PG EG S4-03 (DSC)

TWO YEAR MASTER'S DEGREE COURSE

(CBCS in Accordance with NEP 2020)

SEMESTER-IV

AMERICAN LITERATURE

ENGLISH

Padmanath Gohainbaruah School of Humanities

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Subject Experts

1. Professor Bibhash Choudhury, Department of English, Gauhati University
2. Professor Lalan Kishore Singh, Department of English, Gauhati University
3. Dr. Merry Baruah, Department of English, Cotton University

Course Coordinators : Dr. Prasenjit Das,Professor, Discipline of English, KKHSOU

SLM Preparation Team

UNITS	CONTRIBUTORS
1-4, 6-7,11-14	Buddhadeb Roychoudhury Former Editor-in-Chief MNR Research Foundation, Hyderabad
5	Arfan Hussain, Research Scholar, IITG
8	Dr. Chayanika Roy Department of English, KKHSOU
9-10	Buddhadeb Roychoudhury & Dr. Prasenjit Das
15	Dr. Deetimali Barua Department of English, Cotton University

Editorial Team

Content : Prof. Pona Mahanta,Former Head, Department of English, Dibrugarh University Units (1-4, 6,7,9,10, 11-14)
Dr. Manab Medhi, Department of English, Bodoland University (Units 5,8,15)

Structure, Format & Graphics : Dr. Prasenjit Das

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Headquarters : Patgaon, Rani Gate, Guwahati - 781017

City Office: Resham Nagar, Khanapara Guwahati-781022; Web: www.kkhsou.ac.in

DSC 3: American Literature

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COURSE INTRODUCTION : [Adapted from M. H. Abram's *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (7thEdition) (Page 204-210)]

This is **Discipline Specific Core (DSC) Course** 3 of the MA English Programme Semester IV. This course shall introduce us to American Literature as a whole. It is however difficult to locate the periods of American Literature on the basis of convenient historical segments. A number of recent historians, anthologists, and teachers of American literature simply divide their survey into dated sections. A tendency has been to recognise the importance of major wars in marking significant changes in literature. Subsequently, many literary historians refer to the Revolutionary War (1775-81), the Civil War (1861-65), World War I (1914-18), and World War II (1939-45). Such divisions make it convenient to distinguish periods and sub-periods in American literature.

1607-1775: This overall era, from the founding of the first settlement at Jamestown to the outbreak of the American Revolution, is often called the **Colonial Period.** Writings of this period were mostly religious, practical, or historical. Notable among the seventeenth-century writers were William Bradford, John Winthrop, and Cotton Mather. In the following century writers like Jonathan Edwards, Benjamin Franklin, Anne Bradstreet and so on proved their mastery as writers.

1765-1790: This period is sometimes distinguished as the **Revolutionary Age.** It was the time of Thomas Paine's influential revolutionary tracts; of Thomas Jefferson's "Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom," "Declaration of Independence", of *The Federalist Papers* in support of the Constitution, most notably those by Alexander Hamilton and James Madison.

1775-1828: The years in-between 1775-1828, is known as the **Early National Period** ending with the triumph of Jacksonian democracy in 1828. This signalled the emergence of a national imaginative literature, including the first American comedy (Royall Tyler's *The Contrast,* 1787), the earliest American novel (William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy,* 1789), and the establishment in 1815 of the first enduring American magazine, *The North American Review.* This period also saw the emergence of Washington Irving (essays and stories), Charles Brockden Brown (Gothic novel), James Fenimore Cooper, (the first major American novelist), William Cullen Bryant and Edgar Allan Poe who wrote poetry. In the year 1760 was published the first of a long series of **slave narratives** and autobiographies written by *African-American* slaves who had escaped or been freed.

1828-1865: This period is often identified as the **Romantic Period** in American literature. This period is sometimes known as the **American Renaissance. This is also the period of** outstanding writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Is also sometimes called the **Age of Transcendentalism,** after the philosophical and literary movement, centered on Emerson, that was dominant in New England. It was the age of Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, Edgar Allan Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Harriet Beecher Stowe and so on.

1865-1900: This period is often known as the **Realistic Period,** with reference to the novels by Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, and Henry James and so on. Their works, though diverse, are often labeled "realistic" in contrast to the "romances" of their predecessors like Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville. Some realistic authors grounded their fiction in a regional milieu which reminds of Mark Twain's novels on the Mississippi River region. Besides, Walt Whitman continued writing poetry up to the last decade of the century, and was joined by Emily Dickinson who is now recognized as one of the most distinctive and eminent of American poets.

1900-1914: This period is known as the **Naturalistic Period** in recognition of the powerful though sometimes crudely wrought novels by Frank Norris, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser, which typically represent characters who are joint victims of their instinctual drives and of external sociological forces.

1914-1939: The era between the two world wars, marked also by the trauma of the great economic depression beginning in 1929, was that of the emergence of what is still known as **modern literature.** Unlike most of the authors of that earlier period, the American modernists achieved widespread international recognition and influence. Among the notable poets were Edgar Lee Masters, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, Robinson Jeffers, Marianne Moore, T. S. Eliot, and E. E. Cummings. They wrote in an unexampled variety of poetic modes. This was also the period in which America produced its first great dramatist in Eugene O'Neill.

1939 to the Present, or C**ontemporary period.** The contemporary literary scene in America is crowded and varied, and these lists could readily be expanded. We must await the passage of time to determine which writers now active will emerge as enduringly major figures in the *canon* of American literature.

Keeping this history of American Literature in mind, an attempt has been made in this course to discuss some of the important authors and their texts starting from the Colonial period to the Modern. Although it is practically impossible to discuss American Literature in just a few units, the 15 units are carefully chosen to encompass the history of American literature and some representative texts to the best possible extent.

This course is divided into three Blocks. **Block 1** deals with the History of American Literature; **Block 2** deals with American Poetry and Drama; and **Block 3** shall deal with American Fiction.

In **Block 1**, the four units will specifically deal with literary history.

Units 1 & 2: Puritan Beginnings & Frontier Experience (Part I& Part II) shall help us to understandhow the Puritan ideas helped in developing American literature in its early stage. The early settlers in America were responsible both for the early American establishments and for the growth of early American literature. Thus, the idea of Puritan literature is integrally connected with the colonial era in American social history. Because, the early settlers, had a profound impact on American life, culture and society. From this unit, we shall get to know that Puritanism so deeply influenced America that no real understanding of American culture and literature is now possible without a good understanding of Puritanism.

Unit 3 & 4: Transcendentalism and American Modernism (Part I& Part II) shall help us you to understand how America as a nation was born as the result of the evolution of a new, topical, clear prose style in literature. Moreover, this unit also intends to offer you a brief idea of the Romantic age from 1828—1865. The period between 1828 and 1865 is generally known as the Romantic age in American literature. The authors during this period revolted against the cult of reason and good sense and were inspired by the English Romantics. The age is also roughly referred to as the American Renaissance and the Age of Transcendentalism. Literature during this period portrayed the love of wild American nature, of the past and the Orient.

Block 2 discusses American Poetry and Drama with reference to some of the most representative writers. This Block has five units which are as the following.

Units 5:Introducing American Poetry serves as an introductory unit of the Block; we shall read about American poetry with reference to some of the important poets. A full range of American poetry, including the work of a large number of contemporary poets, exists today. In order, however, to trace a relatively coherent history of poetry in America, we shall begin by referring to the poets from the colonial period or from other countries of North and South America.

Unit 6: Walt Whitman: "Wound Dresser", "One's Self I Sing"shall deal with Walt Whitman one of the greatest American poets. Whitman broke away from the mould of his predecessors and gave birth to a unique style in American poetry that used free verse with new idiom and flexible rhythm. Whitman is also known for his innovative ideas and values, his life and his larger-than-life image, his rise from obscurity to monumental fame. In this unit, we shall also find that the Transcendentalist movement finds itself best celebrated in Whitman's poetry.

Unit 7: Emily Dickinson: "A Bird Came Down the Walk", "Much Madness" shall discuss the poet Emily Dickinson, another most significant poet in American Literature in terms of two of her mostly anthologised poems "Much Madness" and "A Bird Came Down the Walk".

Unit 8: Robert Frost, (1874-1963): "Stopping by the Woods"; "Mending Wall" shall discuss the life and works of the poet Robert Frost with reference to his poems "Mending Wall" and "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening". Chiefly noted for his realist descriptions and symbolism, the most dominant themes of Frost's poetry are Nature, love for humanity, nostalgia, self-realisation, etc. among others

Unit 9 & 10:Eugene O'Neill: *Desire Under the Elms* (Part I& Part II) provides a thorough discussion on the play *Desire Under the Elms* written by EugeneO' Neil—who is considered the father of modern American drama for his experimentation with stagecraft and acting. We shall note that O' Neil transformed the art of producing drama by making it a serious cultural institution. Hence, this unit intends to offer us a brief idea of his uniquely American style of tragedies, his plays with a new vitality, originality and psychological realism.

In Block 3, we shall discuss American fiction with reference to some of the most representative fiction writers.

Unit 11 & 12: Ernest Hemingway: Life and Works&Ernest Hemingway: *The Old Man and the Sea*shall introduce us to Ernest Hemingway, the celebrated American novelist, and his Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Old Man and the Sea*. We shall also learn how many of his works carry deep impressions of his own experiences with life.

Unit 13 & 14: Herman Melville*: Life and Works &Herman Melville: Billy Budd* deal with Herman Melville's novel *Billy Budd*, which records the final confrontation between evil and innocence. *Billy Budd* could be seen as a narrative that takes place in the sea and at the same time, it could also be read as a philosophical novel dealing with Christian allegories. Thus, in these units, we shall find that *Billy Budd* uncovers a strong, mature author who questions his own art.

Unit 15: Mark Twain: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* shall discuss the American novelist Mark Twain who occupies a unique position in the history of the American novel. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures Huckleberry Finn* are two famous novels by Mark Twain that have fascinated readers for over a century now. By the time we finish reading this unit, we shall learn that *The Adventures Huckleberry Finn* is highly significant due to its deep study and analysis, of issues relating to racism and morality.

While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you know some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also read about some relevant ideas and concepts in “LET US KNOW” along with the text. We have kept “CHECK YOUR PROGRESS” questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. The hints for the answers to these questions are given at the end of the unit. We strongly advise that you answer the questions immediately after you finish reading the section in which these questions occur. We have also included a few books in the “FURTHER READING” which will be helpful for your further consultation. The books referred to in the preparation of the units have been added at the end of the block. As you know the world of literature and criticism is too big, we strongly advise you not to take a unit to be an end in itself. Despite our attempts to make a unit self-contained, we advise that you read the original texts of the authors prescribed as well as other additional materials for a thorough understanding of the contents of a particular unit.

UNIT 1: PURITAN BEGINNINGS & FRONTIER EXPERIENCE (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 The Social Context

1.4 The Intellectual Context

1.5 Major Writers

- 1.5.1 Anne Dudley Bradstreet (1612-1773)
- 1.5.2 Edward Taylor (1642-1729)
- 1.5.3 Cotton Mather (1663-1728)
- 1.5.4 Michael Wigglesworth (1631-1705)

1.6 Let us Sum up

1.7 Further Reading

1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

1.9 Possible Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss how the Puritan thinking/theology/vision influenced early American literature
- interpret the subtleties of the early colonial period of American history
- identify the major American writers of the colonial period
- discuss the social atmosphere and the intellectual setting of the period

1.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of the course on American literature. In this unit, we shall try to know how the early American colonies were established based on the Puritans' involvement in early American establishments. Besides, we shall also get to know about the involvement of the early English

colonists in the growth of early American literature. Thus, the idea of Puritan literature is integrally connected to what we may call the colonial era in American social history. Christopher Columbus discovered the American continent in 1492, but the first English colony came up in Jamestown, Virginia in 1607, more than hundred years later. In 1620, the second group the 'Pilgrim Fathers' arrived by Mayflower and founded the Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts. Later, a string of thirteen colonies came up along the Atlantic sea-board, which grew in complete isolation, without each other's knowledge. The early settlers, the Puritans, had a profound impact on American life, culture and society. They had the aim to purify the human mind and the English Church and Church worship to restore it to its earlier 'pure' state. They were completely against the elaborate rituals of the English Church, as they believed that the Holy Bible carried the exact words of the almighty and people must follow the Bible. Their philosophy of life turned out to be a dominant factor influencing American life, thought and literature. Puritanism so deeply influenced America that no real understanding of American culture and literature is now possible without a good understanding of Puritanism. Let us, in this unit, now discuss the role of Puritan ideas in developing American literature in its early stage of development with reference to the important American writers who emerged out of the social and intellectual contexts of the time.

1.3 THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

When the early settlers reached the shore of America, they discovered virgin forests, unexplored land, and vast expanses of wilderness, and started believing that God had purposefully sent them to this blessed land. Contending that there is one God who rules the world, these Puritans believed that they were 'the selected few' chosen by the Almighty to establish a state based on the teaching of the Bible. The Puritans associated themselves with the ancient Jews and believed that just like the Jews in the Old Testament; they were persecuted for their religion. They also believed in one true God and in the notion that they were the chosen people to establish the New Jerusalem. Like Moses, the Puritan Fathers took the

charge of cleaning spiritual corruption by crossing the sea and establishing forms of governments in New England with new laws.

New England Puritans were archaic by choice, conviction and circumstances. Life was not easy for them. They worked hard to make a living and encountered both misfortunes and tragic failures. The native Indians also helped them through the severe natural situations. They struggled hard to survive. These people were highly optimistic. They offered themselves a sense of purpose, ideal beliefs, new theories regarding religion and governments to scrutinize those and voice them. These people infused in the early Americans a sense of duty towards their religion, nation and fellow men. They taught the idea of judging others not by their births but by their deeds, and thereby to be good always; to help them and to lead a life of Puritan values of self-denial, discipline, and hard work. The Puritans were Christians and opposed to the concept of hierarchy. Therefore, the laws in New England included the Biblical injunction against drunkenness, adultery, murder, and theft with an aim to regulate the religion and morality of the people. The 17th century Puritan colony of New England was not a dull one, but fully involved in profitable trades that led to a social life where consumption of alcohol was quite common. However, those educated also read religious as well as secular literature.

The settlers in America had their own reasons to exploit the rich resources of the virgin lands, meet their practical needs like shifting people to reduce the burden of resources on their own land, displace a troublesome population (those accused of religious persecution in Europe) to a 'distant land'. Also came with the early settlers slaves from Africa who were forced to work on cotton and sugar plantations. Before the early settlers touched the shores of North America, the tribal North Indians were the inhabitants of the land. They were nomadic but some led a settled life doing agriculture on vast pieces of land. These people accepted the Europeans who had settled among them, amidst occasional conflicts between the two groups.



LET US KNOW

The United States of America was born out of religious controversies; out of the desire to exploit the rich resources of the continent; out of the desire of the rulers to expand empires; out of the human yearning for land and adventure and to save shifting surplus populations. The process began with exploration and colonisation. Interestingly, records by explorers, traders, settlers, about their hopes, adventures, disasters and triumphs created a literature that was large, various and rich. Therefore, the story of American literature began long before the nation was born. Besides, the oral literature of Native Americans, of the earliest writers began with explorers like Captain John Smith who established Jamestown in 1607. He described his experiences in a book like *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England and the Summer Isles* (1624). Soon, New England saw the emergence of literatures, which were basically sermons, histories, autobiographies and poems. Then, started the great century of Puritan literature, which reflected life that it saw as an unremitting moral struggle.

For the Americans, the frontier would always be a liberal and mythical place. Even as the early settlers struggled against a harsh landscape to create new homes themselves, a variety of thinkers sought to present their frontier as a figurative place where pioneers could make themselves into whatever they wanted to be. Certain ideas associated with the frontier like self-reliance, individualism, regeneration, or democracy were designed to portray a young America as a place where one's future was absolutely a matter of what one was willing to make of it.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What were the initial reasons of the Settlers to arrive in America?

Q 2: What were the real intensions of the Puritans in colonising parts of America?

1.4 THE INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT

The history of American literature begins long before the present day nation was born. The Native Americans had oral literature of their own, and like many other literatures, they evolved from its humble origins that began with letters, sermons, diaries, notebooks, journals, travel books, etc. The literature of the early settlers in New England or the Colonial period is of great historic and literary significance. During this period, personal literature occupied a key position. The earliest writers were either interested in exploring spirituality or the land. Though they closely followed the English tradition, their literature depicting the dangerous adventures, hardships, sufferings into the building of a nation forms a significant chapter of American intellectual and literary history.

Puritanism had a profound effect in varying degrees on American social culture, political thinking and literature. As far as American literature is concerned, Puritanism permeated several aspects like American literature being the literary expression of the pure idealism of the Puritans; literature as the reflection of the Puritans' metaphysical mode of perception, which shaped the American literary symbolism; simplicity in the style of writing and so on. You will note that the Puritans were god-fearing people who wanted to live in a world of perfect order. The idea had an impact on the early American writers like Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman and others. The literature of this period, which mainly comprised sermons, diaries, biographies, religious poems, etc., centred on the glorification of the Lord. Two very common themes in early American writings of the Puritan period were idealism, which was both religious as well as political; and pragmatism, which was characterised by practicality and common purposes (of glorifying God).

Puritanism also contributed towards American literary symbolism. To the religious Puritans, the physical world depended on the spiritual. In the works of the early writers like William Bradford, Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards and Emerson, one discerns a deep spiritual involvement in their works, which later evolved into symbolism in the able hands of Hawthorne,

Melville and Poe. The early writing style in early American literature is characterised by simplicity. The writers had distaste for any kind of projection of sensual beauty. Thus, the writings of the early settlers were fresh, simple, plain and honest. Even the metaphors they used beautifully explained their views. Therefore, the form of the novel was absent as a genre, and non-fictional prose, especially biography, was the most popular form of literature. In a way, Puritan writings of the Colonial era reflected the nature, character and mental scope of the early American reading public who were well-educated with a good knowledge of religion.

Literary output of the early settlers in New England of the colonial period was scanty since they were busy in waging a relentless war against nature and the native tribes. Moreover, the explorer-cum-writers were English, who had left Europe a long time ago. They looked to the English for inspiration. Only after independence, the world of literature in America started taking a new turn.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: How did Puritanism leave a profound effect on American intellectual minds?

Q 4: How did the Puritan writers contribute to the emergence and growth of American literature?

1.5 MAJOR WRITERS

In this section, we will look at some of the important authors who contributed immensely to the development of American Literature in the Puritan period.

1.5.1 Anne Dudley Bradstreet (1612-1773)

Anne Dudley Bradstreet was the earliest of the Puritan New England poets (America's first published poet) and the first notable poet in America. Closely modelled on the works of English poets like Sydney and Spenser, her works deal with her own feelings and experiences, and her lyrics remained unsurpassed by any American

women writers for long 200 years until Emily Dickinson appeared in the literary scene. Her *The Tenth Muse Lately Spring Up in America* (1650) was the first published collection of poems composed by a settler in the English colonies. The book consists of four long poems known as “The Four Elements”, “The Four Humours of Man”, “The Four Ages of Man” and “The Four Seasons”. These poems were imitative in structure and were composed in heroic couplets. The volume received considerable attention in London with its first publication, especially due to its composition, which was simple and easy to read. The four poems are a series of orations— the first by earth, air, fire and water; the second by choler, blood, melancholy and phlegm; the third by childhood, youth, middle age and old age and the last by Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter. Each demonstrates the poet’s mastery over physiology, anatomy, astronomy, Greek metaphysics and the concepts of medieval and Renaissance cosmology. Likewise, *The Four Monarchies* (a long unfinished poem within *The Tenth Muse*) describing the four great monarchies of civilisation namely Assyrian, Persian, Grecian, Roman, shows the poet’s command over history. She was the first woman to be recognised as an accomplished New England poet, and is still considered to be one of the most important early American poets.

Anne never attended school, yet received an excellent education from her father Thomas Dudley, a widely read man who was a steward to the Earl of Lincoln. Anne herself did extensive reading. Virgil, Plutarch, Homer, Seneca, Spenser, Sidney, Milton, Raleigh, Hobbes and the Bible were some of her favourite writers. Her father encouraged her to read. She was married to Simon Bradstreet and immigrated to New England. However, she was quite unhappy in exchanging the comfort of the aristocratic life for a New England wilderness and primitiveness. While the family reached at Massachusetts Bay Colony, distressed by sickness, suffering, inadequate food, Anne admitted that her “heart rose” to protest

against the land. But, throughout her whole life, Anne remained a devout Puritan.

Her simple poetry reflects the tension she experienced between flesh and spirit, between emotion and religion as a Puritan as well as a woman writer. Her struggle to win over the issues like the pleasures of sensory and familial experience as a woman and her commitment to religion and promises of heaven are significant aspects of her poetry, which grew intensely as she matured. She composed her earliest poem when she was 19, accounting her traditional concerns as a true Puritan—the transience of life and hope of salvation—and by abiding by God's will. The fight between her love of the world and the desire to attain an eternal life can be felt everywhere, including her lyrical *Contemplation*, which, according to many critics, is her best poem.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What distinguishes Bradstreet as an important poet of the early phase of American literature?

1.5.2 Edward Taylor (1642-1729)

He is considered to be the most important poet to have appeared during the 17th and 18th century America. However, his poems were not published until 1930s. Taylor was a conservative Puritan minister of the Congregational Church at Massachusetts. His poems are replete with imageries drawn from the farms and the countryside of both England and New England, occasionally appearing in the Leicestershire dialect in his colloquial poems (Leicestershire being his supposed birthplace). For a brief period, he was a schoolteacher but his deep faith as a Protestant, which formed during his childhood and strengthened during Cromwell's regime, forbade him from teaching. In 1668, he sailed for Massachusetts. The poet's earliest verses composed in England

show his everlasting love for the Protestant cause and his anti-Roman and anti-Anglican mindset. The seventy days of long journey to Boston added to his impressive list of imageries to be used in his later poems. His perceptive observation of natural phenomena, of birds and fishes in his poetry is extraordinary.

He entered Harvard as the college butler in charge of kitchen utensils. The next three years of his life were busy with recitations, disputations, lectures in Latin with daily morning and evening prayers at Harvard. He studied Greek, Hebrew, logic, metaphysics, rhetoric and astronomy. He composed poetry, especially elegies, focusing more on wit and wordplay than genuine feelings. In a debate at Harvard, defending in verse the value of English language against three ancient languages, namely, Hebrew, Greek and Latin, he displayed an interesting aspect of his personality—an astonishing verbal wit. After graduation in 1671 from Harvard, Taylor left the campus. He became minister to a small farming community in Westfield where he spent the rest of his life. He died in 1729, and was buried in Westfield. His tombstone is engraved with a face of an angel.

By 1682, Taylor had started composing his major poems. Poems like Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Bunyan's *The Holy War*, Wigglesworth's *The Day of Doom*, Lorenzo Scupoli's *The Spiritual Conflict* served as models for his poems. In justifying God's ways to man, Taylor used a homely, colloquial style. Taylor's poems deal with spiritual combat between the soul and Satan in allegorical ways. *God's Determinations Touching His Elect*, a dramatic allegory, displays his religious beliefs as a Calvinist in Predestination, Creation, Nativity, Original Sin and Redemption through God; the notion of segregating humanity into two groups—the damned and the elect and joys of divine salvation. Though the poem missed the universal appeal of *Paradise Lost*, it is the best long poem composed in 17th century America with various meters and styles unified by a single theme.

In 1682, Taylor composed his greatest work, *Preparatory Meditations before My Approach to the Lord's Supper*, a series of some two hundred poems not discovered until the 20th century. Today recognised as a major poetic achievement of colonial America, the poem provides an understanding of the religious as well as psychological history of the age. Some of the poems, though they have little poetic worth with dull diction and repetitive themes, resemble the themes dealt with by the English metaphysical poets. Taylor was highly influenced by the Anglican poet and Minister George Herbert. In his diction, Taylor successfully combined the colloquial with the cosmic like Donne. His occasional rhetorical style was derived from King James Version of the Bible. Though not at his best like Donne and Herbert in meditations, Taylor composed more than two hundred meditations dealing with love—divine love of Almighty for man; human love; man's love for Christ and the poet's love for the Almighty. However, there is a hidden tone of despair in his meditations—despair that emerges out of his concern for the sins of humankind as well as his own ones. He composed an untitled poem of some 20,000 lines, which was later named *A Metrical History of Christianity* by the publisher. The poem deals with the suffering and persecutions of Christians from the beginning to the 12th century.

Taylor continued composing poetry until his last days. In his final years, Taylor was ill and composed some moving poems. His elegies to his wife and Samuel Hooker are successful exercises in the genre.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Briefly comment on Edward Taylor's Poetry.

1.5.3 Cotton Mather (1663-1728)

The third in a distinguished family of American congregational ministers and authors, Cotton Mather lived all his life in Boston. He became one of the most celebrated of all New England puritans and the most remarkable authors in the whole range of American letters with over 400 works to his credit. He entered Harvard at 12, and having already mastered Latin and Greek, he devoted completely to studies and prayer. At 18, he got his Master's degree, conferred by his father, the president of the college. He preached his first sermon in his father's church in 1680. In 1685, he was formally ordained. His father Increase Mather was a leading divine whereas his grandfathers—Richard Mather and John Cotton were the colony's spiritual founders and thus Cotton Mather was the object of great expectations. Mather devoted his entire life to praying, preaching, writing books and pamphlets and publishing them. He came into political limelight in 1689, during America's Glorious Revolution when the Bostonians deposed the royal governor Sir Edmund Andros.



LET US KNOW

Mather combined a rare blend of mystical beliefs with modern scientific quest. While he believed in the existence of witchcraft, he also advocated small pox inoculation, a stand that earned him the antipathy of many of his neighbours. His reform efforts included pleas to educators to inspire students with rewards and not punishment. His interest in new medical theories distinguishes him from his contemporaries. His inoculation activities, which earned him membership in the Royal Society of London in 1713, made him the first American to be so honoured. He corresponded with notable scientists like Henry More, William Derham, John Roy, Thomas burnet, William Whiston, Sir Isaac Newton, Robert

Boyle and others. He fought against the united opposition of Boston's physicians during the epidemic of 1721 for the small pox vaccine. Mather represents the best of early Enlightenment thinkers in colonial America. However, his belief, similar to most of the educated men of his time about Devil and people giving away their souls for black powers of witchcraft, tarnished his reputation. His publication 'Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possession' (1689) witnessed public interest. He was firm in prosecuting accused witches.

His contribution to Colonial American literature is enormous, which deals with various contemporary debates—religious, historical, biographical, political and scientific. His magnum opus *Magnalia Christi Americana* or *The Ecclesiastical History of New England* (1702), is an epic church history from the founding of New England to his time, written after the sensational Salem Witchcraft case that weakened the Church. The book was a timely warning against too much authority of the Church by a staunch defender of Puritan orthodoxy and conscience. Many readers found an extended ecclesiastical history of New England (popular in its earlier days) difficult to accept later, which commemorated the author's constant interpellation of judgements and comments. His *Manuductio ad Ministerium* (1726) was a handbook for young graduates about to enter the ministry— on doing good, on college love affairs, on poetry, music and style.

The humanitarianism of Cotton Mather is best found in his ambitious twenty year work on Biblical learning which was only interrupted by his death—*Bonifacius* or *Essays to Do Good* (1710). The book is not a mere collection of pious utterances but provides a set of instructions on humanitarian acts, and introduces ideas that are far ahead of his age—the schoolmaster rewarding rather than punishing students to teach, the physician studying psychology of the patient to understand the probable cause of illness, etc. He

established societies for communities and urged people to improve the community. Benjamin Franklin acknowledged the profound influence the *Essays to do Good* had upon him. Mather's *Christian Philosopher* (1721) is a philosophical, scientific attempt to recognize God in the wonders of the earth and the universe beyond. His representative work *The Wonders of the Invisible World*' (1693) is New England's official defence of the court's procedures. His autobiography *Paterna* throws light on his nature but *The Diary of Cotton Mather* (Volume I, II and III) provide the best insight into the man. His Diary is a Puritan document par excellence focussing on him as a tool of divine guidance in the world. His Diary reveals his 'down to earth' nature; a modest man, a doting son, a loving father, an affectionate husband and a caring pastor. His *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) and *Journey into Northern Pennsylvania and the State of New York* (1801) served as major contributions to the European interpretation of American society. During his time, **Mather's** essay 'What is an American' was considered one of the most influential single reports on America ever written.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: Write in short about Mather's significance in the context of American literature?

1.5.4 Michael Wigglesworth (1631-1705)

One of the most popular of early New England poets, a diarist and a sermon writer, Michael Wigglesworth was born in England, probably in Yorkshire in 1631 to Edward and Esther Wigglesworth who made the voyage to Charlestown in 1638 seeking religious freedom in the Colonies and later settled in New Haven Connecticut. Michael had a very strict Puritan parentage. He came to America with his parents at the age of seven, lived in New Haven until he entered Harvard from where he graduated in 1651 and remained a

tutor for three years, counting among his students John Eliot and Increase Mather. While at Harvard, Wigglesworth had a profound religious experience, which led him to leave medicine and peruse divinity. He moved to Malden Church, Massachusetts in 1654 and began preaching, but not formally ordained till two years later in 1656. Meanwhile his father passed away and the son paid a warm tribute to his father's self-sacrificing and pious trust and life-long devotion to service to the ministry in his autobiography. Wigglesworth, a man of small stature, seemed to have inherited a feeble constitution, which delayed his ordination and frequently interrupted his ministry.

Wigglesworth's first work *The Day of Doom* deservedly remains his best known and most widely read work. With its first publication in 1662, the book attained phenomenal success among the readers of the time and for the next century; it held a secure place in Puritan household. Cast in familiar, jingling ballad meter, *The Day of Doom* is a collection of poems on the themes of salvation and damnation with an aim to remind the New Englanders the doctrine of righteousness. Addressing the readers poetically, the prayers are composed in simple verse to make his points easy to remember. However, throughout this collection, it is basically a Puritan doctrine that he elaborates. By modern standards, the poem might seem harsh but readers have to keep in mind that it was the period of newly expanding theology among Puritan Americans. To many critics today, Wigglesworth was a morbid fanatic but the poetry collection holds its place not for any poetic merit but for its discourse on Puritan psychology and doctrine.

His next major work, *Meat out of the Eater*, a less popular work among modern readers, proves Wigglesworth to be a poet of greater breadth and skill with its variety of tone and style. Poems in this volume are personal in focus, revealing the poet's experiences with sin and suffering. But what attracts modern critics much is his 'Diary' written between 1653 and 1657 focussing his inner struggles,

while handling ministry, his marriage, his suffering and anger due to his knowledge of physical as well as spiritual weaknesses. Both his collection of poems—*The Day of Doom* (1662), *Meat Out of the Eater* (1670)—were popular, saw success, and were also reprinted, revised and memorised by generations of New England Puritans.

Wigglesworth is a significant figure and one of Colonial America's foremost religious poets. By the 19th century his plain style, harsh religious Calvinistic doctrine and no real poetic appeal or attribute interested no more critics and scholars. However, despite his literary shortcomings, *The Day of Doom* has earned the title of America's first best-seller, circulating 1800 copies during the first year of publication in 1662. It went through ten editions in the next fourteen decades. Even today, many readers regard it as the best official statement of a Puritan's attempt to apply poetry with the purpose to exhibit his beliefs and lead a life by those. Though to modern readers, his works on Puritan themes may be challenging and are not comfortable due to strict Calvinistic undertones, no one can ignore the significance of Wigglesworth's achievement-associated with the development of Puritan thoughts in America.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: State the significance of Wigglesworth's "The Day of Doom."



1.6 LET US SUM UP

By this time, we have realised that the Colonial or Puritan age of American literature spans the time between the establishment of the first settlement at Jamestown to the outbreak of the American Revolution till the colonists felt a sense of nationalism. The early works in the Puritan colonies were mainly religious that set forth the colonists' views, to defend and promote their visions of religion. Even histories like Cotton Mather's epic

Magnalia Christi Americana (1702) had religious overtones. Puritan poetry was offered to the service of the Almighty. Michael Wigglesworth's *Day of Doom* (1662) was totally theological while Anne Bradstreet's poetry reflected her own piety. Sermons were hugely popular until Calvinism found its last utterance in Jonathan Edwards. The gems of the colonial age who managed without any theological shadow in their writing were Edward Taylor and William Byrd. Taylor's works remained unpublished until two centuries after his death while Byrd's *History* received poor reviews from the target audience.



1.7 FURTHER READING

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1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Many reasons… …some came with a secular venture… …some came to make money in the virgin land… …but majority arrived with a religious aim... …some came to save themselves from bloody religious persecution in England… …some to follow their faith without any compromise... …some to promote true religion in the American wilderness... ...some came to reform, purify and establish Church in America, rejecting the Church of England.

Ans to Q 2: The Puritans came with an intention of settling not of simply exploring the land… …wanted to leave their mark… …create history… …make a place of their own.

Ans to Q 3: Puritanism was a political, social, cultural, intellectual force… ...Puritan age in America lasted upto 1728 till the country came away from just depending on religion as the primary force to growing on economic front... …however religious thoughts and a high sense of Puritan morality continued to influence the American writers.

Ans to Q 4: The native American literature was mostly oral… …consisted of myths… ...but the Puritan Literature had historical values as they record social, intellectual and political growth of the country… ...Puritan authors had a profound effect on subsequent generations born on the land.

Ans to Q 5: Bradstreet's maturity increased with each of her poems expressing her personal feelings… …many of her later poems show impressive intelligence and mastery of the poetic form… …she tried hard to handle the lofty style of the already established male poets, though she is known today for her expressions on issues like faith, grace, and salvation.

Ans to Q 6: His poems deal with the spiritual conflict between the soul and Satan in allegorical ways… …*God's Determinations Touching His*

Elect displays his religious beliefs as a Calvinist in Predestination, Creation, Nativity, Original Sin and Redemption through God… …*Preparatory Meditations before My Approach to the Lord's Supper* is yet another collection of some two hundred poems not discovered until the 20th century.

Ans to Q 7: Without Mather's contributions, Puritan literature of America would have been much poorer… …he was a tragic figure… …his influence on literature was immense but his efforts were confined to his Massachusetts society that no longer exited… …he was one of the outstanding leaders of the early New England Puritan theocracy… … Mather became the symbol of Puritan doctrine—the symbol of an orthodox mindset doomed to fail.

Ans to Q 8: *The Day of Doom* is based on the themes of salvation and damnation… …aim was to remind the New Englanders the doctrine of righteousness, a Puritan doctrine… …*The Day of Doom* is regarded as the best official statement of a Puritan's attempt to apply poetry with the purpose to exhibit his beliefs and lead a life by those.



1.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What are the important aspects of the works of the American authors of the Colonial period? Discuss with reference to at least two of the authors.

Q 2: What does the literature of the Colonial period reflect on the early American aspiration and values?

Q 3: Discuss the contributions of the Puritan authors towards the growth and development of early American literature.

Q 4: Discuss the various social and intellectual contexts of the early literature of America with special reference to one or two authors and their works.

Q 5: Mention some of the important Puritan authors and discuss the Puritan elements expressed in their works.

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UNIT 2: PURITAN BEGINNINGS & FRONTIER EXPERIENCE (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.1 Learning Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 Major Writers

- 2.3.1 William Bradford (1590-1657)
- 2.3.2 Thomas Godfrey (1736-1763)
- 2.3.3 Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)
- 2.3.4 Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)
- 2.3.5 William Byrd II (1674-1744)

2.4 Influences on Later Writers

2.5 Let us Sum up

2.6 Further Reading

2.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

2.8 Possible Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- identify some of the other important authors of the Puritan period
- discuss the contributions of these writers
- find out how the Puritan authors, had influenced American literature as well as its culture so deeply

2.2 INTRODUCTION

We shall read this unit as part of the previous unit. In this unit, we shall read about some of the other important American writers of the Colonial period whom we could not include in the previous unit. We shall have to note that the early English colonists were mostly Puritans who came either to escape religious persecution at homeland or to exercise their faith in a free land. Not until the 1760s, these people started to claim America as

their land and call themselves Americans, distinguishing from their European ancestors. With the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the United States of America was legally born as an independent nation. After many conflicts with the French and English on the issues of territories, in 1789, George Washington became the first elected President and after two years, Washington DC was recognised as the nation's capital. In the previous unit, we have already looked at the social and intellectual history of the colonial period in American literature with reference to some of the authors. However, as we finish reading this unit, we shall also be able to identify some other important authors and examine how they influenced the formation of American literature and culture in the days to come.

2.3 MAJOR WRITERS

The following are some of the other important authors from the Colonial American literature who deserve critical attention.

2.3.1 William Bradford (1590-1657)

Born in a small farming community of Austerfield, Yorkshire in 1590, William Bradford was one of the founders of Plymouth Colony in 1620. He was a signatory of the Mayflower Compact, writer of 'Of Plymouth Plantation' (1651), the most interesting of the narrators of Puritan histories on European settlement in the New World.

With no formal education, Bradford was a self-educated man who had learned several languages, including Hebrew with a purpose to "see with his own eyes the ancient oracles of God in their native beauty." A deeply pious man, Bradford possessed innate literary merit. His active role in the Mayflower voyage to Plymouth, framing the Mayflower Compact, establishing Plymouth Colony and his responsibilities as the governor for long thirty years made him ideally suited to be the first historian of his colony. Form 1630 he started writing a vivid account of the early settlement of the Plymouth Colony known as *Of Plymouth Plantation*, which was published in 1856.

Around 1630, Bradford started compiling his second volume of *Plymouth Plantation*. It was the first work of the period in its tendency to separate religion from secular concerns. Unlike orthodox Puritans, authors of the colony of that time, Bradford never interpreted temporal affairs as the inevitable unfolding of God's wish or great providential plan. Leaving behind the dogmatic temper and religious enthusiasm of the contemporary Puritans, Bradford headed for a middle path for the Plymouth colony between the Holy Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the tolerant secular community of Rhode Island. His History also recorded the first written document of Colonial self-governance in the New England—the 'Mayflower Compact' at a time when the pilgrims were still on board the ship. No doubt, the Mayflower Compact was the harbinger of the Declaration of Independence which was to arrive a century and half later. With the just, clear and compelling description of the first view of the colony's beginning, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (1651) has been a unique source of information about early America, the Puritans' voyage and the challenges the early settlers faced. Today, it is regarded as one of the most important early chronicles of the settlement of New England written "in plain style, with singular regard to the simple truth in all things".



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: State the significance of William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*.

2.3.2 Thomas Godfrey (1736-1763)

Born on his family's farm in Bristol Township, Thomas Godfrey, the American poet-cum-playwright became apprenticed to a watchmaker after his father's early death. He was left to the care of his relations. He had an English education but showed a strong inclination towards poetry and painting. However, he ended up becoming a watchmaker. He devoted himself to the study of

polite letters in his private hours. With great zeal, he read and wrote several poetical scraps, which were later published in the 'American Magazine' and accepted well. He also entered the military services in the Pennsylvanian forces for the campaign expedition against Fort Duquesne. However, while on the frontiers, he composed a poetical epistle addressing a friend. At the end of the expedition, he went to North Carolina and lived there for three years. He engaged in mercantile transactions. During this period, he composed a tragedy in blank verse to be presented at Philadelphia, but he met with several disappointments in business and came back to North Carolina. A few weeks after his arrival, he felt feverish occasioned by riding into the country on a very hot day. He died of this illness on 3rd August 1763. He was only 27.

He was recognised as a colonial playwright and poet and was a significant member of a small intellectual circle in Philadelphia. He was also a founding member of Benjamin Franklin's 1727 Junto club and served as the director of the Library Company of Philadelphia from its establishment in 1731. In 1743, the American Philosophical Society listed him as "Mathematician". *The Court Of Fancy* (1762), his most notable volume of poetry, offers the most favourable example of his poetic merits. The poem shows the influence of both Chaucer and Pope. The design is drawn from Chaucer's *House of Fame* but his art of description is noteworthy. The images are carefully selected and are in perfect harmony with the verse. In 1765 appeared *Juvenile Poems on Various Subjects*, Godfrey's posthumous collection of early works, including his famously known romantic tragedy *Prince of Parthia* that was composed in 1759. It is believed to be the first attempt at dramatic composition in blank verse by a native born American. The work is known to be the earliest American tragedy to be professionally performed on stage at Southwark Theatre, Philadelphia in 1767. The five-act blank verse tragedy, based on Parthian history, is reminiscent of Shakespeare and Marlowe. Godfrey was only 22

when he finished the work. Though the tragedy was a complete failure with its heavy dialogues, stiff language, uninteresting characterisation, the poetical tragedy is the first important dramatic undertaking made in the colonies. The natural flow of poetry in *Court of Fancy* has proved as a work of high credit to American literature, giving much evidence of his distinct poetic power.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 2: Who is Thomas Godfrey?

Q 3: State why Godfrey's Prince of Parthia is important in American Colonial history?

2.3.3 Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

Jonathan Edwards, the American puritan theologian and philosopher, was born in East Windsor, Connecticut. Edward entered the Collegiate School at New Haven (known today as Yale University) and graduated four years later in 1720 as valedictorian. He stayed there to continue his studies in theology. He received his Master's later. Young Edward was unable to accept the Calvinist sovereignty of God and it appeared to him "a horrible doctrine". He believed in the inward communication of the soul with God and dedicated himself completely to Christ. He believed that God is innocent and man can regenerate. He had a symbolic way of looking at things—to him God created the world out of himself by diffusing Himself into time and space. Therefore, everything in the world is an image of God. In 1727, Jonathan Edwards was ordained minister at Northampton and appointed assistant minister to his maternal grandfather Solomon Stoddard. In the same year, he married Sarah Pierpont, a 17-year-old beautiful, witty girl and later they had eleven children.

Two years later, Edwards took charge of one of the largest and wealthiest congregations in the colony upon his grandfather's death, a position Edwards held for twenty long years. Throughout

this time in Northampton, he became a significant figure whose preaching brought two remarkable religious revivals in New England. The first revival was known as the "First Great Awakening", which took place during 1734 and 1735. The second awakening occurred in the early 1740s. These revivals were results of the flood of religious excitement in the colonies when people started realizing their sins. Edwards moved to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where he ministered a small congregation and served as a missionary to the Housatonic Indians. It was here that he returned to study and finished his celebrated work *The Freedom of the Will*. His last position was that of the President of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) in early 1758. He was a popular personality, as the most eminent American philosopher-theologian of his time. Edwards is seen as the last medieval man—a relic of Puritanism and also the first modern American for his vast knowledge of science lighted by Newton—one of the most influential men in Colonial America. Edwards was one of the greatest writers of pre-nineteenth century America. He is best known for his frightening, powerful sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (1741). His sermons had enormous impact and were somewhat dogmatic and medieval.

2.3.4 Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)

Benjamin Franklin was born in Boston, Massachusetts on 17th January 1706, the tenth son of a family of fifteen children. His father earned a living by making candles and soaps. Young Benjamin loved to read, hated his father's career, and later became an apprentice to his printer older brother. After helping his brother compose pamphlets and set type, young Ben sold their products on the streets. At 15, his brother brought out the first newspaper in Boston "The New England Courant". The other two newspapers in the city were reprinted news from abroad. "The New England Courant" had articles, opinions by the printer's friends, advertisements, news of ship schedules, etc. Benjamin had little formal education but he was an avid reader. Fearing rejection from his brother, Benjamin

began writing letters under the pseudonym of **Silence Dogood**, a fictional widow who was full with suggestions and very critical of the world around her. He wrote those letters at night and left those under the print shop door. They were a big hit and after publishing 16 letters, Ben confessed the truth. At this, his brother became jealous of Ben's growing fame. Unable to take any more harassment from his brother, Ben escaped to Philadelphia and found a job of an apprentice printer. By 17, he was a fully skilled printer. With this skill, he went to London and spent several months as a printer. Upon returning to Philadelphia, he borrowed some money and started his own printing business.

In 1929, Benjamin bought the newspaper 'Pennsylvania Gazette' which became a great success in the colonies. It was his most famous publication. He not only printed but contributed pieces and political cartoons to the paper; the cartoons being the first of their kind in America. Benjamin devoted himself to public good and initially gained acclaim for his organisation called Junto or the Leather Apron Club, a young working men's group dedicated to self and civic improvement. He became a public service man initiating a paid city-watch, a voluntary fire department, a library and the American Philosophical Society that promoted scientific as well as intellectual dialogues. Today, the American Philosophical Society is known as one of America's premier scholarly associations. He also joined the Masons. He became a busy social figure of the time.

Benjamin Franklin was a scientist, remembered for the invention of bifocal glasses, swing fins, effective street lighting, lighting rod, a glass armonica, watertight bulkheads for ships and the wood stove. Much later inventors like Thomas A Edison and Alexander Graham Bell followed Benjamin's footsteps and helped to improve people's lives by inventing electricity and telephone. He was a man of many qualities and varied interests with a natural curiosity to know things around him and finding ways to make them work better. His *Autobiography* is the first of its kind in American literary history. It is one of the frankest of all personal records. With a comic tint in it, the Autobiography is today considered a model for

self-improvement. His famous publications were surely the *Pennsylvania gazette* and his very popular *Poor Richard's Almanac* (1732-1757). The latter expressed his sense of humour but never without moral advice. Franklin's prose style was clear, lucid and dignified. He was flexible, which came from his studying the virtues of the masters. He believed in the power of press, using his printing press as a means to bring news and views to the public. He used cartoons to express his new ideas to enable the laymen understand his thoughts. Benjamin's publication reflected his democratic spirit and advised his readers on issues like politics and philosophy. It was a hit with Benjamin's lively writing and witty aphorisms. Apart from the print shop, he also ran a bookstore, which was very enterprising.



