections that are even unconnected to each other. The incidents and dialogues are all seen through the eyes of the narrator who remains unnamed throughout and relates the events in the first person.

At the beginning of the story, we are told that Patti does not have a job but the narrator does. While this evokes a feeling of respect for him, it is soon dispelled when he dismisses it as, "It is a nothing job. I did some work, signed the card for eight hours, went drinking with the nurses." Patti wants to improve her life: "After a while Patti wanted a job. She said she needed a job for her self-respect but there is the glaring contrast between her and the narrator who comes across as someone with no self-respect.

His drinking is the current that runs throughout the story and we see him drinking too much and much too often. He drinks too much and too often and we form our judgement about his character and personality that is reflected in his actions, speech and reactions during his bouts of drinking.

He has no qualms about seducing his live-in partner's best friend but when the date turns out badly, he couldn't care less what happened to her or where she went. He shows the same indifference to Sheila when she leaves his house after a quarrel. This reveals how insensitive and callous he can be. He also makes love to Patti by fantasizing about Donna, thus reinforcing our view regarding the dishonest streak in his character.

The narrator comes across as a pretty worthless person who would go to any lengths, make any compromises, settle for anything as long as he is comfortable.

23.3 Review Questions

1. Discuss the part played by alcohol and vitamins in the story.
2. What do you think of the relationships of the various characters in the story?
3. Discuss the story as a tale of modern life with suitable illustrations.
4. Attempt a sketch of the narrator.
5. The women in the story are all strong in their own ways. Discuss.

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UNIT-24

RAYMOND CARVER: *A SMALL GOOD THING*

Structure

24.0 Objectives

In this unit we will analyse another story by Raymond Carver and explore the major issues that run through his stories as manifested in his themes and characters. We will also look at his style of narration and language. By the end of this unit, you should be able to pick out the features that are unique and special to Carver's work and see how they contribute to the effect of his narratives.

24.1 Introduction

Raymond Carver has frequently been called a minimalist writer, a post–modernist appellation that he fiercely challenged because he felt that it trivialized his work, saying, that it "smacks of smallness of vision and execution."

However, a reading of his work would suggest that this labeling is not so far off the mark if we were to take into account his concentration and economy of method as well as his focus on the little indicators in behaviour that point to greater human dilemmas. The minimalist tag also appears pertinent when we look at the titles of his stories.

Furthermore, in form, structure, rhythm, unity, tone and close attention to detail, Carver's short stories appear to share many characteristics with poetry rather than with the form of the novel. The rendering of small, compact vignettes are like verses and our understanding of the story evolves gradually like in the unfolding of a poem as the deeper meaning emerges.

In Carver's own words, the best thing about a short story: "I love the swift leap of a good story, the excitement that often commences in the first sentence, the sense of beauty and mystery found in the best of them; and the fact - so crucially important to me back at the beginning and now still a consideration - that the story can be written and read in one sitting. (Like poems!) (Foreword, **Where I'm Calling From**, 1998).

Carver's prose style recalls Chekhov's uncomplicated lucidity while at the same time sounding echoes of the portentous shades of Franz Kafka. "It is possible to write a line of seemingly innocuous dialogue and have it send a chill along the reader's spine - the source of artistic delight, as Nabokov would

have it. That's the kind of writing that most interests me." (Carver in **The New York Times**, February 15, 1981).

A lot of Carver's writing came out of his own experiences in the Pacific Northwest: He has himself declared that "... everything we write is, in some way, autobiographical". He portrayed the silent anxiety and desperation of ordinary people – workers, salesmen, waitresses – their feeling of betrayal and inability to articulate their feelings and ideas. In many of his stories, much is left unspoken, conflicts are not resolved and the meaning of the story manifests itself only through implication.

Quite often, Carver's writing appears to be understated, one can even say, anticlimactic but he evokes an atmosphere reminiscent of the tenseness of Harold Pinter. Turning his back on the fiction that toyed with experimentation in the 60's and 70's, he was among the forefront of the 'dirty realists' brigade, so called because of their no-holds-barred, stark portrayal of daily life. Although, at a superficial glance his stories may seem quiet and ordinary, they are loaded with disturbing emotional friction, grievances, wistfulness, sadness, hate, veiled memories and anxiety.

In Carver's stories, specially in the shorter ones, the terseness of the narration is emphasized further by the qualities of the characters – their inability to be verbally expressive and their lack of reflectiveness.

While the characters seem to be involved in a quest for understanding, they never really get to that point.

As far as irony is concerned, though it is present in the stories, Carver himself said that he was uncomfortable with irony if it was at the expense of someone else or if it hurt the characters. Rather, what he wants to convey is achieved through the imperfect perception of his characters as well as a closely fitted orchestration of triteness and peculiarities at the surface level. He does not make fun of his characters but writes at a level through which we may empathise with them. That is why the comic sequences in his stories are not biting as he deliberately stays away from mocking his characters and allows the meaning to be conveyed through them rather than foisting his own viewpoint on us.