LET US KNOW

In the 1750s, Benjamin Franklin started taking interest in politics. He was in England from 1757 to 1775 as a colonial representative. English thinkers, philosophers, artists, litterateurs, which America lacked, inspired the learner-cum-artist-cum-scientist in him. He believed in building a new nation and actively worked for American's independence and helped to draft the Declaration of Independence. He was a true statesman, one of the makers of the nation, considering his vital diplomatic role during the Revolution and the alliance with France. He served as a member of the Constitutional Convention and was elected President of the Pennsylvania Society for promoting the Absolution of Slavery. He died in 1790 at the age of 84. His funeral was attended by 20,000 people.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What is Silence Dogood?

Q 5: Why did Benjamin Franklin use Cartoons?

2.3.5 William Byrd II (1674—1744)

William Byrd II, born in 1674 in Westover, Virginia was a merchant, trader, planter and one of the first Americans to record his appreciation of the Vast American wilderness, linking the natural world to science, unlike the settlers during Byrd's early years, who disdained the wilderness. Young Byrd was lonely and unable to find a place for himself in England. He graduated in 1695, received his law degree from Middle Temple and joined the Bar where he developed a friendship with Sir Robert Southwell. His father's reputation helped him to become a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1697. On his father's death, he returned to Virginia, much against his wish. Upon his return, without any acquaintance in New England, he started suffering from identity crisis. He was unable to identify himself as an English man. However, his American compatriots valued him greatly, admired his reaction in Europe against the unpopular Governor Spotwood. In 1727, Byrd was appointed one of Virginia's boundary commissioners, experiences of which serve as the factual basis of his *History of the Dividing Lin*'. His literary works remained unknown until over 100 years after his demise. His ability to appreciate wilderness indicates refinement and good breeding.

Byrd's *History of the Dividing Line*, which established him as a significant historical figure, is based upon an actual journal that he kept during the surveying trip where he drew the boundary line between Virginia and North Carolina. Byrd maintained the journal regularly and faithfully from 1709. The journal with maps, illustrations, notes on the native flora and fauna along with his private memories served as the basis for his lively *History* in detailing the experiences and achievements of his troop into the heart of America. Byrd never planned to create a book from his accounts of the American wilderness; but with time, it took the shape of a prose work. It started as a long report of the expedition to the Board of Trade. When a friend showed interest in his adventures and difficulties in a letter,

the unexpected impression prompted him to send letters detailing experiences to some well-known educated friends in Europe. At last, he decided to craft a literary account—revealing the issues of his identity crisis as well as his perception of America and the American wilderness, the Indians and the half-savage whites.

Thus came out the *History*, appreciating and celebrating the beauty of American wilderness, a work Byrd is best known for today. His writings show the great interest the Southerners took in the material world— land, plants, animals, Indians and settlers. His writings, full of irony and humour, were like fresh air in the world of colonial literature. The book stands apart from other texts of its age. The way he refers to America's wilderness in the romantic light is refreshing and beautiful and this makes it a significant American text. His interest in wild life, flora and fauna and their characteristics reveal a significant tone. The author believed that his project into the wilderness would prove an important step into the cultivation of the wilderness and provide a better understanding of the Americas and the nation. He considered himself as an explorer, first of the human race and probably the last to attempt it ever. Byrd was very critical of unsophisticated and lazy settlers in the border area— the North Carolinians. However, while writing the *History*, Byrd got a scope for the first time in life to assume all the positive qualities of 'Steddy'— the character representing his own self, which is at odds since his childhood. It provides for himself a solid sense of self-confidence, virtue and independence.



LET US KNOW

The early immigrants had settled in the southern colonies more due to economic opportunities than religious freedom. During that period, the Southern literature catered more to the aristocratic, secular and London readers representing the dominant social and economic systems of the Southern plantations. The Southerners were poor farmers

but the upper class was influenced by the classical, old world ideal for nobles served by slaves. The wealthy class could afford leisure and lead an aristocratic life amidst American wilderness whereas their Puritan contemporaries emphasised on education and hard work. The Southern feudal lords were highly moved by the ideal of the gentlemen who were equally good at managing a form and studying classical literature—a true Renaissance man in America.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Explain the important aspects of Byrd's *History of the Dividing Line.*

Q 7: In what ways were the colonies of Southern America different?

2.4 INFLUENCES ON LATER WRITERS

There is no doubt about the fact that American writing began with the work of English colonists and experiences in the New World aiming at the readers belonging to their country of origin, yet the large body of literature they produced has its significance even today. A good portion of these early works reached the level of literature that influenced later writers profoundly. The truthful account of adventures encountered by Captain John Smith who established Jamestown in his *Description of New England* (1616), the journalistic histories of William Bradford and William Byrd form interesting reading even today. Taylor's metaphysical verses are considered worthy of comparison with George Herbert whereas critics maintain Byrd's witty and urbane observations in his *History* as the best writing of the colonial period. The variously gifted Benjamin Franklin made America literature move a step forward not only by his literary works (his *Autobiography* is first of its kind in American literature) but by founding and promoting newspapers and periodicals.

Like any other colonial literature, American literature too imitated the form and technique of the mother-country. The only difference was the religious passion, frequent reference to Bible (for the authors, the great model of writing was the Bible which was also the model for their life) and the new environment that had given New England writing an identity of its own. Lack of books in the colonies and the rejection of English authors in New England cut themselves off form the finest lyrics and style of English literature. Writings by early colonial writers were already outdated in England but they proved a source of inspiration for the later writers who showed striking originality. Both Puritan authors and later writers of the colonial era who started relying heavily on reasoning and individualism had influenced the subsequent generations of American writers.

The early settlers, the pilgrims, had to fight for life—they were god-fearing but ambitious, hard working people who aspired for earthly success in life too. Life for the Puritans was a mixture of all these (earthly as well as eternal achievement) and they saw God's design rather than deeper spiritual meaning in every little object. In their secular achievement laid the community's success. This idea later influenced the transcendentalist authors deeply.



2.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, and also in the previous unit, we have discussed in some details how American literature in the colonial times, came into formation as can be read through its social and intellectual history of the period. We have learnt that the early settlers, mostly known as the Puritans, had reached the shore of America, discovered the virgin forests and unexplored land mass with its vast wilderness, and started believing that God had purposefully sent them to this blessed land. Like Moses, the Puritan Fathers took the charge of cleaning spiritual corruption by crossing the sea and establishing forms of governments in New England with new laws. We have learnt that important writers like Edward Taylor, Cotton Mather, Michael

Wigglesworth, with their outstanding contributions shaped what we today call the social and intellectual history of American literature in the Colonial period. The Great Awakening in American literature finally brought about the following changes in Puritan theology—it stressed the emotional part of religion, wreaked institutional supremacy, rejected doctrinal orthodoxy, made religion more popular, flexible and democratic in nature, and most importantly it made religion trans-colonial.



2.6 FURTHER READING

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2.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Form 1630, Bradford started writing a vivid account of the early settlement of the Plymouth Colony known as *Of Plymouth Plantation*… …it is the first work of the period in its tendency to separate religion from secular concerns.

Ans to Q 2: A colonial playwright and poet… …a significant member of a small intellectual circle in Philadelphia… …Founding member of Benjamin Franklin's 1727 Junto club… … director of the Library Company of Philadelphia since its establishment in 1731… …the American Philosophical Society listed him as "Mathematician".

Ans to Q 3: *Prince of Parthia* is a Romantic tragedy… …the first attempt at dramatic composition in blank verse by a native born American… …the earliest American tragedy to be professionally performed on stage at Southwark Theatre, Philadelphia… …The five-act blank verse tragedy, based on Parthian history, is reminiscent of the works of Shakespeare and Marlowe.

Ans to Q 4: Silence Dogood is the pen name under which Benjamin Franklin wrote some important letters… …The name referred to a fictional widow who was full with suggestions and very critical of the world around her… …he wrote those letters at night and left them under the print shop door… …they were a big hit and after publishing

Ans to Q 5: Because, he believed in the power of press, using his printing press as a means to bring news and views to the public. He used cartoons to express his new ideas to enable the laymen understand his thoughts.

Ans to Q 6: *History* celebrates the beauty of American wilderness… …also show the great interest the Southerners took in the material world—land, plants, animals, Indians and settlers… …references made to

America's wilderness in the romantic light is refreshing and beautiful… …his interest in wild life, flora and fauna and their characteristics reveal a significant tone as it provides a better understanding of the Americas and the nation.

Ans to Q 7: Some early immigrants had settled in the southern colonies more due to economic opportunities than religious freedom… …the Southern literature catered more to the aristocratic, secular and London readers representing the dominant social and economic systems of the Southern plantations… …the Southerners were poor farmers but the upper class was influenced by the classical, old world ideal for nobles served by slaves… …the Southern feudal lords were highly moved by the ideal of the gentlemen who were equally good at managing a form and studying classical literature—a true Renaissance man in America.



2.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How did the writings of the puritan authors in early Period of Colonial literature contribute towards the growth of American literature? Discuss.

Q 2: How would you judge the significance of William Bradford as an early American writer?

Q 3: How did Benjamin Franklin emerge as a writer in Colonial America? Discuss with reference to some of his important works.

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UNIT 3: TRANSCENDENTALISM AND AMERICAN MODERNISM (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 The Social Context

3.4 The Intellectual Context

3.5 Let us Sum up

3.6 Further Reading

3.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

3.8 Possible Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the literary, social, and cultural influences of authors in American Literature from 1800 to 1945
- assess the intellectual contexts of American literature of the period mentioned.
- discuss the philosophy of transcendentalism of 1830 which is an outcome of the influence of American romanticism and the transcendentalists of the period

3.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the third unit of Block 1 of the course on American literature. As we already have an impression, this unit deals with the history of American literature that traverses through Transcendentalism and ends with American modernism. This unit will help in understanding how America as a nation was born as the result of the evolution of a new, topical, clear prose style in literature. Moreover, this unit also intends to offer you a brief idea of the Romantic age from 1828-1865 (American Literature to American Modernism). Attempts will also be made to discuss the social as well as intellectual background of this age and explore the contributions of the major

American authors during this period. The period between 1828 and 1865 is generally known as the Romantic age in American literature. The authors during this period revolted against the cult of reason and good sense and were inspired by the English Romantics. The democratic spirit was congenial to the rise of romanticism in America. The age is also roughly referred to as the American Renaissance or the age of Transcendentalism. As we finish reading this unit, we shall have learnt that literature during this period portrayed the love of wild American nature, of the past and the Orient. Romanticism helped in shaping the ideas, mindset, thoughts and ideals of the people, especially the young American authors.

3.3 THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

Till the early years of the 17th century, the process of settling down in New England was on and the whole of America had been colonised. The Enlightenment had already made its mark in American literature through political writings and through works of authors emphasizing logic and sense rather than religion. Benjamin Franklin had been a major influence. During the period, the establishment of Harvard University enabled youths to exchange views, ideas and beliefs, publication of newspapers, journals and periodicals. The social, political, economic, religious, cultural issues of the period were conducive to the birth of a nation and growth of a sense of nationalism. The Loyalists continued to be loyal to the British Crown and the Republicans wished independence from the oppressive British rule for the colonies to be within the framework of a strong Federation. Some ten thousand pamphlets were published in this period in a span of twenty years. The result was the evolution of a prose style, which was entirely topical, simple, easy to follow for the masses, yet forceful and clear for both intellectuals and laymen. In the works of these poets, orators and prose writers, democracy found its true voice and some of the significant documents of the nation's history were also authored. Thomas Paine, the most gifted prose writer of the Revolutionary age wrote 'Commonsense' with a strong plea to revolt against the tyrannical English monarchs. Then, Thomas Jefferson, a scholar and statesman, authored "The Declaration of

Independence" that was adopted in the Continental Convention in 1776. Alexander Hamilton wrote 'The Federalist' in defence of the constitution, which served the source of the Constitution. Finally, in 1787, the US Constitution was drafted and in 1789, it was ratified. The early national age (1775—1828) witnessed the foundation of a literature that was truly American. It followed the English style but had significantly distinct themes, characters, backgrounds—which were authentically American. Independent of its British counterparts, the American poetry made a distinct mark on its own.



LET US KNOW

Transcendentalism (1840-1855), which is an offshoot of Romanticism (1800-1855), held the view that intuition and conscience would transcend experience. The transcendentalists brought out a new idea that one who follows intuition and remains faithful to personal vision becomes a more moral, idealistic individual. Thus, many of them were critical about things that were 'evil' and wanted to bring a positive change in the society. Transcendentalism also was the force behind the abolition of slavery.

Many literary figures of the time who belonged to Concord exerted a formidable influence on American cultural life throughout the 19th century. The Transcendentalist Club, established by Ripley and Emerson in 1836, tried to connect diverse minds from different places that believed in transcendentalism and thus gave a chance to be in one place with the best of American thought and art.

The mid-19th century was a period of great civil turmoil and unrest in America. The age witnessed the emergence of a new, proud, and self-confident nation. The public was interested in socio-cultural issues and wanted to find an answer to the political unrest and economic upheaval of the time. The literature of the period was national in its outlook, showing intense loyalty of the authors to the national flag. There was a rapid expansion of the means of communication, which linked all sections of the

state. There was progress in both agriculture and commerce. American ships were on all seas carrying American merchandise. While the North America industrialised rapidly, the South predominantly grew tobacco and cotton, which resulted in a conflict between the North and South that ended in the Civil War.

The Civil War and its aftermath are known as the National Period II in American history when the nation emerged more powerful, more united and more proud with President Lincoln. There occurred profound legal changes during this time, making it a significant era in American legal history. The war on the question of slavery from 1861—1865 ended with the defeat of the South under the able leadership of President Abraham Lincoln. Another significant development of the period was the rise of American democracy. 'Liberty, fraternity and equality' of the French Revolution inspired the Americans. Lincoln offered the classic definition of democracy as "the government of the people, for the people and by the people".

With the increase of wealth, towns and cities sprang up. The increase in the number of quality educational institutions was the most distinctive feature of the time with Cambridge and Boston becoming the seats of learning. Boston, over a period grew into a city of art, culture, literature and theology. Even the South had Charleston, its only literary centre. In addition, New York became the noted industrial as well as cultural centre of America. New York's wealth contributed to the growth of the publishing industry. At the same time, there was an advent of many newspapers. With the growth and spread of trade and industrial prosperity, the standard of living rose and a commercial class came up. Thus, the social and economic lives of the people grew richer. Eventually, they developed interest in philosophy, literature, science and issues related to education, the rights of the poor, of women, of prisoners, etc. The age also experienced a craving for amusement. Theatre groups sprung up in the cities and later the infant American theatre grew up to be a nation-wide success. Following the Civil War, the modern American literature entered into a different period altogether—the age of realism. It was the era of common man and the focus was on their lives and aspirations. Rapid industrialisation, urbanisation

and individualistic society caused anxiety, ennui, boredom, a sense of loneliness, etc., which were the characteristics of the age.

Between 1914 and 1929, the nation entered into another phase—the modern era—and great changes occurred in the state. The Americans were devastated by World War I, the Great Depression and World War II. They saw many great leaders during this time that very ably dealt with issues like depression, war, etc. and managed to keep the American ideals intact. However, unlike the earlier tumults that crisscrossed the lives of the Americans, this time they witnessed the advent of technology in an altogether new form that transformed people's lives. Radio and television broadcasting along with other technological advancements brought great changes. The Jazz age, often described as the period of 'flaming youth', for the younger generation, challenged the traditional society and freed themselves to set a new way of life. Movies were made and people took special interest in sports. Advertisements, in both print and radio, reached a new level. It was an era of progress with the automobile too. The country was witnessing optimism and prosperity.

However, the Great Depression devastated America in 1929—a tragedy that was one of violence, disturbance and poverty. Penniless, workless, Americans were losing hope and the nation's economy completely broke down. The situation changed for the better with President Roosevelt's New Deal programmes that eased the hardship of the people. In 1939, after the bombing of Pearl Harbour, when America joined World War II, there was a major but positive change that had taken place for the American economy. There was demand for people in the army and in the industries to manufacture food, weapons, artillery, ships, airplanes, etc. The Post-war period was a time to re-establish domesticity in the American society. A happy family life became significant to the Americans.

The 60s and 70s were remarkable for the Americans for events like the Bay of Pigs crisis, the Vietnam War, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and the Civil Rights Movement that played a significant role in the lives and minds of the citizens. Then the Watergate scandal and the oil crisis were a matter of great concern and stress for the Americans.

The Cold War remained a threat to America and the Soviet Union was viewed as its major enemy.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Comment on the changes in the social history of America following the Civil War.

Q 2: In what ways did the American cities become the centre of attraction?

Q 3: State some of the characteristics of the modern era between 1914-1929.

3.4 THE INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT

Historically, the Romantic Period in American literature was an era of tensions and turmoil that resulted in the Civil War. However, in literature one gets to see a different, peaceful depiction of life. The American Romanticism was a reaction against the rationalistic philosophy or the philosophy of Enlightenment. Human emotion, intuition, and instincts were emphasised rather than intellect; the individual became the centre of life over art; more emphasis was placed on man's goodness; nature became a source of inspiration and knowledge; man was portrayed as closer to nature than society; democracy and free will of man became matters of prime importance; medieval tales, ancient forms and the Gothic were highlighted in literature. Transcendentalism was a movement within this Romantic Movement that emphasised the importance of nature in man's life. The optimistic tone of Romanticism appealed to some of the most influential transcendentalist American authors like Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman. Aesthetically, romanticism liberated literature from the restrictions imposed by earlier literary philosophies and so came out novels, essays and lectures. Romanticism brought a literary revolution in America. Romanticism found its voice in the poets and novelists of the American Renaissance.

Transcendentalism was a philosophical movement of the 19th century in New England that made a deep impression on the people,

nation and even on Europe. It also symbolised a battle between the young and the old generations and the desire to reform the society and education as well as to assert the emergence of a new national culture. The transcendentalists believed in the essential oneness of all creation; they believed in the innate goodness of man and intuition over individual necessity. They argued that the human conscience is a better guide to the deepest truth and considered that the individual was superior to the tradition and society. They respected the individual spirit and glorified nature. They believed in the omnipotence of God. The principles that the transcendentalists insisted upon were strongly American. The transcendentalists struggled for the abolition of slavery and for women's rights. The transcendentalist movement itself originated around a small town called Concord, Massachusetts, 19 miles from Boston, which was also the first battleground of American Cradle Revolution and of the American independence. Transcendentalism, roughly assigned from 1835—1880, definitely marked the beginning of the American Renaissance— radical/ new thoughts in lively aspects of art, literature, poetry, painting, sculpture, music, architecture of the period.

The 18th century brought notable changes to the literary arena even in England. It was the period of the rise of novels that were authored by the great masters – Defoe, Richardson, Fielding and Scott. Their novels were very popular in America as well. The American writers were profoundly influenced by the English authors. The first professional American novel was a Gothic romance named 'Wieland' (1799) by Charles Brockden Brown (1771 -1810) who adopted the English gothic novel to American settings. Brown along with his gothic romances became a precursor to the American Romance best presented by later writers like Poe, Melville and Hawthorne. However, at that time, every aspiring American writer wanted to be recognised in Europe, especially in England. The two men of letters from New York who adopted European legends to the American context and achieved immense popularity were Washington Irving (1789–1859) and James Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851). Irving won attention by presenting American folklore. His short stories like "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Story of

Sleeping Hollow" in *The Sketch Book* (1819) marked the beginning of a new chapter in literature with typically American pattern. After several years of stay in Spain, he composed 'The Alhambra' (1832)—tales with Moorish flavour.

Another American writer who enjoyed great success like Irving was Cooper who adopted Walter Scott's historical novels to the American context and created Western prototypes. His *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Deer Slayer* (1841) are fine examples of Romances. He composed enduring tales of adventures on the frontier and at the sea. His stories have great epic and mythical power. In fact, he is probably the first American writer to deal with the "man *vs* nature" theme, which would go on to have a deep impact on American literature.

By 1825, William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878) had appeared as America's leading poet with his delicate lyrics, extolling nature and composing philosophical poems, talking about Romanticism in America. His 'Thanatopsis' (1817) and 'To Waterfowl' (1819) reflect his admiration of nature. Combing the style of essay and sketch, Washington Irving created a new genre called short stories; Cowper with his historical romances and Bryant inspired by English romantic poetry went on to describe American landscape and to find moral significance in natural beauty.



LET US KNOW

The influence of Romanticism was to be distinctively noticed in poets like Joseph Rodman Drake, Fitz-Greene Halleck, Henry Wordsworth Longfellow, etc. who wrote moralizing verses and won the hearts of the Americans.

Edgar Allan Poe appeared in the literary scene with his emotional poems, aesthetic themes and tales of horror and mystery, which won him much respect and popularity. He believed in the line of the great English Romantics—the end of poetry is to express the yearning for the beautiful. A number of seminal works of American literature were composed during the 1850s. Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), depicted the gloomy

setting of early Puritanism, the suffering caused by the concealing sin. He used Romance to study the depths of human nature. Herman Melville's classic *Moby Dick* (1851), another example of the American romance, infused into an adventure tale of whaling days offered profound symbolic significance. Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855), with the optimistic principles of American democracy marked the beginning of a new kind of poetry in American literature. Poe was the best exponent of Gothic fiction with its gloomy atmosphere and setting.

You must have understood that the Transcendentalist movement in the 1830s and 40s rejected the conventions of the 18th century philosophy, rationalism and thoughts with members who led many contemporary reform movements led by socialist and communist thoughts and fought for women's and workers' rights, children's education and for several other humanitarian causes. Most of them were born into Unitarianism of England. They were highly influenced by the new literature of England and by the Continent as well as the Orient. Ralph Waldo Emerson has been regarded as the founding father of the Transcendental Movement in America. Tragedies in personal life made Emerson consider both life and world in a different light. He advocated individualism and the inner goodness in man. Thoreau, who meditated in a self-made cabin to have some freedom to compose, was an example of the transcendental life to its fullest potential. By far his most known work of art, *Walden*, composed while he was at Walden Pond entirely alone, is a landmark in American philosophy. The moral earnestness of Puritanism is evident in Emerson's transcendentalism. It was not a philosophical theory in the strict sense of the term but a new concept for the new American democracy—an ethical guide to the young generation of a young nation.



LET US KNOW

The other significant American renaissance authors Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Margaret Fuller and others belonged to the same social circle. All were influenced by one another's creative work. They were all Romantics

with their own themes, ideas and visions. The masterpieces that flowed were Emerson's *Representative Men*, Thoreau's *Walden*, Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Melville's *Moby Dick*, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, etc. A growing circle of readers, especially women readers, was a significant aspect of the period. Although difficult, writing was gradually becoming a vocation for many writers. However, some of them who are considered 'classic' today were virtually unknown during their lifetimes.

Hawthorne's and Melville's masterpieces were densely symbolic, original works of art and need close reading. These are difficult texts for modern readers. Apart from novels and short stories, Hawthorne also contributed to literary theory and criticism. Hawthorne believed that any object have an underlying deeper significance than their obvious meanings. Hawthorne's novels are imbued with suggestive meanings and coloured with imagination.

Unlike English Romanticism, the Romantic Movement in America was slightly delayed (it begun roughly from 1830 and continued till the Civil War), different and basically concentrated in novel as the most fitting genre for the exposition of Romanticism. The romantics found the individual consciousness and imagination very fascinating. Revolting against the previous style where the power of reason was celebrated, romanticism celebrated 'individualism' and the power of the 'self'. Gradually the concentration on the individual mind moved to a deep, modern and open study of the underside of humanity. During mid-19th century, America faced a political unrest that surely played a vital role in the growth of a darker aesthetics in American literature.

Margaret Fuller, besides her support for abolition, women's rights, and overall social equality is also remembered for her contribution towards publishing ventures. She was the main publisher of *The Dial*, a journal that promoted works by prominent Transcendentalists. The journal still holds a high position in the history of American letters. Other major authors of the Transcendentalist Movement were William Henry Channing, George Ripley, Jones Very, Amos Bronson Alcott, Convers Francis, Elizabeth Peabody and Frederick Henry.

During the second half of the 19th century, a school of thought called Realism swept over Europe in the arts, music and literature. There came a new generation of artists who composed works with a new approach to matter and character. They made an effort to replicate the contemporary view and true side of reality. They were interested in creating something new that reflected the modern city life and the American population. In literature, mainly novel as a genre came out bright. These were psychologically complicated, multifaceted, densely meaningful, composed in journalistic techniques and with layered characters and reflected inner workings of human mind, delicate play of emotions, conflicting impulses and motivations that very nearly replicate the daily tribulations of being human. In literature, a subgenre called Social Realism, following Marxist and Socialist ideas and thoughts came into existence. Major American writers during the period were Mark Twain, Henry James, Edith Wharton, Stephan Crane, William Dean Howells, and Horatio Alger Jr.

Mark Twain was known for his faithful reproduction of vernacular/ natural speech patterns and vocabulary. Rejecting the elite class, Twain focused on middle and lower classes of the society for his characters. William Dean Howells, the editor of Atlantic Monthly that promoted other realistic rising writers, wrote novels reflecting American Realism. His 'The Rise of Silas Lapham' contains ideas of Realism like honest narratives. Henry James practiced realism in fiction most skilfully. He was highly influenced by his brother William James, a noted figure in the history of human psychology.

By the end of the 19th century, Realism gave birth to another literary form called Naturalism. With Naturalism, authors looked to certain factors like heredity, social conditions, environment, history, etc. to define characters. In Naturalism, there are some significant aspects that determine man's actions in life. French novelist and playwright Emile Zola is hailed as the pioneer of the Naturalist movement proper. Stephen Crane's 'Maggie: A Girl of the Streets' is often regarded as the first true Naturalist work in America. Frank Norris who had been influenced by the evolutionary theory of man and Edith Wharton who portrayed a world devoid of free will were two major Naturalists.

At the turn of the 20th century, the group of thinkers known as the Lost Generation marked the age of American Modernism. Profoundly affected by the World War I, intellectuals struggled to find the meaning of life in the world amidst chaos. Literature of the age expresses the disillusionment, frustration and pessimism. Writers turned the mind's eye inward and tried to record the inner space of the human consciousness. Major Modernists include Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, William Faulkner, William Carlos, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald and several others. The authors adopted simple, day-to-day language in their works. Joyce's 'Ulysses' and Eliot's 'The Waste Land' are considered examples of the experimental mode of the Modernists—the "stream of consciousness" technique. It deals with the self and inner thoughts. Contrary to the works of the Lost Generation, writers who were full of cynicism and alienation, by mid-century, after the Second World War, there came up a new generation of writers with optimism after a long gap in history



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Write briefly about the characteristics of American Romanticism.

Q 5: How did the English authors influence their American counterparts?

Q 6: What are the characteristics of the Realist literature from America?

Q 7: How did Emerson's ideas influence his contemporaries and later writers?



3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have tried to deal with the history of American literature that traverses through Transcendentalism and ends with American modernism. The reference made to the social and intellectual contexts of American Transcendentalism and Modernism must have helped us to

understand that America as a nation was born as the result of the evolution of a new, topical, clear prose style in literature. However, this unit has also offered a brief idea of the Romantic age from 1828-1865 (American Literature to American Modernism). The authors revolted against the cult of reason and good sense and were inspired by the English Romantics. The democratic spirit was congenial to the rise of romanticism in America. We have learnt that the age is also roughly referred to as the American Renaissance or the age of Transcendentalism. We shall in the following unit, discuss the contributions of the major American authors of this period between 1828 and 1865, which is generally known as the Romantic age in American literature.



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3.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The period following the Civil War is known as the National Period II in American history… …the nation emerged more powerful, more united and more proud with President Lincoln… …significant era in American legal history… …the war on the question of slavery from 1861—1865 ended with the defeat of the South under the able leadership of President Abraham Lincoln… …the period also saw the rise of American democracy based on 'Liberty, fraternity and equality'… …Lincoln offered the classic definition of democracy as "the government of the people, for the people and by the people."

Ans to Q 2: With the increase of wealth, towns and cities sprang up… …with the increase in the number of quality educational institutions Cambridge and Boston became the seats of learning… …New York became the noted industrial as well as cultural centre of America… …advent of many newspapers, growth and spread of trade and industrial prosperity… …the social and economic lives of the people in the cities grew richer.

Ans to Q 3: The modern era witnessed the advent of technology transforming people's lives… …Radio and television broadcasting along with other technological advancements brought great changes… …emergence of the Jazz age, often described as the period of 'flaming youth' challenged the traditional society and freed themselves to set a new way of life… …movies were made and people took special interest in sports… ..advertisements, in both print and radio, reached a new level… …it was an era of progress with the rise in the automobile industry.

Ans to Q 4: Unlike English Romanticism, the American Romanticism began roughly from 1830 and continued till the Civil War… …different and basically concentrated in novel, not poetry, as the most fitting genre for the exposition of Romanticism… …the romantics found the individual consciousness and imagination very fascinating… …romanticism celebrated 'individualism' and the power of the 'self'.

Ans to Q 5: The English realist writers of 18th century–Defoe, Richardson, Fielding and Scott were very popular in America… …every aspiring American writer of the time wanted to be recognised in Europe, especially in England… …two men of letters from New York who adopted European legends to the American context and achieved immense popularity were Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper… …Irving's short stories like "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Story of Sleeping Hollow" in *The Sketch Book* (1819) marked the beginning of a new chapter in literature with typically American pattern.

Ans to Q 6: The Realist writers of America composed works with a new approach to matter and character… …they were interested in creating something new that reflected the modern city life and the American population… …the novels are psychologically complicated, multifaceted, densely meaningful, composed in journalistic techniques, used layered characters reflecting inner workings of the human mind… …major American realists include names like Mark Twain, Henry James, Edith Wharton, Stephan Crane, William Dean Howells, Horatio Alger Jr.

Ans to Q 7: To Emerson America was left "unsung" and poets must compose poems on it… …Emerson's concepts of self-reliance, liberty, nature, conformity and assertion of individualism inspired Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* and *Walden*… ...his balance between human, nature and spirit directly influenced Hawthorne, Margaret Fuller, Chas. A. Dana, G. W. Curtis etc. … ...indirect influence on the writing of Longfellow, Holmes, Whittier, Lowell, etc. with the idea and aspirations of his new theology.



3.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the basic principles of American Transcendentalism. Is Transcendentalism a theme or a view of life that influenced the authors of America?

Q 2: What are some of the features of Modernism in the context of America? Distinguish the major Modernist writers and assess their contributions.

Q 3: How did the contemporary historical and intellectual background influence American literature in the 19th century? Discuss.

Q 4: Why is T. S. Eliot considered synonymous with Modernism? Discuss.

Q 5: Transcendentalism was a philosophical movement of the 19th century in New England that made a deep impression on the people, nation and even on Europe. Discuss.

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UNIT 4: TRANSCENDENTALISM AND AMERICAN MODERNISM (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 Major Writers

- 4.3.1 Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)
- 4.3.2 Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)
- 4.3.3 Mark Twain (1835-1910)
- 4.3.4 Henry James (1843-1916)
- 4.3.5 Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965)
- 4.3.6 Stephen Crane (1871-1900)

4.4 Influences on Later Writers

4.5 Let us Sum up

4.6 Further Reading

4.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

4.8 Possible Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- distinguish the major authors of the age, their influence on the social change
- provide an analysis of their specific contributions to American literature
- assess their contribution to American literature in the subsequent periods.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we have discussed the social and intellectual contexts of Transcendentalism and American Modernism. In this unit, which needs to be studied along with the previous, we shall try to identify the important American writers of the period and examine how their contributions

led to the enrichment of America literature with all its vigour and strength during the period under discussion.

4.3 MAJOR WRITERS

The following are the most important authors of American Transcendentalism and Modernism.

4.3.1 Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

A transcendentalist poet, philosopher, lecturer, essayist, Emerson was born in Boston in 1803 and raised in a Unitarian household in Massachusetts. Emerson's ancestors had been in America for seven generations, dating back to the early days of immigration from England. Both his father and grandfather had been clergymen, following which he became clergy of a church in Boston. In 1832, he resigned his pulpit as he could no longer serve the Sacrament of Communion. He married in 1829 but his wife died in 1831. Following the two incidents, Emerson travelled the whole of Europe for two years and begun to absorb the philosophical ideas of the German idealists as well as of the English giants—Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Carlyle—who became his close friends. Then he turned to Platonism, Neo-Platonism, and to the teachings of Swedenborg (1688-1772)—the Swedish scientist, philosopher, theologian and mystic.

Upon his return from Europe, he moved to Concord from Boston and armed with his new conviction, carried forward with the entries in is journal, which he had continued since his undergraduate years. Emerson started public lecturing as a career and writing became his life's passion. The ten-year span from 1834 through 1844 was the time of Emerson's literary flowering. Initially, published anonymously as a little book named 'Nature' (1836) and his two seminal orations, 'The American Scholar' (1837) and 'The Divinity School Address Delivered Before the Senior Class' in Divinity College, Cambridge (1838) established his premises for the doctrine

of Transcendentalism and the principles of his whole canon of writing for which he is famous today. He stood in the centre of Transcendentalism in Concord. Two series of 'Essays' (1841-1844) and 'Representative Men: Seven Lectures' (1850) variously dramatised the basic idea of Transcendentalism and acknowledged their implications. Some poems, essays and dozen other lectures comprise most of Emerson's published writings. Together with Margaret Fuller, he edited a magazine, 'The Dial' from 1842 to 1844 reflecting the ideas, principles and articles relating to the Transcendentalist Movement. After about 1870, Emerson's declining health and mental stress limited his literary activities. Five more titles, essays, ten volumes of his journals and six volumes of his letters were published posthumously. Emerson is hailed as a religious teacher, original thinker, great orator and author. He achieved a reputation, which reached a high point at the time of his death in 1882. Emerson believed in the "Over-Soul".

In the first half of the 18th century, America had believed in the rationalistic philosophy—the philosophy of Enlightenment that regarded Man as a rational being and could discover the ultimate truth only through intellectual enquiry. Romanticism came as a reaction to that, emphasizing the emotional, institutional and instinctual element in human personality. Aesthetically, Romanticism liberated literature from the bondage imposed by rationalism. Literature became spontaneous, imaginative and represented man as a vehicle to lead to the Divine Spirit. To Emerson, the universe and the human spirit were the expressions of God and people and given the chance, they could spur divine inspiration and freedom, truth and knowledge.

Emerson had a deep interest in the sacred writings of the East since his Harvard days. He believed in the concept of Selfhood in the Hindu scriptures according to which the central core of one's self is identifiable with the cosmic whole, namely, God. He was also influenced by the Confucianism and Islamic Sufi poetry. Neo-Platonism that believes in the emplacement of spirit over matter

and an ascending hierarchy of spiritual values rising to God on top impressed Emerson. He believed in the moral earnestness, the faith that nature confides in man, the beauty and harmony of God and their importance on man's duty to glorify the power that has created him. Though he never intended to be a philosopher, today Emerson is considered one of the original thinkers of the age, who poetically expressed his ideas on individualism, non-conformity and on the harmony between men and nature.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How did Emerson's sojourn in Europe help him as a writer?

Q 2: Briefly comment on American Romanticism.

4.3.2 Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

Henry David Thoreau, the American Transcendentalist, philosopher, abolitionist, naturalist, essayist, and poet was born in Concord, Massachusetts in 1817. He attended Harvard but could not make many friends due to his apparently indolent nature. He returned to Concord and worked in his father's factory. Later he took up lecturing and refined the lectures into essays in a direct conversational tone. He also wrote for periodicals on myriad topics like poetry, economy, anecdotes, animals, etc. To find solitude and simplify his life, he chose to live close to nature. He spent two years in a self-built cabin on the edge of Walden Pond on a property belonging to his friend Emerson. For his ever-questing mind, it was an experiment in self-reliance rather than an adopted way of life. He tested the doctrine of self-reliance and his own philosophy of life. The Walden years were his most intense days where he was genuinely his own self—the poet in word and act. Nature became his area of interest and study. Some of his early writings include *A Natural History of Massachusetts* (1842), *Sir Walter Raleigh* (1843), *Thomas Carlyle and His Works* (1847).

The occupation of a land surveyor, which he took up in 1850s to make ends meet, enabled him to come closer to natural surroundings and from the experiences came his book *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Reverse* (1849), which was a memorial based on a river trip he had taken with his brothers and his essay *Walking* (1861) was a detailed journal account of his travel. Then followed 'Cape Cod' in 1865 based on a series of excursions he took to the Atlantic seaside town to study people and the Cap's flora and fauna. He was particularly interested in frontiers and Indians.

He was a supporter of Darwin's theory on Evolution and some of his writings like "The Succession of Forest Trees' (1860), 'Autumnal Tints' and 'Wild Apples—The History of the Apple Tree' (1862) reflect his deep observation and detailed analysis of botanical, meteorological and geographical elements in Nature which was quite uncommon during his time. Thoreau's most influential and famous essay was 'On the Duty of Civil Disobedience' (1849) where he states, "The government is beta which governs least". He was uncompromising in his war against materialism, opportunism and hypocrisy. Thoreau's writings greatly inspired countless individuals including Martin Luther King Jr and Mahatma Gandhi. Thoreau took up political issues promptly and spoke publicly. Many of his lectures published including 'Paradise to be Regained' (1843), 'Slavery in Massachusetts' (1854) where he lectured against slavery and 'A Plea for Captain John Brown' (1859) where he supported John Brown for its abolition. He also wrote on many social causes to reform the society including civil rights, nature conservancy, etc. He died of tuberculosis in 1862.

Walden (1854) is the best known work of Thoreau. It is a definitive text on Thoreau's own philosophy of life, what he believed in and how he lived it. He was critical of the contemporary industrialised, urbanised society. However, as a transcendentalist, he had firm faith on man's inherent dignity and nobility and that man would acknowledge his oneness with Nature. However, he did not

believe on mass reforms. If each individual reforms himself, society will reform automatically. To him, crime could not be abolished by legislative measures. There is Divine law governing each individual and he has to follow the voice of his conscience. Thoreau was critical of rapid growth of large-scale industries as he saw man turning into mere tools. To him, life is beautiful if lived in simplicity, faith, truth and innocence. A significant message in Thoreau's text that man's spiritual quest to find harmony within himself reflects directly in his social, cultural and political surroundings.



LET US KNOW

Other major transcendentalists of the age include the following:

Margaret Fuller (1810-1850),
William Henry Channing (1810-1884),
George Ripley (1802-1880),
Emile Dickinson (1830-1886),
Walt Whitman (1819-1892),
Jones Very (1813-1880),
Amos Bronson Alcott (1799-1888),
Convers Francis (1795-1863),
Elizabeth Peabody (1804-1894),
Frederick Henry Hedge (1805-1890).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Write in short about Thoreau's nature writings.

Q 4: In what way, is Walden a significant contribution of Thoreau?

4.3.3 Mark Twain (1835-1910)

One of the major Realists of American fiction, Samuel Langhorne Clemens, who wrote under the pen name Mark Twain,

was the early pioneer of Realism. Born in Missouri he spent his early days on the west bank of the Mississippi, which was in his own words "a heavenly place" that became his inspiration for writing. At 12, he left school on his father's death and went to a newspaper, turned an apprentice to a printer where he experienced the magic of words. In 1857, he became a team boat pilot who had full knowledge of an ever-changing Mississippi. Due to hostilities, he gave up his career on the river in 1861 and joined a confederate militia group fighting against slavery, which too broke up. Then he returned to journalistic humour where he was at his best. In 1863, he started publishing his writing under the pen name. By 1866, he became a public speaker, which helped him as a writer for "Mark Twain came to write by ear, testing his book by reading aloud".

His travel narrative *The Innocents Abroad* (1869) was an instant success. Besides, his travel letters to the *San Francisco Alta California* and the *New York Tribune*, describing his tour of Europe, Egypt and the Holy Land, ridicules the foreign sights and manners. In 1871, with his wife he moved to Hartford, Connecticut, which proved the most productive period for him. Written in collaboration with Charles Dudley Warner, *The Gilded Age* (1873) was Twain's first attempt at writing a novel. As the title indicates, the book satirises the selfishness, moneymaking plans of the decades just after the Civil War. In 1876 came out *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, representing Twain's major book of childhood memories; the other two being– *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), commonly considered as his greatest books and some of the most frequently banned books in schools of that age for using offensive language and Huck's casual morals. However, being a realist, Twain was just representing honest, colloquial speech. On a deeper level, the novel asks for the fundamental equality for all and sketches universal aspirations of all races. The book with humorous parody and faithful reproduction of vernacular speech patterns, inaugurated a new era of writing. He is

noteworthy for his memorable characters belonging to middle and lower classes.

Financial difficulties compelled him to set out on a world lecture tour in 1895 to places like India, South Africa and Australia, which eventually helped him pay his debts off. By this time, he became an international figure. As a public figure, he started enjoying people's love and attention and continued to cynically criticize America's foreign policy. Personal bereavements turned him into a pessimist. His later novels were just echoes of earlier works. His growing pessimism and gloomy views on life, beliefs, and selfish human motives became apparent in his last notable fiction 'The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson' (1894), which was about racial prejudices in the American society. His later works were far from humorous treat of young Twain. Oxford honoured him with the degree of Doctor of Letters in 1907. He died in 1910 of heart disease.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Why is Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* considered a seminal text?

4.3.4 Henry James (1843—1916)

Henry James, the noted essayist, critic, author and an accomplished practitioner of Realism in American fiction was born in 1843 in the city of New York. His father, also an intellectual, knew Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Carlyle and Longfellow and other influential thinkers of the time very well. No doubt, they affected his son's life profoundly. A student of art in New Port, he spent a year at Harvard Law School. A voracious reader of French, Russian, English and American classic literature, James decided to become a writer and in 1865, he published *The Story of a Year* in the Atlantic Monthly. 1871 witnessed the publication of his first novel *Watch and Ward* (1871) in a serialised form in the Monthly. He left America, visited

Paris and settled down in London in 1876. He continued to compose short stories, novels, one novella and a critical essay. Arguably, his most famous work, the novella *American Daisy Miller* (1879) was followed by *The Europeans*, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *The Bostonians* (1886). His other works include *A Little Tour In France* (1884), *The Aspern Papers* (1888), *The Reverberator* (1888), *The Tragic Muse* (1890), *The Pupil* (1891), *Sir Dominick Ferrand* (1892), *The Death of the Lion* (1894), *The Coxon Fund* (1894), *The Altar of the Dead* (1895), *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), *The Ambassadors* (1903), *What Maisie Knew* (1897), *The Awkward Age* (1899), *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Beast in the Jungle* (1903), *The Golden Bowl* (1904), etc. His autobiographies include *A Small Boy And Others* (1913), *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914), and *The Middle Years* (1917). He received honorary degrees from Harvard and Oxford Universities in 1911 and 1912 respectively. He became a British citizen in 1915 after the outbreak of World War I. He died of pneumonia on 28 February 1916, the year he was awarded the Order of Merit by King George V.

James's works have inspired other authors and adaptations to the stage and screen. His novels are very intricate featuring completely realistic characters. His stories and novels are self-contained and self-explanatory. He was noted for his ability to dispense with commentary or subjectivity within his narratives. Readers can see the events happening through the eyes of the characters. His characters are highly developed, layered and real; they are motivated by emotions, moods, interests, desires, and fears that trigger turning points and climaxes. He was admired for the simple and direct language, which was a feature of his style. He dealt with many themes like freedom, feminism, morality, politics, greed, power, class and status, the exploitation of the New World by the Old, etc. He employed narrative techniques like internal monologue and point of view to expand the readers' enjoyment of character perception and insight. No doubt, his brother William

James, who was a known figure in the early history of human psychology in America, must have influenced Henry's creative development.



LET US KNOW

Other major American realist writers include the following:

William Dean Howells (1837-1920)

Stephen Crane (1871-1900)

Horatio Alger, Jr (1832-1899)

Edith Wharton (1862-1937)

John Griffith "Jack" London (1876-1916)

John Ernst Steinbeck, Jr. (1902-1968)

Benjamin Franklin Norris, Jr. (1870-1902)

Theodore Herman Albert Dreiser (1871-1945)

Upton Beall Sinclair, Jr. (1878-1968) etc.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What are the characteristics of Henry James' works?

4.3.5 Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965)

You have already read about Eliot in Semester III. One of the 20th century's most cited poets, Thomas Stearns Eliot, was also a renowned essayist, publisher and playwright and literary and social critic who achieved numerous awards and honours in his lifetime, including the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948. He was in St. Louis, Missouri in 1888 and attended Harvard University before leaving America to study philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1910. He earned his Master's degree in English Literature and contributed several poems to 'The Harvard Advocate'.

In 1914 he settled in England where he met Ezra Pound, a contemporary poet who was first to recognize his poetic genius. His first book of poems, *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917) immediately established him as a leading poet of the period. 'The Waste Land' (1922) was Eliot's another famous and oft-quoted work, which is today considered as the single most influential poetic work of the 20th century. His use of poetic techniques like collage, extreme concision and precise visualisation and use of unusual, unconventional sources for inspiration revalorised literature. His major collection of poems include *Poems* (1920); *Poems 1909-1925* (1925), "Ash Wednesday" (1930), *Four Quartets* (1943); *On Poetry and Poets* (1957); *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (1963). His vast collection of works on literary and social criticism include *The Sacred Wood* (1920), *For Lancelot Andrewes* (1928), *Selected Essays 1917–32* (1932), "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism" (1933), "After Strange Gods" (1934), *Elizabethan Essays* (1934), *Essays Ancient and Modern* (1936) and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1940). Eliot was also an important playwright. His plays include *The Rock: A Pageant Play* (1934); *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935); *The Family Reunion* (1939); *The Cocktail Party* (1950); *The Confidential Clerk* (1954); and *The Elder Statesman* (1959). Eliot was the editor of the *Egoist* (1917–1919) and later also published his own quarterly literary journal *Criterion* which is now considered as one of the most acclaimed publications in the genre.