When we raise the point of Carver being most often described as a 'realist' writer, it may seem to be a contradiction in terms – can fiction ever be realistic? Fiction, itself means something that is not fact so how can it claim to be real or realistic? We may say that at the most, realistic fiction is something in which the writer delineates probable events. And, in his stories, Carver takes up apparently normal, everyday incidents, shapes and forms them through his imagination and directs them towards a rationale that lies outside their context. By doing this, he allows room for interpretation and analysis at various levels. For readers who would like to make their own deductions, Carver's understated style is ideal as it gives them freedom and does not impose any pre-determined notions on them. For instance, most of the time, Carver uses the reporting verb "said", and leaves it to the reader to imagine the emotional state of the characters while mouthing that particular dialogue. In the same way, many of the stories are open-ended and the reader can imagine what the next turn of events would be.

Carver's stories can often appear to be pointless or depressing if they are not read with sensitivity or the reading is restricted to the superficial level.

It may safely be said of Carver's characters that in the course of the story, nothing really seems to happen to them. It is in their reaction to situations that gives weight to the stories. They are striking not because of what they do but in how they do it and in the process, attract or repulse the reader.

24.2 Discussion on *A Small, Good Thing*

The story opens with a woman at a bakery ordering a birthday cake for her son. We see how she takes her time over it, leafing through photographs to get a cake that her son would like.

> Saturday afternoon she drove to the bakery in the shopping center. After looking through a loose-leaf binder with photographs of cakes taped onto the pages, she ordered chocolate, the child's favorite. The cake she chose was decorated with a spaceship and launching pad under a sprinkling of white stars, and a planet made of red frosting at the other end. His name, SCOTTY, would be in green letters beneath the planet.

There is no interaction between her and the baker and the latter comes across as a silent, unfriendly man whose only interest is in finishing the transaction and getting on with his job.

> The baker was not jolly. There were no pleasantries between them, just the minimum exchange of words, the necessary information. He made her feel uncomfortable, and she didn't like that. While he was bent over the counter with the pencil in his hand, she studied his coarse features and wondered if he'd ever done anything else with his life besides be a baker. She was a mother and thirty-three years old, and it seemed to her that everyone, especially someone the baker's age-a man old enough to be her father-must have children who'd gone through this special time of cakes and birthday parties. There must be that between them, she thought. But he was abrupt with her-not rude, just abrupt. She gave up trying to make friends with him.

Scotty has an accident on his birthday. Although he is apparently unhurt, he has to be taken to hospital later on becoming unconscious and slips into a deep sleep but which the doctor, assures them, is not a coma. The worried parents stay by his bedside and there is a poignancy about the description of their vigil and their feeling of helplessness.

> Of course, the birthday party was canceled. The child was in the hospital with a mild concussion and suffering from shock. There'd been vomiting, and his lungs had taken in fluid which needed pumping out that afternoon. Now he simply seemed to be in a very deep sleep-but no coma, Dr. Francis had emphasized, no coma, when he saw the alarm in the parents' eyes. At eleven o'clock that night, when the boy seemed to be resting comfortably enough after the many X-rays and the lab work, and it was just a matter of his waking up and coming around, Howard left the hospital. He and Ann had been at the hospital with the child since that afternoon, and he was going home for a short while to bathe and change clothes. "I'll be back in an hour," he said. She nodded. "It's fine," she said. "I'll be right here." He kissed her on the forehead, and they touched hands. She sat in the chair beside the bed and looked at the child. She was waiting for him to wake up and be all right. Then she could begin to relax.

When Howard reaches home, the phone is ringing and when he takes the call, he is informed by the caller who does not identify himself, that there is a cake waiting. Howard has no idea what the call is about as, in the anxieties of the day, Ann has forgotten all about the cake. Tormented as he is by worry about his son and feeling that he should not have left the hospital, this phone call is an irritant and vaguely menacing.

> "There's a cake here that wasn't picked up," the voice on the other end of the line said.

"What are you saying?" Howard asked.

"A cake," the voice said. "A sixteen-dollar cake."

Howard held the receiver against his ear, trying to understand. "I don't know anything about a cake," he said. "Jesus, what are you talking about?"

"Don't hand me that," the voice said.

Howard hung up the telephone. He went into the kitchen and poured himself some whiskey. He called the hospital. But the child's condition remained the same; he was still sleeping and nothing had changed there. While water poured into the tub, Howard lathered his face and shaved. He'd just stretched out in the tub and closed his eyes when the telephone rang again. He hauled himself out, grabbed a towel, and hurried through the house, saying, "Stupid, stupid," for having left the hospital. But when he picked up the receiver and shouted, "Hello!" there was no sound at the other end of the line. Then the caller hung up.

Howard goes back to the hospital and tells his wife to go home and get some rest while he stays with their son. He tells her that there is an anonymous caller who is pestering them and warns her to hang up but neglects to tell her that the caller had mentioned a cake. They try to take consolation from the fact that the doctor and nursing staff tell them that their son is stable and will be fine once he wakes up although Ann has her doubts.