For many, the name Eliot is synonymous with modernism. Eliot's poetry made a departure with the past tradition. His use of interior monologue, fragmented structure, and startling figurative language, focus on form, rejection of older literary forms that seemed outdated and diction that seemed too artificial to suit an era of technological innovations, wonders and global violence, use of myth to express modern experiences are features of his poetry. After World War I began an era of profound disillusion and artists expressed the exhaustion and cultural crisis of the time in art. Eliot's

early and experimental poetry depicts a bleak and barren soullessness. His critical works set the aesthetic standards for the New Criticism in literature. Eliot's reputation began to grow and by 1930, he was the most dominant figure in poetry and literary criticism and 20th century's most profound figure in literature. He became a British subject in 1927 and died in London in 1965.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: Which are the specific qualities of T. S. Eliot as a writer?

Q 8: Name some of the important plays of Eliot.

4.3.6 Stephen Crane (1871–1900)

Poet, author, but primarily a journalist, Stephen Townley Crane (1871–1900) was born in Newark, New Jersey to a Methodist minister. He composed fiction, essays, poems and plays, which are remarkable works in realism as well as naturalism in American literature. His first novel, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893), is one of the best examples of naturalistic American novel with a realistic and scientific narrative style without any preaching. It did not prove to be a bestseller, yet managed to gain attention by William Dean Howells. He was at once noticed as a new talent in American literature.

Started as a serial, his haunting Civil War novel, 'The Red Badge of Courage' (1895) gained Crane almost instant popularity and respect. He continued to achieve success with *The Black Riders and Other Lines* (1895), *The Little Regiment* (1896), *The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky* (1897), *The Third Violet* (1897), *The Blue Hotel* (1898), *War Is Kind and Other Lines* (1899), *The Monster and Other Stories* (1899), *Active Service* (1899), *The Open Boat* (1898), etc. His reporting career offered him chance to see life in slums and on battlefields. However, he could not enjoy the love and attention of the public much as, having neglected his health, Crane died at the

age of twenty-eight. Thus, he had a short life but an eventful one, highly respected by authors like Henry James, H. G. Wells, Joseph Conrad, Ernest Hemingway and several others. Today he is hailed as a champion of the common man, a realist, and a symbolist.

4.4 INFLUENCES ON LATER WRITERS

Some of the major concepts of Transcendentalism (1840-1855) had huge impact on American literature. The most significant influence that the philosophical movement had on the later generation was the affirmation of the right of individuals. Transcendentalists were strong believers of individualism, which was reflected in their resistance to government and to religion and social norms. They inspired the abolitionist, civil rights and conscientious objector movements of the 19th and the 20th century. Transcendentalism had an impact on American culture and social life too, with its principles of individualism and self-reliance.

Emerson, hailed as the father of Transcendentalism, had an enormous influence on Walt Whitman. The very first line of the poem 'Songs of Myself' was "I celebrate myself" reflects the poet's creed of individualism. The other principles and beliefs of the movement like self-improvement, spiritualism and moral courage not only touched Americans but writers like Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein, Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald, Willa Sibert Cather, etc. Before the Civil War, the movement, for its main ideas and concerns, acted as a guiding force in American lives and letters. Ideas like self-reliance, democracy, responsibility, optimism, etc. form part of America's cultural practices and political attitudes even today.

Realism that believes in presenting story and style in an unembellished way not only had significant effects on contemporary art, literature and culture but also had become a dominant trend during Modernism in 1920s. Modernist fictionists modified and imaginatively enlarged the basic idea of the Realists, namely truthful representation of American life and people. Realist writers William Dean Howells, Stephen Crane, Edith Wharton, Henry Adams, Horatio Alger, etc. attempted to "give

a comprehensive picture of modern life" and portrayed images showing different classes, manners, and stratifications of life in America. In Realism, the characters were more important than the subject matter; no poetic or decorative language was used as characters were average men; no sentimental and dramatic scenes were portrayed.

The Realists were followed by Naturalists like Benjamin Franklin Norris, Jr., Theodore Herman Albert Dreiser, Harry Sinclair Lewis, etc. The Naturalists presented reality without illusion and imagination. They presented an objective, scientific and detached view of life, which was also followed by the Modernists. They portrayed the American urban life and attempted to explore the fate of the people impacted by the rapid industrialisation in America. These aspects of Naturalism survived into Modernism. The Naturalists believed that social situations, environment, heredity, etc. play a tremendous role in shaping man's life and character. Crane's novel "Maggie, A Girl of the Streets" (1893) is a classic example of Naturalism. Hemmingway's early works show his Naturalist influence. The themes of his novels - the hero being tested by extreme circumstances and fight to live without any self-delusion are borrowed from the Naturalist writers.

The Realists and Naturalists of the late 19th century influenced the Modernists of the 1920s by holding a mirror to the contemporary American life and people without being judgmental and sentimental. The Modernist writers consciously attempted to break from traditional modes of art, literature and culture and experimentation in new forms of narrative. Modern writings were pessimistic in tone regarding issues dealt with by writers from real life. Man's psychological dilemma, his struggle to fit into the society touched by urbanisation, rapid technological changes and industrialisation, isolation and dehumanisation of modern man after the World War I were represented in the works. They found modern life horrific, chaotic and fertile. Eliot's poems are full of a sense of loss and despair.

Modernist authors used the "stream of consciousness" technique as a tool to present inner thoughts of the complex characters. The Modernist authors promoted and combined the individualism of the Transcendentalists, the physical and psychological accuracy of the Realists and scientific

exploration of various aspects from the Naturalists. Modern writers like Hemingway, Faulkner, and F. Scott Fitzgerald bought the modernistic renaissance by employing both Realistic and Naturalistic techniques in writings. Like the Realists, Modernists focused on changes in the society. However, Faulkner wrote about the connection between environment and fate very strongly. F. Scott Fitzgerald addressed the problems that the society faced through symbolism. Modernism has continued to influence and shape the later generation of writers by making art a form of Cultural Revolution.

Thus, though these literary movements were separated by several years, the influence on later writers is quite prominent.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: What are some of the features of Realism in the context of American literature?

Q 10: What are some of the features of Naturalism in American literature?

Q 11: Based on which aspects would you like to read Modernism in American literature?

Q 12: How did the ideas of Transcendentalism had an impact on American culture and social life?



4.5 LET US SUM UP

By this time, we have learnt that the period is also referred to as the American Renaissance. Authors like Emerson, Thoreau, Poe, Longfellow, Hawthorne, Melville, etc. created original works that helped shape the ideas, ideals and literary aims of many American writers. The Realistic Period (1860-1890), just after the Civil War, tried to depict a complete picture of the contemporary society. Henry James and William Dean Howells's writings portrayed the changes in the American society, culture, economy and life and also criticised American morality and ethics with an aim to stimulate change. Contrary to the romantic fiction that focused on the ordinary and

the commonplace realistic fiction by authors like Mark Twain, Henry James, Bret Harte, and Kate Chopin forced the readers to believe that such characters actually exist. The characters were complex and the events realistic, not sensational or melodramatic anymore.

Closely related to Realism was Naturalism (1900-1914), the movement that sought to replicate a believable everyday reality. It claimed to give an even more accurate depiction of life than realism with an attempt to present life's truths. However, it was the ugliness and cruelty, rather a pessimistic view of life that the naturalists depicted. The readers are thus left to make their own conclusion about life. Therefore, writings by Naturalist authors like Stephen Crane, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser etc. are blunt, crude, and tragic since the characters in their works act and behave according to their heredity and environment.

Between the two World Wars American literature entered into the Modernist Period (1914–1939). Modernism was highly influenced by Realism and often referred to as an extension of naturalistic ideas. Artists were disillusioned by the effect of World War I and they not only tried to depict the events accurately, but also illustrated the positive aspects. After the period of crisis was over, artists attempted to explore spiritualism in men and the value of his society and institutions. Symbolism and the stream of consciousness techniques were extensively employed by the modernists to paint dehumanisation of civilisations. American Modernists like T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Langston Hughes, W. E. B. DuBois, Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, Edna St. Vincent Millay, E. E. Cummings, etc., who were stunned by the destructive power of war, and questioned the future of humanity. They also explored the changes brought in by the machines in men's lives. The authors could also see that with increased capitalism every individual was moving towards loneliness. They created a literature with a combination of scientific reasoning, un-idealistic ideas, and physical and psychosomatic examination that highlighted a society aiming to help American society adjust, define, and heal.



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4.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Emerson was introduced to the philosophical ideas of the German idealists as well as of the English giants—Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Carlyle—who became his close friends.

Ans to Q 2: Romanticism came as a reaction to rationalism… ….emphasis on the emotional, institutional and instinctual elements in human personality… …Romanticism liberated literature from the bondage imposed by rationalism… …literature became spontaneous, imaginative and represented man as a vehicle to lead to the Divine Spirit.

Ans to Q 3: Thoreau's career as a land surveyor enabled him to come closer to natural surroundings… …*A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Reverse* (1849) is based on a river trip he had taken with his brothers… …his essay *Walking* (1861) was a detailed journal account of his travel… …undertook a series of excursions to the Atlantic sea-side town to study people and the Cap's flora and fauna… …he was a supporter of Darwin's theory on Evolution… …works like "The Succession of Forest Trees' (1860), 'Autumnal Tints' and 'Wild Apples—The History of the Apple Tree' (1862) reflect his deep observation and detailed analysis of botanical, meteorological and geographical elements in Nature.

Ans to Q 4: *Walden* reflects Thoreau's own philosophy of life… …he was critical of the contemporary industrialised, urbanised society… …as a transcendentalist, he had firm faith on man's inherent dignity and nobility… …oneness with Nature… …he believed that here is Divine law governing each individual and he has to follow the voice of his conscience.

Ans to Q 5: *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* represents Twain's major book of childhood memories… …along with *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) this book is commonly considered his greatest work… …the novel asks for the fundamental equality for all and sketches universal aspirations of all races… …the book with humorous parody and faithful reproduction of vernacular speech patterns, inaugurated a new era of writing… …this book is noteworthy for his memorable characters belonging to middle and lower classes.

Ans to Q 6: James's literary works are self-contained and self-explanatory… …he was noted for his ability to dispense with commentary or

subjectivity within his narratives… …readers can see the events happening through the eyes of the characters… …his characters are highly developed, layered and real… …he was admired for the simple and direct language… …he dealt with themes like freedom, feminism, morality, politics, greed, power, class and status, the exploitation of the New World by the Old, etc… …he used internal monologue and point of view to expand the readers' enjoyment of character perception and insight.

Ans to Q 7: His use of poetic techniques like collage, extreme concision and precise visualisation and use of unusual, unconventional sources for inspiration revalorised literature of the time.

Ans to Q 8: *The Rock: A Pageant Play* (1934); *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935); *The Family Reunion* (1939); *The Cocktail Party* (1950); *The Confidential Clerk* (1954); and *The Elder Statesman* (1959).

Ans to Q 9: Realism departs from the nostalgic and idealistic kind of life… ...honest depiction of life and people... … denial of idealisation and/or romanticism/imagination/emotion/artificiality... …focus on ordinary common man/middle or lower class people... …characters with ethical problems and everyday experiences... …objectivity rather than subjectivity of subject matter... …use of regular language/dialect and not poetic... …a journalistic narrative style.

Ans to Q 10: An offshoot of Realism... …but more detailed/clear/deeper picture of life than in realism… ... emphasis on heredity, environment, instincts, and social and economic conditions... …belief on man behaving according to the rules of nature… ... writer is a distant observer... …so a scientific approach towards the subject matter... …characters are more important than plots... … Darwinian Theory of the survival of the fittest... …a pessimistic world-view.

Ans to Q 11: An international literary/art movement... …in between the two World Wars… ...rejection of traditional attitude and Romanticism… ...extensive use of symbolism, imagism, stream of consciousness technique.

Ans to Q 12: Affirmed rights of individuals… …Transcendentalists were strong believers of individualism, which was reflected in their resistance to government and to religion and social norms… …inspired civil rights movements of the 19th and the 20th century. Transcendentalism influenced American cultural and social life with its principles of individualism and self-reliance.



4.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss some of the major authors of 19th century America and assess their contribution in shaping 20th century literature.

Q 2: Choose two authors representative of the period from Transcendentalism to Modernism, and research his/her life and literary accomplishments to prove why they have been seen as major figures of that era.

Q 3: Emerson is considered one of the original thinkers of the age, who poetically expressed his ideas on individualism, non-conformity and on the harmony between men and nature. Discuss.

Q 4: How did Emerson and Thoreau emerge as American writers? Discuss.

Q 5: Who are the renowned writers of the Transcendentalist movement?

Q 6: Who are the realist writers in American literary history? How would you connect Realism with Modernism in American literature?

Q 7: Between the two World Wars American literature entered into the Modernist Period (1914–1939). Discuss.

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UNIT 5: INTRODUCING AMERICAN POETRY

UNIT STRUCTURE

5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 A Brief History of American Poetry

5.4 Major Poets

5.5 Some Important Themes in American Poetry

5.6 Let us Sum up

5.7 Further Reading

5.8 Answers to Check your Progress (Hints Only)

5.9 Possible Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- gain a critical understanding of the ages that had shaped American poetry at different point of time
- discuss the growth of the seed of American poetry in the colonial period
- Explain the different aspects of American poetry
- acquire knowledge of the major American poets

5.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of Block 2 of the Course on American Literature. In Block I, we tried to discuss the various important aspects of the history of American literature through a reading of the history starting with the Puritan/Colonial and Transcendental literature and ending with modern literature. In this unit, which serves as an introductory unit of the Block, we shall read about American poetry with reference to some of the important poets. A full range of American poetry, including the work of a large number of contemporary poets, exists today. In order, however, to trace a relatively coherent history of poetry in America, we may begin by referring to the poets from the colonial period or from other countries of North and South

America. We can begin with the groundbreaking works of poets such as Philip Freneau, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman, all of whom helped to establish a more-or-less distinctive and self-consciously "American" poetic tradition. We shall learn that the quality of a poem, its relative availability in standard anthologies, and the degree to which it lends itself to a thematic approach were important areas that we as the readers of American literature should be aware of. As we finish reading this unit, we shall be in a better position to read the prescribed poets of this Block.

5.3 A BRIEF HISTORY OF AMERICAN POETRY

American poetry arose first as an outcome of the hard work by the colonialists to add their opinions and expressions to English poetry in the 17thcentury, just prior to the unification of the thirteen colonies even though, earlier to this constitutional unification of colonies, an effective oral tradition often similar to the poetry existed amongst the Native American societies. Most of the initial literary works of the colonialists seemed to rely heavily on contemporary British models of poetic diction, form, and themes. Nevertheless, in the 19th century, a typical American idiom began to appear. In the later part of that century, the poets from the soil had started to take their place at the forefront of the English language.

The history of American poetry is not at all easy to comprehend. A considerable volume of the American poetry published in book forms from 1910-1945 appeared to remain lost in the small circulation as political periodicals. It may be mentioned that T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound were possibly the most persuasive and significant poets of the age of modernism during the period of World War I. Along with these two tall figures of English literature, there were many African American as well as women poets whose works were published and read extensively in the very first half of 20th century. By the 1960s, the young poets of the British Poetry Revival looked to their American predecessors as archetypes for the kind of poetry they wished to produce. Towards the end of the millennium, consideration of American poetry had varied and diversified, as the literary scholars started giving simultaneous emphasis on poetry by women writers, African

Americans, Chicanos, Hispanics, and other cultural divisions. Starting from Anne Bradestreet to Elieen Miles, American poetry through the periods has garnered consideration for its wide range of style and its diversity of poets.

The tradition of American poetry is fortified by the major poets like Anne Bradstreet, Henry Longfellow, Walt Whitman, William Carols Williams and Langston Hughes. One of the first recorded poets of the colonies was Anne Bradestreet who remains one of the earliest known women poets writing in the English language about political and religious issues. Phillip Wheatley was another famous voice in the colonial era who was a slave and her book *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773) proved to be the known literary work of her time.

The early poets in America from the first half of the 17th century were from the Puritan colonies and were technically British, as Puritanism seemed to dominate the early socio-cultural development of America. The first American poets were mostly British Protestants like Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672), Michael Wigglesworth (1631-1705) and Edward Taylor (1642–1729). In terms of the style of writing poetry, their works can be categorised as metaphysical poetry that prevailed in America. The black slaves of America were among the first from the Southern part to pen poetry in English. Jupiter Hammon, a black American poet, expressed the commencement of black poetry against the system of slavery in America.

18th century American poetry has witnessed the cumulative emphasis on the land of America itself and the poems of that time reveal this aspect distinctively. In a nutshell, the gradual progress of American poetry in the colonies of America clearly reflects the expansion of colonies as well as the urgency felt by the natives of the independence from the shackle of colonial masters.

In the 19th century, the group of poets from Concord appeared as the epitome of Romanticism in America called Transcendentalists. As you have read in the previous Block, Transcendentalism is an idealistic literary and philosophical movement started in mid 19th century America which stressed the dominance of intuition, trust in individualism and self-reliance, nonconformity to tradition, customs and government authority. These poets

defined American poetry in a unique way. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for instance, in his "A Nation's Strength" (1847) visualised the nation and its people like the following:

…Not gold but only men can make
A people great and strong;
Men who for truth and honor's sake
Stand fast and suffer long.
Brave men who work while others sleep,
Who dare while others fly...
They build a nation's pillars deep
And lift them to the sky.

In the beginning of the 20th century, poetry was much more prominent in American literature. The publication of Hariet Monroe's *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* (1912) was an epoch making event as it projected the path for future prospect of American poetry. Poetry in the contemporary time has been moving far away from the mainstream poetic tradition as started during colonial regime. Subjects like environment and the need to maintain ecological harmony seem to be a major trend in the current flow of poetic world. The new American poetry is indeed experimental in both theme and language.

In the Preface to *Leaves of Grass* Famous American writer Walt Whitman says, "The United States themselves are great poem". The American landscape or the geographical condition is so vast and diversified that it amases human creative imagination. This vast geographical area provided ample subject matters to the young poets of America. It is the European settlers, mainly the British, who initiated writing poetry in the American colonies in the English language. The colonisers in America opposed the unpleasant colonial regime and poetry becomes the medium of expressing of their national identities. It is true that similar to other colonies, the American identity emerged in opposition to their colonial masters. The American nation was born out of the defiance of its European ancestor, only after the revolutionary wars about American poetry. M S Merwin says, "I certainly do not think of the tradition of American poetry as simply a

homogenised addition to the English tradition. I feel that we are lucky to inherit it with a particular closeness, but that we also inherit the whole tradition of poetry in the language. I don't think there is much to be gained by self-conscious efforts to write some kind of genuine American poetry. If American poets write poems they will be that".



LET US KNOW

It is seen that the trend of modernist writings especially of poetry as developed in Europe did not exert noticeable influence on America until some decades into the 20th century. Till then poetry of the American world depended more on a customary concept of verse. American poets like Edwin Arlington Robinson and Carl Sandburg used to write poetry that are comprehensible, realistic and locally coloured. However, gradually, this fashion was overshadowed by modern poetry marked by different issues related to human mind and psyche.

The complexity as well as the psychological aspects of human minds seem to be the major trends of American poetry as followed by the modern major writers like Ezra pound and T. S. Eliot. Among all the poems dealing with the complex aspects of human psychology, Eliot's poems "The Waste Land" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" can be considered the best embodiment to reflect the disintegration and hopelessness of the modern minds caused by the World War. "The Waste Land" describes a mood of deep disillusionment stemming both from the bitter experiences of the war as well as from the personal life of the poet himself.

Another major trend developed out of the modernist movement in poetry is Imagism that describes images with simple and easy language precisely. In London, this movement was promoted by Ezra Pound, which was previously initiated by T. E. Hulme. Pound emphasised this new trend of writing poetry for which he has also been called as inventor of Chinese poetry in modern age. His language is concrete and visual and he chooses for his poems fresh epithets and metaphors to give vent to his poetic sensations.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Mention some of the common aspects of American poetry.

Q 2: Write in short about 17th century American poetry.

Q 3: Is there any relation between the poetic works America and Britain?

5.4 MAJOR POETS

In the previous Block, we have already mentioned about many of the American poets. In this section, we shall try to discuss some of them in detail.

Ralph Waldo Emerson:

Emerson is one of the famous American writers whose essays, poems and journal entries have attained international acclamation. He is one of the original thinkers of America who is known as the sage of concord. He was a mystic poet; his poems were collected in two volumes entitled *Poems* (1847) and *May-Day and Other Pieces* (1876). Some of his famous poems are "the Rhodora", "Each and All" "The Problems", "The Snow Storm", "Hamatreya" and "Each Song". The main themes of his poetry are nature, nationalism, personal or domestic life and philosophical understanding. Emerson like Thoreau and other transcendentalists was influenced by the concept of 'selfhood' and found in Hindu scripture a well-elaborated doctrine of the self. His famous poem "Brahma" reflects the evidence of Katha Upanishad and the Gita. For example;

If the red slayer think he slays
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again

Walt Whitman:

Whitman is a popular autobiographical and a representative poet of American soil. He has put more of himself in his masterpiece than any

other poets in any country or language. In his famous *Leaves of Grass,* he celebrates his own self and in doing so, he celebrates America too. In his poems, he writes of his age as well as his motherland. The "I" whom he seems to celebrate in his book is not Whitman, a certain historical personality, but the typical or average American. It labels him as the poet of democracy and a poet of USA. As far as the form of his verse and his method of communication are concerned, he can be considered a great revolutionary as well as a technical innovator as he broke away from the mould of his predecessors. Some of the significant poems in his *Leaves of Grass* are: "I Celebrate Myself"; "I Sing the Body Electric", "Out of the Cradle Endless Rocking and "I Hear America Singing". His "Song of Myself' is the longest and the most significant poem in *The Leaves*. A collection of lyrics in 52 clusters, the poem speaks about America in a comprehensive way. Whitman's identification with America and her common masses is complete and this makes the poem 'the epic' of America', 'the song of America', as well as 'the Bible of Democracy'.

Emily Dickinson:

Emily is one of the distinguished poets of American literature whose poems were first published in 1890. Though she belongs to the 19th century her form and style as employed in her poems put her in the category of 20th century writers. The majority of her poetry consists mostly of short lyrics, which are the manifestation of her deeply felt emotional or psychological conditions and strong spiritual experiences. The intensity of her own vision imparts intensity to her lyrics, and she remarks, her vision creates a form best suited to its expression. She is also a great nature poet and a good number of her lyrics particularly deal with the themes related to nature. Like the metaphysical lyrical poem, her lyrics, also are the battleground for the class of opposites that explore her courageous acceptance of life. The beauty of nature is minutely observed and rendered with precision in her poems. She is a great love poet and her poetry on love may be categorised into three groups: The first group expresses her devotion, love and strong faithfulness towards her lover who is not present. The second group of love

poems can be considered as poems of separation and subsequent misery. The third group of poems can be called 'poems of renunciation'. Some of the notable poems of Emily Dickinson are "A Light Exists in Spring", "Because I Could not Stop for Death", "Success is Counted Sweetest", "I Felt a Funeral in My Brain", "Hope is the Thing with Feathers" and "This is My Letter to the World".

Robert Frost:

Frost received more honours than any other present-day literary figures in America. It was in 1912 that he decided to make poetry his vocation in life. His first volume of lyrics *A Boy's Will* (1913) attracted a great deal of attention in the literary world. After the first two volumes *A Boy's Will* (1913) and *North of Boston* (1914) eight more volumes of poetry were published: *Mountain Interval* (1916), *New Hampshire* (1923), *West Running Brook* (1928), *A Further Range* (1936), *A Witness Tree* (1942), *Come in and Other Poems* (1943), *A Masque of Reason* (1945) and *A Masque of Mercy* (1947). Robert frost is a great pastoral poet who writes of rural people, various rustic events, occupations of the common people and different situations faced by them. Undoubtedly, he prospered in imparting universal validity and significance to pastoral art. He is a regional poet of America and the place Boston forms the background of his poetry. Being a poet of nature, he writes abundantly about the natural sights and scenes, hills and mountains, flora and fauna of Northern Boston. However, he does not portray the scenery of modern day lifestyle but he certainly deals with the rudimentary problems and the facts of modern industrial life. The fundamental problems of human frustration, anxiety, isolation, as well as disappointment find place in his poetry. "Mending Wall' is a symbolic poem by him that depicts modern day problems of attitude towards life, generation gap as well as issues of boundaries between neighbours. His "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" is one of the famous lyrical poems, which even has touched the core of the heart of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, one of greatest personalities of the world. Another important poem "Two Tramps in Mud Time" is somewhat autobiographical that portrays a delightful picture

of Frost as a farmer. “The Gift Outright” is a poem having tone of patriotism, which is one of the finest lyrics of the poet presenting the history of American people.

T. S. Eliot:

Eliot is undoubtedly one of the most popular poets of the age of modernism whose poems as well as the poetic techniques explore elements of the popular modern movement. Two of the most prominent poems where he shows his modern orientation are “The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock” and The Waste Land”. These two poems reflect the sense of disintegration and restlessness human beings felt in that time. “The Waste Land” remains a great, positive achievement of Eliot’s life which has proved to be a massive significance in the English poetic tradition and its impact on English poetry of the time is found to be enormous. Eliot is truly a great visionary and preceptor in modern English poetry. The combination of intellectual dignity and high skilfulness, philosophic profoundness and technical mastery is a rare accomplishment, but this is essentially evident in his poetry. His significance in modern literature is enormous and enduring.

Edgar Allen Poe:

Poe was an American writer, editor, and a literary critic. He is best known for his poetry as well short stories filled with mysteries and ambiguities. His first collection of poems, *Tamerlane* and *Other Poems* was published in 1827, and in 1829, he has produced the second collection entitled *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane and Minor Poems.* His *The Raven and Other Poems* (1845) and *Eureka: A Prose Poems* (1848) have also received fame and recognition in the world of American poetry.

Maya Angelou:

Angelou is a writer of autobiography, poet, as well as a popular screenplay black-author of 20th century. She is the icon of the civil right movement of America known for her 1969 memoir *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Though she is best known for her seven autobiographical works, she is also a prolific and popular poet known as “the black woman’s poet laureate”.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Give the names of some famous American poets.

Q 5: Who is the writer of *Leaves of Grass*? Mention the main motto of poet.

Q 6: Mention Robert Frost's significant works on poetry. What are the issues chosen by Robert Frost in his poems?

Q 7: What are the major themes in the poetry of Emily Dickinson?

Q 8: Give the names of the two famous poems by T. S. Eliot.

5.5 SOME IMPORTANT THEMES IN AMERICAN POETRY [Adapted from *Thematic Guide to American Poetry by Allan Burns*]

Civilisation:

The poets from America have always had an uneasy relationship with American civilisation as a whole. On the one hand, they have extolled ideas like liberty, democracy, possibility, prosperity, and ingenuity; on the other, they have shown their disgust against American materialism, vulgarity, greed, corruption, hypocrisy, and imperialism. Thus, poems in both praise and blame of America are numerous and they are critical of the world falling short of its promises. Some may like the more "realistic" appraisal of human limitation and the drawbacks of other civilisations, past and present; but the poets themselves, quite justifiably, allow little time for self-congratulation while self-improvement remains a possibility. Walt Whitman often regarded as the great celebrant of American democracy, freedom, and diversity, could be quite acerbic on occasions about America's shortcomings, his statements of disappointment sharpened by the very intensity of his love and hope for the nation. Whitman often felt an acute gap between the ideal of America and the reality as could be perceived in the political situation of the 1850s.

Family Relations:

The dark side of family relations is yet another important preoccupation of the American poets. Lyric poetry, both intimate and subjective, had rarely been brought to bear on the volatile theme of family relations, at least before the rise of the "confessional" mode in mid-twentieth-century American poetry. Confessional poetry, associated particularly with the work of W. D. Snodgrass, Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton, introduced a new autobiographical candour and intensity to American poetry. Poems about sex, divorce, alcoholism, and insanity suddenly became quite fashionable. A new freedom of subject matter reflected and contributed to larger shifts in American culture in the late fifties and sixties. It became possible for the mainstream poets—even those only marginally associated with confessional verse—to write candidly about family life.

The Individual and Society:

In America, where individuals and expressions of individualism are highly valued, writers tend to side with the individual against the traditional, conformist, and legal pressures exerted by society. Just like in case of fiction, American poetry too tended to side with the individual against the norms of society. The tendency is writ large in the work of perhaps our most eccentrically individual major poet, Emily Dickinson. Her poems like "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" and "Much Madness is divinest Sense" celebrate the private life of the individual and scorn the values of society. Dickinson inverts traditional values that would promote the latter at the expense of the former. She likens public existence to a frog croaking "To an admiring Bog!" The poem celebrates the private and authentic life of the individual, whose values and creative abilities need not be cheapened by publicity, politics, or self-promotion. "Much Madness," examines how individuality is not necessarily safe from society's values but can be taken by society for madness—and dealt with accordingly.

Another example can be cited of T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1917) that depicts the complex tension between a neurotic

individual and the high society he finds simultaneously attractive and repulsive. J. Alfred Prufrock, the name of a furniture dealer in Eliot's home city of St. Louis, sounds like an unlikely name to be yoked to a love song, and indeed, his song is hardly conventional or straightforward. Eliot prefaces it with an epigraph drawn from Dante's Inferno, in which the damned soul of Guido da Montefeltro addresses Dante, saying he would not speak except that he knows no one returns to the surface world from Hell. The opening line of the poem invites an unspecified "you" to "go then" to an unspecified destination. The "you" may be understood as the reader of this confiding and depressing poem (although it could also be taken to indicate another figure in the poem or, perhaps, some part of Prufrock's own fractured personality; the anxious Prufrock does not clarify whom, exactly, he means). The poem as a whole is an exercise in self-revelation cast in the form of a dramatic monologue.

Life and Death:

American poets have grappled with various fundamental aspects of life and death, the transience of life, how to conduct one's life in the face of death's inevitability, the meaning or meaninglessness of life, the difficulty of fathoming one's own mortality, and the possibility of an afterlife and so on. Since every generation must face life and death, none of these aspects ever become dated, although specific ideas and emphases do evolve over time. The relative triumph of democracy over class privilege has, for instance, made the old idea of death as an equalizer—a favourite notion of aristocratic ages—less compelling as the years have passed, while at the same time poets, for reasons speculated on below, have tended to find the most universal expression of these themes not in the lives, struggles, and deaths of humans bound by civilisation but rather in those of the denizens of the natural world. Philip Freneau issued the nation's first significant poetic statement on the themes of life and death in the form of an apostrophe to a flower. Freneau's "The Wild Honey Suckle" (1786) begins by noting the kinds of death that are unlikely for the flower: it grows in a hidden retreat and is therefore safe from feet that crush and hands that pluck. Freneau conceives of nature as a benevolent entity; he personifies it as a kind of

caretaker or gardener that not only planted the honeysuckle far from human settlements but also continues to supply it with shade and water. Even in these idyllic circumstances, however, the honeysuckle's days are numbered. In Freneau's idealizing eyes, early, unspoiled America may be a kind of new Eden, but as he points out, even the flowers of the original Eden decayed after the fall. The poem's philosophical weight, resides in the final stanza. For Freneau, the problem the flower brings into focus is that the inevitability of death seems to call into question the value of life.

Love and Sex:

Walt Whitman introduced a new frankness of subject matter into American poetry. Even today, the sexual candour of some of his poems can surprise, shock, and even outrage certain readers. From the "Song of Myself", to the poems celebrating heterosexual love entitled "Children of Adam", to the homoeroticism explicit in Calamus and implicit in some of the Civil War poems and elsewhere, to such cosmic love poems that seem to embrace all of humanity as "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" and "The Sleepers," Whitman defied all the prudish, puritanical conventions of early American culture. Even Emerson, who claimed that limitation was the only sin, advised him to tone down the sexual content of his work—but Whitman refused. Whereas a conservative strain of Western thought has always treated the body and sex with suspicion, Whitman unabashedly celebrates both. "From Pent-Up Aching Rivers", included in the "Children of Adam section of *Leaves of Grass,* illustrates the forthrightness with which Whitman approached these "taboo" subjects, "singing the phallus, / Singing the song of procreation". The transparent metaphor of the title refers to repressed sexual energy that Whitman's tumbling, turbulent poem seeks, symbolically, to release. Throughout the poem, Whitman associates sexual love with nature, which for him, as a modern and a romantic, is something more fundamental than laws, religions, and mores, all of which are seen as human constructs that attempt to channel and control natural impulses.

Nature:

Ralph Waldo Emerson defined "nature" as all matter (as opposed to spirit); in a common sense, it is matter not altered by human activity. A

leaf would seem to be part of nature in both senses, whereas a chair or an automobile would be part of it in the first sense but not in the second. In the modern world, however, the leaf may be eaten by acid rain and coated with pesticides. The distinction Emerson draws has come, increasingly, to be one of relative degrees rather than of absolute kinds. Few things in the world have not been altered by human activity, and with each passing year, there is less of nature—on this planet at least—in Emerson's common sense. The history of the United States is largely a record of how nature in this common sense has been converted into human commodities. The Puritans viewed the virgin land as, in the words of their chronicler William Bradford, hideous and desolate wilderness, full of dangerous creatures and infernal savages. Their early assault on the land was, as they viewed it, both the work of God and a matter of self-preservation. Once the settlers established a foothold, however, they began to view the land not so much as an enemy but as something to be exploited for economic gain. The settlers soon came to be amased at the abundance of nature in America: tracts of virgin forest and wildlife populations seemed inexhaustible in their plenitude. American poetry has—as much as American industry—depended upon nature as a resource, but with the important difference that poems do not transform or exhaust natural objects. Natural images and symbols abound in their poetry; but relatively few of the poems that employ them are principally concerned with nature itself as a theme. The more typical procedure has been to use a natural image as an illustration of something else, as Philip Freneau does in poems like "The Wild Honey Suckle" and "On Observing a Large Red-Streak Apple."

The Idea of Self:

Some of the most innovative and vital poetry in America, starting with the publication of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855), took an inward turn and began scrutinizing the self. Whitman's idea that the self could serve as an adequate theme of poetry was confirmed—independently— by Emily Dickinson, whose hermitical habits made her own being an ideal subject for her work. It was almost as if modern American poetry took its cue directly from the conclusion of Henry David Thoreau's

Walden, published just one year before Leaves of Grass: “be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you,” Thoreau advised, arguing that “it is easier to sail many thousand miles through cold and storm and cannibals, in a government ship, with five hundred men and boys to assist one, than it is to explore the private sea, the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean of one’s being alone.” William Wordsworth, often taken to be the father of modern poetry in English; but it was Wordsworth, more than any other poet in English, who confirmed and inspired these trends. Walt Whitman followed the advice of Thoreau, the prophecy of Tocqueville, and the example of Wordsworth—with a vengeance—in his “Song of Myself”.

Time and Change:

In the works of some representative American poets, such as Robert Frost, Robinson Jeffers, and A. R. Ammons, the theme of time and change seem to haunt virtually every line. Poems have long addressed themselves to the problems of mutability and loss—in fact, such phenomena are the virtual wellsprings of poetry. The way American poets have handled these themes, however, says something important not only about the protean nature of our world but also about America itself and the character of modern thought. As a tale such as Washington Irving’s “Rip van Winkle” strongly implies, American civilisation, throughout its history, has been irremediably dynamic and prone to change quite dramatically, even within a single generation. The pace of American westward expansion and technological development has challenged and practically defied the powers of an individual imagination.



5.6 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that the history of American poetry begins with the poets from the colonial period. We have learnt how the groundbreaking works of poets such as Philip Freneau, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman actually helped in establishing a more-or-less distinctive and self-consciously “American” poetic tradition. The various

thematic elements in American poetry, about which we have read in this unit, would help us to read the prescribed poets in the following units of the Block.



5.7 FURTHER READING

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Web Resources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_poetry



5.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: 18th century American poetry has witnessed the cumulative emphasis on the land of America itself… …reflects the expansion of colonies as well as the urgency felt by the natives of the independence from the shackle of colonial masters… …20th century poetry moved away from the mainstream poetic tradition… …subjects like environment and the need to maintain ecological harmony seem to be a major trend in the current flow of poetic world… …new American poetry is experimental both in theme and language.

Ans to Q 2: The 17th century poets came under the influence of Puritanism that dominated the early socio-cultural development of America… …the poetry of American writers like Anne Bradstreet, Michael Wigglesworth and Edward Taylor can be categorised as metaphysical poetry… …the black slaves of America were among the first from the Southern part to pen poetry in English.

Ans to Q 3: Yes, most of the initial literary works of the American colonialists seemed to rely heavily on contemporary British models of poetic diction, form, and themes.

Ans to Q 4: Some of the famous American poets are Walt Whitman, Robert Frost, Emily Dickinson, Langston Hughes, Allen Ginsberg and Maya Angelou.

Ans to Q 5: Walt Whitman is the writer of the famous American poem *Leaves of Grass*… …the chief motto of the poet in that poem is the celebration of American democracy as well as of the self.

Ans to Q 6: The major volumes of poetry of Robert Frost are: *Mountain Interval* (1916), *New Hampshire* (1923), *West Running Brook* (1928), *A Further Range* (1936), *A Witness Tree* (1942), *Come in and Other Poems* (1943), *A Masque of Reason* (1945) and *A Masque of Mercy* (1947)…. …he wrote abundantly about the natural sights… …delt with the rudimentary problems and the facts of modern industrial life... …also delt with the fundamental problems of human frustration, anxiety, isolation, as well as disappointment find place in his poetry.

Ans to Q 7: The first group expresses her devotion, love and strong faithfulness towards her lover… …the second group consists of love poems dealing with separation and subsequent misery… …the third group of poems can be called 'poems of renunciation.'

Ans to Q 8: Two of the most prominent poems where Eliot's shows his modern orientation are "The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock" and The Waste Land".



5.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Give the names of the major American poets. Do you think that the country called America matters for the poets?

Q 2: Is Walt Whitman a representative poet of America? Discuss.

Q 3: Can slavery be considered a crucial aspect for some of the poems produced in America? Elaborate.

Q 4: Explain in detail how American poetry emerged? Write a comprehensive note on the major poets of America.

Q 5: Discuss the development or growth of American poetry starting from the Colonial period.

Q 6: Write a note on Walt Whitman as a celebrator of the self as well as the country.

Q7: What are the elements of Transcendentalism as imbibed by the American poets? Discuss in detail.

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UNIT 6: WALT WHITMAN: "THE WOUND-DRESSER" & "ONE'S SELF I SING"

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 Walt Whitman: The Poet

- 6.3.1 His Life
- 6.3.2 His Works

6.4 The Poems "The Wound-Dresser" & "One's Self I Sing"

- 6.4.1 The Text of the Poems
- 6.4.2 Major Themes
- 6.4.3 Whitman's Poetic Style

6.5 Critical Reception of Whitman

6.6 Let us Sum up

6.7 Further Reading

6.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

6.9 Possible Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the life and works of Walt Whitman
- explain what is so unique about Whitman's poetry
- examine how Whitman incorporated current events into his poetry
- write about Whitman's use of diction, his play with language
- understand why Ezra Pound had identified Whitman with the America of his birth.

6.2 INTRODUCTION

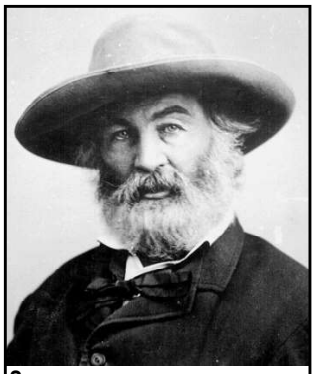
In this unit, we shall read about one of the greatest American poets—Walt Whitman with reference to two of his most famous poems. In the previous unit, we have learnt that Whitman broke away from the mould of his predecessors as well as stylistic boundaries. He is instrumental behind

the emergence of a unique style in American poetry that used free verse with new idiom and flexible rhythm. Whitman is also known for his innovative ideas and values, his life and his larger-than-life image – his rise from obscurity to monumental fame. As we read through this unit, we shall get to know that Whitman is recognised as a national figure owing to his poetic contribution to the American literature. In this unit, you will also read that the Transcendentalist movement finds itself best celebrated in Whitman's poetry. Finally, from the study of the two prescribed poems in this unit, we shall try to read about the significance of the American "I" in Whitman's poems, which makes his poetry unique.

6.3 WALT WHITMAN: THE POET

The following subsections shall deal with some of the important aspects of the life and works of Walt Whitman.

6.3.1 His life



Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Walt_Whitman

Walt Whitman was born on May 31, 1819 in West Hills, Long Island, New York, in a farming community, his ancestors being English and Dutch. In 1923, when he was just four years old, the family moved to Brooklyn, where Whitman had his schooling (1825–1830). He often visited his grandparents in rural Long Island and these visits helped him realize the charms of the countryside. In Brooklyn, they lived near the Great Harbour and Whitman enjoyed the ferry rides to Manhattan Island – the metropolis of New York City. After leaving school at the age of 11, he held various jobs as office boy, nurse, typesetter, schoolteacher and finally as a journalist and editor. He was less than successful; his radical views as editor made him unpopular among his readers. It was during his association with various periodicals and newspapers that he began to compose the poems,

which were later published in the *Leaves of Grass*. He travelled extensively throughout America, which introduced him to the rich variety of his land.

In 1855, he published a thin volume of poems entitled *Leaves of Grass* containing a prose preface and twelve untitled poems. The author's name appeared nowhere in the book's title page or cover but facing the title page was his portrait. On page 29, in 'Song of Myself', the author's name appeared for the first and the last time. The volume was completely ignored in literary circles but with one significant exception. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote him a congratulatory letter saying the poet was 'at the beginning of a great career'. Whitman promptly published another edition of the *Leaves of Grass* in 1856, expanding it with twenty additional pomes. In 1860, the third edition of a much longer *Leaves*, containing some 156 poems appeared, which was issued by a trade publisher. At the outset of the Civil War in 1861, his brother George, a soldier for the Union army, was wounded and Whitman travelled to Virginia to visit him where he was touched by the sheer number of the wounded in the hospitals. Whitman volunteered as a nurse in army hospitals, also wrote dispatches as a correspondent for the New York Times. The war inspired his poetry and he composed *Drum-Taps* in 1865, which was incorporated into an 1867 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Another volume of wartime poetry titled *Sequel* was published which included the poems composed on Lincoln's assassination. Whitman's wartime work led to a job with the Department of the Interior but soon failed because of the alleged indecency of the *Leaves of Grass* in 1865. He was later hired by the Attorney General's office and he remained there until 1873, when he suffered a mild paralytic stroke, which left him a semi-invalid. During this period came out *Democratic Vistas*, the best-known prose work of Whitman, arguing for the maintenance of democratic ideals. Then another edition of the *Leaves of Grass* appeared including more poems. Several other prose works followed, with a further extended version of the *Leaves of Grass* in 1881.

Since the mid 1870s, Whitman's health had been shaky and in his last years, when he was mostly confined to his room in the house in New Jersey, Whitman prepared his so-called 'Deathbed' edition of the *Leaves of Grass*, which came out in 1892. Whitman breathed his last that year on March 26, two months before his seventy-third birthday. Thus ended the lifelong pilgrimage of Walt Whitman, the 'Good Gray Poet', as his contemporary critic W. D. O'Connor was heard to call him often.



LET US KNOW

The American Civil War (1861–1865), also known as The Civil War, a four years of warfare, mostly within the Southern states in the United States, took place in response to the election of Abraham Lincoln as President of the United States. 11 southern slave states declared their secession from the United States and formed the Confederate States of America ("the Confederacy"); the other 25 states supported the federal government ("the Union"). After four years of struggle and bloodshed, mostly within the Southern states, the Confederacy surrendered and slavery was outlawed everywhere in the nation.

So, you should note that Whitman was the first modern poet who broke away from tradition and started a new trail. He chose the free verse with new idiom and flexible rhythm to express his innovative ideas and values. The rhythms of his poems deserve special attention due to their flowing and expanding nature. The *Leaves of Grass* had proved to be a pioneering work. Whitman had concentrated over this volume of poems throughout his lifetime until his death in 1892. He revised, altered, classified, re-classified, deleted, added, arranged, re-arranged and polished his masterpiece over the years. With its first publication in 1855 began the era of Whitman and he completely identified himself with *Leaves of Grass* saying, 'This is no book, /who touches this touches a man.'

Whitman was a being of paradoxes. His was a duel nature, a profound spirituality combined with an equal pride. He became a legendary figure during his lifetime due to the charm of his personality. The early critics have vehemently criticised his *Leaves of Grass* for their violation of poetic decency and representing obscenity in verse. However, Emerson, another literary giant, was the first to acknowledge Whitman's greatness. He said that the *Leaves of Grass* was the most extra-ordinary piece of art and wisdom. Whitman is known today as an outstanding personality in the history of American literature.

Walt Whitman's achievement as a poet is truly monumental. He was a witness to two major happenings in American history – the American Civil War and the rise of America as a commercial and political power. He witnessed both the apex and the abolition of slavery. The Civil War stirred his imagination and sensibility. Lincoln's assassination in 1865 moved him deeply. His poetry bears testimony of these major events during his time and focuses on the ideas of democracy, equality and brotherhood. Whitman developed a poetry that was uniquely American, surpassing the mould of his contemporaries. The *Leaves of Grass* with its multiple editions and public controversies set the pattern for the later generation of modern poets.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How did the American Civil War touch Whitman the person and the poet?

Q 2: How, according to you, Whitman was the quintessential American poet?

6.3.2 His Works

From the above section, you must have understood that *Leaves of Grass* proved to be a pioneering work in Whitman's life. From 1835 till his death in 1892, Whitman devoted his entire life to

nourish this one piece of work. The *Leaves of Grass,* ever since its first publication in 1855, with twelve untitled poems and a prose preface, has been inspiring and enthralling the reading public. Since its first edition, critics savagely criticised the *Leaves of Grass* and Whitman wrote favourable, anonymous reviews. He wrote notes to his poems, which he circulated under the pen name 'John Burroughs'. The second edition came in 1856, consisting twenty additional poems with a favourable review by Emerson printed on the back cover. Whitman not only added to this edition but altered some of the pervious poems too. The 3rd edition appeared in 1860 containing 124 new poems. The 4th volume of the *Leaves of Grass* was called the 'workshop' edition due to the numerous revisions done to the work. It contained eight new poems. The 5th edition in 1871 included the new poem 'Passage to India'. The 6th edition, in two volumes, came out in 1876. The 7th edition, which is widely accepted as an authoritative edition today, appeared in 1881. The last edition, also called the 'death-bed' edition (since it was finished and published in the year of Whitman's death), came out in 1892 carrying 423 poems. Whitman is justly famous for the *Leaves of Grass* that has displayed his poetic power, depth and richness.

The Civil War was a major event in Whitman's career, which profoundly affected the poet. The War exposed him to violence, horror, misery, pain and death. Those sad experiences helped him to control his feelings, develop a deep concern for others and learn to see things differently. During this time, in 1865, appeared Whitman's prose work *Memoranda*, which is now included in *Specimen days.* The *Memoranda* has been registered as the best record of the Civil War. However, the finest fruit of the war has been the cluster of poems included in *Drum-Taps* published in 1864. A few of his writings along with *Drum-Taps* and the *Sequel* to *Drum-Taps* can be classified as biographical sketches. Even in the *Leaves of Grass,* the poet did explore and express many aspects of his personality. Whitman also wrote a novel titled *Franklin Evans* (1842)

and a prose pamphlet named *Democratic Vistas* (1871) and another prose piece *Specimen Days*. Today the world remembers Whitman as the Father of Modernism and one of the finest poets that America has ever produced.

Whitman was a very careful craftsman, who never got tired of revising the lines of his poems until they came out perfectly in print. With patient care he self-educated himself, widened his intellectual horizon by consulting the works of the masters like Homer, Shakespeare, Spencer and Keats. He also learned by his own experiences and self-realisation. He observed and absorbed the things that he saw around him. The Civil War being an episode of prime importance in his life, his poetry reflects the horror and misery of life. Democracy is a vital theme in Whitman's poetry and his *Leaves of Grass* is regarded as the epic of democracy. To him, each one is beautiful and worthy of praise and he sang on behalf of 'them', about 'them'. He believed in democracy and fellowship. Whitman often used the term 'personalism', which indicates the fusion of the individual with the society in an ideal democracy. His doctrine of 'personalism' says that each human being has his 'self', an identity which one receives at the time of one's birth and which curves one's entire life. Man should first be aware of oneself, which makes him closer to God. He should comprehend the Divine within him, his identity and the relation to the Divine. There is an artistic expression of various aspects of mystical experiences in Whitman's poetry. He truly believed man could communicate with his soul in a mystical experience, thereby could unite with nature, universe and God. Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* displays the poet's responses to the soul and his union with God.



LET US KNOW

Personalism is a term first used by F. D. E. Schleiermacher in 1799 in Germany in his book

> Über die Religion. Amos Bronson Alcott was perhaps the first American to use the term, explaining it in an essay (around 1863) 'the doctrine that the ultimate reality of the world is a Divine Person who sustains the universe by a continuous act of creative will.' The term 'American personalism', coined by Walt Whitman in his essay 'Personalism,' was published in *The Galaxy* in May 1868.

Whitman was a transcendentalist and his *Passage to India* demonstrates this best. With an interesting combination of the spiritual and the worldly, the *Passage to India* lays emphasis on 'self' – the individual entity unique to each being. Whitman's poise and state of awareness were singular to him that made others around him conscious of his strengths and limitations at the same time. In the culmination of the narrative of *Passage to India*, the 'self' reaches the final phase of maturity and realisation, where it should shed all its arrogance, intellect, and senses and prepare itself to be one with God. To attain this mystic union, there must be self-awareness followed by surrender of self to the almighty.

Transcendentalism as a spiritual movement finds itself best expressed in Whitman's poetry. Many of Whitman's poems are nature-centred. His narratives present to his readers various forms of nature – the divinity of nature, the manifestation of God in nature and man as nature's child, forbidding distance between the creator and its creation. Throughout Whitman's spiritual narratives, one finds a subdued emotional narration dealing with the spiritual and the worldly, symbolised by the images of the body and the soul. To him the soul and the body are inextricably linked. While the soul is the ultimate repository of the self, the body is the vessel that allows the soul to experience the outer world. The body is the source of identity in the world and the means for connecting with others. Whitman values both the body and the soul. So when he sings of the body or its performances, he is singing of the soul too.

Several different qualities in Whitman's poems like a rare mix of the transcendent and the mundane and the sublime and the prosaic made Emerson opine that Whitman's poetry was 'a remarkable mixture of the

Bhagavad Gita and the New York Herald.' Whitman was someone who could be a sage and a monger at the same time; someone who could be equally concerned about the level of spiritual attainment of the human soul on the one hand and the sale and review of his books on the other.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Write a short note on the Transcendentalist movement. How is Whitman connected to Transcendentalism?

Q 4: Write a short note on Whitman's 'Personalism'?

6.4 THE POEMS "THE WOUND-DRESSER" & "ONE'S SELF I SING"

The following subsections will guide you to read the two prescribed poems by Whitman.

6.4.1 The Text of the Poems

The Wound-Dresser

1

An old man bending I come among new faces,
Years looking backward resuming in answer to children,
Come tell us old man, as from young men and maidens that love me,
(Arous'd and angry, I'd thought to beat the alarum, and urge relentless war,
But soon my fingers fail'd me, my face droop'd and I resign'd myself,
To sit by the wounded and soothe them, or silently watch the dead;)
Years hence of these scenes, of these furious passions, these chances,
Of unsurpass'd heroes, (was one side so brave? the other was equally brave;)
Now be witness again, paint the mightiest armies of earth,
Of those armies so rapid so wondrous what saw you to tell us?
What stays with you latest and deepest? of curious panics,
Of hard-fought engagements or sieges tremendous what deepest remains?

2

O maidens and young men I love and that love me,
What you ask of my days those the strangest and sudden your talking recalls,
Soldier alert I arrive after a long march cover'd with sweat and dust,
In the nick of time I come, plunge in the fight, loudly shout in the
rush of successful charge,
Enter the captur'd works—yet lo, like a swift-running river they fade,
Pass and are gone they fade—I dwell not on soldiers' perils or
soldiers' joys,
(Both I remember well—many the hardships, few the joys, yet I was content.)
But in silence, in dreams' projections,
While the world of gain and appearance and mirth goes on,
So soon what is over forgotten, and waves wash the imprints off the sand,
With hinged knees returning I enter the doors, (while for you up there,
Whoever you are, follow without noise and be of strong heart.)
Bearing the bandages, water and sponge,
Straight and swift to my wounded I go,
Where they lie on the ground after the battle brought in,
Where their priceless blood reddens the grass the ground,
Or to the rows of the hospital tent, or under the roof'd hospital,
To the long rows of cots up and down each side I return,
To each and all one after another I draw near, not one do I miss,
An attendant follows holding a tray, he carries a refuse pail,
Soon to be fill'd with clotted rags and blood, emptied, and fill'd again.
I onward go, I stop,
With hinged knees and steady hand to dress wounds,
I am firm with each, the pangs are sharp yet unavoidable,
One turns to me his appealing eyes—poor boy! I never knew you,
Yet I think I could not refuse this moment to die for you, if that
would save you.

3

On, on I go, (open doors of time! open hospital doors!)

The crush'd head I dress, (poor crased hand tear not the bandage away,)
The neck of the cavalry-man with the bullet through and through examine,
Hard the breathing rattles, quite glased already the eye, yet life
struggles hard,
(Come sweet death! be persuaded O beautiful death!
In mercy come quickly.)
From the stump of the arm, the amputated hand,
I undo the clotted lint, remove the slough, wash off the matter and blood,
Back on his pillow the soldier bends with curv'd neck and side falling head,
His eyes are closed, his face is pale, he dares not look on the
bloody stump,
And has not yet look'd on it.
I dress a wound in the side, deep, deep,
But a day or two more, for see the frame all wasted and sinking,
And the yellow-blue countenance see.
I dress the perforated shoulder, the foot with the bullet-wound,
Cleanse the one with a gnawing and putrid gangrene, so sickening,
so offensive,
While the attendant stands behind aside me holding the tray and pail.
I am faithful, I do not give out,
The fractur'd thigh, the knee, the wound in the abdomen,
These and more I dress with impassive hand, (yet deep in my breast
a fire, a burning flame.)

4

Thus in silence in dreams' projections,
Returning, resuming, I thread my way through the hospitals,
The hurt and wounded I pacify with soothing hand,
I sit by the restless all the dark night, some are so young,
Some suffer so much, I recall the experience sweet and sad,
(Many a soldier's loving arms about this neck have cross'd and rested,
Many a soldier's kiss dwells on these bearded lips.)

One's-Self I Sing

One's-self I sing, a simple separate person,
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse.
Of physiology from top to toe I sing,
Not physiognomy alone nor brain alone is worthy for the Muse, I say the Form complete is worthier far,
The Female equally with the Male I sing.
Of Life immense in passion, pulse, and power,
Cheerful, for freest action form'd under the laws divine,
The Modern Man I sing.

6.4.2 Major Themes

The following are some of the important themes in the two poems by Whitman you have just read in the previous section.

Influence of American Civil War

The American Civil War (1861–1865) was an incident that altered the course of history of the country forever and the violence threatened to destroy the newborn America. The War had a profound impact on Whitman's career and imagination. It not only touched his sensibility but also made him a dresser of spiritual as well as physical wounds as he offered his service as a volunteer in hospitals in Washington until the end of the War on April 9, 1865. During this period appeared his prose work *Memoranda*, which is regarded as the faithful and accurate record of the Civil War. But the collection of poems in *Drum-Taps* with his classic composition 'When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd', a pastoral elegy for Abraham Lincoln, written shortly after his assassination, is known to reflect the finest reflection of horror, misery and chaos of war. Therefore, a class of his later poetry deals with themes like death, suffering, trauma, catastrophe and war – making it a darker group of poems. The poem "The Wound-Dresser", one of the poems that form a part of *Drum-Taps*, portrays death and suffering due to the Civil War; as well as love, humanity and spirituality. The poem brings the readers face-

to- face with the cruelties of war, the horrific pictures of those truths that are a part of the battlefield. The narrator of the poem is the wound-dresser – someone who attends to the injured soldiers. He vividly presents to the readers things that he sees and feels during his job as a wound dresser. As a medic, the narrator watches over and soothes the dying. Recollecting his experiences, he writes about the traumatic events that he is a witness to.

Sensitisation/Comprehending Pain

Seeing intense suffering around him, the wound dresser feels that sometimes death is the only thing that heals. A poor man, in the care of the wound-dresser struggles with life to die and escape the pain of the bullet that had pierced his neck, pleads, 'Come sweet death! be persuaded, O beautiful death! /In mercy come quickly'. This is just like the other soldier with a pale face who has not been able to bring himself to look at the stump where his hand once was. With the 'amputated hand' and 'putrid gangrene' of the soldiers 'so sickening, so offensive', the readers delve into the horrific aspects of wars. The wound-dresser knows no one in person, yet he goes on aiding the suffering individuals. He knows 'I could not refuse this moment to die for you, if that would save you'. The speaker is faithful to his duty as a nurse, has developed compassion as he tends to the soldier's physical wounds. While dressing the wounds he feels 'the pangs are sharp yet unavoidable'. While examining the wounded soldiers he suffers seeing in them 'yet life struggles hard'. There is a burning sensation inside the narrator – 'deep in my breast a fire, a burning flame' but outside, he must remain calm and comfort these people. He tries to pacify the wounded with his soothing hand and comfort them. He offers them the only thing he can – company – while they are alive. The poem ends with the speaker's sad remembrance of 'Many a soldier's loving arms about this neck have cross'd and rested, /Many a soldier's kiss dwells on his bearded lips.' The narrative on war depicts the poet's stance to the subject, which evoked in him feelings of pity and concern for those young,

dying soldiers. From the perspective of a wound dresser, the war cannot establish brotherhood and equality as it violates basic human rights.

Faith in Democracy

Whitman has been claimed as America's 'first poet of democracy'. The title imparts to his poetry a uniquely American character. Whitman had a deep faith in democracy as a way of life – a way of experiencing the world. In the early 19th century while the world still had doubts regarding survival of the United States of America (which was a newly born country) with its democratic principles, Whitman believed that America could be best expressed through the common folks who had the guts and the urge to fight for freedom. Whitman believed that one could attain true freedom only in a democratic state where it was possible for all to attain 'self-hood'. 'Song of Myself' specially notes that democracy depends on the fact that all human beings are equal and democracy would fail if it were unsuccessful in establishing equality. Whitman tried to be democratic in both life and poetry. Whitman composed the *Leaves of Grass* to eulogize democracy and the American nation. Princes and nobles hold no charm for him, in fact he sings of the common folk. A leaf of grass, for him, is as significant as the heavenly motions of the stars in the sky.

Though Whitman never discussed politics in his poetry, most of his poems deal with democracy. His poems describe people coming together, mingling with one another and many voices pouring into a unified whole. Democracy is an idea to be felt in day-to-day life. Whitman is the singer of the 'self' as well as a trumpeter of the common man. Throughout his poetry, Whitman praises the individual and 'self' in his own peculiar way. While most of his poems carry the pronoun 'I', it does not denote an individual, but talks of everything and everyone. He, thus, has his own way of dismissing the boundary between the self and the world using the contrasting metaphor 'I' – that could denote the individual and the world at the

same time. Imagining a character carrying the entire world within him, Whitman created an elaborate analogy about the ideal democracy.

Idea of the Self

'One's Self I sing', a composition of nine lines, is often regarded as the preface to the *Leaves of Grass*. In the beginning, the poet sings of the self as 'a single separate person', but in the next line, he utters the word 'democratic', which implies his identification of self with the common populace. Throughout the narrative, he has a unique identity and at the same time, he visualises himself as part of the crowd. He sings of all physiology (creation) for he knows that neither physiognomy (outward appearance) nor brain alone can be celebrated independently. He sings of 'the Form complete' (the kinship of the body and the spirit makes it complete). He represents both male and female qualities and praises 'life immense in passion, pulse and power'. He sings of 'Modern Man'. To the poet a modern man is one who is conscious of 'self', yet fully aware of his responsibilities of being a part of a democratic set-up. The other idea that Whitman believes in is that the self bears qualities of both physical and spiritual entity and the self is an indivisible part of one Divine soul. The self is one's own identity – a quality that distinguishes one individual from another and yet bears a similarity with the others. So, while Whitman sings of an 'I' (which is an individual being), that 'I', at the same time, is universal and a part of the Divine. Thus, individuals are different, yet similar in certain aspects.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: How did Whitman try to project the negative aspects of wars in the poem "The Wound-Dresser"?

Q 6: Who is the 'I' in the poem "One's Self I Sing"?

Q 7: Write a note on Whitman's idea of democracy.

Q 8: Who is the Modern Man in "One's Self I sing"?

6.4.3 Whitman's Poetic Style

In the Preface to the 1855 edition of the *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman wrote that he truly believed that there was a vital, symbolic relationship between the poet and the society. In 'Song of Myself', using an all-powerful first person narrative, the poet assumed the identity of a common man. His inspirational writings on the topics of human dignity and man's right to be free had a profound effect on society. Walt Whitman experimented with content, meter, rhythm, form and style in poetry, for he believed that experimentation was the law of the changing times and innovation was the gospel of the modern world. He was an admirable technical innovator. He played with new subjects as well as diction. It was the vernacular, the common man's language that he preferred; his writings aimed to make 'an attempt to put a Person, a human being ... freely, fully and truly on record'. His unconventional poetic style reflects his democratic ideals. In his poetry, he used the language of the common people; in his diction, he included colloquialism, slang and regional dialects rather than the stiff 19th century poetic language. 'The Wound-Dresser' is a free verse in five sections of unequal lines and strikes its readers due to its prose-like style. In the poem, the poet's feelings are expressed within brackets. The use of irregular, broken, long or short lines, a striking aspect of Whitman's verse, sets the poem apart. He is compact as well as exact in his use of words. It is only the war, the wounded soldiers and the dresser in the hospital he is concerned with. His experiences in journalism inspire him seek the plain, unvarnished truth.

Whitman often makes use of lists in his poems that help him bring together a wide, assorted range of various things to express his idea. A line in his poem is, at times, broken into many clauses, separated by commas. Each clause describes several

different scenes. In the poem 'The Wound- Dresser', he provides a cold, practical list of wounds of the soldiers, describing the places where they bleed. These vivid descriptions relate the horror of the war to the readers who realize that each casualty of war that they hear is not just a name, but also actually a soldier, a unique human being, who has a normal, family life like the rest of the world. In the second section of the poem 'The Wound-Dresser' the glorious memories of the battles fought so bravely and won are compared to footprints in sand that melt away as soon as they appear. The poet witnesses the trauma of war, feels the great loss of human lives and realises the meaninglessness of such violence, which threatens the entire human race. The first person pronoun 'I' in many of Whitman's poems is symbolic. 'I' never stands for the poet or the speaker, but symbolises 'Everyman'. 'I' stands for the modern American individual. In 'One's Self I Sing', the letter 'I' appears five times, with an undertone of the presence of the universal, a part of the Divine, thereby referring to Whitman's idea of the Self. Whitman's borrowing terms from technical, commercial or scientific field adds colour and variety to his style. The poet in the poem uses medical terms like physiology and physiognomy to make his idea clear.

The intricate structure of his unique style inspired many of the later poets of his time and played a major role in transforming American poetry. He meticulously wrote and rewrote passages of his compositions, heavily revising the entire draft then strictly instructing his printers to be careful with the production. Lack of metrical regularity and conventional rhyming is a characteristic of his poetry. As substitutes for regular rhyme and rhythm, he preferred the use of multiple ideas, distinct images, various symbols exuberant phrases, catalogues, enumerations, sometimes-idiosyncratic spellings and punctuations. For vocabulary, Whitman borrowed from every discipline like astronomy, anatomy, carpentry, construction, medicine, military etc., from various businesses and from America's flora and fauna. Critics have come to agree that Whitman was an

inspired poet but a skilled craftsman who had full control over the newly discovered free verse style.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: What are the poetic devices that Whitman uses in his poems "The Wound-Dresser" and "One's Self I Sing"?

Q 10: Do you think "One's Self I Sing" belongs to an accepted form of poetry? Illustrate.

Q 11: Mention the main features of Whitman's poetry.

6.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF WHITMAN

In 1920, Van Wyck Brooks (1886-1963), the American Literary critic, biographer and historian, stated that Walt Whitman was the 'focal centre' of American creative experience and literary expression. Whitman was a quintessential American poet he gave to America 'the romantic desire for a native experience'. He was not only a poet but a philosopher, a mystic and a critic too. Ezra Pound had admired Whitman as the Spiritual Father of America as he embodied qualities typical of the American experience – its curiosity, diversity, adventure and pioneering spirit. His work symbolises variety, largeness and the tendency towards innovation. He faithfully projected the essential, positive American spirit and captured in his poems the hopes and aspirations of the Americans and their philosophy of life along with guidelines for the realisation of their dreams.

Beginning with World War I and the work of Wilfred Owen, it became widely possible to grieve for soldiers without being patriotically inspired by them and without representing them as sacred martyrs. Sensitive poets like Whitman who had direct experience in warfront found it acceptable to grieve on behalf of the less-fortunate soldiers who were crippled for life in battlefields. His forceful and vivid narratives had great, unpredictable impact on countless poets that was even beyond Whitman's imagination. William Carlos Williams once remarked rightly that the only way to write like Whitman

is to write unlike Whitman. As both a poet and a prophet, Whitman's achievement is undoubtedly monumental. His immediate men of letters in America were deeply influenced by him. Emily Dickinson, Hart Crane, Marianne Moore and many others were inspired by his style. Whitman broke with tradition. In fact not only in his writings but also in choosing themes for his poetry, Whitman was always innovative and ahead of his time. The reiterations of 'I' in his poetry do not stand for the speaker alone but embodies Everyman.

Whitman's craft of drawing on popular imagery from quotidian existence and imparting a new meaning to the object attracted the interest of many modern poets. With his rare imaginative power and deep sensory perceptions, he made the past alive by his images and could show the immediate future. Richard Chas, a critic, who wrote several books on Whitman – *Walt Whitman Reconsidered* (1955) and *Walt Whitman* (1961), justly describes him as 'the poet of American optimism and pragmatism'. Randall Jarrell finds Whitman 'grand, elevated and comprehensive and real with an astonishing reality.'

His magnum opus *Leaves of Grass* has been translated into almost all major languages of the world like French, German, Spanish, Italian, Chinese and Japanese. Not only for his formidable contribution to the world of literature, Whitman gained wide admiration from the socialists and communists for his stand on liberty, revolution and democracy. In literary circles, he is seen as an author who praised the beauty, strength and exceptional qualities of democracy. Whitman claimed in 1885 that 'the proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it.' Over a century after his demise, Whitman continues to inspire the creative world.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 12: In what ways, do you think, Whitman inspired the modern poets?



6.6 LET US SUM UP

From the above sections, we have found that Whitman turned to poetry at a much-advanced age. Over the years, many critics have been intrigued by this mystical transformation on this poet's part. We have found that Walt Whitman was a true representative of his age who reflected in his works the varied crosscurrents of his time. His poetry portrays the impact of the romantic idealism, which reached its peak before the Civil War and also shows the scientific realism that dominated literature after 1865. American patriotism in the 19th century along with the Transcendentalist Movement, which influenced the American renaissance, had profound impact on the poet. No doubt, his association with transcendentalist poet, philosopher Emerson had greatly influenced and shaped his mind. Whitman could visualise the role of a poet as a seer. Whitman's ideal poet is a singer of the self who completely understands and acknowledges the socio-political scenario of the world and the spiritual universe. As Emerson believed on self-reliance, Whitman had faith in the Inner Light of man that led to the authority of the Self – the 'I' in Whitman's poetry. The *Leaves of Grass* is not only the celebration of his Self but a celebration of the spirit of the nation too. Whitman's 'I' is the prime character of the *Leaves of Grass* where it symbolises the common man that believes in the ideas and values of America. Being a true spiritual democrat, he first stressed on the revival of the individual, and later on the reformation of the masses. His idea of democracy is a rare combination of the socio-political as well as the spiritual well-being of an entity, as well as for equal share of rights, duties and laws for each individual. He equally emphasised the development of one's inner power and the measureless possibilities of spiritual attainment in man. This unique thinking regarding man and society was a part of his poetic programme as one can also find in the poems prescribed.



6.7 FURTHER READING

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6.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Whitman's brother George, a soldier wounded during the Civil War… …Whitman was touched by the sheer number of the wounded in the hospitals... …his experiences as a nurse... …the poet's attitude to the subject of war in *Drum-Taps* and *Sequel*... … catastrophe, death, decay, suffering, surgery, survival, trauma, medicine, human limbs, blood, tragedy finding place in his verse.

Ans to Q 2: Whitman combined many qualities of the American 'character' in his poetry... …'I' in Whitman's poems never stands for the poet or the speaker alone, but symbolises the masses… ...democracy, a

way of life for the author, stands for equality, responsibility, freedom, humanity… ... he stressed listening to and assuming voices of others... …he expresses the very American tendency towards innovation… …manifestation of geographical, ethnic, and economic diversity of America in his works.

Ans to Q 3: Transcendentalism is a philosophical movement… …basic idea is going beyond one's self through the soul to be one with the superior Soul... …the sensory perceptions must be transcended to achieve a mystic union with the Almighty... …Emerson is the shaping spirit and guiding force… …Whitman defined the efficacy of Emersonian transcendentalism in his poetry.

Ans to Q 4: 'Personalism' is a significant doctrine in Whitman's poetry... …it relates to his idea of the Self... …the fusion of the individual with the community in an ideal democratic society... …everyone possesses distinct individual identity at the time of birth that makes the individual different from the others... …the individual's soul/personality is a part the Divine Soul etc.

Ans to Q 5: "The Wound-Dresser" describes the American Civil War years... …the poet's attitude to the subject of war... …catastrophe, death, decay, suffering, surgery, survival, trauma, medicine, human limbs, blood, tragedy influencing the poem.

Ans to Q 6: 'I', in Whitman's poems, never stands for the poet or the speaker alone, but symbolises mass – Everyman... …in "One's Self I Sing" "a single separate person" can sing a song for the whole nation "En-Masse"... …the author sings of 'I' which is universal and a part of the Divine, not egoistic.

Ans to Q 7: Whitman had deep faith in democracy... …democracy, a way of life for the author, stands for equality, responsibility, freedom, humanism… ...the narrator stressed the importance of each individual and the voice within ... ...his faith in the individual's attainment of self-hood is possible only in democracy

Ans to Q 8: One who is conscious of 'self'... …also aware of his being a part of the mass, a part of democracy... ...man has an individual self

whereas the world or cosmos has a universal or cosmic self... …the poet wishes to maintain the identity of his individual self yet desires to merge it with the universal self which involves the identification of the poet's self with mankind and the mystical union of the poet with God, the Absolute Self.

Ans to Q 9: Whitman believed that poetry should be spoken, not written... …must contain musical elements... …exuberant phrases, images, symbols, free verse , catalogues, anecdotes, motifs, metaphors... …Whitman used figurative language and symbols... … vocabulary borrowed from different disciplines... ...to him words have both a "natural" and a "spiritual" significance.

Ans to Q 10: No ... ... The poems don't belong to any common/accepted form of poetry... …the form is distinctively the author's own... …'One's Self I Sing' seems unsystematic and disorganised... …but, in fact, is democratic in both subject matter and language... …the poetic structure seems unconventional but represents his democratic ideals.

Ans to Q 11: Liberal use of content and innovative style of writing... …rejection of traditional approach... …he aimed at exploring, discussing and celebrating America as a nation and the Americans as people... …with expansive lines and elevated expressions tried to embrace the whole of America... …absence of metrical regularity and conventional rhyme... …use of free verse as the basis of his poetic structure... …use of unique vocabulary

Ans to Q 12: A host of modern poets have been influenced by his unique use of symbols, images and vocabulary... ... exercising liberty in poetic theme, form and meter... ... cultivating a style of his own in literature.



6.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: List the characteristics of Walt Whitman's poetry as seen in "The Wound-Dresser" and "One's Self I sing" that make him 'America's' poet? What is so uniquely 'American' about his poetry?

Q 2: How do the different themes in Walt Whitman's poetry reflect the time in which he lived?

Q 3: What are some of the traits of Walt Whitman's literary style? Discuss with reference to the poems prescribed.

Q 4: Attempt a critical appreciation of "One's Self I sing" focussing on the idea of the 'self'.

Q 5: What is the main theme of the poem "The Wound-Dresser"? What does the narrator try to convey?

Q 6: How does Whitman portray the themes of war, freedom, and democracy in the poems you have read?

Q 7: Whitman's poems broke new grounds in their subject matter and language. Explain.

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UNIT 7: EMILY DICKINSON: "MUCH MADNESS IS DIVINEST SENSE" & "A BIRD CAME DOWN THE WALK"

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Learning Objectives
7.2 Introduction
7.3 Emily Dickinson: The Poet
7.3.1 Her Life
7.3.2 Her Works
7.4 The Poems: "Much Madness is Divinest Sense" & "A Bird Came Down the Walk"
7.4.1 The Text of the Poems
7.4.2 Major Themes
7.4.3 Dickinson's Poetic Style
7.5 Critical Reception of Dickinson
7.6 Let us Sum up
7.7 Further Reading
7.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)
7.9 Possible Questions

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss Emily Dickinson's secluded life and her works and how that influenced her writings
- infer why she has been regarded an innovator in her poetic technique and treatment
- explain Dickinson's wide range of themes treated in the prescribed poems
- assess Emily Dickinson's influance on the later generation American poets
- discuss why Emily Dickinson is regarded as one of the two founders of American poetics alongside Walt Whitman

7.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces us to Emily Dickinson, one of the most significant poets in American Literature. Dickinson, who has been enjoying an ever-increasing reputation in the literary world many decades after her death, never liked her works to come to the public eyes and had never intended to see them in print. Her private life was secluded and uneventful. In her lifetime, hardly a few poems (fewer than ten of her nearly two thousand poems) were published in campus magazines and journals of limited circulation. Upon her death Dickinson's family discovered her note books – some forty hand bound volumes of nearly two thousand poems and the first volume of her work was published posthumously in 1890. To her publisher's surprise, the first volume became popular at once and slowly the literary circle of America woke up to the merits of this neglected poet. Then more volumes would be published in the years to come as word of Dickinson's magnificent works of poetry spread throughout America. However, it was in 1955 that T. H. Johnson brought out the definitive edition of *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Due to their unique ideas and imagery her letters, which to critics were as valuable and interesting as her poetry, appeared finally in 1958. In this unit, we shall get an opportunity to discuss two of her mostly anthologised poems "Much Madness" and "A Bird Came Down the Walk".

7.3 EMILY DICKINSON: THE POET

The following sub sections will help us to read about the life and works of Dickinson.

7.3.1 Her Life



Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Emily_Dickinson

Emily Dickinson was born in the quiet community of Amherst, Massachusetts, on December 10, 1830. She was the second daughter of Edward and Emily Norcross Dickinson. Dickinson was raised in a traditional New England

home in the mid 1800 shaded by a stern and authoritative father. The Dickinson family was prominent in Amherst. Emily's grandfather, Samuel Fowler Dickinson, was one of the founders of Amherst College; her father, Edward Dickinson, was actively involved in state and national politics, serving in Congress for one term. Unlike her father, Emily never enjoyed popularity and public life and yet remained relatively active in Amherst social circles. Her brother, Austin, and younger sister, Lavinia, were not only family, but also her intellectual companions for lifetime. During her youth, Emily shared interests in intellectual pursuits, nature, and local affairs with her brother. Lavinia, two years younger to her, was extremely close and a significant person in Dickinson's life. All her life Lavinia took pride in her brilliant sister and was fully devoted to protecting her.

Being the daughter of a prominent politician, Emily received the benefit of a good education. From the time she started school, Dickinson distinguished herself as an original thinker. She entered Amherst Academy in 1840 and graduated in 1847. From 1847–1848 she attended Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, in South Hadley, where she acquired limited notoriety as someone unwilling to publicly confess faith in Christ and one with "no hope" of salvation. She was familiar with Emerson's essays, which helped her develop into a free willed person. She keenly started feeling her isolation. Emily was good at College but severe homesickness led her to return home after a year in 1848 and then she began her life of seclusion. The religious awakening peaked around 1850 – the time she began to write seriously. In the meantime, she withdrew from public view. Throughout her life, Dickinson seldom left her home. She read widely and lived in total physical isolation from the outside world. However, she remained open to visits from close friends and family.

Emily was a gifted conversationalist. Especially as a young woman, Dickinson was at ease socially and always the centre of attention. She charmed all the important people she met but Emily never married. The few people she was in touch with had an

enormous impact on her thoughts and poetry. In her entire life, she took one trip to Philadelphia, one to Washington and a few trips to Boston. Fortunately, during those rare trips she met two very influential men that later became her source of inspiration and guidance – Reverend Charles Wadsworth, a clergyman whom she called 'my closest earthly friend' and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the eminent literary figure of the time. It was in 1862 when she had a sizable backing of poems Emily promptly wrote a letter to Higginson for literary advice and received a discouraging reply warning against publishing her poetry because of its unconventional form and style. As a result, only seven of her poems were published in her lifetime and that too anonymously, the rest would wait until after the poet's death. Since she was 'discovered', critical and popular reaction has historically trailed the various publishing strategies for her work.

The later years of Dickinson's life were mostly spent in mourning. Her father died in 1874 and both Emily's mother and Charles Wadsworth died in 1882. Emily's poetic flow came to a stop with her terminal illness. Throughout the year of 1885, Emily was confined to bed and on May 15, 1866, Emily Dickinson took her last breath at the age of 55 in her Amherst home where she had lived her entire life. She was buried in West Cemetery, located in the centre of Amherst with her sister, parents, and paternal grandparents. Her original tombstone simply had her initials, 'E.E.D.', inscribed on it. That headstone was later replaced by her niece Martha Dickinson Bianchi, who included Dickinson's birth and death dates as well as the phrase 'Called Back', the only words in her last known letter, written to her cousins Fannie and Loo Norcross in May 1886.



LET US KNOW

In 2003 was constructed The Emily Dickinson Museum comprising two historic houses in the

centre of Amherst, Massachusetts, associated with the poet Emily Dickinson and her family with an aim to educate diverse audiences about Emily Dickinson's life, family, creative work, age and enduring relevance, and to preserve and interpret The Homestead, the poet's home and The Evergreens as historical resources for the benefit of scholars and the general public.

Emily Dickinson greatly influenced American Romanticism. In her works, Dickinson sought answers to events that she saw around her, especially the ones concerning life and death as well as 'life after death'. Her poems deal with a varied range of themes like nature, love, death, eternity, relationships, religion, etc. She rebelled against the church, which had a profound impact on her throughout her life. Like Emerson, she defended maintaining one's individuality. She was fascinated by both nature and death, which she attempted to explain in her writings. Some of her mature verses deal with the difficulty and necessity of conforming to faith, which relates directly to the subject of romanticism. Mortality is a repeated theme in her work through which she tries to evaluate life beyond death. Dickinson's obsession with truth gave her writings a special slant towards allusions, ambiguities, circumlocutions, definitions, humour, irony and riddles. Her themes are abundant with moral values and theological questions composed in elevated language.

Emily Dickinson wrote with some self-imposed limitations. Hers was a time when America – the New England – was reeling under the chaos of the Civil War, the tragedy of Lincoln's assassination and the turmoil of Reconstruction. Though Dickinson lived in troubled times, none of the events touched her poetry. Though social values and historical ideas had an impact on her character and mind, she confined her emotions to herself. Therefore, she is often described as a poet of 'inwardness'. She looked inward and not at the outside world for the substance of her poetry. Her world was bound by her home and the countryside. To a great extent, her

contemporaries did not impact her writing. She was original and innovative in her poetry. Despite the contradictory general impression made by her work and personality, Dickinson's popularity is a great tribute to her genius. Today Dickinson's place as the founder of a uniquely American poetic voice along with Walt Whitman is secure.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Do you think Emily's family background and upbringing had a role to play in the making of the poet?

Q 2: How did the friendship with Reverend Charles Wadsworth and Thomas Wentworth Higginson affect Dickinson?

7.3.2 Her Works

Emily Dickinson had left behind nearly two thousand poems. The period between 1858 and 1865 was one of her greatest creative periods. She had the habit of writing her poems on any piece of paper that came to her hand. Those were stored in all sorts of places in her room. As the poet had no idea of publishing them, she did not give finishing touches to many of her poetic output. Some of the poems were found in various states of composition – fair copies, semi-final drafts and rough drafts. Her handwriting was difficult to decipher and many poems listed alternate choice of words, lines and stanzas. Four years after her death, Lavinia Dickinson resolved to display Emily's poetic genius to the literary world. She first approached their brother Austin's wife, Susan Huntington Gilbert Dickinson (1830-1913), who had been one of the poet's closest friends for editing, but later Lavinia had to turn to Mabel Loomis Todd. Mabel Todd was a good choice in terms of Emily's artistic and literary sensibilities. T. W. Higginson assisted with the publication and promotion of Emily's work. In 1890, Higginson with Todd published some of Emily's poems in *First Series* (1890); next year he brought out *Second Series* (1891) and in 1896, responding to public interest,

Mrs. Todd alone brought out the *Third Series* (1896). These volumes of 499 poems of Emily Dickinson attracted reader's attention but failed to impress the critics.

In the second decade of the 20th century, the poet's niece Martha Dickinson Bianchi, Austin and Susan Dickinson's daughter came across many unpublished pieces her poet aunt had sent to her mother and with Alfred Leete Hampson's help, she edited and brought out *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1924). More poems turned up and were published in *The poems of Emily Dickinson* (1937). All the editions of those collections took fewer liberties with the texts and misread many terms of the original. In 1945, Millicent Todd Bingham issued her compilation of her mother; Mabel Loomis Todd's edit of another 668 poems in their possession, under the title *Bolts of Melody: New poems of Emily Dickinson* (1945) which was a carefully edited work. However, the publications of her selected poems were horribly botched in an attempt to 'clean up' her verse which was restored by the definitive edition of Thomas H. Johnson (the text is also known as Johnson text) in 1955. He edited all known manuscripts of the poet's works including variant readings, tried to arrange the poems according to their dates of composition, and published them with complete accuracy. In 1960, Johnson simplified the variorum edition into a single volume, reader's edition, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*. In 1961, Johnson issued *Final Harvest: Emily Dickinson's Poems*, a selection of 575 poems. In prose, under M. L. Todd's editorship, in 1894 and 1931, appeared two editions of selections of Dickinson's letters – *Letters of Emily Dickinson* and *Emily Dickinson Face to Face: Unpublished Letters with Notes and Reminisces.* In 1958, T. H. Johnson gathered all known letters into the 3 volume *The Letters of Emily Dickinson.* Johnson was responsible for making Dickinson's art available to readers in its full brilliance.

Emily Dickinson was a child of rural America of 19th century. Throughout her work, there are evidences of natural scenes and images drawn from it. She was familiar with Wordsworth, Bryant

and Emerson and she looked in nature for meaning, imagery, and spiritual rejuvenation and oneness. However, unlike them, her view of nature as beneficent was balanced by a feeling that nature was elusive and at times destructive. Nature, to Emily Dickinson, as she wrote once in a letter to a friend, was 'a Haunted House'. This expression implies that the natural world is replete with mystery, which deceives man as to the purpose of things in nature as well as to God's purpose in the creation of nature. However, she always tried to establish a relationship with the natural world. Her desire to feel at home amidst nature and to become a part of it is expressed in 'The Grass so little to do'-'I wish I were a Hay'. In Dickinson's poetry, there is a morbid preoccupation with death and life beyond the grave. The Puritan blood in her makes her brood constantly upon good and evil; life and death. Her contemporaries, Poe and Bryant, were also obsessed with the theme of death but there is a delicacy in Emily Dickinson's treatment of death. She suffered constantly from death-wishes and with such contemplation, she attempted to come to terms with death, through familiarisation so that when it approaches her, she can face it boldly.

Her poem 'Because I Could not Stop for Death', a masterpiece in English poetry, shows her attempt to receive death politely as befits a lady receiving the attention of a gentleman caller. Death is personified and she waits for it with all eagerness of a beloved waiting for her man. In 'Dying', she investigates the physical process of death. In 'Behind Me–dips Eternity', death is the normal state but life is an interruption. No two poems have exactly the same understanding of death – sometimes death is gentle and sometimes just inevitable. Her paintings portray death with many facets. In her poems, she narrates what religion had taught her – death is not the end but the gateway to immorality and eternal life. Dickinson's poetry is highly centred on religion and faith. Most of her poems are modelled on traditional religious hymnal stanza form. Dickinson was a religious poet and God was essential to her, but unlike others,

who saw themselves as subordinate to god, she rejected traditional dogma in her poetry.

She challenged God's domination throughout her life and tried to explore the relationship between an individual and God in her work. She refused to submit to His divine will. In the poem 'Mine by the Right of the White Election!' she makes a fiery challenge where the speaker roars in revolt against God, claiming the earth and heaven for herself. In many of her poems, Dickinson criticised god for man's suffering He causes and His various affronts to human being's sense of self. Perhaps hundreds of verses portray god as aloof, cruel, insensitive, vindictive, and 'a murderous hunter of man'. Grief is virtually omnipresent in her work. It is only 'Agony' as emotion she believed in. Only grief could be a bond between her and the other person. Knowing that both are grieving makes her closer to the 'other' and makes her burden of grief lighter. Nevertheless, grief has a positive side too. It offers her acute perception and strength to face reality. Another interesting aspect of Dickinson's poetry is her love for freedom, which she expresses through her poems. Many of her poems act as great liberating forces for her. While the society acts as a limiting force, the speaker in her poems creates the setting for what liberates her – poetry. Time and again the limitations of the society inspire her, rather fuel Dickinson, the poet, to write poems.

Mabel Loomis Todd (1856-1932), a pretty, vivacious, talented young woman, was an amateur naturalist, poet, and storywriter, who cultivated the art of writing. She spent nine years ordering, transcribing, and editing hundreds of poems into three volumes of Poems by Emily Dickinson published in 1890, 1891, and 1896 respectively and delivered lectures about the mysterious poet of Amherst to influence the public's initial image of Dickinson. With a lecture career for almost fifteen years she was instrumental in founding the Amherst Historical Society, the Amherst Woman's Club, and the Amherst chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Do you really think it was a limited world depicted in Dickinson's poetry?

Q 4: How does Dickinson's poetry differ from that of her contemporaries?

7.4 THE POEMS: "MUCH MADNESS IS DIVINEST SENSE" & "A BIRD CAME DOWN THE WALK"

7.4.1 The Text of the Poems

"Much Madness is divinest Sense"

Much Madness is divinest Sense—
To a discerning Eye—
Much Sense—the starkest Madness—
'Tis the Majority
In this, as all, prevail—
Assent—and you are sane—
Demur—you're straightway dangerous—
And handled with a Chain—

"A Bird came down the Walk"

A Bird came down the Walk—
He did not know I saw—
He bit an Angleworm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw,
And then he drank a Dew
From a convenient Grass—
And then hopped sidewise to the Wall
To let a Beetle pass—
He glanced with rapid eyes
That hurried all around—
They looked like frightened Beads, I thought—
He stirred his Velvet Head

Like one in danger, Cautious,
I offered him a Crumb
And he unrolled his feathers
And rowed him softer home—
Than Oars divide the Ocean,
Too silver for a seam—
Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon
Leap, plashless as they swim.

7.4.2 Major Themes

The following are some of the important themes of the two poems prescribed for your study.

Truth and Faith:

Emily Dickinson's world was small, insular and limited to her garden; her experience of life was not too wide, yet the range of themes she handled is quite impressive. Her life proved that travelling wide in search of themes is not the only way to compose great poetry. Alone in her house at Amherst, Dickinson pondered over her experiences fully and felt acutely. She explored a variety of subjects like divinity, purity and beauty of nature; experiences of love, affection, longing and loss, grief and her own sceptical attitude towards God and religion, immortality as well as her playful fascination with death. Dickinson had a passion for truth, which she sought to find in the inner world of experience. This is an interesting aspect of her poetry. Dickinson was fascinated as well as obsessed with the idea of truth and its tenuous nature. According to her, it is impossible to find out the true nature of truth as it has many faces. She never searched for it in the external world. In her search for truth, she rejected the Christian Puritan idea of God. This New England faith was based on the concept that man was sinful and was entirely at the mercy of a loving but arbitrary God and salvation depended on the will of Almighty. In Dickinson's time, this faith was wearing thin as poets persistently tried to elevate man's spirituality and self-esteem with

the steam of nature to the level of divine without ever denying the Godhead. They could see God's will everywhere in the signs of nature. Dickinson too felt that God, the Creator, could be seen and felt in His creatures. She tended to see man's spirit manifested in nature. She observed all the objects of nature, both animate and inanimate, lovingly and carefully.

Nature:

Nature has been a significant theme in Dickinson's poetry. She never claimed to have understood the deep mystery of natural phenomena. She believed that God and nature were two unknowable entities beyond the range of human mind. Man must admit the complexity of natural phenomena; their inner significance and how insignificant man is in the enormous spectacle of nature with its limited identity. Dickinson has over a hundred poems dealing with all possible creatures, objects, forces and phenomena of nature.

'A Bird came down the Walk' is an extraordinary poem based on nature. Apparently simple, it goes to the very heart of nature. The bird that figures in this poem symbolises the unyielding mystery of nature. The bird comes down the walk unaware that it is being watched. The poet keenly depicts the bird as it eats an angleworm, then drinks a drop of dew from a grass leaf, hops sideways to let a beetle pass by. The bird is expected to be aggressive towards the worm, which it eats in order to survive. However, its shocking conduct of allowing the beetle politely to pass on intensifies the basic tenet that nature believes in – live and let live! The insecurity of the bird's life is conveyed by the expression 'frightened beads'. Its frightened, bead-like eyes glance all around. While the speaker with all good intentions offers it some crumbs, out of suspicion and fear, the bird unrolls its feathers and flies away home softly. The natural creature is freighted by the observer into flying away gracefully without disturbing the environment like a butterfly. It merges smoothly with nature. At once, the bird becomes a symbol of the quick, lively wild essence that distances nature from the human world, which aims

to tame or appropriate it. The quotidian experience of observing a bird and its movements inspires the poet to exhibit her extraordinary poetic power of observation and description. Emily Dickinson never claimed to have understood the deep mystery of the phenomena of nature. She believed God and nature were two unknowable entities beyond the range of human perception. Man must admit the complexity of natural phenomena, nature's inner significance and their own relative insignificance.

Assertion of the Self:

Another significant theme in Dickinson's poetry is the assertion of the self. To her, the 'self' means an understanding of identity, believing in one's own values, goals and judging the world as one perceives. The body can be imprisoned but not he mind which remains free and roams around. In many of her poems, a strong sense of personal suffering can be heard. This suffering arises from the poet's deep remorse of being trapped. A mocking tone can be felt throughout some of the poems. These poems deal with the theme of suffering and rebellion against the social bondage and the establishment of the self.