A nurse pushed the door open. She nodded at them as she went to the bedside. She took the left arm out from under the covers and put her fingers on the wrist, found the pulse, then consulted her watch. In a little while, she put the arm back under the covers and moved to the foot of the bed, where she wrote something on a clipboard attached to the bed.

"How is he?" Ann said. Howard's hand was a weight on her shoulder. She was aware of the pressure from his fingers.

"He's stable," the nurse said. Then she said, "Doctor will be in again shortly. Doctor's back in the hospital. He's making rounds right now."

"I was saying maybe she'd want to go home and get a little rest," Howard said. "After the doctor comes," he said.

"She could do that," the nurse said. "I think you should both feel free to do that, if you wish." The nurse was a big Scandinavian woman with blond hair. There was the trace of an accent in her speech.

"We'll see what the doctor says," Ann said. "I want to talk to the doctor. I don't think he should keep sleeping like this. I don't think that's a good sign." She brought her hand up to her eyes and let her head come forward a little. Howard's grip tightened on her shoulder, and then his hand moved up to her neck, where his fingers began to knead the muscles there.

Their conversation with the doctor does not reveal any more answers and they are left with the assurance that their son is only sleeping and that they will know more once they put him through some more tests.

Ann got up from the chair. “Doctor?”

“Ann,” he said and nodded. “Let’s just first see how he’s doing,” the doctor said. He moved to the side of the bed and took the boy’s pulse. He peeled back one eyelid and then the other. Howard and Ann stood beside the doctor and watched. Then the doctor turned back the covers and listened to the boy’s heart and lungs with his stethoscope. He pressed his fingers here and there on the abdomen. When he was finished, he went to the end of the bed and studied the chart. He noted the time, scribbled something on the chart, and then looked at Howard and Ann.

“Doctor, how is he?” Howard said. “What’s the matter with him exactly?”

“Why doesn’t he wake up?” Ann said.

The doctor was a handsome, big-shouldered man with a tanned face. He wore a three-piece blue suit, a striped tie, and ivory cuff links. His gray hair was combed along the sides of his head, and he looked as if he had just come from a concert. “He’s all right,” the doctor said. “Nothing to shout about, he could be better, I think. But he’s all right. Still, I wish he’d wake up. He should wake up pretty soon.” The doctor looked at the boy again. “We’ll know some more in a couple of hours, after the results of a few more tests are in. But he’s all right, believe me, except for the hairline fracture of the skull. He does have that.”

“Oh, no,” Ann said.

“And a bit of a concussion, as I said before. Of course, you know he’s in shock,” the doctor said. “Sometimes you see this in shock cases. This sleeping.”

“But he’s out of any real danger?” Howard said. “You said before he’s not in a coma. You wouldn’t call this a coma, then-would you, doctor?” Howard waited. He looked at the doctor.

“No, I don’t want to call it a coma,” the doctor said and glanced over at the boy once more. ‘He’s just in a very deep sleep. It’s a restorative measure the body is taking on its own. He’s out of any real danger, I’d say that for certain, yes. But we’ll know more when he wakes up and the other tests are in,” the doctor said.

“It’s a coma,” Ann said. “Of sorts.”

“It’s not a coma yet, not exactly,” the doctor said. “I wouldn’t want to call it coma. Not yet, anyway. He’s suffered shock. In shock cases, this kind of reaction is common enough; it’s a temporary reaction to bodily trauma. Coma. Well, coma is a deep, prolonged unconsciousness, something that could go on for days, or weeks even. Scotty’s not in that area, not as far as we can tell. I’m certain his condition will show improvement by morning. I’m betting that it will. We’ll know more when he wakes up, which shouldn’t be long now. Of course, you may do as you like, stay here or go home for a time. But by all means feel free to leave the hospital for a while if you want. This is not easy, I know.” The doctor gazed at the boy again, watching him, and then he turned to Ann and said, “You try not to worry, little mother. Believe me, we’re doing all that can be done. It’s just a question of a little more time now.” He nodded at her, shook hands with Howard again, and then he left

the room.

More tests are conducted and the parents stay in the hospital getting more and more worried as their son continues to be in a deep sleep and the doctors can tell them nothing.

In an hour, another doctor came in. He said his name was Parsons, from Radiology. He had a bushy moustache. He was wearing loafers, a western shirt, and a pair of jeans.

"We're going to take him downstairs for more pictures," he told them. "We need to do some more pictures, and we want to do a scan."

"What's that?" Ann said. "A scan?" She stood between this new doctor and the bed. "I thought you'd already taken all your X-rays.'"

"I'm afraid we need some more, he said. "Nothing to be alarmed about. We just need some more pictures, and we want to do a brain scan on him."

"My God," Ann said.

"It's perfectly normal procedure in cases like this," this new doctor said. "We just need to find out for sure why he isn't back awake yet. It's normal medical procedure, and nothing to be alarmed about. We'll be taking him down in a few minutes," this doctor said.