'Much Madness' expresses a strong feeling of anger, frustration and suffering as an intelligent female living in a world dominated by dictators. She feels trapped and a sense of rebellion permeates the narrator's voice at all levels. The author uses irony, and wit, to express anger. The paradox in the initial line of the poem prepares the readers for the twisted meanings that appear later. The narrative offers a powerful message – madness could be the manifestation of sanity and could make absolute sense to some while ideas that are taken to be 'sane' by the larger mass could actually imply insanity to a sensitive person. Because following one's own way, choosing one's own values lead to an intense life with many upheavals. It is a voice against the majority, dictating standards for personal values and conduct, as well as all organisations in the society. From a personal perspective, the speaker moves to social

dictatorship in the last three lines of the poem. These lines confirm the speaker's sense of being imprisoned. A social satire, the poem starts with illustrating the daring of independent souls in the first three lines, moving from the personal to the social level in the two middle lines and at the end showing how independent souls are restricted.

While for other poets, the society provides a context for their treatment of love or perhaps a clear delineation of a world from which they quit into love, Dickinson's social satire criticises all kinds of shallowness and pretensions of the society. In Dickinson's poetry, critics have discovered a voice that critiques social norms though she prided herself on her indifference to broader social concerns. She does comment occasionally on the social landscape when it catches her satirical eyes. Since the voice of majority rules, the act of agreeing to the voice of the majority implies being sane in public eyes while revolt against the voice of the majority projects insanity. The act of disagreeing with the majority may lead to the loss of freedom to stand up to one's own thoughts. Dickinson was against god and the society for imposing compromising conditions upon individuals according to their whims in her poetry. Self should be essentially defined. To her, an individual may be subject to any amount of torture or suffering but as long as they remain a sovereign self, free in thoughts and beliefs, they possess that which separates man from other animate and inanimate beings.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: How has Dickinson described nature in the poem "A Bird Came down the Walk"?

Q 6: What is Dickinson trying to convey through the poem 'Much Madness'?

Q 7: What are the varied themes that Dickinson dealt with in her poems?

7.4.3 Dickinson's Poetic Style

Emily Dickinson was an innovator, who displayed marked originality in choosing her themes and in their treatment, determining form, diction and technique. A quick glance through her poems reveals their strikingly different forms. Her poems are often extremely short, do not waste words, and thus subvert the traditional forms of poetry of her days. Dickinson constructed a distinctively elliptical language for expressing what was possible but not yet realised. She had her own rules of grammar, punctuation and use of capitals. She was very fond of the dash as a tool to signify a pause or to emphasize. These apart, her use of vertical lines, slanting lines, sloping double lines to indicate pauses need careful reading. Particular attention should be given to grasping the sense of her whole sentences, straightening out inverted word order and expanding the sense of telescoped phrases and metaphors. Each of her words, sentences, stanzas need careful reading due to her aphoristic style whereby substantial meanings are compressed into very few words. It is her brilliant diamond-hard language that makes her poems difficult to understand on one's first reading but surely, it has added to her greatest achievement. Dickinson demands her readers to tune their ears to the peculiarity of her language.

Drawing primarily from musical forms such as hymns and ballads and then modifying them with her sense of rhythm and sound, Dickinson always had something unusual about her poems. The poetic form used by Dickinson along with her customary four-line stanzas, ABCB rhyme schemes and alternations in iambic meter between tetrameter and trimeter is largely influenced by Psalms and Protestant hymns. No doubt, her poetic rhymes had their main source in the standard Protestant hymns of her time, largely from those of Isaac Watt's 'Christian Psalmody'. Yet the poet interposed her long, rhythmic dashes designed to interpret the meter and indicate short pauses. Dickinson was highly influenced by folk line,

the oldest and the most popular form of verse in the English language. She used Common Meter or Hymn Meter, long metre, short metre and their dozen variations, but never forgot to add her own variations. Violating conventions, she stubbornly struck to her ways.



LET US KNOW

Isaac Watts: Isaac Watts (1674–1748), a descendant of 17th century Independent Dissent, a churchman, an educator, a true shaper of the modern congregational hymn rightly known as the "Father of English Hymnody" who composed some 650 hymns incorporating strong theology into them, also a theologian and logician, writing many books and essays on these topics. He mixed the language of scripture with a meter known today as hymn meter, a lyrical quatrain based on English folk poems. Emily Dickinson made this same hymn meter – and the emotionally spiritual content of Watts' biblical adaptations – the foundation of her poetic style.

Common meter: Also known as Hymn Meter, a close poetic quatrain rhyming A B A B, where iambic tetrameter alternates with iambic trimester.

Dickinson developed a personal style of using symbols and allusions, assigning complex meanings to colours, places, times, and seasons. Not only with unusual rhyme schemes and enjambment, she also experimented with compression and employed an idiosyncratic use of capitalisation and punctuation, thereby creating a poetic style that further distinguished her work from contemporary American poetry. Like the metaphysical poets of the 17th century England, Dickinson was very fond of using metaphors, which shocked the readers. She used metaphors extensively in her poems. Her imagination led her into a very peculiar territory from where she borrowed her metaphysical conceits. The most famous and daring image is the bold metaphor of a bar with God-the-Almighty as the bar tender in her "I taste a liquor". A superb

example of her use of metaphor is represented in the poem 'Because I could not stop for death', where the entire poem is a metaphor. In English poetry, it is hard to find a better-illustrated co-extensive metaphor that is as large as the poem. Nature, which appears widely in her work, is her endless source of metaphors and symbols. Other sources include domestic activities, industry, warfare, law and economy. Her poems exhibit her extraordinary power of observation and description. She was equally deft in composing striking poems with conceits borrowed from everyday life. This blending of the homely and exalted, the trivial and the valuable in her works and represented through her metaphors is typically Dickinsonian.

Often in her poems, Dickinson created mouthpieces to voice her ideas. She confessed that the speakers in her poems were not her own self but imaginary persons. She frequently employed the first person in her narratives and her poems often looked as if they were dialogues between two people – the speaker and the reader. At times she employed multiple speakers in a poem with the use of plural personal pronoun 'we'. The speaker's unique voice allowed the narrator to write about specific experience in the world. Often in her poems, the readers experience a tinge of an ironic voice. 'Much Madness' is a brief poem of eight lines. The poem starts with a statement that immediately catches the reader's attention. It begins with a paradox – madness could actually imply the most profound kind of sanity. What is often declared by the 'majority' (read 'the majority of the people that is formed by the powerful/dominating section') as sense/sanity could imply insanity. The poet's use of alliteration in the beginning with the use of double 'm' in 'much madness' and the 's' towards the end of the words-'madness', 'is' and 'divinest'. Note the word 'sense' that has an 's' at the beginning as well as at the end. Thus, the initial line not only makes it a catchy read for the paradox, but alliteration makes it fun to read as well. The narrator plays with the two key words – madness and sense in the third line. Completely turning the first line upside down, the poet

inserts the word 'sense' where there was madness earlier while 'starkest madness' replaces 'divinest sense'.

Structurally 'A Bird came down the Walk' is absolutely typical of Dickinson; it uses iambic trimeter with occasional four-syllable lines; her stanza forms, typically quatrains following a loose ABCB rhyme scheme and rhythmically breaking up the meter with long dashes'; her unusual emphasis on words, either through capitalisation or line position. In the poem, in each quatrain, specific words are capitalised to stress. Her quatrains are typically closed in the poem, meaning that while the first and third lines rhyme with each other, so do the second and the fourth.

This nature poem deals with man's alienation from nature. The bird is an emblem of the unyielding mystery of nature. Dickinson keenly depicts the bird that is at home among nature being aggressive towards the warm and politely indifferent beetle. While the speaker is enjoying her secret spying which adds to the tension, the scene becomes more explicit in the third stanza with the description of the bird's frightened uneasiness. The speaker appreciates the bird's increased beauty under stress, a stress which is implied by the metaphors of its eyes being like beads and head being like velvet. As the natural creature is about to flee, it becomes a symbol of the wild essence that distances nature from the artificial world of man. However, the most remarkable feature of the poem is the imagery used in the final stanza. Here the poet provides one of the most breath-taking descriptions of the bird's flight. Just by offering two quick comparisons of flights and by using aquatic motion (rowing and swimming) the poet presents the bird's power, ease and union with nature. The bird departs into an ocean of air where the entire creation blends seamlessly in itself. The flight through the air is equated with movement through water, leading to the image of butterflies leaping 'off Banks of Noon'; and 'plashlessly swimming through air' is one of the most remarkable comparisons in all of Dickinson's writings.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: What does it feel like to read a Dickinsonian poem? What do you feel about her musicality, sound, rhythm, and use of space, capitals or punctuation?

Q 9: Where does Emily Dickinson depart from these patterns and forms?

7.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF DICKINSON

Though never taken seriously or given due acclaim, Emily Dickinson's poetic genius was recognised from the moment her first volume of poems appeared in 1890. It was only with the publication of 'Poems by Emily Dickinson' containing 1,775 poems published by Thomas H. Johnson that the poet became a centre of interest in all quarters. During her lifetime, Emily Dickinson had only one literary critic – the American minister, author, abolitionist, and soldier – Thomas Wentworth Higginson. After he wrote a piece encouraging new writers in the Atlantic Monthly, Dickinson sent him a small selection of poems, knowing from his past works that he was particularly sympathetic to the cause of female writers.

Though opposed to publishing her poems, Higginson was her only critic and literary mentor calling her 'wholly new and original poetic genius.' Critic Willis Buckingham has noted that in the 1890s Dickinson was praised for her 'inspired"' thoughts and emotions rather than her poetic techniques. Only modern critics have come to appreciate Dickinson's achievements for their unique language and poetic structure. Margaret Dickie has challenged critics who have attempted a narrative explanation of Dickinson's poems by a collective study. Dickie maintains that her poems were composed as lyrics and should be examined as such. Karen Oakes has explored Dickinson's use of metonymy to establish an intimate, feminine discourse with her readers.

Other critics, such as Judy Jo Small and Timothy Morris, have analysed Dickinson's rhyme structure; Small noting the acoustical effects

of this structure and Morris observing how Dickinson's patterns of rhyme and enjambment developed over time. The enigmatic details surrounding Dickinson's personal life continue to fascinate readers and critics. Special mention is to be made of her biography by Alfred Habegger. Critics like Jane Donahue Eberwein, who has examined Dickinson's poems concerning a romantic love reciprocated but unfulfilled in her life; Nadean Bishop, who has studied Dickinson's spirituality, specifically the poems that seem to indicate the poet's rejection of God and heaven; Paula Hendrickson, who has examined Dickinson's poems focusing on the precise moment of death and notes that her poetry should be subcategorised as death. However, to all Emily Dickinson remains an enigma.

Dickinson had no school of poets to carry on her poetic tradition. She was an obscure poet until she was discovered. Even today, when she has won much critical attention, she has no imitators because Dickinson's technique is inimitable. All attempts in following her kind of expressing thoughts and approaching her style and tone fall flat. Her poems are subjective and inextricably bound with her being. Many innovations in literature of modern times in the field of technique and diction were curiously, seriously and sincerely anticipated by Dickinson. On this point, she was very modern. Her stylistic form in poetry, manipulating iambic/trochaic metres, full/half rhymes, alliterations, puns, short/long lines in poetry are some areas that need special attention by readers. Pouring out the pangs of the soul without being too sentimental, raising the private self into the dimension of art – the poets of later generations have much to learn from Dickinson. The rare combination of emotional as well as intellectual energy in her poems makes them a class apart. Her furious and strong defiance of male dominated social as well as literary authority has been appealing the feminist critics who have placed Dickinson along with the major writers like Anne Bradstreet, Elizabeth Browning, Sylvia Plath and Adrienne Rich. Today she is regarded as the most widely recognised women poet in English. The technical originality of her poetry, the variety of themes she addressed, and the range and depth of intellectual and emotional experience she explored have established Dickinson's esteemed reputation as a major American poet.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: How, do you think, did Emily Dickinson leave her mark in American literature?



7.6 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that Emily Dickinson, along with Walt Whitman, gained wide recognition and stunning success for her strong artistic control, brilliance in innovating and handling themes, stylistic complexity, emotional and intellectual energy and strangeness and versatility. Dickinson challenged the existing definitions of poetry and the poet's work. Like her notable contemporaries Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman, she too experimented with expression in order to free it from conventional restraints. Not only for her personality but for her craft, Dickinson has become an inspiration to all the women writers. Her literary ambition was in conflict with societal restrictions on women. Her resistance to patriarchal authority and stimulated interest in the revolutionary nature of the self-presented in her work have been attracting Feminist authors. Dickinson accepted the transcendental cultures and at a difficult time of anxiety and tension due to the Civil war, she stood firm that proved to be the most intense period of productivity in her career, announcing the emergence of poetic modernism. Undoubtedly, Dickinson's inventive poems helped to initiate modern poetry. She was one of the most enigmatic and creative thinkers as her secluded life and poetic work still fascinate readers and are studied widely. She was reclusive and these tendencies caused gossip to build around her even while she lived – some Amherst townspeople referred to her as "The Myth." Whereas to some feminist scholars and critics, behind her reclusive nature was the usual female artist's urge for privacy, in matters of heart and emotion, it was inspiration and creativity.



7.7 FURTHER READING

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7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Yes… …Emily Dickinson was raised in a traditional New England home… …had a stern and authoritative father… …Emily never enjoyed popularity and public life … …siblings were good intellectual companions for a lifetime... … Emily shared interests in intellectual pursuits, nature, and local affairs… ...Emily received a good education and distinguished herself as an original thinker… …developed into a free willed person.

Ans to Q 2: Reverend Charles Wadsworth, a clergyman was called by the poet 'my closest earthly friend'… …Thomas Wentworth Higginson, an eminent literary figure, whose intellectual brilliance influenced her… …he inspired her love poems… …Higginson's intellectual prominence helped Dickinson gain poetic merit… …after her demise, Higginson collaborated and published volumes of her poetry.

Ans to Q 3: Yes… …Dickinson's life was that of solitude ... ...she focused on her own private world rather than the world outside ... …known as

'poet of inwardness'... ...was a highly introspective poet... …additionally, her poems have their root in the 19th century Amherst society she knew.

Ans to Q 4: Dickinson is an extensively prolific poet with inward depth... … dealt with her own feelings and emotions, recorded painfully and honestly… …known for their universal poetic appeal and thought provoking ideas... ...nature poems exhibit excellent power of observation and description... …death poems carry bizarre conceits and unusual death fantasises showing heights of imagination… …religious poems explore a complex relationship of individuals with god... … novel poetic methods… …forceful language and use of dashes ...

Ans to Q 5: "A Bird Came down the Walk" deals with man's alienation from nature ... the bird a symbol of the unyielding misery of nature ... elusive, incomprehensible ... close observation of the bird and minute details as it eats, flies in fear or shies away from humanity ... depiction of nature in its brilliance distinguishes the poem ...

Ans to Q 6: "Much Madness" shows her personal suffering as an independent mind... …rejection of authority and institutions... …anger towards society trying all to control or to formalize/restrict... …mocking tone.

Ans to Q 7: Themes like love, religion, individuality and nature… …they gave an intense emotional and intellectual energy never seen before... …her love poems are scornful towards an indifferent god for subjugating human identity... …importance of 'Sovereign Self'... …natural world is full of mystery... …death is the most prominent theme… ... impressive sensitivity and imaginative handling of a morbid subject like death.

Ans to Q 8: Dickinson wrote lyric poetry instead of common prose ... …poems in rhythmical stanza forms... …partial/slant/off-rhymes to focus only on selection of diction and metaphors... …language is aesthetically marked... …lexical craft includes antithesis, synonymy, kennings, polysemy, puns, symbols, idioms and metaphors drawn

from diverse sources... …violating conventional linguistic rules... …excessive use of space, capitalised words, punctuation showcasing intense emotion… …attempt to express complex psychological state of mind.

Ans to Q 9: Dickinson is always innovative in technique... …her poems are tightly condensed… …modernising traditional forms of writing... … manipulating iambic or trochaic metres, short and long lines, full and half rhymes and extensive use of alliteration, puns and dashes... …playing with diction ... …her ironic wit, adaptation of personae, varied imagery, allusions... …separate her, make her style distinctly different.

Ans to Q 10: Dickinson was far ahead of her time ... … had her own thoughts, style, diction ... ...incomprehensible to readers and critics, contemporaries of her time... …original in themes and innovative in technique... …her themes range from nature, love, friendship, society, suffering, death, immortality, faith, poetry, art, and imagination... … brilliant images and metaphors, fine blending of symbolism and allegory, subtle ironies, unique and varied poetic voices.



7.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss some of the major themes that appear in Emily Dickinson's poetry with special reference to the poems prescribed for you.

Q 2: In what ways does Dickinson share place with the modern poets of the 20th century?

Q 3: Examine Emily Dickinson from the feminist context. In what ways has she been an inspiration to all women writers?

Q 4: "Dickinson a rarity not only because of her poetry but as one of the first female pioneers into the field of poetry." Discuss.

Q 5: Discuss the poetic techniques of Dickinson with reference to her poems.

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UNIT 8: ROBERT FROST: “MENDING WALL”& “STOPPING BY THE WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING”

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Learning Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 Robert Frost: The Poet

8.4 Reading the Poems

8.5 Major Themes

8.6 Frost’s Poetic Style

8.7 Reception of Frost

8.8 Let us Sum up

8.9 Further Reading

8.10 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

8.11 Possible Questions

8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

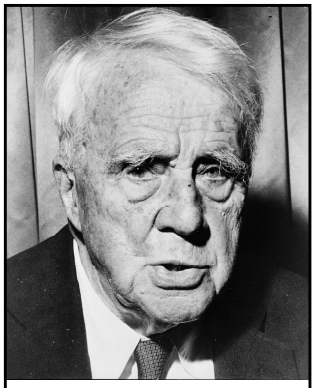
- get a fair idea about the famous American poet Robert Frost
- discuss his works in general and the two poems that have been prescribed in particular
- highlight the important themes reflected in both the prescribed poems
- analyse the poetic style of Frost

8.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals with one of the most popular American poets, Robert Frost whose works contributed to American literature to a great extent. The learners are provided with a description of the life and works of the poet in the first section of the unit since it is very crucial for the understanding of the works of the poet. An idea regarding the influences, inspiration and philosophy of Frost shall enable us to appreciate his works more

meaningfully. Chiefly noted for his realist descriptions and symbolism, the most dominant themes of Frost's poetry are Nature, love for humanity, nostalgia, self-realisation, etc. among others. Besides this, the unit includes two of his well-known poems, namely, "Mending Wall" and "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening" with detailed explanation. The learners shall in this unit, also be acquainted with Frost as a poet and gain an idea about the major themes that Frost deals with in his poetry. Apart from these, the poetic techniques that characterise Frost's poetry shall also be laid down in detail in the unit. Lastly, as we finish reading this unit, we shall be able to familiarise ourselves with the reception of Frost's poetry that is very essential to assess Frost as a poet.

8.3 ROBERT FROST: THE POET (1874-1963)



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

Robert Frost, one of the most celebrated American poets, was born in San Francisco, California in the year 1874. He lost his father, William Prescott Frost, at the age of eleven in the year 1885. It may be noted that severe addiction to drinking and gambling led to the deterioration of his father's health. However, his mother Isabelle Moodie was a poet and a teacher. After his father's demise, the family moved to New Lawrence, Massachusetts. As a young boy, Robert Frost was quite offended with the choice they had made, that is, moving to New England to be with his father's relatives; it was the last wish of his dying father. However, along with his mother and sister, Jeanie, Robert Frost settled down in New England with his paternal grandparents. It was not very easy for Frost to cope up with the environment at New England, as he mostly felt isolated. Unfortunately, his grandparents were not able to shower their love on either him or his mother as they considered Isabelle the cause of their son's death. This background is very relevant to our understanding of the poet, Robert Frost. He turned to poetry while in high school because "the solitary nature of the activity suited him and helped

ease the loneliness he felt as a teenager" (DeFusco 15).In 1892, Frost graduated from Lawrence High School and notably, his first poem appeared in the school magazine, Lawrence High newspaper.

In 1895, he married Elinor White, for whom he had fondness since his high school days. Their first son Elliott was born the following year but unfortunately, died due to cholera when he was only three years old. Along with their second child Lesley, Frost and his wife moved to Derry farm in New Hampshire. However, there was another setback when Frost's mother succumbed to cancer six months after their son's death. It may be mentioned that the transition from city to rural life was well adjusted by Frost who engulfed himself in works, as a means to deal with the grief caused by the death of his dear ones. Among his works during this time, the poem "Home Burial" is one. Frost and his wife had four more children- Carol, Irma, Marjorie and Elinor. The youngest child Elinor died in infancy that posed emotional challenge for the couple.

All these incidents at the personal front affected Frost's education to a great extent that he dropped from college twice, first Dartmouth College, and then Harvard University from where he matriculated. In between, he worked in a wool mill and then took to farming before joining the teaching profession in 1906 at Pinkerton Academy in Derry. As a poet, Frost had a hard time publishing his works in America; coupled with the challenges of his personal life Frost had to live amidst frustration. However, his short stay at England, over a period of three years, proved to be quite lucky for him. When he moved to England with his family, he befriended several well-known British poets like T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, William Butler Yeats, etc. whose influence enhanced his image as a poet. In fact, his first collection of poetry titled *A Boy's Will* (1913) was published in England. Some of the poems from this book are "Mowing", "Reluctance", "Into my Own", "Tuft of Flowers", "In a Vale", "Storm Fear", "My November Guest", etc. Thematically, the poems of this collection deal with rural life, nostalgia, closeness with nature, etc. – the subjects close to him in personal life.



LET US KNOW

Robert Frost borrowed the title of his book *A Boy's Will* from the American poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The first stanza of Longfellow's poem "My Lost Youth" is provided below for your reference:

Often I think of the beautiful town
That is seated by the sea;
Often in thought go up and down
The pleasant streets of that dear old town,
And my youth comes back to me.
And a verse of a Lapland song
Is haunting my memory still:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts."

Following many positive reviews of his first book, especially Ezra Pound's review further earned Frost publisher in America for his second volume of poems namely, *North of Boston* (1914) which contained seventeen poems. It was well received both in America and England. Frost had returned to America as War broke out that year, that is, in 1914. Some of the poems that appear in this collection are "The Mountain", "Home Burial", "The Code", "Mending Wall", "After Apple-Picking", etc. among others.

Interestingly, his return to America was glamorous as he was already popular as a poet and hence approached by many Colleges of New England where he worked as a teacher. In 1916, his third book namely *Mountain Interval* came out with poems like "The Road Not Taken", "Birches", "The Encounter", "The Bonfire", etc. Notably, his fourth collection of poems titled *New Hampshire* (1923) displaying simplicity and colloquialism earned Frost his first Pulitzer Prize in the year 1924. Poems like "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", "Fire and Ice", etc. You must note that Frost won Pulitzer Prize for other three other collections, namely, *Collected* Poems (1931), *A Further Range* (1936) and *A Witness Tree* (1942). Apart from these, another poetry collection by Frost is *West-Running Brook* (1928).

On the personal front, the death of his wife in 1938 and his son, Carol in 1940 caused major distress to the poet. However, he immersed himself into poetry, which helped him overcome, to some extent, his personal grief. *Steeple Bush* (1947) marks Frost's concern about the effects of World War II and upheld the poet's emphasis on the role of poetry during such times. Frost's poetry was not political even during wartime and hence provided solace to the nation. It was very well noted that his reputation as a poet rose during the war through to the fifties. He experimented by writing the drama *A Masque of Reason*. Frost won the Bollingen Prize in 1962 for his last work titled *In the Clearing* (1962). He breathed his last on January 29, 1963.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What are the three aspects in poetry that Robert Frost emphasised?

Q 2: Name the first collection of poetry by Frost?

Q 3: What are the works for which Frost received Pulitzer Prises?

8.4 READING THE POEMS PRESCRIBED

I. "MENDING WALL"

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.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the **yelping** dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbour know beyond the hill;



Yelping: barking in a high-pitched tone.

And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
"Stay where you are until our backs are turned!"
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, "Good fences make good neighbours."
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
"Why do they make good neighbours? Isn't it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence.
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. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbours."



Elves: fairies that are somewhat mischievous.

The poem "Mending Wall" has been taken from his second volume of poetry titled *North of Boston* (1914). In this poem, though Frost takes into account the discourse between two neighbours on mending a wall, it is written in the form of a dramatic monologue. The speaker of the poem is not very keen about the whole idea of mending walls whereas his neighbour, who is more of a silent participant, believes in the old traditions that have laid emphasis on mending the walls for "Good fences make good neighbours". (L 27) Generally speaking, the poem throws light upon two opposing ideas or notions about boundaries. While the speaker concentrates on the absurdity of such boundaries, on the other hand his neighbour reflects the conventional mind set of having such boundaries for maintaining good relationship as well as for security. Let us read the poem in more details.

The poem begins by striking a note on the idea of "walls" which metaphorically creates boundary. It also reflects an important idea, that is, Nature in opposition to concrete forms: "Something there is that doesn't love a wall". (L 1) The first four lines of the poem, in fact, overtly addresses how Nature or the mysterious forces of Nature are against 'walls' because it perturbs the way natural things occur. For instance, in the poem it has been noted that the natural forces do not identify with walls because it:

"sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast".

The speaker mentions how the gaps appear every year even after repair work. It is beyond their comprehension because suddenly during mending time in spring season, the gaps become visible again.

Ironically, it is the speaker who informs his neighbour about the gaps in the wall that has to be mended:

I let my neighbour know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.

"One on a side", both the speaker and his neighbour toils throughout the day to mend the gaps in the wall by placing the fallen boulders and

stones of varied shapes on either side. The speaker even goes to call it a "kind of out-door game" because they have to balance all the stones, some of which are flat, square or uneven; they had to repeatedly balance the boulders and the stones because it keeps falling down. It is very aptly expressed in the following lines:

We have to use a spell to make them balance:
"Stay where you are until our backs are turned!"

Here, in the following lines we get a glimpse of the sceptical attitude of the speaker. From taking active part in mending the wall, suddenly there is a change in his tone. He throws light on the fact that his apple orchard and his neighbour's pine yard do not actually need a wall for the gardens are not going to shift themselves. However, the speaker again brings to light the way his neighbour emphasises on "good fences" to maintain a sound relationship. There are two contradictory views- one favours 'walls' as a means to protect property, maintain cordial relation with neighbours, and also defines one's acknowledgement of the limitation of boundaries, while the other questions the absurdity of creating differences due to 'walls' which prevents closeness and creates imaginary division between people. You must keep in mind that the speaker is the one who believes that walls are useless structures that disrupts the harmony of nature thereby creating differences among people. In addition, it is only through the following line that the readers find the presence of a second person (that is, the speaker's neighbour): "Good fences make good neighbours."

The speaker then informs the readers that it is the spring season that makes him playful. On such a note, he intends to influence his neighbour to rethink on the importance that he lays to 'walls'. He points out that there is no necessity for walls where there are no cows or other animals that may cause injury. He further reflects on the fact that he is not going to harm anyone if he does not have a wall. By opposing the idea of a wall, the speaker not only creates trouble for anyone but also brings to light a crucial aspect. Symbolically, walls are associated with divisions. A close look at the poem reveals a tendency of the speaker against any boundaries between men,

be it in home or nations, in general and between individuals in particular. Frost deals with this idea to reflect on how differences or divisions lead towards a crippled future of a society and a country at large.

The speaker once again stresses that walls are against the creative forces of Nature and wants his neighbour introspect himself about the same. Regretfully, the speaker on being aware of his neighbour's ignorance or "darkness" of the uselessness of walls finds him repairing or mending the wall:

I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.

The poem ends with the adamant neighbour believing in the importance of 'walls' as laid down by his forefathers. However, in the speaker's views, we find an urge to adapt in the common interest of human beings for sustaining harmonious relationship and brotherhood. Structurally, we have seen that the poem is written in first person narrative and contains forty-five lines. Let us look into the second poem included in the unit.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Does the poem "Mending Wall" present two opposite views? Explain.

II. "STOPPING BY THE WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING"

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near

Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and **downy flake**.

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.



Downy: soft, fine feathers.
Flake: a crystal of snow.

The second poem by Frost prescribed for you is one of the most popular and anthologised poems that appear in his first Pulitzer Prize winning volume titled *New Hampshire* (1923).The poem begins with the speaker in the woods who stands there wondering to whom the woods belong. While admiring the woods, the thought runs through the speaker's mind that he might know the owner who lives in the 'village' and assures himself that the owner cannot see him 'stopping by the woods' that is filled with snow:

He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

In the second stanza, the speaker makes it clear that it was the 'darkest evening of the year' and hence, reflects that his "horse must think it queer/ To stop without a farmhouse near". On one side of the speaker, there is a frozen lake while on the other side, there are the woods. Being surrounded by darkness, the speaker imagines that even his horse might be troubled to think over the reason behind stopping amidst such lonely surrounding.

The third stanza further establishes in the speaker's mind the notion regarding the horse. As if in agreement to what the speaker imagined, his horse shakes his 'harness bells' to question if the speaker mistakenly stopped there. Except the bells, the only sound came from the sweeping winds and the snow.

You might be familiar with the idea of a 'foil'. In the poem, the horse represents the foil by allowing the speaker to introspect. John Ciardi in the article "Rhyme and Symbols in "Stopping by Woods""maintains that "a foil is a character who "plays against" a more important character…by presenting a different point of view or an opposed set of motives" which leads to the exposure of the more important character, that is, the speaker in case of this poem. (DeFusco, 1999, pp. 95). The second as well as the third stanza uses the 'horse' as a foil to point towards the condition of the speaker who is engulfed completely by the sight of the woods and the mysterious forces at work in nature.

However, the poem ends abruptly without giving the readers any clue about the intention of the speaker who stopped by the woods that are "lovely, dark and deep". It is not clear as to what compels the speaker to stop in such a lonely, cold and snowy evening. The fourth stanza reflects that the enchanting view could not be enjoyed by the speaker forever because there are other promises to be fulfilled. The repetition of the line:"And miles to go before I sleep" may be interpreted as "social obligation, or personal commitment, or duty, or just the realisation that a man cannot indulge a mood forever" (DeFusco, 1999, pp. 96).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Provide a brief critical summary of the poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening."

8.5 MAJOR THEMES

After reading both the poems, one important theme that becomes pertinent is **the theme of Nature**, which engulfs not only these two poems but also Frost's works in general. However, one has to note the difference between Frost's treatment of Nature from the Nature-poet William Wordsworth. Unlike the latter, Frost believes in 'detachment' and his poems thereby prove the poet's accurate description of Nature as it is, rather than dependency. In fact, Lionel Trilling, calling Frost a "terrifying poet" points out

that "the manifest America of Mr. Frost's poems may be pastoral; the actual America is tragic" (DeFusco, 1999, pp. 55-56). For instance, in the poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", tells about the experiences of not only one man- anyone who stops by the woods on a snowy evening is tend to feel like that. The dark woods mesmerise the speaker to such an extent that he stops at such a worse time. The fact that he is not seen by the owner trespassing is first mentioned, which also points to his loneliness. Then, the queerness of the whole situation further pushes him into isolation, which he very much welcomes. In a way, though dealing with woods that are lovely, it depicts wildness. In comparison to "promises" that are bounded by social obligation or family, restraint as well as order, wildness is the reverse (DeFusco, 1999, pp. 80). Thus, we see how through the theme of nature, Frost engages with crucial aspects of his time such as loneliness, isolation, terror, fear, etc. In the poem "Mending Wall" also, Frost's treatment of nature is proof of the way he realistically portrays the bare facets of nature without exalting it. Admitting about the power of nature, Frost in this poem brings out the man-nature conflict very well.

Frost's **preoccupation with rural landscape** is another prominent theme in his poetry. How could he not invest in depicting rural themes in his poetry being a poet-farmer? It is obvious due to his association with rural life in New Hampshire. This fascination of Frost with New England brings a fine tune of regionalism into his art as well. John F. Lynen (DeFusco, 1999, pp. 67) while discussing Frost's use of pastoral elements in his poetry noted that the very idea of pastoral poetry is based upon a 'basic duality', that is, through the lenses on the rural life; the pastoral poet always envisions a 'world beyond'. It is through the 'dissimilarities' that the poet portrays "universal experience by revealing the basic realities common to both worlds". For example, in the poem, "Mending Wall", Frost refers to the yearly tradition of mending wall; however, the walls are not just restricted to country walls that separates only neighbours. The 'wall' goes on to be infinitely interpreted as any kinds of divisions- economic, religious, social, political, etc.

Besides these, it is seen that Frost is concerned about humanity. Behind his description of nature in its various forms, Frost's engagement with the theme of humanity is obvious as in both the poems of this unit. In "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening", for instance, Frost deals with human obligations on the one hand and escapist tendencies of human beings by dwelling into the wilderness of nature. Interestingly, his poetry also reveals his interest in the theme of loneliness and isolation. He is very well aware of the isolation of modern human beings from society as well as from nature. Frost has very high **regards for individualism and humanity**. Though many critics were perplexed by Frost's distance from his contemporaries in language and style, yet he has a wide readership unlike the others. The rift between tradition and modernism is found in Frost to a great extent. His inclination towards Nature has to be read in terms of the scientific development: "He wrestled with the relationship of poetic knowledge and scientific knowledge of the world, acknowledging an interesting, if uneasy, relationship between the two seemingly disparate realms" (Faggen, 2008, pp. 24).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: In what way is Frost's treatment of nature different from that of the Romantic poet William Wordsworth?

Q 7: Describe Frost's concern for humanity with reference to any of the poems discussed in the unit.

8.6 FROST'S POETIC STYLE

Frost's popularity as a poet rests on various aspects like symbolism, language, simplicity, rhymes, choice of words, etc. His poetry is known for simplicity of language as well as thought. His language is often 'deceptive' in a way because under its simplicity, Frost brings forth some very serious issues concerning modern human beings. As a farmer poet, his poems have a flavour of the language of common people. Another feature of his poetry is the conversational style.

Repetition is also used by Frost, which serves as an important component in poems like "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening". However, in this poem it is very closely associated with the rhyme scheme. The rhyme scheme of the first stanza is a-a-b-a. John Ciardi has pointed out that "English is a rhyme-poor language" and Frost has adopted a hard rhyme scheme in this poem where three out of four lines rhyme. An interesting view put forward by Ciardi on this aspect of the poem is provided below for your reference:

Frost could not have known what a stunning effect his repetition of the last line was going to produce. He could not even know he was going to repeat the line. . . for in picking up the rhyme from the third line of stanza one and carrying it over into stanza two, he has created an endless chain-link form . . . so by stanza four, feeling the poem rounding to its end, Frost had to do something about that extra rhyme. (DeFusco, 1999, pp. 99)

Therefore, the repetition of the line "And miles to go before I sleep" might be suggestive of the poet's difficulty at first, and then his victory, over the difficulty of experimenting with rhyme schemes. Nevertheless, the poem is widely accepted as unique and has also created an impression of Frost as an excellent poet.

As mentioned earlier, Frost's poems are enriching because of the layered meanings and symbols. Indeed, symbolism runs through his poetry largely, which gives a vibrant significance to his poems. In "Mending Wall", for example, wall can be interpreted into any wall that divides not just two individuals but also an individual from himself or herself. Other implications of 'wall' can be from societal factors to nation-wide concerns. In "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", the 'woods' are merely referred to as dark and deep. If we further move deeper into the poem, the poet's fascination for the woods is not clearly mentioned, as to what caused him stop and withdraw himself in the woods. While the woods are a contrast to the 'promises', the only thing that the reader knows is the speaker's decision to leave the wood as he has much work to do before 'sleep'. In fact, through the symbol of 'sleep', Frost tends to give scope to his readers to interpret it in various forms. Another example from his famous poem, which you might

be familiar of, "The Road Not Taken" also, uses symbol of 'roads' to discuss the problem of choice. Hence, behind Frost's use of symbols, it is clear that his aim was to move from particular to general and encompass the humanity into the ambit of his poetry. Frost's symbolism can be understood in the following lines: "…in all good poetry symbolic meaning will be manifold and ambiguous, but in Frost's it tends to be so broad as to seem indefinite..." (DeFusco, 1999, pp. 70).

LET US KNOW



Let us spare some time to know Frost's idea of poetry. He laid emphasis on three aspects- "sound of sense", figurative language (particularly metaphor) and pastoral mode. The concept of "sound of sense" implies that "sentences have meaningful tones that precede the words, "abstract vitality" and "pure form" (Faggen, 2008, pp. 26). In fact, this brings him closer to his contemporaries because of "the desire to shed the perceived archaic literariness of Victorian and Edwardian verse. In the essay "The Constant Symbol", Frost mentioned that "there are many other things I have found myself saying about poetry, but the chiefest of these is that it is metaphor, saying one thing and meaning another, saying one thing in terms of another, the pleasure of ulteriority. Poetry is simply made of metaphor. So also is philosophy –and science, too, for that matter, if it will take the soft impeachment from a friend. Every poem is a new metaphor inside or it is nothing. In addition, there is a sense in which all poems are the same old metaphor always (pp. xvi). With the pastoral mode, Frost emphasises that "poems become subtle meditations on the relationship between man and the rest of the creaturely world, and tend to challenge the romantic tendency to use nature in purely symbolic and emblematic ways" (Faggen, 2008, pp. 114). An idea of this basic concept of Frost's poetry shall be helpful to you for reading and discussing his works. In the following section, we shall discuss the poet, his personal life as well as his literary outputs.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: Identify few aspects of Frost's poetic style that exalted him as a poet.

8.7 RECEPTION OF FROST

As we have learnt, Robert Frost faced difficulty finding publishing houses. He initially published his poem in magazines. However, when his first book was published and was able to garner good reviews, especially from Ezra Pound, he became a sensation not only in England but also in America. Though he has a wide readership, many critics were harsh on Frost for omitting highly significant issues of gender, race, etc. It can never be denied that "Frost gives a powerful and compelling vision of the world, with insight into nature and human nature that stirs thought and brings one continually back to the poems (Faggen, 2008, pp. 164-165). After the publication of *West-Running Brooke* in 1928, Frost for the first time, encountered criticism. For Frost, who already won two Pulitzers by then, it was a difficult time. Except the title poem of the volume, none of the other poems could put an impression on the readers/critics. Regarding the absence of current concerns like "industrialism, the disruptive effects of scientific effects of scientific hypotheses, and…Freudianism" in Frost's *Collected Poems*, Granville Hicks in his review wrote Frost's inability to "contribute to the unification, in imaginative terms, of our culture. He cannot give us the sense of belonging in the industrial, scientific, Freudian world in which we find ourselves" (Faggen, 2008, pp. 165).

In 1944, in an essay entitled unambiguously "The Case Against Mr. Frost", Faulkner Malcolm Cowley, not only directs his criticism to Frost but also his supporters. Cowley in the essay "claims Frost dismissive of scientific matters (a poignantly ironic claim in light of recent scholarship), and for not following in the politically revolutionary paths of his New England predecessors, particularly Thoreau and Emerson, or at least Cowley's version of the latter" (Faggen, 2008, pp. 166). This was directly linked to literary politics from which Frost kept a distance unlike his other contemporaries.

Despite such criticism, Frost's reputation as a poet did not stop from growing because of various positive reviews of his later books from poets and critics like W. H. Auden, Robert Lowell, Jarrell, etc. Jarrell praised the "psychological and the largely tragic vision" as reflected in Frost's poetry in two of his essays "To the Laodecians" and "The Other Robert Frost". Referring Frost as a "terrifying poet", Lionell Trilling considers him a poet "who assures us by his affirmation of old values, simplicities, pieties, and ways of feeling" (Faggen, 2008, pp. 168). Noted poet W.H. Auden appreciated Frost for his matured and wise outlook. He praised Frost's shorter lyrics as well.

Some of the books that contributed to Frost's reception as a poet are Reuben Brower's *The Poetry of Robert Frost: Constellations of Intention* (1963), John Lynen's *The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost* (1964), John C. Kemp's *Robert Frost and New England* (1979), George Monteiro's *Robert Frost and the New England Renaissance* (1988), Judith Oster's *Toward Robert Frost: The Reader and the Poet* (1991), Katherine Kearns's *Robert Frost and a Poetics of Appetite* (1994). All these critical works on Frost are suggestive of his popularity as a poet. Frost had a wide readership despite all the criticism and this proves his greatness as a poet.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: Write a note on the critical reception of Robert Frost.



8.8 LET US SUM UP

After reading the unit, we have become familiar with the poet Robert Frost. Four-time winner of Pulitzer Prize, Frost is a farmer poet whose poetry is replete with pastoralism and symbolism. We have looked into the various works, which have created him into a renowned poet. In this unit, we have dealt with two of his notable poems "Mending Wall" and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" and reflected upon the various thematic

concerns identified in both the poems. Often considered a nature poet, it has to be remembered that Frost deals with themes of isolation, nature, humanity and so on. We have also discussed the various aspects of his poetic style. Further, we have got an idea regarding the reception of Frost. To get a better understanding of his poetry you are advised to go through his other poems too.



8.9 FURTHER READING

DeFusco, Andrea. (Ed.) (1999). *Readings on Robert Frost*. San Diego: Greenhaven Press.

Faggen, R. (Ed.). (2008). *The Cambridge Introduction to Robert Frost*. New York: Cambridge University Press. E-book.

Frost, R. (2001). *Poems by Robert Frost: A Boy's Will and North of Boston*. Penguin. E-book.

Frost, R. (1930). *The Poems of Robert Frost: With an Introductory Essay "The Constant Symbol" by the Author.* New York: The Modern Library. E-book.



8.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: He laid emphasis on three aspects- "sound of sense", figurative language (particularly metaphor) and pastoral mode.

Ans to Q 2: *A Boy's Will* (1913).

Ans to Q 3: *New Hampshire* (1923), *Collected* Poems (1931), *A Further Range* (1936) and *A Witness Tree* (1942).

Ans to Q 4: Two contradictory views presented in the poem through the speaker and his neighbour… …one favours 'walls' as a means to protect property, maintain cordial relation with neighbours, and also defines one's acknowledgement of the limitation of boundaries… …while the other questions the absurdity of creating differences due to 'walls' which prevents closeness and creates imaginary division between people.

Ans to Q 5: Refer to section 8.4

Ans to Q 6: Unlike the Nature-poet William Wordsworth, Frost believes in 'detachment' and his poems thereby prove the poet's accurate description of Nature as it is, rather than dependency.

Ans to Q 7: Frost is concerned about humanity… …Frost's engagement with the theme of humanity is obvious as in both the poems of this unit… …in "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening", Frost deals with human obligations and escapist tendencies of human beings by dwelling into the wilderness of nature.

Ans to Q 8: Frost's popularity as a poet rests on various aspects like symbolism, language, simplicity, rhymes, choice of words, etc… …his poetry is known for simplicity of language as well as thought… …language is often 'deceptive' in a way because under its simplicity… …Frost brings forth some very serious issues concerning modern human beings.

Ans to Q 9: Refer to Section 8.7



8.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss Robert Frost as a nature poet.

Q 2: What are the major thematic concerns found in Frost's poetry? Discuss in detail.

Q 3: Analyse the poems prescribed in the unit with reference to Frost's use of symbolism.

Q 4: Interpret the following poems critically:

a) "Mending Wall"

b) "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"

Q 5: Comment on the life and works of Robert Frost. Do you agree that his background has influenced his concept of poetry? Discuss.

Q 6: Discuss the salient features of Frost's poetic style. Illustrate your answer with reference to the poems you have read.

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UNIT 9: EUGENE O'NEILL: *DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS* (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 Eugene O'Neill: The Playwright

9.3.1 His Life

9.3.2 His Works

9.4 Sources of the Play

9.5 Critical Reception of O'Neill

9.6 Let us Sum up

9.7 Further Reading

9.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints only)

9.9 Possible Questions

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the life and works of Eugene Gladstone O' Neill
- explain *Desire Under the Elms* as an experimental, symbolic, tragic, and emotionally probing play
- acquaint yourself with the various sources of the play
- make a survey of the various critical studies done on Eugene O'Neill and his works
- discuss the importance of Eugene O'Neill in the history of American literature

9.2 INTRODUCTION

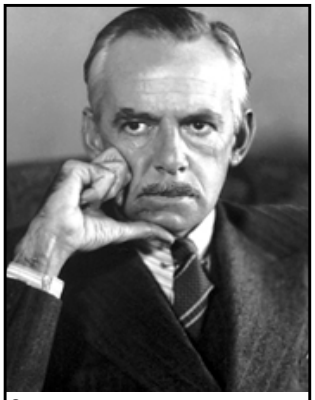
In this unit, we shall deal with the American playwright Eugene O'Neill with particular reference to his *Desire Under the Elms.* O'Neill was an American playwright and Nobel laureate in Literature. His poetically titled plays were among the first to introduce into U.S. drama techniques of realism earlier associated with Russian playwright Anton Chekhov,

Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, and Swedish playwright August Strindberg. O'Neill's plays were among the first to include speeches in American English vernacular and involve characters on the fringes of society. They struggle to maintain their hopes and aspirations, but ultimately slide into disillusionment and despair. Nearly all of his other plays involve some degree of tragedy and personal pessimism. As we finish reading this unit, we shall have not only discussed the life and works of this famous American playwright, but have also looked at the sources of the play *Desire Under the Elms* and made a survey of the different critical studies done on Eugene O'Neill and his works.

9.3 EUGENE O'NEILL: THE PLAYWRIGHT

In this section, you will get to read about the life and works of O'Neill.

9.3.1 His Life



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

Born in a hotel on Broadway, in New York City, in 1888, Eugene O'Neill never saw any stability in life. His father James O'Neill being an actor, young Eugene spent most of his childhood days accompanying his busy father on tours around the country. His summers were spent in their only permanent home in New London, Connecticut. He literally grew up in the world of theatre seeing and understanding the front and back stages. These experiences unfolded the difficulties of maintaining artistic integrity. The sense of insecurity, a common trait in most of his plays, came from his personal life. The playwright's search for a meaning of life prevails all his plays. He had a strict Catholic education during childhood. Though a bright student, his career suffered a setback when he was dropped out of Princeton University for his indiscipline, which was a mark of the end of his formal education. O'Neill took up various occasional jobs and then

served as a cub reporter in New London Daily Telegraph. During this period, he composed many poems and plays. In 1912, when he was diagnosed with tuberculosis, he was highly inspired by his studies, and decided to become a playwright upon recovery.

He enrolled in a brief course in writing plays at Harvard under Prof. George Pierce Baker in 1914. From 1924 to 1943, O'Neill composed plays and explored theatrical forms and literary techniques. In 1916 was staged his first one act play, *Bound East for Cardiff*, a story about sailors and their lives at sea. In 1920, came out *Beyond the Horizon*, his first full-length play that not only introduced him as a genius to the American audience but also earned him the prestigious Pulitzer Prize, the first of the three in his lifetime. After *Beyond the Horizon* followed many of his great plays proving the periods the most productive age in his life as an artist. *The Emperor Jones* (1920), *The Hairy Ape* (1922), *Anna Christie* (for which in 1922 O'Neill received his second Pulitzer), *Desire Under the Elms* (1924), *Strange Interlude* (for which in 1928 he won the third Pulitzer), *Mouring Becomes Electra* (1931) are some of his major plays. The only comedy he composed was *Ah, Wilderness* in 1933. In 1936, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature for his contribution to the art of theatre and he became the first and only American playwright to be honoured with the Nobel Prize. He was honoured with Pulitzer Prize again for the fourth and last time posthumously for *Long Day's Journey into Light*.

O'Neill married thrice and he knew the hardship and mental turmoil of broken marriages and homes. Oona, his 18 year old daughter (from his second wife, Agnes Button) married film star Charlie Chaplin, who was 54 in 1943 which deeply hurt him. He never met his daughter again. Then in 1948, his son, Shane O'Neill (from his second marriage) was arrested in charge of possessing heroin and O'Neill never met his younger son. In 1950 Eugene O'Neill Jr, (from his first marriage to Katherine Jenkins) committed suicide. Due to his ill health, O'Neill could not attend the funeral of his oldest

child. His final years were marked by physical suffering (that had robbed him of his ability to write and for long twenty years he battled a crippling nervous disorder), by isolation and family issues. However, those could not stop him from composing two great works that the American theatre has ever seen – *The Iceman Cometh* and *Long Day's Journey into Night*. Both were produced posthumously.

During his lifetime, his plays were received warmly, were highly appreciated by public and critics; though they created much controversy sometimes, but those established him as the master of the craft and America's leading playwright. In 1953, O'Neill passed away in the Shelton Hotel in Boston.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How did O' Neill's life and relationships influence his works?

9.3.2 His Works

O'Neill composed twenty long plays and many shorter ones between 1920 and 1943. In 1916, young O'Neill began his career with *Bound East for Cardiff*, the first work to be publicly performed. It was a one act romantic melodrama about seafarers and their lives at sea. The playwright's unhappiness with life is obvious in the play. As in his other plays, this play not only reflects the tragedy of human lives but also the author's point of view. The sailors in the ship hate the sea but they do not try to escape. The play has the lonely sea and the oppressive fog as symbols of approaching death. The play was primarily staged for the amusement of a special audience by an enterprising group of young Greenwich writers and painters at Provincetown, Massachusetts. O'Neill's joining the Greenwich group was remarkable, for the group unknowingly prepared his way for experimental dramas on stage, which was indeed O'Neill's revolt against the traditional forms.

In 1920, O'Neill's first full-length play, *Beyond the Horizon*, a tale of two brothers beaten up by wrong choices, was enacted on Broadway at the Morosco Theatre, New York City. The play not only achieved production on commercially minded Broadway but won O'Neill the first of the four Pulitzer Prises too. It was an incredible literary and productive period in O'Neil's life. The same year, following the success of *Beyond the Horizon* came out *The Emperor Jones*. The play depicts the hero's ascent in social ladder from a porter to an emperor who has got control of an island in West India, followed by his descent and destruction. In 1922 was staged O' Neill's first real box office success *Anna Christie*, a story about a prostitute returning to her seafaring father and falling in love with a sailor. The play won the second Pulitzer of his life.

In 1924 came out *Desire Under the Elms* about which you are reading in detail in this unit. In 1928, O'Neill staged *Strange Interlude*, a play in nine acts that bought him his third Pulitzer for bringing novelty in theme and treatment. The play depicts the life of a lady from the death of her fiancé to her countless marriage that follow. In 1931, O'Neill finished his most ambitious work *Mourning Becomes Electra.* In 1933, he composed *Ah, Wilderness!* which was the only comedy the playwright wrote. In 1939, O'Neill completed *The Iceman Cometh*, one of his masterpieces, a play about 'pipe dreams' of a drunken group in New York. One of his best-known plays, *Long Journey Into Night*, depicting the embattled bond of his parents, came out in 1941. The play won him Pulitzer (posthumously).

O' Neill was 27 when he bounced back to life and left the sanatorium with a sure knowledge of what he wanted to do with his life. It was indeed a spiritual as well as physical rebirth on his part. O'Neill's early life contributed a lot to his writing. Like O'Neill as a boy, many characters in his plays are caught in destructive situations from where they cannot escape. Many of his plays reflect O'Neill's introspective view into the family life. His plays also deal with issues

like moral and physical entanglements, which bring complexity into family life. Man in search of his identity and his struggle within himself are two major themes of most of his acclaimed plays. His poetic dialogues (not the verbal beauty but the emotional lines, moods, feelings, imaginations etc.) have made his plays distinctly different from any other playwright.

O'Neill was restlessly seeking peace and was dissatisfied in life. Therefore, his successful plays reflect his tragic vision of life. His tragedies are the reflections of modern life; his tragic heroes are drawn from the humblest class of society who bring about their own downfall. O'Neil continuously experimented with various dramatic techniques. His plays are expressionistic. Therefore, exaggerations, symbolic ideas, mask and use of distortion, elliptical language are common elements in his plays. Before him, American Drama was farcical or melodramatic. O'Neill was the first American playwright who made theatre a means to project the inner life of people and dealt with serious social issues and ideas. He made American drama a serious cultural institution.



LET US KNOW

The Legacy of O'Neill [https://www. britannica. com/biography/Eugene-ONeill]

O'Neill was the first American dramatist to regard the stage as a literary medium and the only American playwright ever to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. Through his efforts, the American theatre grew up during the 1920s, developing into a cultural medium that could take its place with the best in American fiction, painting, and music. Until his *Beyond the Horizon* was produced, in 1920, Broadway theatrical fare, apart from musicals and an occasional European import of quality, had consisted largely of contrived melodrama and farce. O'Neill saw the theatre as a valid forum for the presentation of serious ideas. Imbued with

the tragic sense of life, he aimed for a contemporary drama that had its roots in the most powerful of ancient Greek tragedies—a drama that could rise to the emotional heights of Shakespeare. For more than 20 years, both with such masterpieces as *Desire Under the Elms, Mourning Becomes Electra,* and *The Iceman Cometh* and by his inspiration to other serious dramatists, O'Neill set the pace for the blossoming of the Broadway theatre.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 2: Name some of O'Neill's significant works.

Q 3: Do you think O'Neill's major works appear to be a criticism of the society at large?

9.4 SOURCES OF THE PLAY

Desire Under the Elms is influenced by O'Neill's personal tragedies. However, for inspiration he turned to authors like Freud and Jung and to Greek tragedians including Euripides and Sophocles. The set is New England in 1850.

The action of the play centres around the Cabot family, with a "hard and bitter" father Ephraim and his three young sons who hate him as he treats them with scorn whenever they fail to match his physical strength or fail to live up to his 'standards'. Simeon and Peter sell their rights to the farm to Eben to join the California gold rush and finally to become free of their father's oppressive ways. The California gold rush as a new American dream must have touched the playwright. California came up with a hope for a better life despite numerous hardships. The rush was however not without some negative impacts on the people like the genocide of Native Americans and environmental damage, which ultimately helped in establishing California's statehood in 1850. Again, this trip to California could have turned into one of the worst nightmares imaginable and so this American dream symbolised taking risks in life and one's readiness to

gamble one's future. In the play, Eben's two elder half-brothers represent the groups of such fortune hunters.

The play definitely communicates to the readers O'Neill's study of Greek theatre. Since tragedy as a genre flourished in Greece, it is obvious that generations of playwrights have been greatly influenced by their timeless themes. The *Desire Under the Elms* might not have been derived directly from any particular play, yet the themes like incest and infanticide echo several mythical themes from Greek tragedies. The sense of an inevitable destiny awaiting the major characters – Ephraim, Eben and Abbie remind one of the Greek tragedies. All the characters are forced to consciously choose the evil and it is destiny that structures events to bring about the downfall of otherwise noble characters.

The play seems to be influenced by other tales like that of Phaedra's—the tale of a queen—who is pressurised by the gods to fall in love with her husband's son from another marriage. The king's son, Hippolytus, rejects his stepmother's advances, prompting Phaedra to seek revenge on him by falsely accusing Hippolytus of raping her. The father King Theseus curses poor Hippolytus to death. An angry Phaedra kills herself. The myth inspired many playwrights to compose plays, with a few variations but presenting Phaedra as a source of Hippolytus's demise. It also served as O'Neill's principal model.

Another myth, the story of Medea (later made into a drama by Euripides), must have inspired O'Neill. Medea, the wife of Jason, is infamous for seeking revenge against Jason (who left her for another young princess) by murdering her own sons then leaving Jason alive to suffer. Medea, for committing such a sin, is often portrayed as a witch or sorcerer. Medea can be identified with Abbie when she deliberately decides to kill her own blood. The innocent son would have secured the property of Ephraim.

Furthermore, O'Neill complicates the classic tales by introducing Old and New Testaments motif in the play. God in the play is judgemental, angry and hard. The moment Eben knows about his child's murder, he rushes off to inform the Sheriff. This is the Old Testament rage - the superiority of justice over mercy. Abbie faces the wrath of Ephraim who

suddenly becomes the personification of the punishing God. However, Ephraim in despair thinks of abandoning his harsh God and in sharp contrast to his son says that he would never have told the police. He declares to turn the livestock loose and burn everything. Yet by the end of the play, the hardness has won and Ephraim's life on the farm continues as usual. Then, Eben's rage over Abbie proves short-lived and his instinctual side wins over. He comes back to her realizing his love for her and to share her blame and punishment by accepting part of the guilt. This love, charity reminds us of "Now there remaineth Faith, Hope, and Love, these three; and the greatest of these is Love." in the New Testament.

So, several myths are brought together in the play. The sensitive use of Greek sources to draw on the archetypal plot as well as resonances from Old and New Testaments, American history, Sigmund Freud together have provided extraordinary power, flavour and colour to the characters of the play, thereby making the play one of the finest in the American theatre.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What parallels/differences do you find between some Greek mythical characters and the characters in *Desire Under the Elms*?

9.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF O'NEILL [Adapted from *Cambridge Companion to Eugene O'Neill*. pp 236-243]

The reception of O''Neill falls essentially into two categories: (I) the reception of his plays in critical reviews following their performances, and (2) the interpretation and evaluation of his plays by scholars and historians. The former have obviously appeared in newspapers like the *New York Times* and magazines like *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The Nation*, and *The New Yorker*; the latter in scholarly journals and in books devoted to his life and works.

From the early 1920s until the late 1930s—the period of O'Neill's heyday as a popular dramatist - journalistic reviews were the chief category, though some quasi-scholarly studies also appeared in that period, most notably Barrett H. Clark's *Eugene O'Neill*, which was originally published in

1926. With the appearance of Sophus Winther's *O'Neill: A Critical Study* in 1934, evaluation of the playwright as a major American dramatist and a significant figure in world drama has come to predominate, though obviously reviews of individual productions in the United States and, increasingly, abroad continue to appear.

The most comprehensive survey of what has been written on O'Neill until the year of its publication is Jordan Y. Miller's *Eugene O'Neill and the American Critic* (1973). Miller's work is unique in giving equal attention to newspaper reviews and scholarly studies. Another important work is Oscar Cargill, N. Bryllion Fagin, and William J. Fisher, eds., *O'Neill and his Plays* (1961) which actually juxtaposes reprints of selected journalists' reviews with both reprinted and original scholarly articles. Other listings and discussions of O'Neill criticism appear, of course, in general bibliographical discussions—e.g., Madeline Smith and Richard Eaton's *Eugene O'Neill: An Annotated Bibliography* (1988) or Margaret Loftus Ranald's *An O'Neill Companion* (1984) - and in general surveys of American drama criticism, notably Floyd E. Eddleman's *American Drama Criticism,* second edition.

Sophus K. Winther's *Eugene O'Neill: A Critical Study*, originally published in 1934, and Richard Dana Skinner's *Eugene O'Neill: A Poet's Quest*, first published in 1935, are other pioneering critical works written without the understanding that Long Day's Journey and the biographies of the 1960s and 70s would bring. John Gassner's *Eugene O'Neill* (1965), Frederick I. Carpenter's *Eugene O'Neill* (1979), and Normand Berlin's *Eugene O'Neill* (1982), all works analyzing the O'Neill canon in the entire context of the man and his theatre. To this latter group, Virginia Floyd's *Eugene O'Neill: A New Assessment* (1984) might appropriately be added.

Four studies deal with the playwright's emerging dramaturgical techniques: Egil Tornqvist's *A Drama of Souls: O'Neill's Study in Supernaturalistic Techniques* (1969), which deals with his methods of characterization. Jean Chothia's *Forging a Language: A Study of the Plays of Eugene O'Neill* (1979), which is rooted in Chothia's unique perception of growing sophistication in the playwright's dialogue; Michael Manheim's *Eugene O'NeillS New Language of Kinship* (1982) which reaches

conclusions for the entire canon based both on the autobiographical context and language of the late plays; Doris Alexander's *Eugene O'Neill's Creative Struggle* (1992), which uses an autobiographical context to concentrate on the years 1924-33; and most recently Kurt Eisen's *The Inner Strength of Opposites*, which sees inner psychological conflict in the plays from the perspective of the twentieth-century novel.

O'Neill's relationship to earlier writers—Ibsen, Strindberg, and the Greek tragedians—has been included in several critical studies, but comparisons of his plays with the work of two writers he is not normally compared with is the exclusive focus of two full-length works: Peter Egri's *Chekhov and O'Neill* (1986), which deals more with Chekhov's short stories than his plays; and Normand Berlin's *O'Neill's Shakespeare* (1993), one of the most original approaches to the playwright in recent years.



9.6 LET US SUM UP

O'Neill has been acknowledged as one of the foremost American playwrights of the early 20th century. A realist, O'Neill, writes of "things as they are", neither gloomy nor moralistic. O'Neill in his life was passionately dissatisfied; his restless soul dominates his major plays. His restless spirit was deeply conscious of man's tragic predicament that has been caused by forces powerful and unknown to man. He believed that man is a mixture of good and evil encounters with incidents and accidents that make up his life. He presents some real characters on the stage with the secrets of their thoughts, their planning, their appearance and all. O' Neill's plays try to find out the meaning of human life. There is a constant quest for identity on man's part that ends in death and destruction. His characters fail to have any comfortable foothold to find life's meaning and fall into tragic dilemma. They are isolated and frustrated souls even in the times of modern science and technology.



9.7 FURTHER READING

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Web Resources:

https://www.britannica.com/biography/Eugene-ONeill

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugene_O%27Neill



9.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Intense personal point of views can be found in O'Neill's plays... ...plots derived directly from the scarring consequences of tragic relationships within O Neill's own family... ...disturbing relationships between parents, tragic deaths of O'Neill's older brother, who died of alcoholism ... ... caught and tormented between love and rage ... ... themes of incest, lust, infanticide, revenge, conflicts etc. in his plays have their roots in his own family's conflicts.

Ans to Q 2: *Bound East for Cardiff… …Beyond the Horizon… …Desire Under the Elms… …Mourning Becomes Electra… …Long Journey Into Night… …The Emperor Jones*

Ans to Q 3: O'Neill's works criticise society's labelling something right or wrong ... … something that appears wrong can later prove right and vice versa ... ... sometimes sins are justified and forgivable ... ... at times impulse or human desire prove very dangerous ... ... also the reason behind committing sins ... ... the play criticises man's less control over passion, vanity, obsession and desire and his conscious decision to move towards disaster.

Ans to Q 4: Both gods and fate play significant roles in Greek myths... …in the play individuals appear as if modern embodiment of mythic characters... …Abbie resembles Phaedra who attempted to seduce Hippolytus... …Abbie also resembles Medea who kills her own blood... …Eben is Oedipus who has an incestuous relationship with his (step) mother by which Eben supplants his father... …Eben resembles Hippolytus as well who becomes the victim of his mother's revenge...

…Ephraim too seems a mythic figure haunted by destiny and must pay for his wrong deeds ... ... characters accepting punishment for committing sin is derived from the Greek concept of tragedy.



9.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Who is Eugene O'Neill? Discuss the life and works of the American playwright Eugene O'Neill.

Q 2: What aspects of Eugene O'Neill's life and relationships are seen to manifest in his works?

Q 3: Provide a detailed account of the sources of the play *Desire Under the Elms.*

Q 4: Write in detail about the critical studies done on the Eugene O'Neill and his works.

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UNIT 10: EUGENE O'NEILL: *DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS* (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 Reading the Play

10.3.1 Act Wise Summary of the Play

10.3.2 Major Themes

10.3.3 Major Characters

10.4 Critical Reception of the Play

10.5 Let us Sum up

10.6 Further Reading

10.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints only)

10.8 Possible Questions

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- make act-wise summary of the play
- trace its experimental and rather complicated themes, as well as the complex major characters
- gain ideas about its critical reception of the play among the audience and critics
- appreciate the play in its nuanced totality

10.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall mainly discuss Eugene O' Neil's play *Desire Under the Elms* in terms of its various important aspects. From the previous unit, that deals with the life and works of Eugene O'Neill, we have learnt that O'Neil transformed the art of producing drama by making it a serious cultural institution. This unit deals with O'Neill's play *Desire Under the Elms* which is a story about a young woman married to an old man who cements her relationship with her stepson. The play ends with a tragic note—the

lady kills her new born in order to prove her love and loyalty to her stepson-lover. The overtone of incest in the play caused much controversy. By the time we finish reading the unit, we shall learn why O' Neil's plays are a continuous inspiration to the newer generation of authors from America as well as readers across the world.

10.3 READING THE PLAY

The following section will help you to read the play in some detail.

10.3.1 Act Wise Summery of the Play

Act I, Scene I

As the curtain rises, audience see Eben Cabot with his half-brothers Simeon and Peter who have just come back from work. Eben calls them in for supper. They stop in front of the house to remark on the beauty of the setting sun. They talk of going to California in search of fortune for an easy life. They are tired of the hard life of working in the fields. The farm belongs to their father Ephraim Cabot who went missing without anyone's knowledge two months ago. They are not sure of his being alive. However, Eben who has been busy in the kitchen comes out and he shows no interest in going to California leaving his farm behind.

Act I, Scene II

Scene II takes the readers inside the house where the three brothers have their supper. While the two elder brothers share their doubts about their father, Eben violently reacts to them saying that Ephraim is not his father. However, Eben fondly remembers his dead mother.

Act I, Scene III

Next morning, Eben wakes up his half brothers to inform them that their father is alive and has married at New Dover for the third time a lady who is about 35 years old. The brothers realise that all their fortune, the field will go to that lady now. Eben strongly rejects this notion and says that the farm actually belongs to his mother

and he is the rightful heir to the farm. Eben tells them that he hates his father who has murdered his mother. However, his two elder brothers believe that two-thirds of the farmland belongs to them too. Eben strongly rejects the idea. Eben lures them so that they relinquish any claim to the land, promising money, which he stole from his father, for their trip to California. The brothers agree to leave the property if Eben pays them 300 dollars in lieu of their share in the farm. Eben becomes happy to find that they agree. He prepares to visit Minnie, a local prostitute, in the town and the two bothers taunt him.

Act I, Scene IV

Eben is seen brooding over his food, thinking something deeply. He senses his father approaching home with his new bride. He goes to the gate and with glowing possessive eyes stare at the farm, which he believes, cannot go to anyone but him. Both brothers get emotional while planning to leave the house and the land where they have given 30 years of sweat and blood. Soon they compose themselves thinking California will not only give them fortune but some freedom too. As their father proceeds home, angry Simeon and Peter sign on the papers leaving their claim on the land. They wait to see their new mother. Ephraim Cabot enters with Abbie Putnam, his new bride, and introduces her to his two elder sons. Abbie is more interested to see the house, which she mentions, as "my house" instead of "our house" than to know her new family. Abbie goes inside the house in search of Eben to tell him that she is the lady of the house from now. Meanwhile insulting their father, Simeon and Peter leave the house for California as free men. As Abbie goes in to explore her new home, she finds Eben in the kitchen. She at once tries to befriend Eben, a handsome young man, but he rejects her. Abbey tells him that in her past she had been in search of her own home. Now she has found her own home and the property belongs to her. These revelations make Eben furious. Older Cabot enters the room and prays to God to smite his two undutiful elder

sons. He asks Eben to go to work in the field but Eben answers that he cannot work alone.

Act II, Scene I

Two months later, on a hot Sunday afternoon, Abbie, dressed in her best, is seen sitting at the end of the porch. Very carefully, trying not to make any noise and later when caught by Abbie, ignoring her existence, Eben goes out of the house. Abbie passionately makes advances towards him. She very swiftly asks Eben not to hide his emotions towards her. She sees his desire in his lustful eyes. Abbie tries to come close to him at times through seduction and at times through a commanding voice. Though Ebenis confused, he agrees with her and leaves. Abbie knows what is he up to and angrily asks him if he is to see Minnie, the prostitute. Eben replies that he finds the village prostitute better than her for at least she does not want to steal his fortune. Later Abbie asks her husband if he has plans to leave the farm to Eben. Old Cabot brushes it aside and says that when he dies he would rather burn his property that was earned with his sweat and blood than leave it to anyone. He says that he will turn the livestock free. Even Abbie becomes free thereafter. Abbie asks whether she has any right over the property but as the field needs a son to work for it, Abbie cannot inherit the farm. Abbie declares that she wants a son from Cabot. At this idea, the old man is overcome with pride, joy and emotion and both pray to God to bless them with a son. While Cabot is joyous hoping for a son in his old age to replace his loneliness, Abbie becomes busy plotting her future.

Act II, Scene II

That night, in their bedroom, old Cabot is excited dreaming of a son from Abbie. It turns out an unsuccessful attempt at making a baby that puts Abbie into another thought. Old Cabot remembers his past – how much hard work he put in the farm and how lonely he was after the death of his first and second wives. Now his only hope

is Abbie and the son she will bring. Abbie promises him a son too, veiling the threat in her voice. Cabot, feeling cold and lonely in the room, goes off to the barn. He finds peace talking to the cows.

In another room, Eben, also alone, thinks of the oppression created by the stonewall. He and Abbie stare at each other through the wall. He senses Abbie's closeness. Both feel nervous and uneasy. Abbie moves to Eben's room and kisses him. Forgetting his hatred of her, Eben too returns her love. Abbie declares her love for him. The scene ends with a confused Eben remembering his dead mother as Abbie goes to the open parlour downstairs.

Act II, Scene III

Totally confused, Eben goes to the parlour. Abbie tells him that she senses someone inside the parlour; Eben replies it's his mother who, he believes, hates Abbie for stealing her place at home. Eben misses his mother who was so kind and soft to him and who used to sing for him. Abbie promises to be kind and soft to him too and would love him like his mother. However, passion overcomes her and soon they passionately express their love for each other.

Act II, Scene IV

Next morning, as Eben, now has a bold and confident expression, leaves for the farm; Abbie expresses sadness over the parting for the whole day.

Act III, Scene I

The next spring, Abbie bears a baby boy. Neighbours gather at Cabot's house for celebrating the arrival of Cabot's new family member. But the guests suspect that the father of the baby is Eben and gossip about it. However, no one dares say that in front of Cabot. As Cabot very proudly announces his ability to make a boy at the age of 76, Abbie looks for Eben among the invitees.

Eben in a room closely watches his boy and tells Abbie that he does not like his baby to be related to Old Cabot. Abbieasks him to be silent and wait for the right time. Eben, unable to tolerate the

celebrations and the locals' gossips about him and Abbie, goes out. On the other side, even old Cabot comes out to the barn to have some peace and solace. The party goes on.

Act III, Scene II

On the set is shown the exterior of the Cabot house after half an hour. Eben with a dumb face is standing at the gate gazing the night sky. Old Cabot comes up from the barn with his eyes on the ground. As he sees Eben standing there, with a cruel triumphant smile he slaps Eben's back and asks him why has he been outside and not being part of the dance in honour of the new born inside. Soon quarrel over the farm follows and Eben says that he will possess the farm anyway. A furious and suspicious Cabot discloses Abbie's secret in plotting against Eben to secure the farm for herself and her son. Abbie wanted her husband to cut off Eben from the property after his death. Trusting his words, Eben breaks down with grief and tries to kill the woman in rage. While Cabot resists him, he attacks the old man but Cabot overpowers him. Abbie comes out to find Eben beaten badly. When Cabot goes inside to party, Abbie tries to kiss Eben asking if he is hurt. Eben, sobbing violently, reacts by asking her if she had designed the whole game of love with him. Abbie admits that initially when she first met him, she had conspired, but with time she has fallen in love with him. Abbie asks Eben to forgive her. He calls her a liar, wishing his dead mother come back to life to help him in murdering the woman. He wishes the baby had never been born and vows to join his two brothers in California, since Abbie has used him to get a son so that she can be heir to the land. It wasn't love for him but the desire for the farm had driven her to him. Abbie keeps on saying that her love for Eben is true and she desperately wants him in her life. As Eben goes inside the house, Abbie, confused and alone, promises to prove her loyalty to Eben.

Act III, Scene III

After a few hours, just before the dawn, Abbie rushes to the kitchen to meet Eben and kisses him wildly and informs him that

she has proved that she loves him more than anything in the world. But Eben, cold and unmoved, prepares to leave the house, saying that one day he will be back to his son, who will look just like him. Abbie tells him that she had killed the baby to prove her love to Eben. Eben falls to his knees. Horrified and in deep rage and grief, he accuses her of committing such a sin and rushes away to summon the Sheriff. Eben starts hating her more. The scene ends with Abbie running to the door after Eben saying that she loves him and she does not care what he does but she would still love him. She faints on the floor.

Act III, Scene IV

After an hour, Abbie is seen in the kitchen waiting for Eben to come back with the Sheriff. Cabot, not finding Abbiein the bedroom beside him, goes to the baby and wishes him good morning. He becomes happy finding the baby in sound asleep and remembers that the baby did not cry all night as he usually does. Quietly he leaves the room to find Abbie in the kitchen. Abbie confesses to him that she has killed the baby. Abbie also tells him that the baby is Eben's. Cabot is amased to learn that Eben has gone to bring the Sherriff. Eben returns alone and tells Abbie that while describing everything to the Sheriff, he realised how much he loves her and hopes that they can run away together. However, Abbie insists that she must be punished for committing the sin. Eben also realises that he too has to take his share of punishment in the sin. As the Sheriff arrives to arrest the criminal, Eben tells him that he planned the killing. Both are taken away to prison by the Sheriff. Old Cabot turns the livestock loose in the forest and plans to leave for California. As he seeks his hidden money, he discovers that it has already been stolen. Eben confesses that he had given those to his brothers to pay the passage to California. Old Cabot gives up his plans and accepts God's will to make him lonesome again and to work in the farm alone.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What ideas do you form in your mind about the characters after going through Act I of the play?

Q 2: Consider the essential nature of Abbie as the central female character as it appears in Act II of the play.

Q 3: After studying Act III, do you think there are larger forces at work, other than God and Faith, guiding the three major characters to their ends?

10.3.2 Major Themes

The following are some of the important themes of the play.

Human greed, passion, desire, lust and aversion

The play deals with themes like intense greed, lust, passion, desire, etc. that end in despair. The characters are somehow influenced by intense desires. As the play begins, the three Cabot brothers Eben, Peter and Simeon are introduced and by the end of the first scene, it is clear that they hate their old father. While the older sons hate their father for he made them work hard in the farm, Eben, the youngest sibling, hates him, as he believes that the man had snatched his mother's property and had overworked her to death. Eben thinks that he is the only inheritor and must be the landowner. Eben's greed and passion lead to his later tragic life. He plans to win his inheritance through Abbie, and at the same time avenge his father.

Both Eben and Abbie fall in love and their passions sow the seeds of a greater tragedy. Initially both want to possess the farm and the house, but over time they change due to their passion. Initially Eben hates Abbie for she assumes the position of his dead mother in the house. However, through his passionate relationship with her, Eben realises his hidden desire. He discovers comfort in Abbie who not only has become his lover but a mother figure too. Abbie too

starts loving him and to prove her allegiances he smothers the infant in its cradle. The passions of Eben Cabot and Abbie Putnam lead to a complicated relationship that causes their tragedy.

Ephraim is not free of faults. He does not love his sons and never thinks of passing on his property to his rightful heir after him. Rather he intends to have a baby from Abbie to inherit his property.

Complex relationships between parents and children

The most complicated relationship dealt with in the play is the relationship between parents and children. It is the core thematic focus of the play. Conflict takes place between Eben, who is emotionally volatile, his young stepmother Abbie and his eccentric, controlling father. The relationship between Eben and his long dead mother is quite interesting. Eben hates his father like his other two half-brothers. After his mother's death, the property has been transferred to his father, which Eben cannot take easily. He still remembers her fondly and sees his mother around him in the house. Eben's resentment of his father is due to his hunger to own his farm. When after a lengthy, unannounced absence, Ephraim returns with a new bride less than half his age, Abbie, he seems her as a new competitor for 'his' farm. His relationship with his stepmother actually is his mother's revenge on his father.

Then, there is clash between love for his mother and sexual love for Eben. After his mother's death, Eben has been constantly missing her. Abbie seduces Eben saying that she will be his mother. His Oedipal search for a mother in Abbie is very hard to miss. Symbolically, Eben and Abbie consummate their love in his mother's parlour. It is the same place where child Eben had bonded with his mother. Throughout the play, Eben feels his mother's presence in the farm in a supernatural form. When Abbie says that she feels something in the parlour, Eben responds with "Maw…Maw allus loved me." After their union in the parlour, the restless spirit of Eben's mother vanishes. At once, it becomes difficult for the audience/ readers to accept this complex, inappropriate, morally wrong

relationship between a mother and her young son. Unaware, both Ephraim and Eben compete with each other. Not only visiting Min, the village prostitute, but in having a passionate relationship with Abbie, Eben competes against his father and his hatred and anger is deep. However, these love triangles lead to the final tragedy.

When Abbie tells her old husband that she wants to have a baby, Ephraim rejoices at the idea. When the son is born, though the entire world guesses it right that it is Eben's, the old man is proud of his fatherhood. Eben, the real father of the son, becomes depressed for to him once again his father had stolen something that was 'rightfully' his. The child brings more complications to the parents that end in gruesome, tragic consequences.

Abbie kills her child, to regain Eben's love. Eben's first reaction is his desire to have Abbie pay for her sin. However, he too claims participation in the crime and shares her punishment. The lovers depart from the farm in the custody of the Sheriff. Thus, the complicated relationships between (step) mother and son, lovers, and competitors determine their tragic fates.

Search for a "Home"

The action of the play takes place entirely in and around the Cabot farmhouse, which is quite appropriate, as the house is the focus of the conflict between the major characters. All of them claim ownership of the house and all have their own reasons. To Eben, the two large Elm trees whose branches surround the Cabot farmhouse, symbolize his mother who is dead. Eben's loss of his mother marks the loss of the farm since it was hers. At the beginning of the play, a description about the kitchen of the farmhouse informs us:". . . Kitchen utensils hang from nails. Everything is neat and in order but the atmosphere is of a men's camp kitchen rather than that of a home." It signifies that the farmhouse has failed to offer Eben the satisfaction of a home and Eben a reason to this dissatisfaction—the farmhouse does not belong to him. His father

has stolen the farmhouse. Thus, Eben yearns for a home of his own. Similarly, Abbie has the same desire. When Abbie arrives at the farmhouse, she utters: "Hum! It's purty—purty! I can't b'lieve it' sr'ally mine". Abbie says in Scene iv, Part I: "A woman's got t' hev a hum". Both Eben and Abbie are aware of their desire that make them plot, plan which lead them to the passion for love, that destroys both. Initially both are afraid of each other's intention, so both feel hostile toward each other. Even at the end, Eben misunderstands that Abbie's final goal is to possess the farm and the house. Thus the land and the farmhouse are two most essential and significant elements in the play.

The Oedipal father

The play is further indebted to the Greeks in its classical oedipal hatred of the father. Sophocles' play "Oedipus Rex" had the very themes of incest and immoralities. Oedipus, the mythical king of Thebes in Greece was left behind after his birth fearing the prediction according to which he would kill his own father and marry his mother. After an unfortunate series of events, he fulfils the prediction that brings destruction to his city and disaster to his family. Influenced by the story, Sigmund Freud talked about "Oedipus Complex," signifying a state in which the child feels sexual desire for the parent of the opposite sex and yearns for the death of the parent of the same sex. Eben is so loyal to the memory of his dead mother that he feels her presence everywhere in the house; his mother has a strong influence over his life; he hates his father Ephraim for there is an unconscious rivalry for mother's love. Ephraim appears to be the oedipal father whom Eben wishes to destroy. To Eben, the stonewalls of the farmhouse are a protection, a shield, where he lives with the spirit of his mother and the sheer hatred of his father.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Comment briefly on the parent-child relationships in the play.

Q 5: Do you think *Desire Under the Elms* qualifies as a "tragedy of the common man"?

10.3.3 Major Characters

The following is a list of the major character of the play.

Eben Cabot

Eben, the third son of Ephraim Cabot by his second wife and half-brother of Simeon and Peter is the central character and protagonist in *Desire under the Elms*. The twenty five year old is a "tall and sinewy," dark and rather good-looking, but with an expression that "is resentful and defensive. His defiant, dark eyes remind one of a wild animal in captivity." Eben is impetuous, volatile and emotional. Eben's relationships with his father Ephraim and his stepmother Abbie are the focal points of the play. Like his older half-brothers, he hates his father for the way the self-righteous old hypocrite treated his mother but even more for having held the farm as his. He believes his mother died of over work. He thinks his father married his gentle mother because she had a legitimate claim to ownership of the vast land. Eben is determined to retain control over the farm and land his mother had possessed.

As audience meet Eben in the first scene of the play on the farmhouse porch, they are sure of Eben's impulsive, curious and soft nature. He is different from his older half-brothers Simeon and Peter. Where Eben is busy in the kitchen preparing supper for them, his brothers come from the field (digging stones and laying them into a boundary around the farm). Eben differs from his brothers in his thoughts. Eben is determined to possess the farm whereas Simeon and Peter long for a better life in distant California. Eben is

so determined to gain the land that he buys out the potential claim of his half-brother' shares with money stolen from his father. He offers each three hundred dollars. Ebenis calculative. The first act of the play also reveals Eben's not-so-normal relationship with his father. He prays for the death of his father who has been away for two months.

That Eben resolves to get his land back from his father and does not want to share it with his two elder half-brothers actually resembles his father. In spite of his alleged "softness", Eben is the closest to the old man in his yearning to own the farm, in his vengefulness, and finally in his acceptance of punishment from the "hard" God. Eben's offering them gold in exchange for renouncing the farm and having an adulterous relationship with his stepmother to avenge his father, shows how closely he resembles the latter. Then Eben's attachment to the farm is similar to the nature of the old man.

Eben's first reaction towards Abbie is also quite normal. When Ephraim arrives home with his new wife, Eben immediately starts hating his young stepmother. In fact, he exchanges bitter words with her. Despite his initial hatred, he enters into an adulterous affair with Abbie and fathers her child. Eben's fatherly love for his baby is reflected when he really wishes the community to learn that the baby is his. But when Abbie urges Eben to be patient, with no option left, he goes out of the house and eventually becomes the cause of his father's humiliation. Believing his father's words, Eben denounces Abbie. He suffers and angrily wishes his baby, who to Ephraim has the claim to the farm, were dead. But he goes to the authority to get Abbie arrested for infanticide. However, like a true lover, he also takes the responsibility of the action. Eben realises that they both have sinned in the name of love and both must share the punishment. Together they are taken away by the sheriff and they depart from the farm for prison.



LET US KNOW

One interesting point in the play is Eben's constant connection with the of his dead mother whom he remembers very fondly every time. He is so influenced by his mother that he actually "sees" her at home, which prompts him to keep his vow to avenge her murder (reminding us of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*). He keeps alive the loving memory of his mother. There is a constant search of a mother in Abbie who also convinces him saying in the parlour "I'll be your mother". His loss of his dear mother also symbolises his loss of the inheritance of his land. Once Eben and Abbie fall in love, the ghost of his mother disappears.

Ephraim Cabot

The old widower's character is built much before he is physically introduced to the audience. As the play begins, we learn that one day without exchanging any word, Ephraim had gone away, leaving his three sons in charge of the farm. Eben, his youngest son (from his second wife), blames him to be his mother's murderer, insisting that he killed her with overwork and had taken over the farm. To Eben, he is a greedy old fellow. His other two brothers also throw light on Ephraim's brutal nature and after years of slavery to the old man, they prefer to go away to California. Ephraim is a farmer who works in the New England farm with the help of his three sons. He has made his sons work like animals on his farm. They all hate their father bitterly. Eben has a reason to hate his father whom he believes has stolen his rightful inheritance.

Ephraim marries three times. His first wife was a hard worker who bore Simeon and Peter and was much like himself. Second was Eben's mother who was a softer person. The lady's parents had some claim to the farm. The final marriage, that to a much younger Abbie Putnam is held some twenty-five years after his second wife's death.

As Ephraim enters the stage, he comes with his third wife—a thirty-five-year-old lady called Abbie Putnam. Old Cabot, a myopic, is seventy-five years old, "gaunt, with great wiry power, but stoop-shouldered from toil with a face as hard as the rocks on his farm", yet at the same time "there is a weakness in it, a petty pride in its own narrow strength." His three sons see this marriage as their father's deliberate intention to cheat them of their inheritance. However, over and over again, we hear old Ephraim Cabot lamenting his loneliness. The ineffable loneliness of the man manages to arouse pity among the audience. He marries to gratify his loneliness. Therefore, when Abbie convinces him that they should have a son, he is overwhelmed with the idea of a company and a suitable son to whom he can leave the farm. He is sensitive to Abbie and to the baby, seeks love and wants to love. Unfortunately, he finds only coldness within his house and among other people. However, the old man accepts the harsh truth that the baby he is so proud of doesn't belong to him; it's Eben's son. Ephraim, who fears "lonesomeness", is left isolated. Ephraim, who is left alone by all, presents a bleak view of human condition.

There is no apparent reason of Ephraim's selfish and stern nature. No clue is provided to understand the man's negative disposition. Ephraim has the best farm in the village. His three young sons work really hard giving their sweat and blood in making it prosperous. However, the old man announces that he would love to burn all his property upon his death than leave the land to Eben. Eben, like Ephraim, identifies with both the land and its livestock (sleeping in the barn with the cows is comforting to him). He considers that none of his sons has the right to inherit since each is a rebel against the hardness of their father, in a different way. The man seems so vengeful when he taunts Eben on the day of the celebration that Eben should better hope nothing to inherit after the arrival of the baby. The proud Ephraim is oblivious as his neighbours openly mocking him as a cuckold. He complains to Eben how Abbie

has tricked him out of his inheritance. This false news leads to Abbie's final act of infanticide.

The two positive traits shown in the character is his religious mind-set and his firm belief in hard work; both have made the character a typical New England Puritan. He is a God-fearing, God-obsessed patriarch. His constant reference to God is a significant aspect of his character. His God is an angry god, as he says—"God's hard, not easy," and his state of loneliness is a punishment from Him. Like other farmers, once he headed to the Middle West where the land was so fertile that one merely had to plant the crops and wait them to grow. However, this comfort distressed him there, and he heard God guiding him that this is not what He wanted. He came back to the farm listening to God's order and forced the earth into fertility. He very often recites passages from the Bible. Even at the end, old Ephraim says nothing more than crying "God's hard". The long monologue in Part II, Scene ii from Ephraim, full of Biblical quotations, is an excellent example of poetic eloquence and lyricism.

Abbie Putnam Cabot

Abbie Putnam, an ambitious, good looking young widow is the only woman character in the play. She is the thirty-five-year-old third wife of the seventy-six-year-old Ephraim. Her face is marred by an obstinate chin and a "gross sensuality."

Abbie is no exception to others in the play in terms of having a desire in life. She is a woman in constant search of a home of her own. Her marriage to an old man is solely to gain possession of a home. Later she wishes to get hold of the farm. Eben, whom she later begins to love, acquaints her with how hard her life was until Ephraim came along. She has no love for him, only a desire to have a place where she could belong.

When Abbie enters the farm with her husband, she is at once attracted by Eben's youthful good looks. Whenever she talks to him, she does it with her most seductive tone to attract him. Firstly, it was to gain acceptance of her as his mother since Eben is

deeply attached to his dead mother. Initially Eben considered her as no better than a lady who sold herself for the property. However, two months later, she approaches him and unable to control his emotion, Eben enters in an adulterous union with her. It is interesting to note their adultery is committed "with a horribly frank mixture of lust and mother love." She not only convinces him that he can avenge his father by making love to her, but she also influences him to court her in the parlour, the room where his mother's funeral wake had taken place and assumes the role of his dead mother.

The following year, when a son is born to Abbie, Ephraim, duped by flattery, believes the child is his and makes the baby his heir. The heir's arrival occasions a party and Abbie can clearly see that the celebrants realize that old Ephraim is probably not the boy's father. When Eben hates to pretend what is rightfully his, belongs to his father just like the farm, Abbie tries to make him calm. Taunted by his father, Eben threatens to kill Abbie and wishes the baby dead. By this time, Abbie is so madly in love with Eben that she cannot take his hatred. Destiny plays a cruel game and to prove her love and gain Eben's faith, the mother smothers the baby. However, she later realises that instead of the baby, she should have killed the old man. A devastated Eben, on the discovery of the murder of his own flesh and blood, rushes to the sheriff only to realize that he loves Abbie. He understands her intention—that she loves him than anything else in the world. On his return, very unexpectedly Abbie discovers with strange joy that Eben admits the responsibility of the crime and punishment due to his love for her. Abbie is a tragic character portraying a woman in love with a man who murders her own children; then in her tragedy, she finds some consolation but no way can escape her destiny or punishment.

Both Eben and Abbie's characters share some common traits. The farm holds immense significance to both the lovers. To Abbie, it is a place to belong to and set down roots; to Eben it is a place of kinship with his dead mother and something rightfully his.

Both are closer to the natural order of human existence than any other characters in the play. Their attraction towards each other has been mutual and natural. Both are the children of nature and natural laws bring them together in love. Both become slaves of physical desire and later destiny. They both cannot and do not escape their destiny at the end.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Discuss how does each character in the play feel that he/she is the rightful heir to the farm and the land.

10.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF THE PLAY

When O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* was written and staged in 1924, it was greeted less enthusiastically by the New York press for its frank depiction of lust, desire, incest, passion, infanticide, etc. During its first staging, one critic called it "distresses" that "range from unholy lust to infanticide, and include drinking, cursing, vengeance, and something approaching incest." Not only the play but the playwright also became the subject of heated controversy. However, the notoriety made the play an instant success among public. In addition, a part of the audience was scandalised by the comments of the critics.

Composed about midway through Eugene O'Neill's career, the play with no humour at all, fuses rustic melodrama with elements of Greek tragedy in a modern American landscape. Set in 1850 the play revolves around the struggle for dominance on a New England farmstead headed by the tyrannical Ephraim Cabot over three unhappy, exploited sons – Peter, Simeon and Eben. It is a moralistic tale of lust, love and ambition that came out to be so shocking in its presentation that it was banned in Boston and didn't receive a licence in England till 1940. Even the entire cast went behind bars in Los Angeles in 1925 and were tried in the court for having preformed a lewd, obscene and immoral play. During the trial, the entire court witnessed a special private performance of the play.

The structural set, showing the entire farmhouse with one wall removed, was an innovation during that age. Today *Desire* is one of O'Neill's most admired and frequently performed plays. Almost eight decades later, it got its rightful place among the audience. Due to its sparse style *sans* melodrama and over written language, frank revelation of unconscious drives and primordial fears of the human heart and its projection of honest emotions, the play has been acclaimed as a powerful tragedy among later generation of playwrights and has continued to rank among the great American plays of the 20th century. The brutal realistic depiction of the tale in one way or other has been a source of inspiration of the 21st century playwrights. A difficult piece to perform even today, the epic tale showcases excellent power and intensity of O'Neill as a playwright. The play, the last of Eugene O'Neill's naturalistic plays, presents daring human motives and impulses of love, hate, lust, and greed to offer an honest, convincing, complex and complete impression of human nature for which the play has been influencing modern writers.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: Why, in your opinion, did the play create controversy during its first staging?



10.5 LET US SUM UP

We have learnt that *Desire Under the Elms*, subtitled 'A Play in Three Parts', is perhaps the most maturely composed play by O'Neill. This play is full of tragic gloom, irony and challengingly complex themes. It is a story of isolation–physical and of man's dreams, hopes, love and life. Each character in the play is shaken by events and lonely in this world–but they share a common trait. They all are full of passion or desire, either the desire for fortune or love. Each of them is a sad soul after an experience of denial in life. They are tough, crude, but honest people. Life had no pleasure to give

them. The play today is hailed as the first important American tragedy, was banned in Boston and England and narrowly escaped a ban in New York on the charge of obscene themes like incest, adultery and infanticide etc. dealt with in the play. O'Neill's play is surely a modern tragedy of passions, treating varied themes like love, hate, revenge, incest, infanticide and intense possessiveness.