In a little while, two orderlies came into the room with a gurney. They were black-haired, dark-complexioned men in white uniforms, and they said a few words to each other in a foreign tongue as they unhooked the boy from the tube and moved him from his bed to the gurney. Then they wheeled him from the room. Howard and Ann got on the same elevator. Ann gazed at the child. She closed her eyes as the elevator began its descent. The orderlies stood at either end of the gurney without saying anything, though once one of the men made a comment to the other in their own language, and the other man nodded slowly in response.

Later that morning, just as the sun was beginning to lighten the windows in the waiting room outside the X-ray department, they brought the boy out and moved him back up to his room. Howard and Ann rode up on the elevator with him once more, and once more they took up their places beside the bed.

They waited all day, but still the boy did not wake up. Occasionally, one of them would leave the room to go downstairs to the cafeteria to drink coffee and then, as if suddenly remembering and feeling guilty, get up from the table and hurry back to the room. Dr. Francis came again that afternoon and examined the boy once more and then left after telling them he was coming along and could wake up at any minute now. Nurses, different nurses from the night before, came in from time to time. Then a young woman from the lab knocked and entered the room. She wore white slacks and a white blouse and carried a little tray of things which she put on the stand beside the bed. Without a word to them, she took blood from the boy's arm. Howard closed his eyes as the woman found the right place on the boy's arm and pushed the needle in.

"I don't understand this," Ann said to the woman.

"Doctor's orders," the young woman said. "I do what I'm told. They say draw that one, I draw. What's wrong with him, anyway?" she said. "He's a sweetie."

"He was hit by a car," Howard said. "A hit-and-run."

The young woman shook her head and looked again at the boy. Then she took her tray and left the room.

"Why won't he wake up?" Ann said. "Howard? I want some answers from these people."

When the doctor comes back again, he seems confused himself about Scotty's continued state of unconsciousness and finally reluctantly agrees that he is probably in a coma. He however still assures them that the tests have yielded nothing alarming and that all his vital signs were positive. This prompts Howard to urge Ann to go home for a while which she agrees to after some persuasion.

Trying to get out of the hospital, she missed her way and meets the family of another patient who has been stabbed and is being operated upon.

She went past the nurses' station and down to the end of the corridor, looking for the elevator. At the end of the corridor, she turned to her right and entered a little waiting room where a Negro family sat in wicker chairs. There was a middle-aged man in a khaki shirt and pants, a baseball cap pushed back on his head. A large woman wearing a housedress and slippers was slumped in one of the chairs. A teenaged girl in jeans, hair done in dozens of little braids, lay stretched out in one of the chairs smoking a cigarette, her legs crossed at the ankles. The family swung their eyes to Ann as she entered the room. The little table was littered with hamburger wrappers and Styrofoam cups.

"Franklin," the large woman said as she roused herself. "Is it about Franklin?" Her eyes widened. "Tell me now, lady," the woman said. "Is it about Franklin?" She was trying to rise from her chair, but the man had closed his hand over her arm.

"Here, here," he said. "Evelyn."

"I'm sorry," Ann said. "I'm looking for the elevator. My son is in the hospital, and now I can't find the elevator."

"Elevator is down that way, turn left," the man said as he aimed a finger.

The girl drew on her cigarette and stared at Ann. Her eyes were narrowed to slits, and her broad lips parted slowly as she let the smoke escape. The Negro woman let her head fall on her shoulder and looked away from Ann, no longer interested.

"My son was hit by a car," Ann said to the man. She seemed to need to explain herself. "He has a concussion and a little skull fracture, but he's going to be all right. He's in shock now, but it might be some kind of coma, too. That's what really worries us, the coma part. I'm going out for a little while, but my husband is with him. Maybe he'll wake up while I'm gone.

"That's too bad," the man said and shifted in the chair. He shook his head. He looked down at the table, and then he looked back at Ann. She was still standing there. He said, "Our Franklin, he's on the operating table. Somebody cut him. Tried to kill him. There was a fight where he was at. At this party. They say he was just standing and watching. Not bothering nobody. But that don't mean nothing these days. Now he's on the operating table. We're just hoping and praying, that's all we can do now." He gazed at her steadily.

Ann looked at the girl again, who was still watching her, and at the older woman, who kept her head down, but whose eyes were now closed. Ann saw the lips moving silently, making words. She had an urge to ask what those words were. She wanted to talk more with these people who were in the same kind of waiting she was in. She was afraid, and they were afraid. They had that in common. She would have liked to have said something else about the accident, told them more about Scotty, that it had happened on the day of his birthday, Monday, and that he was still unconscious. Yet she didn't know how to begin. She stood looking at them without saying anything more.

When she reaches home, there is a phone call, again by the unidentified caller and it puts her into a state of panic.

"Yes!" she said as she answered. "Hello!"

"Mrs. Weiss," a man's voice said. It was five o'clock in the morning, and she thought she could hear machinery or equipment of some kind in the background.