10.6 FURTHER READING

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10.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: When Ephraim disappears without exchanging any word, the three sons appear happy guessing that their brutal father may be dead ... ... for Eben, the farm belongs to him ... ... Eben, who is kind, sensitive and gentle seeks maternal love ... ... the brothers' fond hopes are shattered when old Ephraim brings home a new bride ... ... Peter and Simeon go off to the gold fields of California, leaving Eben, his father and Abbie locked in a complicated triangle that ends in disaster for all.

Ans to Q 2: Abbie, the only female character, except the invisible presence of Eben's mother's spirit and frequent references to Min, the village prostitute, desires a "home' of her own... …a place to identify with... …Ephraim's farm comes as a new desire to her... …marries the old man and seduces Eben to fulfil her dream to own the farm... …can go to the point of becoming an adulterous wife... …Abbie comes to light as both a motherly and a sexual figure to Eben.

Ans to Q 3: Neither social and economic circumstances nor fate determine their tragic end ... ...but conscious choice of favouring hidden passion for love prove uncontrollable and destruction drives them to the tragedy.

Ans to Q 4: The father hated most by Eben who believes his mother's death was induced by his father... …Ephraim too has no kindness and love for his sons... … Oedipus complex is apparent with seeking revenge on father and mother's love that ends in Abbie... …fills the void created by mother's death with sheer hatred for father... …Eben

loses faith in love when misled by father into believing that he has been used to steal the farm by Abbie, he wishes the death of his own son.

Ans to Q 5: Yes… …earlier tragedies were about kings, queens and royal families... ... there was no emphasis on the middle and lower classes... ... modern tragedies focus on common people, about everyday problems in households instead of kingdoms… …in 1949, Arthur Miller, coined "Tragedy and the Common Man"... ... the Cabot family is no royalty... ... but farmers... ... issue is regarding true ownership of the land... ... the battle among sons for the farm... ... not fate but conscious decision is to be blamed.

Ans to Q 6: The Cabots are farmers ... land is a significant source of their livelihood as well as happiness... …Ephraim is obsessively dedicated to the farm so much that he alienates from his own people... …to him it is land where the Almighty blesses His devotees with prosperity... …for Abbie the farm signifies something a sense of belonging.... ... Eben is possessive of the land and believes that he is the sole inheritor of the farm.

Ans to Q 7: Treatment of sexual relationships... …obsessive and unhealthy relationship between the step-mother and the son... …Eben's adoration of his dead mother and hunger to avenge his father shows the Freudian psychology... …subjects like infanticide, crudity, incest, passion, adultery, violence, etc... …Abby luring Eben into the parlor and declaring her love... …her promise to Eben to take his dead mother's place before the adultery is consummated... …these were topics of heated controversy at that time.



10.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the parent-child relationships as the theme of the play. What sort of love is evident between them?

Q 2: How does the play put forward the playwright's versions of the American dream, individual identity, self-reliance, social exclusion and the development of consciousness?

Q 3: O'Neill once suggested that modern life is more difficult for women than for men. Mark the character of Abbie in this light.

Q 4: Discuss how O'Neill's play "*Desire Under the elms*" is a work of realism.

Q 5: What is your opinion on the sense of 'belonging' after reading the play *Desire Under the Elms*?

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UNIT 11: ERNEST HEMINGWAY: *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA*

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 Ernest Hemingway: The Novelist

11.3.1 His Life

11.3.2 His Works

11.4 Critical Reception of Hemingway

11.5 Let us Sum up

11.6 Further Reading

11.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

11.8 Possible Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

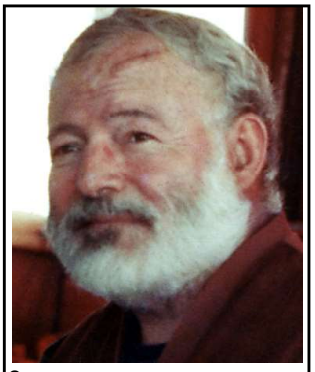
- discuss the life and works of Ernest Hemingway
- read about Hemingway the man and the novelist with all his unique accomplishments
- state why he is considered one of the greatest modern writers from America
- discuss how Hemingway has been critically received

11.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of Block 3 of the course on American literature. This unit shall introduce us to Ernest Hemingway the celebrated American novelist, his colourful life as a hunter, war reporter, writer and a world celebrity who won the Noble Prize for literature in 1954 and the 1953 Pulitzer Prize for his novel *The Old Man and the Sea*. This unit will also familiarise us with Hemingway's works and the ways in which many of his works carry deep impressions of his own experiences with life. We shall finally learn why Hemingway has been pronounced the most influential author of 20th century.

11.3 ERNEST HEMINGWAY: THE NOVELIST

11.3.1 His Life



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Ernest_Hemingway

Ernest Hemingway was born on July 21, 1899 in Oak Park, Illinois, in an upper class suburban in Chicago, the second child and first son of Dr. Clarence Edmonds Hemingway and Gace Hemingway, a devout religious woman with considerable musical talent. Ernest's mother hoped that her son would develop an interest in music but Ernest was no musician, and instead, inherited his father's love for adventures. His boyhood and youth were actively spent in hunting, fishing, camping, vegetable gardening, adventuring in the Michigan north woods, where his family had a summer cabin. Hemingway's literary career started early. He was a reporter for his high school newspaper 'The Trapeze', also published stories in the school's magazine called 'The Tabula'. After graduating from High School, he started his career as a reporter for the Kansas City Star instead of attending college. At 18, he volunteered to serve first as a Red Cross ambulance driver in World War I joining the Italian army and later as an infantry officer. However, at 19, he was badly injured by shrapnel burst. He moved to Paris, re-entered into newspaper work as a correspondent for the 'Toronto Daily Star' reporting on the Greco-Turkish War. In Paris he fell in with a group of American and English expatriate authors like F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein and Ford Madox Ford and became close friends with them, who helped him develop his craft. In the early 20s, Hemingway became famous as a chronicler of the disaffection felt by many American youths after World War I.

LET US KNOW



The phrase 'lost generation' became instantly popular among his readers–a name symbolizing the attitudes of the post world War I American generation, especially the young authors, who had lost all their hope in the war. They were not moved by noble patriotic high ideals anymore but were led by greedy, power-loving groups. The high sentiments of the older generation authors were not to be trusted; only reality which was harsh and life without any meaning was truth for them (the war's effect on their lives and the futility and meaninglessness of life).

In 1923 Hemingway made the first of the five consecutive yearly trips to Pamplona, Spain to experience bullfighting that eventually served as the basis for 'The Sun Also Rises', recording expatriate lives in Paris and Pamplona. He very casually quoted Gertrude Stein's line 'You are all a lost generation' in the epigraph of the novel, the first major novel of his career. The first few volumes of his short stories *In Our Time* and *Men without Women* and *Fiesta* or *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell To Arms* established him as an extraordinary young author of the time. He became the dominant literary voice of America with his revolutionary zeal, charged with his style of writing.

In 1928, Hemingway moved to Key West, Florida and fishing occupied most of his time. In 1932, he went on a 2-month fishing expedition to Havana; then in 1939 to Cuba for fishing again, sailed to Paris, and went to Africa for a Safari in Kenya and Tanganyika. These years of experience in fishing provided him with material for his *The Old Man and the Sea* and the Safari provided him with a setting for 'Green Hills of Africa'. Thus, his life as well as art revolved around hunting, fishing, boxing, bullfighting; endeavours that the author had deep interest in and longed to master. In 1937, he went to Spain as a war correspondent covering the Spanish Civil War,

which provided him essential materials for *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940). This novel deals with an American volunteer and a band of Spanish Loyalist guerrillas. When World War II started, he volunteered his service and cooperated with the US Navy intelligence. Drawing on his World War II experiences, he published in 1950 *Across the River* and *Into the Trees* about a May-December romance. The novel was without his earlier control and precision of narration, less realistic and more symbolic. Critics attacked the book and readers claimed that it was not Hemingway but a parody of Hemingway.

In 1959, the Hemingway family shifted to Idaho. At the end of his life, he suffered from diabetes, high blood pressure and mental depression. The legendary figure committed suicide by a shotgun at his home in Ketchum, Idaho, on July 2, 1961 and left the world to mourn.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Mention Ernest Hemingway's vast range of hobbies that contribute towards making him a successful novelist?

Q 2: What does the phrase 'Lost Generation' mean? Discuss.

11.3.2 His Works

Published in 1926, *The Sun Also Rises*, all in the first person narration, is about the predicament of a hero left alone by an unlucky war wound and his ladylove, an English woman. He has learnt to lead an honest life with much courage in spite of his plight; even the lady, though morally ruined, is true to herself. The hero is morally strong enough to be with her. Hemingway's use of the phrase in the novel 'Lost Generation' to indicate the generation after World War I, which lost all hopes and aspirations, instantly became popular among his readers.

A Farewell to Arms, published in 1929, communicated directly Hemingway's World War I experiences, which included his pain of

being severely wounded in Italy. It is a romantic tragedy of love and war dealing with cruelty and stupidity of war and the greedy materialism and hunger for power. In the novel, war is synonymous with horror. During the war, near the Austria-Italy border, the protagonist is wounded by a machine-gun bullet. Critics believe that the near-death experiences of the protagonist narrated by Hemingway re-tell his own fear of death and war experiences. For Hemingway, writing was a kind of self-therapy.

During this period, he wrote a good number of short stories—the genre for which Hemingway is best known today. He also published two significant non-fictional works *Green Hills of Africa* (1935) which is about big game hunting and *Death in the Afternoon* (1939), which talks about bull fighting. Both the works reflect the author's lifelong love and interest in these two violent sports.

To Have or Have not (1937) deals with contemporary social and political issues which the author experienced being an observer in the Spanish Civil War. This provided material for his play *The Fifth Column* (1960). The novel is often regarded as Hemmingway's masterpiece. His bestselling novel 'For Whom the Bell Tolls' (1940) revolves around two themes—the dynamiting of a bridge by a guerrilla group and the love story of an American partisan and a girl from the guerrilla troop. After a decade of complete silence, in 1950 'Across the River and into the Trees' appeared, which was a symbolic love story. The novel was neither a critical nor a popular success. In 1952, Hemingway wrote a short novel *The Old Man and the Sea* that restored his literary stature. This was his last work of fiction, based on the story of survival and Hemingway's years of experiences of the fisherman's craft. It gained immediate critical acclaim. It is a saga of struggle between an old fisherman and the greatest catch of his life.

A good number of his works came out posthumously. *A Moveable Feast*, published in 1964, narrates striking and abusive representations of famous literary figures the author used to know

in Paris. The long semi-autobiographical novel, set in the Caribbean Islands is about a painter, his relationship with his family, his sense of loneliness and at the end his violent death. 'The dangerous summer', published in 1985, is a record of a bullfight Hemingway experienced and witnessed in Spain in 1960. In 1986 appeared *The Garden of Eden*, which was about the love affair of two women and one man. The work attempted to explore complex gender issues.

Hemingway's works before the World War I, his short stories and three novels, namely, *Fiesta*, *A Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, which won wide critical acclaim as well as popular success, were actually enough to make Hemingway one of the greatest and most influential prose writers of the 20th century. The author was profoundly affected by the First World War and his early works are illusion breakers, ironical and full of suffering. He grew up as a writer and his mortally wounded experience of war, deep interest in deadly sports, made death omnipresent as the supreme reality. His writings are full of his philosophy, his way of life—a life with qualities which help man meet his end—courage, dignity and the power to endure. By 1950, hostile critics started ignoring Hemingway, declaring the author's best years had been past. In 1952, Hemingway shocked them all with his *The Old Man and the Sea* that deserves to be placed with the best works of pre-war time.



LET US KNOW

Hemingway is believed to have been influenced by authors like Gertrude Stein and James Joyce.

Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) poet, short story writer, novelist, literary experimentalist, art patron and an influential literary figure of the 20th century, was born to a wealthy German-Jewish immigrant of a merchant family in Allegheny, Pennsylvania. During World War I, she served as an ambulance driver for the French. She continued to inspire American expatriates like Sherwood

Anderson, Hemingway and Fitzgerald. She coined the phrase 'the lost generation' to describe the expatriate writers living abroad between the wars which Hemingway quoted in the epigraph of his 'The Sun Also Rises'. Her memoir 'The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas' published in 1933 reflects the writer's experiences in the colourful world of art in Paris between the World Wars but written from Toklas's point of view, inventing another technique of describing her own experiences while pretending to be someone else.

James Joyce (James Augustine Aloysius Joyce) (1882-1941) was born in Rathgar, a wealthy suburb in Dublin, Ireland, of old Irish nobility. With Joyce's *Ulysses*, a modern version of Homer's epic *Odyssey*, Joyce was hailed as a genius. His inventive writing style, advanced use of interior monologue, use of stream of consciousness technique, accurate detailing of any geographical feature of locality (namely Dublin in the book) and multiple philosophical themes in the novel set a new course in novel writing and established him as a leading modernist. At the outbreak of World War II, fearing Nazi invasion of Paris, Joyce and his family had to move to Zurich where eventually the writer died of a stomach ulcer at the age of 59 in 1941. Joyce's popularity spread in the decades following his demise. *Ulysses* marks the foundation of the Modernist movement in America.

11.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF HEMINGWAY [Adapted from the entry on Hemingway, Ernest by Thomas Strychacz in *Encyclopaedia of Twentieth Century Fiction*]

No writer of the 20th century can match Ernest Hemingway's charisma. War hero, war reporter, big-game hunter, bullfighting aficionado, celebrity expatriate, bestselling author, winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954 – for 30 years, "Papa" Hemingway found ways to place a series of iconic roles and images before the American public. However, few writers

can match Hemingway's impressive range of literary accomplishments either. The Nobel Prize committee, in its remarks, celebrated him for the "influence that he has exerted on contemporary style." The committee was correct. He was a key figure in the development of American literary modernism, creator of a terse, minimalist style virtually synonymous with his name. He fathered a distinctively American school of "hard-boiled" fiction, whose practitioners, from Dashiell Hammett to Elmore Leonard, feature tough prose and tight-lipped men. Perhaps most remarkably, half a century after his death Hemingway's posthumously published writing has provoked new appraisals of what had long seemed the obvious interpretation of his work: that it was mostly engaged with men and their tough, lonely pursuit of manhood.

After a short stint as a reporter for the Kansas City Star, Hemingway, eager to see action in World War I, undertook to drive ambulances on the Italian front. There, in July 1918, he was seriously injured by an exploding shell. That wounding, according to many scholars, was the seminal event of his life. Physically wounded and mentally traumatised male characters haunt his fiction, from Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), suffering from some serious though unspecified wound to his genitals, to a shell-shocked Nick Adams in "A Way You'll

Never Be," to a plethora of gored bullfighters. For Hemingway, it seems, the existential condition of men in the early twentieth century is to be wounded. Scholars generally agree on two corollaries. First, those male characters who rise bravely to the challenge of that wounding by exhibiting what Hemingway called "grace under pressure" define true manhood. Second, displaying grace under pressure typically means observing a rigorous code of conduct, which allows one to impose a ritualistic control over chaos and pain, and which stands in lieu of a fading belief in a divinely ordained cosmos. Philip Young (1952) importantly extended the idea of the code to Hemingway's early writing style, arguing that its famous economy dramatised in linguistic terms the control men sought to exercise over themselves.

However, the first two great works of Hemingway's career, *In Our Time* (1925) and *The Sun Also Rises*, cannot be explained only in terms of his wounding. By 1922, Hemingway was living and working in Paris, a hotbed of literary and artistic modernist practices. There he was inspired by novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald and the modernist poet Ezra Pound, whose call to express emotion and meaning in poetry by way of compressed, concrete images found a counterpart in Hemingway's famous description of his style, set forth in Death in the Afternoon, to "put down what really happened in action." There he met James Joyce and admired his paradigmatic modernist novel, *Ulysses* (1922); and there he met the avant-garde writer Gertrude Stein, whose linguistic experiments were a particular influence on Hemingway's early style. Through her, he was introduced to the work of post-impressionist painters such as Matisse, Picasso, and Cezanne, whose techniques of fragmentation and juxtaposition resonate throughout *In Our Time*–a work about which Hemingway claimed that he was "trying to do the country like Cezanne."

The posthumous *A Moveable Feast* (1964) gives a moving, often scurrilous, sometimes hilarious, but always fascinating account of those Paris years. Both *In Our Time* and *The Sun Also Rises* portray a post-war world of angst, anomie, disillusion, casual violence, and ruptured relationships amid a pervading sense that all traditional structures of value–spiritual, social, and ethical–are being swept away or shifting in unpredictable ways. *In Our Time*, a collection of short stories thematically related to even shorter interspersed vignettes, concerns conflict in a variety of ways: cultural and racial tensions between European Americans and Native Americans in the early stories, for example, are interwoven with laconically delineated flashes of horror from World War I battlefields. Another source of conflict emerges in stories such as "The End of Something," "Cat in the Rain," and "Out of Season," which anatomize gender relations between men and women in terms of power plays.

The post-war stories in particular depict (to employ a term Hemingway popularised when he used it as the epigraph to Sun) a "lost generation" of men and women who wander, irresolute and broken,

searching for spiritual or emotional sustenance. Like other famous modernist works such as T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *In Our Time* develops aesthetically in concert with a wide spread sense in the early twentieth century that traditional frameworks of Western society were fast eroding. Many scholars consider that Hemingway's work from the early 1930s on suffers an aesthetic decline, relieved by *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) and *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), as the cumulative effect of his alcoholism and his devotion to his "Papa Hemingway" persona began to take its toll on his writing.

LET US KNOW



The Old Man and the Sea, published in 1952, the last one to be published in his lifetime, was a huge success, restoring his reputation as well as earning him the Pulitzer Prize in 1953. In 1954, the Nobel Academy cited his mastery over narration and his powerful writing style. The novel regenerated Hemingway's writing career. The novel has been praised as a classic. It is placed with Melville's *Moby Dick* and Faulkner's short story 'The Bear'.

Hemingway's sensitivity toward gender issues has been the focus of much attention in the last 20 years, particularly after the publication of *The Garden of Eden*. Some critics have explored his career in terms of a fluctuating relationship between masculine and feminine elements of his psyche or investigated the importance of his fascination with cutting and colouring hair, to his constructions of identity. These ideas occur even in what appears the unlikely venue of Hemingway's epic novel of the Spanish Civil War, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, which places Robert Jordan as an American sent to aid a Loyalist (Republican) guerrilla group in their effort to blow up a strategic bridge. The novel gives Hemingway his most thorough opportunity to explore the psyches of men at war at a pivotal historical moment – the imminent victory of the fascists in Spain foreshadowing the rise of fascism elsewhere in Europe. But it also allows him to create one of his more complex and evocative female characters in the figure of Pilar,

who supplants her husband's leadership of the guerillas and plays a tough counterpoint to Maria, whose rape before the novel opens represents in human terms what is at stake in this conflict, and whose experience of love with Jordan offers partial redemption.

Over a decade later, many critics greeted the novella *The Old Man and the Sea* as a sign of Hemingway's literary resurrection, and it was in large measure responsible for his winning the Nobel Prize in 1954. Certainly this tale of a Cuban fisherman in his battle to capture the biggest marlin he or anyone else has ever heard of seems in many ways a miniature gloss on ideas long held to be the quintessence of Hemingway's aesthetic and philosophy. The tale pits Santiago, a man off alone, against gigantic natural forces–the sea, the marlin, sharks – that he seeks to overcome by strength and enduring courage. He is guided by a simple code of ethics that has him respecting the great adversary he must kill. His failure to return the marlin intact after sharks attack accentuates the grandeur of his accomplishment. Since the marlin no longer possesses economic worth, its value has to be reckoned instead in mythic terms: as an epic battle between human and nature, between a man's frail body and his indomitable will, in which Santiago, that most humble of fishermen, takes his place among David, Hercules, Beowulf, Captain Ahab, and many more in an ancient tradition of giant slayers. In some respects, this novella plays an odd role in Hemingway's career. Its laconic understatement and "winner-take-nothing" attitude return us to his early work, but the mythic resonances of the story make Santiago a more complete and confident hero than traumatised characters such as Nick Adams, Jake Barnes, and Frederic Henry. Yet the flood of posthumous work in the next 40 years – Islands, Garden, and True at First Light (1999), among others – showed that Hemingway's attention never shifted from representing a cultural landscape not only of traumatic disorientation, but also of the myriad new possibilities for human expression it liberated.



11.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through the different sections of this unit, you must have understood the importance of Ernest Hemingway in the context of American literature. Authenticity in writing was important to him, as he believed that one could treat a theme in writing more honestly if the writer had actually experienced/observed the subject closely in life. Contrasting to the earlier themes and narrative styles, he enhanced literature of his time with realistic themes borrowed from his personal life like isolation, friendship, strength, skill, pride, man and the nature etc., all immortalised by the individuality of his unique style of subtlety. His Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Old Man and the Sea* is a landmark in American fiction.



11.6 FURTHER READING

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11.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Uncomplicated plots, colloquial language, exact description of situation/scene and character… …the telling of the actual life… …experiences from personal life… …Hemingway's unique personality and ceaseless quest of adventure loomed almost as large as his creative talent… …passionately involved in bull-fighting, hunting, fishing, boxing to war front.

Ans to Q 2: Appeared first in Hemingway's 1926 novel, *The Sun Also Rises*… …coined by Gertrude Stein who heard this from her French garage owner to the young auto mechanics about their poor repair skills… …all the disillusioned young men who had survived World War I… ...signifies a sense of moral loss and high aim in life… ...courageous young men died in the war front or deadly wounded both physically and mentally lost their hopes and belief in the moral guideposts.

11.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Explain Ernest Hemingway's timelessness as a writer.

Q 2: Write a note on how Hemingway has continued inspiring generations of writers and readers.

Q 3: Discuss the significance of the different literary works of Ernest Hemingway.

Q 4: *The Old Man and the Sea* as a sign of Hemingway's literary resurrection, and it was in large measure responsible for his winning the Nobel Prize in 1954. Elaborate.

Q 5: What is the relevance of 'Lost Generation' in the context of American literature? Discuss Hemingway's contributions to the literature of the 'Lost Generation.'

Q 6: Hemingway became famous as a chronicler of the disaffection felt by many American youths after World War I. Explain.

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UNIT 12: ERNEST HEMINGWAY: *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA*

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Learning Objectives

12.2 Introduction

12.3 Reading the Novel

- 12.3.1 The Story Element
- 12.3.2 Major Themes
- 12.3.3 Major Characters
- 12.3.4 Narrative Style

12.4 Critical Reception of the Novel

12.5 Let us Sum up

12.6 Further Reading

12.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

12.8 Possible Questions

12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- describe the major themes dealt with in his works mainly in *The Old Man and the Sea*
- explicate his unique prose style as reflected in his classic novel *The Old Man and the Sea*.
- appreciate the novel in its totality.

12.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit needs to be studied in connection with the previous unit. We shall in this unit, try to examine the various important aspects of Hemingway's novel *The Old Man and the Sea.* Ernest Hemingway was an overall outdoor person who loved adventure, bull fighting, fishing, hunting and was also known to many as a great fan of baseball. He learned from nature's lessons which formed ingredients for his short stories including the Nick Adams Stories (Nick Adams is Hemingway's young fictional

persona) and *The Old Man and the Sea.* He relied heavily on autobiographical sources as an author. Both as a dedicated writer and careful editor, he achieved widespread fame that was swiftly followed by a steady decline in terms of public support for his works. However, with the publication of *The Old Man and the Sea,* his popularity began to grow and continues to last beyond his mortal existence, even after his suicide in 1961. As we finish reading this unit, we shall have read about the major themes, major characters, Hemingway's narrative style and the reception of the novel in the world of literature.

12.3 READING THE NOVEL

The following subsections will help you to read the text in some detail.

12.3.1 The Story Element

Santiago is an old fisherman who is luckless but undaunted and for 84 days, he has caught nothing. The fisherman, who had fished in the Gulf Stream off Havana is alone today, impoverished and considered unlucky. For the first forty days, Manolin, a young boy whom Santiago has taught since the age of five, was his partner in fishing. Now Manolin's parents have ordered him to fish with another productive fisherman. Yet, every evening when Santiago returns empty-handed, Manolin helps carry home his skiff, brings him food and beer and keeps him company. Every morning they drink coffee together before setting out in their respective boats. On the 85th day, Santiago sets out before dawn on a three-day odyssey in a desperate attempt to break his run of bad luck. He loves the sea and all the hardships and cruelties it offers. He baits and waits hopefully for the epic catch. Eventually he catches a marlin of epic proportions and after a long battle with the fish at last Santiago manages to land the great fish. On the third morning when the mighty fish, which is longer than his boat, becomes tired, the old fisherman harpoons it. The fish is dead and the tired but fulfilled old man heads for home, hardly believing his own victory. However, the return to

Havana proves a nightmare. The sharks soon scent the blood of the dead fish within an hour and come in pursuit. First, a Mako shark attacks the marlin, tearing away a great hunk of its flesh. Santiago fights and kills it with his harpoon without trouble, but it sinks with the precious harpoon still in it. The great tear in the marlin's flesh releases more blood and scent into the water attracting more sharks. With whatever equipment on board, Santiago repeatedly fights off the packs of the sharks, defending not only his own prize but also the dignity of the dead fish. In exhaustion and great physical pain, he wonders whether it was a sin to kill the marlin, but soon realises that it's in man's nature to fight. He tells himself, "You were born to be a fisherman as the fish was born to be a fish… …You killed him for pride and because you are a fisherman." Completely fatigued, he is forced to resort to progressively makeshift means of repulsing the sharks—first his knife, then a club and lastly the tiller of his boat. All his struggles go in vain. The sharks eventually take the marlin clean. On the fourth morning, Santiago, defeated, reaches the harbour. Alone, in the dark, he looks back at the dead fish's skeletal remains in the reflection from the street light—all its beauty and valuable meat are gone with just the head and the tail as leftovers. He stumbles home to his shack. The next morning, while coming for coffee, Manolin discovers the injured old man in his hut. He comforts Santiago on being defeated by the sharks. The other fishermen marvel at the catch and seeing the marlin's skeleton find it the greatest fish they have ever seen. Manolin assures him that the fish cannot defeat him and they will fish together again as he has to learn much from the experienced old fisherman. That afternoon, some American tourists see the marlin's skeleton and confused by a waiter's bad English, mistake it for a shark; thereby miss the whole point of drama. As the novel ends, with Manolin sitting behind him in his shack, Santiago falls asleep, dreaming of young lions he had seen along the coast of Africa when he was young.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Do you really think *The Old Man and the Sea* is a tragic story?

Q 2: What role does Manolin play in the story?

12.3.2 Major Themes

The novel presents a number of themes and provides sufficient strata of meaning. The narrative has multiple layers of meaning and critics have many different opinions to offer. The Swedish Academy especially commented on the central themes the novelist dealt with and upheld courage and compassion in a world of violence and death, themes that were seen as the distinguishing traits of great writers and Hemingway reproduced the real picture of the hard countenance of the age.

The Grace and Honor in Courage, Struggle, Defeat and Death

Santiago resembles an epic hero struggling against defeat day after day, having spent 84 days without catching a fish—soon breaking his own record of 87 days. His skiff resembles 'the flag of permanent defeat''. Critics are especially concerned with two wonderful qualities of the old fisherman—his individualism (that he resolves to sail out beyond the others to the place where the biggest prize lay) and his love for the sea creatures with whom he has to fight to get his due. Santiago is an alienated individual. His wife is dead; he has no child; he is old; luck does not favour him; socially he is cut off by the fisherman community. Manolin is his only companion, whom he often remembers in his fatigue and alienation. However, strikingly, he is independent and strong enough to stand alone saying, 'no one should be alone in their old age'. He is reluctant to bow down to defeat at any stage of his life. He continues to ward off the sharks from stealing his prize, fully knowing the battle is useless. While all his struggle go in vain and on the fourth morning he arrives fully exhausted from the three days of fighting, he says,

"A man may be destroyed but not defeated." The novel points out the honour of struggle.

Santiago represents the heroic aspect of mankind. Success may not be the ultimate goal of heroism. Success and failure are the consequences of human endeavours, however, facing adversity or suffering with grace and dignity matters most, which define true heroism. Santiago says, "[M]an is not made for defeat." Like a true hero, Santiago demonstrates heroism with dignity and valour. Even the marlin is heroic in its struggle to escape. It is described as 'great', 'calm' and 'noble' for its dignified struggle and suffering. Both Santiago and the marlin appear clearly as sufferers as well as victors. Success has two different faces—outer, which is materialist and inner, which is spiritual. Though the old hero clearly fails to demonstrate outer success and loses his hard-earned possession, the fish, what he earns in the process is heroism, his lost dignity and respect. Therefore, one way of looking at the novel is the triumph of indomitable heroic spirit of man over materiel resources. As the story starts, Santiago is obsessed to prove his worth to the villagers like he did in the past. However, for Santiago 'Each time was a new time and he never thought about the past when he was doing it.' Like a hero, Santiago hopes to prove his worth each time through his actions.

LET US KNOW



The novel also hints at feelings of brotherhood in human society for though the hero is an isolated man, he often remembers his youth— symbolised by the baseball and the African lions. He has realised that moving ahead alone and leaving his friends behind has ruined not only the great fish but his life too. Santiago is not above an average man, he is dependent on the society and desires human companionship. The theme of brotherhood is also a significant aspect of the novel.

The Relationship between Man and Nature:

The kinship between man and nature has been confronted by authors since long. Nature as a theme has been explored by several generation of authors. As an author, Hemingway was inspired by Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), the American classic, which had an effect on Hemingway's creative mind. *The Old Man and the Sea* sketches the relationship between Santiago and nature. Unlike Melville, he did not represent the malevolence of nature. Unlike Ahab, the protagonist in *Moby Dick*, Santiago does not feel a sense of union with nature.

Hemingway's work talks about an invisible tie that man shares with nature. The novel presents the story of an old man's courage and on a larger scale of human beings' heroic journey and constant struggle with nature. Nature is represented as a malevolent force, which is respected by all for its power. For Santiago, the sea is 'la mar'; he acknowledges the beauty and also occasional cruelty of the sea; fishing is a way of cultivating a craft or art.

In the narrative, Hemingway has provided a detailed account of the old man's thoughts on the grand beautiful fish. With great struggle Santiago conquers the fish that symbolises nature with due recognition of its being his worthy foe; but he is defeated by another natural entity-the sharks. He respects the marlin's strength and intelligence and is impressed by its beauty. While fighting the sharks, he defends not only his own victory but the dignity of the dead fish as well. He comes to love and respect the fish and laments its death. His empathy towards nature—the weather, the sea and the sea creatures reflect another face of Hemingway—a sort of transcendental pantheism, opposing the Christian symbolism in the book. Santiago loves the sea but at times thinks of it as his enemy. However, he loves the sea for its beauty as well as forgives it for its cruelty. Therefore, the novel expresses the conflict between man and nature as well as man's place in nature. It is not a chronicle of man's struggle against the natural world but a story of man's kinship

with nature. The old fisherman as well as the fish exhibit essential human qualities like pride, honour and bravery. However, neither of them is above the eternal law—they must kill or be killed.

Pride and Determination

The character of Santiago is based on the classic heroes of the ancient world. Like them Santiago is strong, brave and possesses a high moral sense. However, his pride causes his downfall. By sailing beyond the measured boundaries of the average fishermen and by losing the marlin to the sharks, Santiago establishes his pride, the flaw which proves dangerous. It is his pride that forces him to risk more than he could afford as he ventures 'beyond all people in the world' to catch the fish. Keenly aware of the mistake he has made, he regrets his pride. His 84-day-long travel far into the gulf waters and killing the mighty marlin are proof of his pride on his own self as a skilful fisherman. His overwhelming trust in himself and on his skills leads to the blow that he experiences during his voyage. However, the narrator does not seem to condemn the protagonist for being proud. Santiago is an instance of how pride motivates man to greatness. His determination to catch the marlin and bring it to shore and his ferocious fights with the sharks exhibit his strong desire to fight against the destructive forces of nature – all these show how pride works in him.

When the first shark comes he is full of resolution but has little hope; however, after some time, "He hit (the shark) without hope but with resolution". He does not mind dying in the process of killing the marlin, and is willing to die fighting the sharks. The old man never gives up his spirit. When he goes back to Havana losing his prize to the sharks after a long battle, he is fully aware of the fact that he has done something courageous. Honour also depends upon one having the pride to struggle till the end, irrespective of the outcome. The edible portion of the fish is gone and the old man almost dies during the fight but the honour he achieves is not due to

the battle but for his pride and determination to succeed. His pride offers Santiago a challenge worthy of his heroism.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What are the various themes dealt with in the novel?

12.3.3 Major Characters

The following are some of the important characters in the novel.

Santiago

The novel's central character, a poor but humble, skilful, dedicated fisherman is the old man in the novel's title who has had an extended run of ill luck. His best days are over; has lost his wife, has no children. Santiago says to Manolin, "I am a strange old man." And as the story develops, he proves right. After going without luck for so many years, which should have affected him badly, shattering his self-confidence, his skills as well as his sensory perceptions are perfect. Not only in physical strength but Santiago is strong in will power as well. Once he readies himself for the challenge, he stops at nothing.

Despite his mastery over the craft, for long 84 days, he has been unable to catch a single fish and started losing his sense of identity and the community's respect as well. Nevertheless, this doesn't deter him; he is humble as well as proud of his knowledge of the sea and sea creatures; it's his mastery over his craft, which keeps his hopes alive, regardless of the circumstances. He has his own philosophy of life and follows his own code of conduct. He is a dedicated fisherman who thinks beyond material gain for survival at a time when materialistic views have percolated through people's minds and the 'fishing village' concept has given way to the 'fishing industry' concept. For him his profession has spiritual connotations.

He acknowledges it as a part of nature's order in the eternal cycle that binds all creatures into one, as either a predator or a prey.

Throughout his life, the old fisherman has been fighting against nature's odds to test his strength; the giant marlin is the greatest challenge of his life against which he struggles tirelessly for three days. It is paradoxical that Santiago loses the great fish to the sharks but the marlin becomes the symbol of his greatest victory. The whole episode of hooking the marlin is symbolic of his strength, knowledge and positive energy. The old fisherman reveals his endurance, his love and respect for the marlin—his opponent—his 'defeat' against the sharks and his triumph in continuing his struggle against his enemies. He suffers a lot while hunting but shows 'grace under pressure'. He is desperate to have an epic catch just not to survive, but to prove his skills once more, to re-establish his identity as a fisherman, secure his reputation in his community and ensure honour for himself and his successor—Manolin—for a life time.

LET US KNOW



It is important to note that the name 'Santiago' has biblical connotations. In Spanish Santiago stands for Saint James who was a fisherman apostle in the New Testament. At an allegorical level, he is a Christ-like figure. Santiago is old, but not senile; unlucky, but not helpless or defeated; gentle, but not soft; proud, but not boastful; resigned but not passive. In his tragedy, suffering, isolation and near-death condition, he is linked with Christ. The "young lions" of Santiago's dream are also very suggestive. The loins on the beaches of Africa appear three times. Santiago associates the lions with eternal youth. The novel ends with Santiago's dreaming the lions at play, which suggests that the old man of the book is eternally young even in the later part of his life. Lions are also linked to the young boy as Manolin watches over Santiago when the hero goes on dreaming about the lions again for the last time in the narrative.

Towards the end of the narrative Santiago is compared to Christ. He transforms into the revered Christ figure at an allegorical level for the readers. During the fight, Santiago's back is beaten raw by the line; he bleeds, gets headaches and struggles with painful hands. The imagery of crucifixion is purposely involved in the most noticeable way. When the fisherman's palms are cut by his fishing line it reminds one of Christ's suffering. Later when the sharks attack, he makes a noise like 'Ay' and the author comments that it is similar to that of a man having nails being hammered through his hand. Furthermore, when the old man returns to shore, he carries his mast up the hill across his shoulders, resting several times in exhaustion and agony that reminds of Christ's march towards Calvary. Finally, when Santiago reaches his hut, he collapses on his bed "with his hands straight out and the palms of his hands up" which again reminds one of the Cross. At the signs of Santiago's agony, Mandolin, his disciple, weeps. The novelist employs these images in the final pages of the novel to transform his pain into gain, his defeat into triumph and his death-like experiences into renewed, reinvigorated life. His physical suffering leads to a spiritual triumph. However, these are indeed parallels and the very essence of the book seems pre-Christian.

Another noticeable aspect is the relationship between the old man as the mentor, a spiritual father to the young boy, Manolin, who inherits his values and philosophies like his pupil and son. In the end, Santiago transpires not as a solitary man but the force behind shaping Manolin. He teaches the young boy with all his dedication the tricks of the trade and instills in him to accept his teachings as a way of life, with all his imagination and inspires him to endure and achieve the intangibles, which make man indefatigable among all odds.

Manolin

Manolin, the young man in the narrative, presumably in his adolescence, is the old man's apprentice, a devoted attendant and

the only person with whom Santiago shares the deepest relationship. He is the old man's only companion who admires Santiago for his unique skill. He says, "There are many good fishermen and some great ones. But there is only you." He has fished with the old man since the age of five but Santiago's recent bout of ill luck forced the boy to fish with another man whom his parents consider luckier than Santiago. However, the young boy still cares deeply for his mentor Santiago. He knows Santiago stands alone among all fishermen of his village and shares a unique relationship with the sea and its creatures; the old man's trust in dignity and unity is exemplary.

The old man and the boy discuss baseball and have coffee together. Though Manolin prevails as a pervasive voice all through the narrative, the character actually appears only twice in the beginning and at the end of the novel. Manolin's devotion, attachment and love for the old man highlight Santiago's character, his value as a man and as a skilled fisherman. Manolin asks for help from the villagers to improve Santiago's poor conditions. He takes care of the old man's food, blankets and makes sure that he gets proper rest and does not go hungry. He attends to his physical needs like a son. Even after his withdrawal from Santiago's boat, he does not stop taking care of the old man. For him, Santiago is the "best fisherman". He hero- worships the old man. When Santiago returns from his last, arduous expedition, and comes home empty-handed, Manolin stands behind him with food and medicines. His deep concern for Santiago and the old man's love for Manolin talk volumes about the selfless love that still exists among human beings.

Manolin's purity of heart and singleness of purpose takes him to the level of the symbolic. He begs Santiago to forgive him for joining another fisherman. Against his wish, Manolin obeys his biological father but gets caught within conflicting loyalties and at the end of the narrative decides to be with the old man regardless of the consequences. He becomes a symbol of uncompromised love

and fidelity, a true companion. He professes his complete trust on the old man and everything the old fisherman stands for. Towards the end of the narrative, the boy watches over his aged friend as Santiago returns to his dream of the lions. Only Manolin truly understands the true significance of Santiago's greatest challenges and his struggle. Manolin's acceptance of marlin's spear clearly shows that he truly values Santiago's inheritance. His dedication to learning the craft and accepting Santiago's fishing spirit ensures that Santiago will live on.

The Marlin and the Sea

Although not a human character, the marlin certainly plays an important role in the narrative. A major segment of the book describes Santiago spending time tracking, killing, and attempting to bring the marlin to the shore. The marlin that Santiago hooks is more than just a giant fish. The fish measures eighteen feet. It's so large that Santiago has to work really hard to bring it ashore. He knows the big catch will drain him of his strength, but he is committed to his job."Fish ... I'll stay with you until I am dead." The fisherman idealises the giant fish ascribing its traits of great nobility, a fish to which he must prove his own capability if he is to be worthy to catch it. Santiago talks to the marlin as if it is a human opponent. "Fish ... I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends." The two opponents become engaged in a kind of tug-of-war for three days and after much hardship, Santiago succeeds in having his sweet prize. Santiago feels oneness with the fish for sharing qualities like fighting spirit, greatness in living, faithfulness to one's identity and ways of life. Santiago admires qualities like endurance, beauty and dignity—all that the fish possesses, So much so that they become intimately connected.

At first Santiago feels pity for the large fish but later begins to admire it. The fish is magnificent and glorious—it's his ideal opponent. But soon he starts feeling that he has committed a sin in

killing the marlin. Nevertheless, he knows that he is a fisherman and it is his profession; he has not killed the fish merely for food.

Santiago's deep understanding of the marlin echoes the fact that he did what he had to do; what he was born to do and what his role in life demanded. Just like the fish was born to be a fish, he was born to be a fisherman. They were brothers under the circumstances. The death of the Marlin fish meant a lot to Santiago—his greatest victory enabled him to achieve what he aspired in life. That was the core of his existence. Just after a while, Santiago became the victim and lost his biggest prize to the sharks. However, later he had to take the fish's meat to survive, which completed the natural circle. Thus, all creatures in nature are predators and preys and they nourish each other as well.

As men continue to kill fish, sharks continue to rob them of the fish, thereby completing the natural order, which is cruel, at the same time remind the existing man-animal kinship. The suffering, struggle and death that were earlier associated with the marlin pass to Santiago. The marlin's spirit to struggle to save itself becomes a part of Santiago's struggle to save the beautiful fish from the sharks. The sharks take away all that is valuable from the fish leaving the skeleton for Santiago. As he returns to his village on the fourth day of his fishing expedition, feeling apologetic towards the fish, he suffers something akin to death, just like the fish. He feels that he has betrayed the marlin by letting it go to the scavenging sharks. However, Santiago feels glad to find himself matched against a creature that brings out the best in him—courage, love, strength and respect. Though he fails in bringing back his precious prize—the marlin—he succeeds in his determined efforts.

As the title suggests, the sea plays a significant role in the novel. Most of the story takes place on the sea. Santiago is constantly identified with it and its creatures; his sea-coloured eyes reflect both the sea's tranquillity and power; its inhabitants are his brothers. Santiago refers to the sea as a woman, and the sea seems to

represent the feminine complement to Santiago's masculinity. The sea might also be seen as the unconscious from which Santiago's creative ideas are drawn.



CHECK YOUR PROGRES

Q 4: Consider some of the biblical and literary characters with whom you can associate the old hero of the novel.

Q 5: 'A man can be destroyed but not defeated,' says Santiago after the first stark attack. So how do you find Santiago at the end?

Q 6: Write a note on the significance of the sea and the giant fish.

12.3.4 Narrative Style

For Hemingway, every book was 'a new beginning' and the author 'should always try something that has never been done'. He was a careful artist who started his writing career as a newspaper correspondent that made him expert in writing graphic declaratory prose. His unique and simple style of writing earned him a place as one of the two great stylists of the 20th century American literature, the other being William Faulkner. Usually Hemingway's novels or short stories are composed in simple, direct, unadorned narrative, the result of excellent training of his early journalistic career. He erased the dividing line between journalism and literature. Before his coming into the literary scene, adjectives, adverbs piled on the top of one another; colons, semi colons clogged the flow in a short paragraph. Hemingway stripped all ornate literary mannerism, adjectival colouring and artificial flourishes. His unique style and manner, his terse representation of simple acts, his sparse dialogues and his understatement of emotions made his narrative distinctive. Throughout his writing career, he was known for his simplicity. He used short sentences, simple terms and colloquial idioms, without any sentimentality.

A deliberate author, Hemingway wrote and rewrote all or portions of *The Old Man and the Sea* more than 200 times before he approached the printer. Hemingway was an obsessive revisionist. He took great pains in revising his work tirelessly. Though all the plots of his novels are simple, the simplicity of *The Old Man and the Sea* is of a unique kind where he aimed at Biblical grandeur. The novel begins with "He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream …"and the readers at once sense that they will be getting something that resembles a parable. The story develops a careful surface realism informing the readers the minute and particular account of the old fisherman's thoughts and acts but one cannot overlook the universality of meanings and references. That is why Santiago and Manolin are "the old man" and "the boy", expressions that are intended to make them typical or universal figures.

Hemingway's simple, lucid, fresh and clean narrative style is his greatest contribution to literature and his true claim to fame. The polished style of *The Old Man and the Sea* affirms why Hemingway has been described as a master creator of dialogues. The narrative truthfully represents the way people speak in their real lives. Hemingway once said, "A writer's style should be direct and personal, his imagery rich and earthy and his words simple and vigorous." One has to admit that the carefully honed and polished writing technique was by no means spontaneous; rather it was the result of evolution, which begun with the publication of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in 1884. Hemingway once commented, "All modern American literature comes from that one book Adventures of Huckleberry Finn'". The renowned Hemingway style of narration derives its roots from Mark Twain's. Each of the authors tried and used day-to-day language for narrating the experiences of their sensitive real characters. Both of them were sceptical of their literary language.

In *The Old Man and the Sea,* the novelist's words are uniquely brilliant, yet colloquial; normally short and common. Readers having no experience of fishing can imagine the whole episode of fishing, for the writer has made it sound so familiar. Hemingway used the exact words to touch the depth of human feelings; the psychic status of the old fisherman's character. The novel employs and aptly illustrates what is particular to Hemingway—the "iceberg principle" technique. This implies that the simplest writing, when done rightly, would hint at the greatest human truths, and hit the terrific frozen mass of an iceberg, which lies underwater.

In Hemingway's novels, there is always a good blend of symbolism and realism. Santiago is a real fisherman with all his thoughts, actions and philosophy. His struggle with the great fish represents man's struggle with life, a universal phenomena. The Marlin is magnificent and glorious symbolising the ideal that needs to be achieved amongst all odds. In a world where "everything kills everything else in same way", the hero feels lucky to find himself fighting against a creature that brings out the best in him—his strength, love, respect, pride and courage. On the other hand, the shovel-nosed sharks, standing in bold contrast to the marlin symbolize the destructive forces of the universe. They are the creatures that thoughtlessly and gracelessly attack the beautiful.