"Yes, yes! What is it?" she said. "This is Mrs. Weiss. This is she. What is it, please?" She listened to whatever it was in the background. "Is it Scotty, for Christ's sake?"

"Scotty," the man's voice said. "It's about Scotty, yes. It has to do with Scotty, that problem. Have you forgotten about Scotty?" the man said. Then he hung up.

She dialed the hospital's number and asked for the third floor. She demanded information about her son from the nurse who answered the telephone. Then she asked to speak to her husband. It was, she said, an emergency.

She waited, turning the telephone cord in her fingers. She closed her eyes and felt sick at her stomach. She would have to make herself eat. Slug came in from the back porch and lay down near her feet. He wagged his tail. She pulled at his ear while he licked her fingers. Howard was on the line.

"Somebody just called here," she said. She twisted the telephone cord. "He said it was about Scotty," she cried.

"Scotty's fine," Howard told her. "I mean, he's still sleeping. There's been no change. The nurse has been in twice since you've been gone. A nurse or else a doctor. He's all right."

"This man called. He said it was about Scotty," she told him.

"Honey, you rest for a little while, you need the rest. It must be that same caller I had. Just forget it"…

…"I was drinking a cup of tea," she said, "when the telephone rang. They said it was about Scotty. There was a noise in the background. Was there a noise in the background on that call you had, Howard?"

"I don't remember," he said. "Maybe the driver of the car, maybe he's a psychopath and found out about Scotty somehow. But I'm here with him. Just rest like you were going to do. Take a bath and come back by seven or so, and we'll talk to the doctor together when he gets here. It's going to be all right, honey. I'm here, and there are doctors and nurses around. They say his condition is stable."

"I'm scared to death," she said.

When Ann goes back to the hospital, she enquires about the boy in surgery whose family she had met and is told that he did not make it. Her husband tells her that a neurologist has been called in for further tests on Scotty. As they are talking about what this would mean, they see Scotty open his eyes.

"They said they're going to take him down and run more tests on him, Ann. They think they're going to operate, honey. Honey, they are going to operate. They can't figure out why he won't wake up. It's more than just shock or concussion, they know that much now. It's in his skull, the fracture, it has something, something to do with that, they think. So they're going to operate. I tried to call you, but I guess you'd already left the house."

"Oh, God," she said. 'Oh, please, Howard, please," she said, taking his arms.

"Look!"' Howard said. "Scotty! Look, Ann!" He turned her toward the bed.

The boy had opened his eyes, then closed them. He opened them again now. The eyes stared straight ahead for a minute, then moved slowly in his head until they rested on Howard and Ann, then traveled away again.

"Scotty," his mother said, moving to the bed.

"Hey, Scott," his father said. "Hey, son."

They leaned over the bed. Howard took the child's hand in his hands and began to pat and squeeze the hand. Ann bent over the boy and kissed his forehead again and again. She put her hands on either side of his face. "Scotty, honey, it's Mommy and Daddy," she said. "Scotty?"

The boy looked at them, but without any sign of recognition. Then his mouth opened, his eyes scrunched closed, and he howled until he had no more air in his lungs. His face seemed to relax and soften then. His lips parted as his last breath was puffed through his throat and exhaled gently through the clenched teeth.

As the parents watch helplessly, their child dies even though all they had been hearing from the doctors since the time they had brought him in was that he was sleeping and would be fine. The doctors call it a "one-in-a-million circumstance" and exonerate themselves by saying that all the tests had been normal so they hadn't known what to look for.

Dr. Francis guided Ann to the sofa, sat down beside her, and began to talk in a low, consoling voice. At one point, he leaned over and embraced her. She could feel his chest rising and falling evenly against her shoulder. She kept her eyes open and let him hold her. Howard went into the bathroom, but he left the door open. After a violent fit of weeping, he ran water and washed his face. Then he came out and sat down at the little table that held a telephone. He looked at the telephone as though deciding what to do first. He made some calls. After a time, Dr. Francis used the telephone.

"Is there anything else I can do for the moment?" he asked them.

Howard shook his head. Ann stared at Dr. Francis as if unable to comprehend his words.

The doctor walked them to the hospital's front door. People were entering and leaving the

hospital. It was eleven o'clock in the morning. Ann was aware of how slowly, almost reluctantly, she moved her feet. It seemed to her that Dr. Francis was making them leave when she felt they should stay, when it would be more the right thing to do to stay. She gazed out into the parking lot and then turned around and looked back at the front of the hospital. She began shaking her head. "No, no," she said. "I can't leave him here, no." She heard herself say that and thought how unfair it was that the only words that came out were the sort of words used on TV shows where people were stunned by violent or sudden deaths. She wanted her words to be her own. "No," she said, and for some reason the memory of the Negro woman's head lolling on the woman's shoulder came to her . "No," she said again.

"I'll be talking to you later in the day," the doctor was saying to Howard. "There are still some things that have to be done, things that have to be cleared up to our satisfaction. Some things that need explaining."

"An autopsy," Howard said.

Dr. Francis nodded.

"I understand," Howard said. Then he said, "Oh, Jesus. No, I don't understand, doctor. I can't, I can't. I just can't."

Dr. Francis put his arm around Howard's shoulders. "I'm sorry. God, how I'm sorry." He let go of Howard's shoulders and held out his hand. Howard looked at the hand, and then he took it. Dr. Francis put his arms around Ann once more. He seemed full of some goodness she didn't understand. She let her head rest on his shoulder, but her eyes stayed open. She kept looking at the hospital. As they drove out of the parking lot, she looked back at the hospital.

Ann and Howard are devastated and they go home, trying desperately to understand what has happened and how to come to terms with the enormity of their grief.

At home, she sat on the sofa with her hands in her coat pockets. Howard closed the door to the child's room. He got the coffee-maker going and then he found an empty box. He had thought to pick up some of the child's things that were scattered around the living room. But instead he sat down beside her on the sofa, pushed the box to one side, and leaned forward, arms between his knees. He began to weep. She pulled his head over into her lap and patted his shoulder. "He's gone," she said. She kept patting his shoulder. Over his sobs, she could hear the coffee-maker hissing in the kitchen. "There, there," she said tenderly. "Howard, he's gone. He's gone and now we'll have to get used to that. To being alone."

In a little while, Howard got up and began moving aimlessly around the room with the box, not putting anything into it, but collecting some things together on the floor at one end of the sofa. She continued to sit with her hands in her coat pockets. Howard put the box down and brought coffee into the living room. Later, Ann made calls to relatives. After each call had been placed and the party had answered, Ann would blurt out a few words and cry for a minute. Then she would quietly explain, in a measured voice, what had happened and tell them about arrangements. Howard took the box out to the garage,

where he saw the child's bicycle. He dropped the box and sat down on the pavement beside the bicycle. He took hold of the bicycle awkwardly so that it leaned against his chest. He held it, the rubber pedal sticking into his chest. He gave the wheel a turn.

It is while they are in the midst of this emotional whirlpool that their anonymous caller phones again.

"Hello," she said, and she heard something in the background, a humming noise. "Hello!" she said. "For God's sake," she said. "Who is this? What is it you want?"

"Your Scotty, I got him ready for you," the man's voice said. "Did you forget him?"

"You evil bastard!" she shouted into the receiver. "How can you do this, you evil son of a bitch?"

"Scotty," the man said. "Have you forgotten about Scotty?" Then the man hung up on her.

He calls again at midnight but hangs up without saying anything. But this time, Ann puts two and two together and suddenly everything clicks into place.

"Could you hear anything?" she said. "In the background? A noise, machinery, something humming?"

"Nothing, really. Nothing like that," he said. "There wasn't much time. I think there was some radio music. Yes, there was a radio going, that's all I could tell. I don't know what in God's name is going on," he said.

She shook her head. "If I could, could get my hands on him." It came to her then. She knew who it was. Scotty, the cake, the telephone number. She pushed the chair away from the table and got up. "Drive me down to the shopping center," she said. "Howard."

"What are you saying?"

"The shopping center. I know who it is who's calling. I know who it is. It's the baker, the son-of-a-bitching baker, Howard. I had him bake a cake for Scotty's birthday. That's who's calling. That's who has the number and keeps calling us. To harass us about that cake. The baker, that bastard."

When the mother finally figures out who's been making the calls, she is furious and the couple goes to his bakery to have a showdown with him. There, she gives vent to all the pent-up anger she'd been feeling at the fact of her son's death.

They drove around behind the bakery and parked. They got out of the car. There was a lighted window too high up for them to see inside. A sign near the back door said THE PANTRY BAKERY, SPECIAL ORDERS. She could hear faintly a radio playing inside and something creak-an oven door as it was pulled down? She knocked on the door and waited. Then she knocked again, louder. The radio was turned down and there was a scraping sound now, the distinct sound of something, a drawer, being pulled open and then closed.

Someone unlocked the door and opened it. The baker stood in the light and peered out at them. "I'm closed for business," he said. "What do you want at this hour? It's midnight.

Are you drunk or something?"

She stepped into the light that fell through the open door. He blinked his heavy eyelids as he recognized her. "It's you, he said.

"It's me," she said. "Scotty's mother. This is Scotty's father. We'd like to come in."

The baker said, "I'm busy now. I have work to do."

She had stepped inside the doorway anyway. Howard came in behind her. The baker moved back. "It smells like

a bakery in here. Doesn't it smell like a bakery in here, Howard?"

"What do you want?" the baker said. "Maybe you want your cake? That's it, you decided you want your cake. You ordered a cake, didn't you?"

"You're pretty smart for a baker," she said. "Howard, this is the man who's been calling us." She clenched her fists. She stared at him fiercely. There was a deep burning inside her, an anger that made her feel larger than herself, larger than either of these men.

"Just a minute here," the baker said. "You want to pick up your three-day-old cake? That it? I don't want to argue with you, lady. There it sits over there, getting stale. I'll give it to you for half of what I quoted you. No. You want it? You can have it. It's no good to me, no good to anyone now. It cost me time and money to make that cake. If you want it, okay, if you don't, that's okay, too. I have to get back to work." He looked at them and rolled his tongue behind his teeth.

"More cakes," she said. She knew she was in control of it, of what was increasing in her. She was calm.

"Lady, I work sixteen hours a day in this place to earn a living," the baker said. He wiped his hands on his apron. "I work night and day in here, trying to make ends meet." A look crossed Ann's face that made the baker move back and say, "No trouble, now." He reached to the counter and picked up a rolling pin with his right hand and began to tap it against the palm of his other hand. "You want the cake or not? I have to get back to work. Bakers work at night," he said again. His eyes were small, mean-looking, she thought, nearly lost in the bristly flesh around his cheeks. His neck was thick with fat.

"I know bakers work at night," Ann said. "They make phone calls at night, too. You bastard," she said.

The baker continued to tap the rolling pin against his hand. He glanced at Howard. "Careful, careful," he said to Howard.

"My son's dead," she said with a cold, even finality. "He was hit by a car Monday morning. We've been waiting with him until he died. But, of course, you couldn't be expected to know that, could you? Bakers can't know everything-can they, Mr. Baker? But he's dead. He's dead, you bastard!" Just as suddenly as it had welled in her, the anger dwindled, gave way to something else, a dizzy feeling of nausea. She leaned against the wooden table that was sprinkled with flour, put her hands over her face, and began to cry, her shoulders rocking back and forth. "It isn't fair," she said. "It isn't, isn't fair."

Howard put his hand at the small of her back and looked at the baker. “Shame on you,” Howard said to him. “Shame.”

When the baker learns of this tragedy, he pleads for forgiveness and comforts them in the only way he can – by offering freshly baked cinnamon rolls still warm from the oven saying that “”Eating is a small, good thing in a time like this” and watches over them solicitously as they eat and feel the warmth of the energy that flows into them with the satisfaction of this basic need. The personality of the baker is now revealed as is his personal story.

“Let me say how sorry I am,” the baker said, putting his elbows on the table. “God alone knows how sorry. Listen to me. I’m just a baker. I don’t claim to be anything else. Maybe once, maybe years ago, I was a different kind of human being. I’ve forgotten, I don’t know for sure. But I’m not any longer, if I ever was. Now I’m just a baker. That don’t excuse my doing what I did, I know. But I’m deeply sorry. I’m sorry for your son, and sorry for my part in this,” the baker said. He spread his hands out on the table and turned them over to reveal his palms. “I don’t have any children myself, so I can only imagine what you must be feeling. All I can say to you now is that I’m sorry. Forgive me, if you can,” the baker said. “I’m not an evil man, I don’t think. Not evil, like you said on the phone. You got to understand what it comes down to is I don’t know how to act anymore, it would seem. Please,” the man said, “let me ask you if you can find it in your hearts to forgive me?”

It was warm inside the bakery. Howard stood up from the table and took off his coat. He helped Ann from her coat. The baker looked at them for a minute and then nodded and got up from the table. He went to the oven and turned off some switches. He found cups and poured coffee from an electric coffee-maker. He put a carton of cream on the table, and a bowl of sugar.

“You probably need to eat something,” the baker said. “I hope you’ll eat some of my hot rolls. You have to eat and keep going. Eating is a small, good thing in a time like this,” he said.

He served them warm cinnamon rolls just out of the oven, the icing still runny. He put butter on the table and knives to spread the butter. Then the baker sat down at the table with them. He waited. He waited until they each took a roll from the platter and began to eat. “It’s good to eat something,” he said, watching them. “There’s more. Eat up. Eat all you want. There’s all the rolls in the world in here.”

They ate rolls and drank coffee. Ann was suddenly hungry, and the rolls were warm and sweet. She ate three of them, which pleased the baker. Then he began to talk. They listened carefully. Although they were tired and in anguish, they listened to what the baker had to say. They nodded when the baker began to speak of loneliness, and of the sense of doubt and limitation that had come to him in his middle years. He told them what it was like to be childless all these years. To repeat the days with the ovens endlessly full and endlessly empty. The party food, the celebrations he’d worked over. Icing knuckle-deep. The tiny wedding couples stuck into cakes. Hundreds of them, no, thousands by now. Birthdays. Just imagine all those candles burning. He had a necessary trade. He was a baker. He was glad he wasn’t a florist. It was better to be feeding people. This was a better smell anytime

than flowers.

> "Smell this," the baker said, breaking open a dark loaf. "It's a heavy bread, but rich." They smelled it, then he had them taste it. It had the taste of molasses and coarse grains. They listened to him. They ate what they could. They swallowed the dark bread. It was like daylight under the fluorescent trays of light. They talked on into the early morning, the high, pale cast of light in the windows, and they did not think of leaving.

The story evokes poignantly, the tragedy and anguish of parents in a situation where they are helpless and isolated, worried sick about their child, in a sleepless, hungry vigil and where the people they look to for answers have none. In another sense, the baker too is an isolated man with no meaningful human contact. When the two get together at the end, there is the warmth of humanity even in the midst of the coldness and starkness of death.

Carver wrote that, "It's possible, in a poem or a short story, to write about commonplace things and objects using commonplace but precise language, and to endow those things – a chair, a window curtain, a fork, a stone, a woman's earring – with immense, even startling power." (**Fires**.)

The story highlights how assumptions can damage situations and relationships and also how change can bring about miracles. For instance, at the very beginning, the mother, while ordering the cake, makes certain assumptions about the baker: "…everyone, especially someone the baker's age - a man old enough to be her father - must have children who'd gone through this special time of cakes and birthday parties." This is perhaps the worst assumption in the entire story because at the end the baker reveals the fact of his childlessness and loneliness to the bereaved couple.

Carver, as in many of his other stories, draws attention to how important the skill of listening is and how most of us never manage to master it. Flawed communication runs through the story as a powerful undercurrent. If Howard had told Ann right after the first phone call that the caller had mentioned a cake, she would have understood at once and they would have been spared a lot of tension and fear.

The story is also an apt portrayal of modern-day lives. The impersonality of contemporary life is brought out by the situations and the isolation of the characters. The baker, for instance, as do so many people in big cities, does not live a life that is driven by passion. For him, his job is just a job in which he produces food that other people buy to celebrate occasions in their lives. Initially, the characters are not referred to by their proper names but only as "she", "the baker" etc, thus deepening the sense of isolation and impersonality.

The situation that is delineated prods readers into identifying with it in certain ways and evokes empathy, compassion and understanding, leading to their pondering about their own lives with regard to their relationships and death.

The story paints a picture of contemporary society with its trauma, difficulties and complicated human relationships but it also, finally taps the inherent goodness and bond between people as manifested in kindness and sensitivity.

24.2.1 The Role of the Baker

The baker plays a major part in the entire story. In fact, the story begins and ends in his bakery.

At the beginning of the story, he is just a professional, very busy and obviously good at his job

judging by the number of customers and orders he has. He is quiet and unfriendly and does not seem to care for anything more than his job.

The reader can guess that his is the one who makes the anonymous calls to the couple. He calls at night because that is the time when he works in the bakery. What is puzzling is why he does not identify himself or why he sometimes makes the call but then does not say anything. It is perhaps his way of amusing himself, his only avenue of entertainment in an otherwise monotonously dull existence.

The baker is a workaholic and his entire life revolves around his baking. Ann wonders "if he'd ever done anything else with his life besides be a baker." His entire attitude expresses his isolation and unhappiness. Having paid attention only to his work all his life, his personal life is nothing to speak of and he does not have the joy of companionship or family. This leads to his bitterness. It is ironic that although he bakes hundreds of cakes for customers to celebrate all kinds of festivities, he never experiences them himself.

Only his baking gives him some comfort and food is his way of offering consolation when Scotty's parents turn up, angry and grief-stricken at his bakery.

The image the reader has of the baker changes by the story's end. He is no longer cold, hostile or impersonal. He sets aside his disinterestedness and becomes kind and compassionate. We now see him as a lonely man and this evokes sympathy for him. The ending, fraught as it is with the pain of the parents, yet holds out a positive note and restores faith not only in humanity, but in society as a whole.

24.2.2 The Title

In this story Carver reminds us that there are many good, small things in our lives which we ignore or take for granted. They range from objects, experiences to people. If we could only take a conscious note of them and cherish them, there would be so much more joy in our lives. What we do however, is neglect people, whether loved ones or strangers, do not treat them with the respect and care that they deserve and make them feel small in many ways. This is the general human tendency and we are not even aware of the error of our ways.

In the story, little things take on importance and have a far reaching effect on the lives of their characters. Scotty is walking to school with a friend on his birthday when he steps off the curb without looking and is knocked down by a car. He gets up and it appears as though he is unhurt. What appears to be a minor accident soon develops into something far more serious.

Similarly, the baker's call to remind them of the cake that had been ordered takes on menacing overtones as the story progresses and it appears that the couple is being hounded by a diabolic pervert.

Scotty's 'harmless' sleep that the doctors explain as a protective measure of the body to heal itself finally leads to death.

The characters are all ordinary people one would meet in the course of the everyday routine and none of them stands out for any particular quality. They are 'small' people who play a large role during the course of the story.

The food that is offered by the baker as an act of penitence and comfort, is a small thing but it nourishes not only the bodies of the bereaved parents but also their heart and spirit. It thus plays an important albeit small role in the story, in keeping with the title.

24.3 Review Questions

1. Discuss the part communication plays in the story from the baker to the hospital staff and how it affects Ann and Howard.
2. Draw a brief portrait of the baker. What is his significance in the story?
3. Of the two, who do you think is stronger – Ann or Howard? Why do you think so?
4. Isolation is a strong current that runs through the story. Do you agree?
5. Does the story concern itself with the small things of life in keeping with the title?

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