The Nobel Prize Committee singled out his literary style as one of his foremost achievements. His style is a combination of elements from Gertrude Stein, James Joyce and his profession of journalism. Hemingway had a good knowledge of French, Spanish and Italian–the romance languages. With his lingual expertise, he had a way with his vocabulary and expressions.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: What is your idea of Hemingway's 'iceberg' principle of writing with respect to the novel?

Q 8: Briefly comment on Hemingway's prose style.

12.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF THE NOVEL

Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* was an instant success with its publication in an edition of *Life* magazine. The book received warm critical reception and was considered Hemingway's best work. William Faulkner said, "Time may show it to be the best single piece of any of us, I mean his and my contemporaries." Some, of course, complained of artificiality in the characterisation and excess sentimentality in the work. Despite these detractors, *The Old Man and the Sea* was awarded the 1953 Pulitzer Prize and American Academy of Arts and Letters' Award of Merit Medal and the novel as an work of art played a significant role in Hemingway's selection for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954.

This novel was published first as a sea story in LIFE, which received readers' approval in the form of reviews and appreciation—the magazine sold over five million copies in just two days. After six months of its release, the Scribner's edition of the book topped the best seller's list. It sold immensely and moved ordinary people to tears. Sermons were preached on it. The novelist received warmth and love from the people and hundreds of laudatory letters every day. Critics were full of admiration for his technical accomplishment, lyrical and rhythmic prose and elegantly used direct symbols in the book.

William Faulkner declared the work as Hemingway's best and perhaps the finest work from his contemporaries. However, notable critics of the day Philip Rahv and John Aldridge found it a minor work with issues like lack of complexity and emotion; colourless style (since the book revolved mainly around the physical and physic world of Santiago, the hero). Despite all, the novel won the Pulitzer Prize in 1953 and Hemingway was honoured with the Nobel Prize in 1954, which restated his international reputation. From 1952 to 1966, critics like Philip Young, Leo Gurko and Clinton S. Burhans appreciated the character of Santiago as a noble and tragic hero. The book's message of respecting humanity and brotherhood did not go unnoticed. Carlos Baker, a well-known Hemingway scholar, welcomed the Christian theme of the book which is evident in Santiago's suffering, his

humility which is quite saintly and the idea of redemption from meaningless existence in this world.

For the first fifteen years or so, after the publication of the book, critical response remained largely positive. Then there came a shift in assessment. Since the mid-60s, it was attacked by realist critics who condemned the book's unrealistic or simply incorrect elements. Earlier admirer Young objected to its affected simplicity whereas Robert P. Weeks could not find realistic details. By the mid 1970s, only few articles appeared in scholarly journals discussing biblical, baseball or some allusions in the book. The views on the book as embarrassingly narcissistic, psychologically simplistic and too sentimental became more and more entrenched. By 80s and 90s, critics lost all interest in the book.

While *The Old Man and the Sea* is popularly loved by many and assigned reading for students in the US and around the world, critical opinion places it among Hemingway's less significant works. The book fell from its earlier grace, yet had an incredible impact on its readers and continues to do so. Despite all, the book continues to nurture Hemingway's reputation. The work is still considered as Hemingway's most distinctive fictional effort and one, which communicated many of his ideas and philosophy of life. Critics and readers of each generation have discovered new meanings and values in the work.

Yet the simple vocabulary and evocative narrative prose style of the book has been influencing generation of writers. If one generation, profoundly affected by the war, had found much to identify with the lost generation's alienation, succeeding generations who were worried about international economics and threats to the world environment were touched by the multicultural aspects of the author in *The Old Man and the Sea*. Similarly, the future generation will discover something irresistible and appreciating. Hemingway's works will remain an invaluable contribution to world literature.



12.5 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that *The Old Man and the Sea* is a short novel written by the American author Ernest Hemingway in 1951 in Cuba. The novel was published in 1952. It was the last major work of fiction by Hemingway that was published during his lifetime. One of his most famous works, this novel tells the story of Santiago, an aging fisherman from Cuba who struggles with a giant marlin fish far out in the Gulf Stream off the coast of Cuba. In 1953, *The Old Man and the Sea* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, and it was cited by the Nobel Committee as contributing to their awarding of the Nobel Prize in Literature to Hemingway in 1954. The various themes of the novel help the readers to comprehend many of the important aspects of Hemingway as a writer and American literature as a whole. You have learnt that Hemingway's simple vocabulary and evocative narrative prose style of the book has been influencing generations of writers even today.



12.6 FURTHER READING

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Kaplin, Harold. (1966). *The Passive Voice: An Approach to Modern Fiction*. Ohio: Ohio University Press.

Mizener, Arthur. (1964). *The Sense of Life in the Modern Novel*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Motola, Gabriel. "Hemingway's Code: Literature and Life." *Modern Fiction Studies* 10 (Winter 1964-1965): 319-329.

O'Faolain, Sean. (1956). *The Vanishing Hero: Studies in Novelists of the Twenties*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Snell, George. (1947). *The Shapers of American Fiction: 1748-1947*. New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc.



12.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Yes… …Santiago is a tragic hero... …Santiago sails out further than others for only a big prize that satisfies his pride... …but loses the great fish to rapacious sharks on his way back... …accuses himself of ruining both the fish and his life... … the novel ends with Santiago's spirit undefeated who represents Everyman, heroic in the face of human tragedy.

Ans to Q 2: The novel is a story of the character Santiago ... ... the only other human character that receives the reader's prolonged attention is Manolin who exists to highlight Santiago's character... ... but he is more like a side/supportive character... ... always appreciating Santiago's heroic spirit and skills despite his outward lack of success.

Ans to Q 3: Honour in struggle… …facing adversity or suffering with grace and dignity… … heroism and worth… …unity or kinship between man and nature… …Santiago and nature's adversities… …brotherhood in human society… …Santiago-an epic hero with his flaw (pride)… …the author's treatment of pride as a positive trait.

Ans to Q 4: Specially images referring the Crucifixion of the lord are present... ... Santiago's palms are cut by his fishing cable while battling with the giant marlin... ... he suffers but determined... ... even ready to sacrifice life to do his job done well... ... then Santiago's reflection on nature of the universe echoes God's answer to Job... … losing all, tired Santiago climbs the hill up with his mast across his shoulders to his hut reminds Christ's journey to Calvary... ... Santiago's position on his bed refers to Christ on the cross.

Ans to Q 5: Santiago killed the fish on the fourth day after much hardship and suffering … ...the dead fish invests Santiago with a new life

…victory with dignity and grace over crushing adversity is the mark of heroism... … Santiago becomes the heroic emblem for humankind after monumental tribulation … what a man achieves or loses externally is not as significant to heroism as the comforting ourselves with inner nobility.

Ans to Q 6: Santiago considers all natural creatures as brothers or friends- the fish, birds, stars and the sky. … …strong bonding with the sea as a fisherman... …loves and respects the sea foe her kindness as well as fears her cruelty... …but never poses as antagonist competing with her... …killing the marlin marks the climax of the book… …Santiago's reflection on nature of the universe… …fish is killed giving the fisherman a new life… …the predatory nature of nature.

Ans to Q 7: Hemingway was the master of simple, evocative prose narrative… …used simple words from the familiar scenes to create poetic images… …chose just the exact words rather than sounds to create maximum effect making the scene visibly imaginable to the readers… …choice of words reflect the speaker's psychological depth… …the simplest writing when done correctly would hint at the greatest human truths just like the tip of an iceberg hits the terrific frozen mass underwater… …this is known as the 'iceberg principle.'

Ans to Q 8: Hemingway's unique writing style and invention of narrative form... …simple vocabulary, colloquial language... …with themes which are distinctly modern, existentialist worldview... …storyline as close to the actual experience as possible ... … matured handling of themes… …tale of man struggling to define their identities and find honour in a chaotic world... ...an enormous influence on American writers.



12.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Describe how Ernest Hemingway has depicted Nature in the novel *The Old Man and the Sea*.

Q 2: What do you think about Ernest Hemingway being a modernist novelist?

Q 3: Attempt an appreciation of Hemingway's narrative style in *The Old Man and the Sea*.

Q 4: *The Old Man and the Sea* has a timeless appeal. Discuss.

Q 5: Discuss the different themes of the novel *The Old Man and the Sea*.

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UNIT 13: HERMAN MELVILLE: *BILLY BUDD* (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

13.1 Learning Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 Herman Melville: The Novelist

13.3.1 His Life

13.3.2 His Works

13.4 Critical Reception of Melville

13.5 Let us Sum up

13.6 Further Reading

13.7 Possible Questions

13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of Herman Melville and understand his philosophies and works
- writer about Melville the man and the novelist with all his qualities
- state why he is considered one of the greatest writers from America
- discuss how Melville been critically received

13.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous two units, we have discussed Hemingway's famous novel *The Old Man and The Sea.* This unit shall introduce us to yet another significant American novelist Herman Melville–one of the two most widely read and written about authors of 19th century America, Mark Twain being the other. Melville is another most widely known novelist from America. Financial difficulties at home forced him to the sea and he had numerous exotic experiences, which provided Melville with endless literary themes. He was a reserved, bookish man of life and yet gave life to his imagination

through his writings. The turning point of his career came with *Moby Dick,* now considered a milestone in American literature. Melville finished his most challenging work *Moby Dick* when he was 32 years old. Still a young writer, he had crafted one of the most incredibly dense and imaginative work of art in all of literature. However, *Moby Dick* failed to impress the critics and was spurned by the readers. A good numbers of novels followed but failed to please the readers. Until then, Melville's gradual literary growth in terms of language and theme started to express the darker side of human soul. His style became demanding and themes started questioning the nature of good and evil. As we finish reading this unit, we shall be in a position to discuss the life and works of Herman Melville in sufficient details.

13.3 HERMAN MELVILLE: THE NOVELIST

In the following section, you will get to read about the life and works of Herman Melville.

13.3.1 His Life



Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Herman_Melville

Born in Pearl Street, in the City of New York, on August 1, 1819, Herman Melville was the third of eight children born to Maria Gansevoort Melville and Allan Melville, a prosperous importer of foreign goods. Allan Melville, Herman's father, a snobbish man, suffered a mental breakdown due to over work and with his death in 1832 Herman's mother Maria moved in with her well-to-do parents, who helped her educate and support her children. They relocated to Albany.

The Melvilles were descendants of respectable Scotch, Irish and Dutch colonial settlers. For two years, young Herman attended the Albany Classical School, which specialised in preparing students for the business world. As a student, he neither showed a scholarly attitude nor literary promise. However, he joined a literary and debate

society and submitted letters to the editor of the Albany Microscope. However, misfortune fell and Herman and his brother Gansevoort had to drop out of school to support the poverty-stricken family. At the tender age of 13, he started working in a bank; finished his formal education after seven years and at 18 became an elementary school teacher. This career was abruptly cut short, followed by a brief tenure as a newspaper reporter. Although he enrolled at Lansingburgh Academy in 1838, studied engineering and surveying and graduated the next year with a dream of helping to construct the Erie Canal Project, he could not gain a post in the project. At 18, his mother's worsening financial condition and his own inability to establish himself forced him to leave home. Melville made his fast sea voyage at 19, as a cabin boy, on a travelling vessel bound for Liverpool, England, in 1839. This four-month voyage established his relationship with the sea. He returned to America the next summer to try his fortune. By that time Melville had become an avid reader of Shakespeare, French and American Classics and the holy Bible. However, he went back to sea in 1841 at 21 after being disappointed in love and continuing financial difficulties. He joined a whaling ship, Acushnet, and in its maiden voyage head towards the South Seas from New Bedford. This journey took him around the continent of South America and across the Pacific Ocean and this eighteen-month voyage provided him the material for *Moby-Dick*, Melville's masterpiece.

However, the brutalities on the ship destroyed his romantic notions of a sailor's life. He abandoned the ship with a fellow sailor named Richard Tobias 'Toby' Greene to avoid intolerable conditions and a meagre diet of hardtack and occasional fruit on the ship in the summer of 1842. The two men found themselves in the Marquesas Islands where they accidently wandered into the company of a tribe of cannibals. Harmed by an injury to his leg, he became separated from his friend and lived for a month under benign house among the cannibals as the guest of Typees, the natives of the island. This experience later formed the core of his first novel *Typees, A Peep at*

Polynesian Life published in 1846. Melville enjoyed a few carefree months amongst the cannibals. He came away from the Western world's philosophies as well as 19th century 'civilised complications' and faith in progress. Melville's career as a sailor was full of adventures. He escaped the Typees aboard the Lucy Ann, an Australian whaler; became embroiled in a mutiny; was jailed for a few weeks in a British prison; deserted a ship a second time at Papeete, Tahiti, with the ship's doctor named Long Ghost in 1842. He had a relaxed life on the island as a field labourer. Leaving Tahiti, he took his final whaling voyage on the 'Charles Henry' as a harpooner, off the shores of Japan, Lahaina, Maui and Honolulu, Hawaii. He left the voyage on the Hawaiian Island and to earn his passage home he worked as a store bookkeeper and a pinsetter in a bowling alley. He enlisted in the US Navy and as an ordinary seaman on the man of war US, Melville landed in Boston in October 1844 nearly three years after his departure in the Acushnert, where he resumed civilian life. His sailing career ended with this and he devoted to writing novels drawing freely on his sea going experiences.

On August 4, 1847, Melville married Elizabeth Lizzie Shaw, daughter of Lamuel Shaw, chief justice of the commonwealth of Massachusetts. They settled in New York City where the couple spent the happiest days of their life enjoying intellectual company like William Cullen Bryant, Richard Henry Dana and Washington Irving. In 1850, the Melville family moved to a large, two-storey farmhouse near Pitt's field, Massachusetts. For twenty years from 1866 to 1886, he served as deputy inspector of customs, a job according to him "a most inglorious one... …worse than driving geese to water." The financial strain, the immobilising attacks of rheumatism on his back, failing eyesight, psychological collapse of loosing readership for his later books led him to a nervous breakdown. He wrote poetry to stabilize his failing finances. Melville's final years were marked by personal tragedy. His son Malcolm shot

himself in 1867, another son Stanwix died of tuberculosis in 1886, then there was this carriage accident with him, which further diminished Melville's health. During his final years, he returned to prose and composed his final manuscript *Billy Budd* which appeared several decades after his death. Melville died of a heart attack on September 28, 1891 in New York.

13.3.2 His Works

Melville's was an eventful life on both sea and shore. From a boyhood of relative affluence, the Melvilles underwent a rapid fall in social circle as their family business collapsed and young Melville chose an adventurous life of a sailor as his career. His profession provided him ample opportunities to taste life and have diverse experiences. His first four novels are semi autobiographical novels. *Typee: A Peep at Polynessian Life* (1846), which he dedicated to his wife Elizabeth "Lizzie" Shaw, was composed from his experiences among the cannibals in the Polynesian island. The novel is the reputed story of his life among those cannibalistic Typee people, but is highly fictionalised dramatisation of the real story. The novel, a fanciful travel narrative, opened the world of the South Seas to the world. It was the most popular and successful work during Melville's lifetime, for the novel went into its fifth printing that same year of publication. An indeterminate mixture of fact and fiction, the first novel of Melville also met with negative criticism from religious reviewers who were offended with his description of the greedy missionaries to the South Pacific. However, the favourable reactions of the readers encouraged him to write a series of novels detailing his adventures blending personal experience with fiction and presenting his philosophy of life.

Typee was followed by *Omoo* (1847) describing his wandering in Tahiris; *Redburn* (1846) is about his maiden voyage to Liverpool, England and *White-Jacket* (1850) describes his last voyage on a US warship. These four fanciful travel narratives

composed in the same style established Melville as a notable author of travel romances. His *Mardi* (1849) with its satirical comments is more of an allegory than a novel. The book, his first experimentation with satire, allegory and symbol, brought a critical and commercial disappointment. By that time, Melville had made a major literary contact. He met and formed a closer relationship with Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose *The Scarlet Letter* and other works Melville had reviewed in an essay for the Literary World. Melville bought the Arrowhead farm near Pittsfield so that he could be Hawthorne's neighbour. Soon the two writers of similar philosophies came even closer. This friendship provided Melville creative energies and in 1851 came out Melville's most renowned novel *Moby Dick* or *The Whale*. Today *Moby Dick* is considered his masterpiece and all those first five novels published before *Moby Dick* are seen as one big prologue to a great work like *Moby Dick*. As a token of his warm feelings, Melville dedicated *Moby Dick* to his friend Hawthorne. *Moby Dick* was an ambitious project and a complex novel offering the readers a glimpse into the life at sea and at the same time it served as a philosophical allegory of life. It remains unsurpassed as a work of amazing symbolic dimensions. Yet Melville's grandest novel, which now is heralded as a landmark work in American literature, received lukewarm reception upon its release. It suffered severe critical disfavour and sold badly.

Moby Dick was followed by *Pierre* (1852), subtitled *The Ambiguities*, a novel that drew from Melville's experiences as a youth. The book with its emphasis on incest and moral corruption was pessimistic and received uncomprehending attacks. His readers who were so accustomed to his sea adventures could not make an easy leap to a probing fiction. After the disastrous reception of *Pierre*, his output dwindled from novel to short story. During this period he wrote 'Bartleby the Scrivener'' (1855), published in Putnam's magazine focussing on the dehumanisation of a copyist and 'Benito Cereno' (1855), which remain his most significant works outside

Moby Dick. He published several fictional sketches of various lengths in various prominent periodicals of his day. Then came out his two completed novels—*Israel Potter* or *Fifty years of Exile* (1855), a historical work that saw a modest success and *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* (1857), a maddeningly dark satire of trust. These were the final works that Melville would publish during his lifetime. None of these ever regained the readership the first four novels had enjoyed.

In the remaining thirty-five years of his life, Melville's creativity declined considerably. Melville devoted himself to lecture tours and a global voyage that he abandoned in San Francisco. He published a volume of war poetry titled *Battle Pieces* delineating the poet's views on war, particularly the American Civil War. *Aspect of the War* appeared in 1866 and a lengthy poem of 18000 lines titled "Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land" came out in 1876, which is said to have evolved from the author's travels in Jerusalem. It describes a young student's search for faith. He produced two more volumes of verse, published privately, primarily at the expenses of his uncle—*John Marr and -Others Sailors* (1888) and *Timoleon Etc* (1891). Then he returned to writing prose, finished *Billy Budd*, the story of a sailor who accidently kills his master after being provoked by a false charge, in April 1891. However, this work remained unpublished for more than thirty years and appeared in 1924 in a limited London edition. After *Billy Budd*, Melville gained wider acclaim in the mid 20th century and scholars as well as readers began to study the novel seriously. *Billy Budd* is based on events that Melville encountered at sea. In the novel, these events are depicted alongside a historical incident involving Melville's first cousin in 1842.

13.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF MELVILLE

[Adapted from *Student Companion to Herman Melville*]

Melville's demise in 1891 caused little stir, as he had long been considered dead as far as his literary reputation was concerned. His early

South Seas narratives had gained him recognition as a romantic travel writer, but the public—and most critics—had been unable to comprehend and appreciate his later, more ambitious works. As a result, late nineteenth and early twentieth-century critics relegated him to "minor status in American literary history… by means of two indices: his subject matter and his geographical location." Melville was deemed unimportant not only because he had written popular adventure books but also because he was a New Yorker rather than a member of the elite New England sphere of literary and intellectual influence. In 1921, 30 years after the writer's death, this contingent finally gained ascendance with the publication of Raymond Weaver's *Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic*. In this first full-length biography, Weaver laboured to rehabilitate his subject's reputation by stressing the authenticity of his writings of the South Seas and by recognizing *Moby Dick* as a critical masterpiece. Although the former argument led to a subsequent overemphasis of the biographical component in Melville's writings, the latter argument formally launched the movement known as the Melville Revival, which redefined the way in which the author would be viewed from that time forward.

Weaver's biography of Melville laid the groundwork for the 1924 publication of a collected edition of the author's works, which incorporated the previously unpublished manuscript *Billy Budd.* A burgeoning body of scholarship, both biographical and critical, soon followed. Because of the experience of World War I, a new generation of readers was now valuing the very qualities in Melville's writings that his contemporaries had condemned—his rebelliousness "against both human society and the cosmos itself". Whereas nineteenth-century readers had been bewildered by what Hawthorne had called Melville's "freedom of view," modernist readers embraced his expansive metaphysical meditations and were not offended when his ideas could not be constrained by typical conventions of form and style. This movement to reassess Melville's critical reputation culminated in 1941 with F. O. Matthiessen's extended treatment of the writer in his *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*. This landmark study "finally established [Melville] as a 'classic

American author'" and gave him a "permanent place in the canon" of American literature. Describing Melville as "the American with the richest natural gifts as a writer," Matthiessen revised the previously accepted reading of Melville's literary career.

Although springing from a kernel of truth, myths and legends move beyond the realm of reality to gain an exaggerated yet exalted status that make them impervious to factual probing. In the case of Melville, the establishment of such myths in the first place was facilitated by the fact that early biographers had few materials except his writings on which to base their suppositions about the man himself. Recent biographers, aided by the discovery of new documents, have sought to revise the portrait that was created as a result of the earlier generation's approach. Keeping in mind that the writer was human with human inconsistencies and failings, scholars have now discounted the more lurid claims that Melville was an insane alcoholic who beat his wife, drove his son Malcolm to commit suicide, and harboured homosexual desires for his mentor and friend Nathaniel Hawthorne. They also have argued that the tendency to read Mary Glendinning, the manipulative and controlling mother in *Pierre*, as a realistic representation of Melville's own mother has resulted in distorted extrapolations about Melville's childhood. Other legends about Melville, although less sensational, have proven equally hard to displace in the public's memory. First and foremost among these is the myth that Melville's later works—those after *Moby-Dick* —are Melville's Contributions to American Literature inferior creations that are as unreadable as they are undeserving of critical attention. Such a view has resulted in the neglect of those works that is only now beginning to be corrected.

Although *Moby-Dick* remains central to and the vortex of Melville's body of texts, scholars are now wrestling with the creative outpourings that followed it. Rather than finding only the signs of failure, exhaustion, and isolation in *Pierre*, *The Confidence Man*, and *Clarel*, scholars are now concluding, "the diversity and experimentation after Moby-Dick reveal an active, still searching, highly inventive artist." As a result of this new scholarship, Melville is now appreciated "not simply as the author of a few

famous prose fictions but as a writer whose lifelong engagement with language pushed him through generic boundaries in search of new ways of shaping and questioning the world." The single greatest influence on Melville's own writing was by all accounts Nathaniel Hawthorne, to whom he linked his own aspirations as a writer in his essay "Hawthorne and His Mosses", and who then inspired him to rewrite his nearly completed whaling manuscript and turn it into *Moby Dick.* The effects of the friendship between these two writers almost always has been credited to Melville's sole advantage, and Hawthorne's influence has especially been posited in Melville's discovery of the nature of evil.

Melville apparently had little effect on other writers of his own day, in large part because the only literary success he enjoyed during his lifetime was in his twenties as a writer of sea adventures. In the disillusion and alienation that followed World War I, however, modernists found much to admire in what they read as his mythic vision, and through their embrace of the archetypal struggle of Moby Dick, they fashioned Melville into an American cultural hero. Somewhat ironically, the British writer D. H. Lawrence, often harsh in his comments about America, was a fundamental voice in this movement to make an icon of Melville, whom he saw as a struggling victim of American duplicity. During this period, the poet Hart Crane wrote "At Melville's Tomb", in which he draws on the ending of *Moby Dick* to mourn the death of his predecessor, an event that he sees as symbolic of America's lost vision. Crane also quotes from Battle-Pieces in his epic poem "The Bridge" (1930), and many scholars have commented on the influence of Melville elsewhere in his poetry.

After World War II, as the Cold War brought conservatism to the forefront of American politics, the influence of Melville continued with a shift of focus to his softer, romantic elements. In addition to the continuing influence of *Moby Dick, Billy Budd*, as a Christian allegory, had particular appeal to this generation. Robert Lowell's "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket" (1946) drew on Moby-Dick, and William Styron's "The Long March" (1953) was linked to *Billy Budd*, while the poetry of W. H. Auden reflects the influence of both texts. In his treatment of Nantucket, John Steinbeck also nods to Melville in his East of Eden (1952).

Nor was Melville's influence during this period limited to American writers. French philosophers Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, for instance, also acknowledge their debt to Melville in their essays. Despite the current critical disinclination to speak in terms of cultural icons, Melville retains a certain mythic status in the public consciousness. Even the many who have never read his works understand the symbolic implications of the related allusions; in fact, the "unreadability" of Melville has itself become part of the myth. Although it is easy to argue that Melville and his Whale are now engrained in American folklore, the reason why is not as clear. Perhaps Charles Olson comes closest to explaining the attraction when he admits, Melville's Contributions to American Literature "I am willing to ride Melville's image of man, whale and ocean to find in him prophecies, lessons he himself would not have spelled out." *Moby Dick* will always be out of a reader's "grasp just as the whale forever escaped Ahab." Nonetheless, Melville still encourages his readers—even those who do not read him—to dive with him into the ambiguous quest of life.



13.5 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have understood that Melville's career as a writer saw many sides of life. All his great works like *Moby Dick*, *The Confidence Man* and *Billy Budd* failed to achieve a great audience in their own time. Throughout his life, Herman Melville had much passionate concern with the ideas/concepts associated with faith, belief, good, evil, life and death, which later grew into an obsession. His novels with their wealth of allusions, imageries and novel ideas/criticisms concerning society and its institutions were not straightforward that could be lightly accepted by the provincial Americans of his age. Today *Billy Budd* is ranked one of Melville's greatest works. The novel has secured a position of being one of the most interpreted books ever written in the English language. *Billy Budd* is the creative product of a mature writer who poses many ethical questions and readers find themselves without answers.



13.6 FURTHER READING

Delbanco, Andrew. (2005). *Melville: His World and Work*. Alfred A. Knopf.

Clark, Davis. (1995). *After the Whale: Melville in the Wake of Moby-Dick*. University of Alabama Press.

Laurie Robertson Lorant. (1996). *Melville: A Biography*. New York: Clarkson Potter.

Leon Howard. (1967). *Herman Melville: A Biography*. University of California Press.

Robert Milder. (2006). *Exiled Royalties: Melville and the Life We Imagine*. Oxford University Press.

Tally, Sharon. (2007). *Student Companion to Herman Melville.* London: Greenwood Press



13.7 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How did Herman Melville's personal experiences in life contribute to his making as a novelist?

Q 2: Write a note on the critical reception of Herman Melville as an American writer.

Q 3: Which are the important fictional works of Herman Melville? Discuss how these work reflect American life and culture.

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UNIT 14: HERMAN MELVILLE: *BILLY BUDD* (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

14.1 Learning Objectives

14.2 Introduction

14.3 Reading the Novel

- 14.3.1 The Story Element
- 14.3.2 Major Themes
- 14.3.3 Narrative Style
- 14.3.4 Major Characters

14.4 Critical Reception of *Billy Bud*

14.5 Let us Sum up

14.6 Further Reading

14.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

14.8 Possible Questions

14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- describe the story of the novel in *Billy Budd*
- discuss Melville's unique narrative style
- explain the major themes of the novel *Billy Budd*
- appreciate and discuss the different critical aspects of the novel

14.2 INTRODUCTION

Virtually ignored by the literary world of his day, Melville started working on *Billy Budd*, which records the final confrontation between evil and innocence. *Billy Budd* could be seen as a narrative that takes place in the sea and at the same time, it could also be read as a philosophical novel dealing with Christian allegories. Thus, in this unit, you will find that *Billy Budd* uncovers a strong, mature author who questions his own art.

14.3 READING THE NOVEL

The following sections will guide you to read the novel.

14.3.1 The Story Element

Billy Budd with its allegorical elements, richness, depth and ambiguities has been ranked as one of the greatest works of Melville as well as one of the greatest novels of the 19th century. The story of *Billy Budd* was drawn from diverse sources. The dedicatory page says Melville owed much to his old friend plus fellow sailor Jack Chase whose love for poetry and rugged good looks and indomitable spirit served as the model for *Billy*. Melville himself was a rebellious good-looking sailor. For the setting, Melville went back to his navy years as the man-of-war US. For the subject matter he relied upon a historical incident–a scandal resulting from an abortive mutiny on the American brig-of-war Somers on 1st December, 1842. At his officer's order, Alexander Mackenzie, the captain, ordered the hanging of three troublemakers, one of whom being the son of the Secretary of War John Spencer. When the ship backed to port, the Captain met the fury of the influential Spencer family. However, he survived both a military and a civil tribunal. However, facts were against the Captain's sanity. Melville was too interested, read the proceedings in the newspapers and received eye witness's accounts from his first cousin who was a lieutenant at Somers. Guert Gansevoort, his cousin, played a role as an arbitrator in the controversy who privately supported the victims. The author could identity with the whole situation and later used it as the basis for his last novel of life.

The action occurs in 1797, following the great mutinies in the British Navy at Spithead and Nore and during the first of the Napoleonic Wars. It is the summer of 1797 and Billy Budd, a young handsome sailor on a British Merchant ship named the Rights-of-Man is the protagonist. Billy is good looking, innocent, simple, good-natured. However, he has one fault–when seised by strong emotion, he stutters. The time is terrible for the British Empire—it has been

four years into the Napoleonic wars between England and French. Napoleon's high ambitions and France's revolutionary attitudes panic the whole world. The navy wing is the foundation of the British defence force and it continues to depend on impressments. H. M. S Bellipotent, an English man-of-war, in need of man, halts the merchant ship Rights-of-man. Lieutenant Ratcliff, the boarding officer, is impressed by only one sailor, Billy Budd, who is also happy to serve his land. He extracts Billy from duty aboard the merchant ship. Though Captain Graveling protests to let his best man go from the Rights-of-Man, he has no option to voice against the superior ship's commands as Billy has no choice. Billy, without any objection, is set on his way. He bids farewell to his old mates and to Rights-of-Man. Aboard the Billipotent Billy settles in quickly and assumes the duties of foretop man. He proves most hard working and takes no time to earn the love of his fellow sailors and senior officers. The Captain of the ship, Starry Vere, is a just officer but the master-of-arms, Claggert, is a malevolent and moody man. Billy attempts to do his job perfectly but is surprised when he is under constant scrutiny for petty errors. Fearing punishment, a puzzled Billy asks the Dansker, a veteran sailor, for advice. The Dansker warns Billy saying Claggert is obsessed with Billy, for that positivity in Billy, which Claggart himself will never possess. However, Billy refuses to accept his opinion for he cannot believe that Claggart harbours any ill will towards him. He continues to wander sadly about his present situation.

One night an after guardsman rouses Billy from his sleep on the upper deck and asks him if he would join a group of impressed sailors in the event of a mutiny and offers him a bribe. Shocked to be approached in this way, enraged Billy threatens the man and the unidentified man flees. Billy does not disclose it to the officers except the Dansker who suspects Claggart's involvement in the incident. Later Claggart approaches Captain Vere and forebodes the chances of a rumoured rebellion and names Billy as head of the mutiny. Not really impressed with Claggart's version when the Captain asks a helpless, terrified, speechless Billy to defend himself, he does it the

only way he knows how—giving Claggart a swift blow on the forehead. The blow proves fatal and kills Claggart. Captain Vere, though loves and knows Billy well, has to call a drumhead court consisting of the captains of the marines, the first lieutenant and the sailing master to decide the foretop man's case. Captain Vere gives a testimony of the incident to the jury as the main witness. Billy admits to his blow but says that the act was unintentional and declares his lack of affiliation with any potential mutiny. The time is tough. England is at war and there have been widespread mutinies in force. If Billy gets free it may result in an all-out mutiny. Captain Vere asks the jury to decide to acquit or condemn in strict accordance with military laws. The officers' panel convicts Billy and sentences him to death by hanging the next morning. Billy is hanged from the yardarm. He dies uttering "God bless Captain Vere."

On the return voyage to join the Mediterranean fleet the Billipotent encounters the French warship Athee (the Atheist). In an attempt to capture it, Captain Vere is fatally wounded and eventually dies in a hospital in Gibraltar, murmuring the last words "Billy Budd". Later, the legend of Billy Budd is falsely recorded; a newspaper figures Billy as the villainous murderer of an officer on duty and Claggart a patriotic sailor. However, the fellow sailors record the truth and continue to believe that Billy was innocent, remember his nobility and the spirit of Billy lives on. They preserve a track of the spar from his gallows as a holy object. To them, it becomes "a piece of the Cross." A fellow foretop man composes laudatory verses and immortalises Billy in a ballad.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Do you think Melville's *Billy Budd* is an attempt to review the concept of military laws?

Q 2: Melville's *Billy Budd* can be termed as a book posing questions on ethics and rich in moral values. Comment.

14.3.2 Major Themes

Melville as an author was deeply touched by the ambiguities of life, the clash between good and evil in the universe, corruption of innocence by society. *Billy Budd* is the posthumous work of Melville, and since his first novel *Typee,* Melville did not alter much his chosen area. All the heroes of his novels face the threat of destruction by an evil force beyond their range of understanding or control. His heroes are noble savages—unaware of the ways of the world.

Billy Budd deals with the theme of **innocence and corruption of innocence** by society. Billy Budd is the embodiment of innocence, in constant clash with the evil embodied in Claggart. However, Billy is not the embodiment of goodness. The novel is not a clash between good and evil but innocence and evil. The two concepts are not the same. The homicidal act of Billy draws the innocent away from virtue into violence thereby proving his poor moral strength. Billy is primitive and not perfect. He is young and handsome; he takes everyone at face value; he is a popular sailor. Claggart is deceptive and distrustful and there is no reason for Claggart's animosity towards Billy except Billy's innocence. His innocence is the beauty of his character yet it is the only quality that dooms him. He becomes victim to Claggart's evil plans, his malice and treachery. However, Billy embraces his punishment; for him, death is a means of atoning for evil. Billy goes quite peacefully blessing his Captain as Christ blessed his enemies. Billy's simplicity and innocence finds its evil counterpart in John Claggart's depravity. The author has tried to present a convincing psychological portrait of Claggart but the reason behind his hatred goes mostly unexplained. The narrative hints at some point that evil exists alongside good and it corrupts innocence. Throughout the narrative, the evil remains unexplained and unmotivated. Billy falls from moral grace by killing the evil and also suffers death; as a result he who lacks sophistication and experience to roll with lives becomes evil's obvious victim.

Melville's fascination with ideas of **man in primitive states** rather than man being the Noble Savage, innocent of the malice of civilisation is so very clear in the novel. Melville prefers the primitive society over the civilised one. Billy is somehow related to Adam before the Fall, he is an idealised version of humanity. This theme may indicate in his terminal work Melville's personal rejection of the so-called civilised society and his acceptance of the simple, honest, yet an imperfect life.

Melville was concerned about society playing its role in limiting **people's individuality.** Bellipotent taking Billy away from his former ship Rights-of-Man symbolises a society which is so powerful that it compels one to participate in wars and while doing so readily dispenses his rights. Bellipotent is usurper of human rights. It protects the rights of a man only by impressing men from the ship. It snatches Billy away from a safe berth to the death penalty. Captain Vere, the Captain of the ship, stands for a truly balanced civilised man of the society. He opposes innovation or change yet wills peace in the society; he knows how to separate one's feelings and emotions from one's social obligation. Therefore, he decides to follow the words of the law despite his knowing that Billy is innocent. His position does not allow him to let a man free who has disobeyed the law; all men must obey the Mutiny Act. Therefore, suppressing his own feelings, he asks the jury to go with the law of the state. To be a "good" captain Vere has to act against his impulse and do which is morally right. The book is a commentary on impersonality and brutality of a civilised man by penalizing the innocent.

The novel also centres upon the **clash between conscience and law**. Life aboard the ship is strongly ruled by a strict set of rules. Not individual conscience, all of them on the ship have to trust the military rule, the aim being to maintain peace an order. All may have individual choice but none is allowed to govern according to their preferences. Captain Vere is the best example of sacrificing conscience for maintaining law and order in the ship.

The Captain has begun to love Billy like his son but he must go against his instincts while condemning a guilty man. The Dansker's position is the same as the Captain. He has started liking Billy too but fails to help him. He never takes direct action against the evil fearing the strict punishment of facing evil directly, thus leaving a good man like Billy to know the deceptive world and help himself. The Dansker represents people in the modern society who never go fully with their conscience or impulse but act as per their own convenience, acceptable to the society. The ship seems to be a larger representation of the society. The narrative poses a question, especially toward the end of the book, when the narrator tries to explore some of the contradictions associated with performing a citizen's duty during the war. Military hierarchy which is in charge of citizens' democratic rights, during emergencies, respect neither individuals nor their rights or ethics. The crew in the ship questions the Captain's right on passing judgement upon Billy so swiftly. Moreover, the Captain plays a significant role as chief witness as well as a jury member. These types of courts do exist during wartime. Even the people in the ship having doubts in mind regarding the case is suppressed by the superiors quickly blowing their whistles and forcing them back to their jobs. The dilemma that people usually have whether to follow ones conscience or the law can be noted in Captain Vere. Law exits to support the integrity of a society and if one disobeys; he threatens the very fabric of the society. However, what if law itself is unjust? Captain Vere surely applies logic in arguments keeping the war in mind. However, like the crew of the ship readers are left feeling that Billy is punished unnecessarily for the greater glory of an abstract cause. Keeping in mind the intention and motivation of a crime sometimes wrongdoings are justified in the eyes of the laws. But, sadly in Billy's case the jury conforms to Vere's rude reliance upon military law and order, a system that rejects any motive or intention on the part of the criminal. Billy chooses to keep himself silent, which complicates the matter further.

Closely connected with this theme is **the theme of duty and principle** which are embodied in Captain Vere whose idea of strictly abiding by the military rules and position cost a sailor his life. The narrator speaks well of the Captain and his values are admirable. However, the novel ends asking the question whether one's sense of duty and principles are higher than a human life.

Melville wrote *Billy Budd* during the last years of his life. Though it may appear a simple tale of injustice, Billy Budd is not just a straightforward narrative. It produces an astonishing diversity of equally plausible interpretations. Due to the novelist's extensive use of different Biblical, literary, and historical allusions and richness of suggestions, a large number of attempts came out of many critics that tired to interpret Billy Budd. Because of its wealth of Biblical allusions, some critics argue that Billy Budd was Melville's attempt to relook at orthodox Christianity and reconcile with the notion that good and evil coexist in the universe. Billy Budd explores **the eternal conflict between good and evil**. If innocent Billy represents Christ, Captain Vere stands for God the Father and Claggart stands for Satan; the novel becomes a retelling of the life of Christ. However, Melville has portrayed both the story and its characters as multi-allusioned and no single interpretation can be ever fully satisfactory. To others, Billy is not Christ, for he is just not perfect; he is "The Noble Savage", too naive to comprehend the implication of his death. Captain Vere cannot be a grand figure to represent God, as his vacillations/limitations are all too human; he is someone corrupted by too long an association with civilisation. Claggart may represent absolute evil, is actually evil, "a depravity according to nature".



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Do you think the narrator showed Biblical parallels for Billy and for Claggart?

Q 4: What do you think about Claggart's reasons behind hating Billy that ultimately leads to Billy's sad demise?

14.3.3 Narrative Style

Billy Budd belongs to the author's favourite genre, namely travel narrative. It is a sea story based on several different events Melville himself experienced at sea. Yet, Billy Budd is not just a sea story; it is like many sea stories, based on an actual event. The book is a jaded satire incorporating a controversial historical incident on board the USS Somers in 1842. It consists of thirty chapters balanced between action and comment. It informs the readers in the beginning that the action of the novel takes place in 1797, which is 22 years before the author's birth. Melville reproduces the story of that event in a narrative form. The foundation of *Billy Budd* can be traced in "Baby Budd, Sailor", a story which the author later revised and expanded to more than twice its original length, rich with allusions, symbols and numerous digressions. Melville's own knowledge of the sea, personal experiences and a faithful, though somewhat imaginative, matured handling of the real events of the Somers' Affair made *Billy Budd* a novel—both believable and realistic. Melville also borrowed from his past work as well as from his past life. The novel can be termed as a Christian allegory as it is full of mythic figures and mythological allusions, then a historical document for containing an actual incident of rebellion with historical background at the same time attracting attention towards much needed reforms concerning ordinary shipmen.

Billy Budd has numerous allusions to imageries and stories from the Holy Bible thereby constantly reminding of Christ throughout the narrative. Billy's death resembles Christ's suffering and His crucifixion. The innocent sailor becomes a victim of a hostile society and sacrifices his life just like Christ. Claggart reminds of the satanic figure that has the evil intention of destroying Billy and throughout the narrative works upon it. Claggart with his evil mind mirrors the serpent of the Genesis. The novel is so full of Christian references that sometimes it makes the critics confused regarding Melville's

objective—to embrace Christianity or a rude critique of religion. The tragedy of innocent Billy flawed by a single fault appears an allegory of a struggle between good and evil.

It is unfortunate that the newspapers of the time provided a 'realistic' account of the incident without voicing what the seamen knew to be true. What the newspapers presented to the people was distorted fact. Through the narrative, Melville presents a ballad composed by Billy's friend, a fellow foretop man in the novel. The novel ends with the crude poem "Billy in the Darbies" (Billy in Irons). Billy waiting for execution and being a corpse dropped down into the sea. It is ironical that Billy is punished but he is immortalised as a saint blessed by the fellow sailor's ironic repetition of Billy's words "God bless Captain Vere". Billy at the time of his death appears Christ-like. Before his death, Billy spends time with the Captain in the stateroom that reminds Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. Billy does not defend himself before the jury and dies with a prayer upon his lips. Paradoxically Claggart tries to defeat Billy but in doing so invites his own death. Melville does not conclude with telling Billy's story but he dedicates three chapters at the end of the novel as moral of his tale. He questions society's habit of twisting the truth about a simple, honest seaman, just as seaweed twine around the jettisoned corpse. Billy has become a legend.

Innumerable literary devices–irony, symbolism, metaphor, simile, poetic diction, foreshadowing, allusions, suspense–are used throughout to give a unified meaning and order to the narrative. The novel is a short one with short chapters and sentences, compact with information. There are two major conflicts in the book—the conflict between the natural goodness and honesty of Billy and the duplicity, subtlety and evil of Claggart. The second conflict is relating to the issue whether Captain Vere should absolve Billy for incidentally killing his officer foe. The captain knows Billy is actually innocent, but he is bound by circumstances to exercise his military authority and execute Billy. Significantly when Billy leaves his old ship, he

cries out with unknowing prophecy "...goodbye to you too, old Rights-of-Man", for at Bellipotent Billy sacrifices his liberty which dominates the entire novel. The novel is a commentary on radical change not only concerning seafarers but on the society.



LET US KNOW

The author frequently uses animal imagery while describing the tragic hero and his fellow seamen. At times Billy is compared to "a young horse fresh from the pasture", then to a dog that is of generous breed and while he lashes out at his tormentor, he looks a cornered dog or caged monkey. Billy is simple, innocent and primitive, natural, one who does not realize law or military order.

Further and even more subtle methods by which Melville used his own unique style to either emphasize the nature of a character or to produce a particular mood are his use of inverted or unusual word orders and his symbolic use of colour. For instance, Captain Vere's reflective qualities are foreshadowed when Melville describes him as an officer "unlike no few." Melville avoids a direct description like not many of the king's officers, but uses instead an oblique and somewhat ambiguous mode to introduce him. The descriptions of Billy on the other hand always portray him in direct motion, climbing, talking, asking; and Claggart in indirect motion, waiting, watching and scheming. Then, Billy's complexion is rose-red, while Claggart's is pale; Billy's hair is blonde and Claggart's black; Billy's domain is the high mast against the blue sky; Claggart's the gloom of the lower gun deck.

The names of the characters in the novel are very suggestive. The author has used names suggesting true characters of people and things. Billy's last name is Budd, which is suggestive of his innocence and youth and brings to mind an image of flower buds. Captain Vere's name suggests his tendency to veer between

attitudes. On the one hand, he is the authoritative figure who is fully aware of his duty while on the other he understands the fact that Billy has fallen victim to the malevolence of the world. Where Rights-of-Man is a place people enjoy greater individual liberties, the name Bellipotent links itself with war, power and strict military rule. Then when the Athee (or the Atheist) defeats the Bellipotent with its crew—the sailors who stand for Christian figures—it suggests the fall of the Christian world.

The story of Billy Budd is told from the perspective of an unnamed narrator who refers to himself as "I", then briefly talks about himself and his past experiences. The first person narrator has no name and is not on board the Bellipotent, yet he speaks quite authoritatively about the events that take place there. The narrator has a limited omniscient point of view, which means that he is able to observe nearly all of the novel's action, including some of the characters' thoughts/plans except Claggart's character, which he admits. At the end, the tale of Billy and his sad untimely demise assumes the quality of myth. Billy Budd is dedicated to Jack Chase who had served as a foretop man as Billy in the novel with Melville during his hitch aboard the U.S. frigate United States.

Thus, in *Billy Budd* Herman Melville, through the use of a seemingly endless variety of literary devices and allusions, unified and gave order and meaning to innumerable disconnected parts. In what is essentially a novelette, he achieved a profoundness, which makes the reader return again and again to the story, each time to discover a new facet, a new idea, a new insight. The novel's tight suspenseful narration, it symbolic allusions, Biblical, historical, and literary and its haunting power upon the reader's mind cause him to ponder over its weighty and profound philosophic and moral implications, and make it the masterpiece of Melville's final years.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What do you think about the narrator's idea about war?

Q 6: What are the different allusions used by Melville in the novel?

14.3.4 Major Characters

The following are the important characters of the novel.

Billy Budd

Billy Budd is simple, naive, good hearted and innocent. He is 21 years old and of obscure origin and limited education who is nicknamed "Baby Budd" and "the Handsome Sailor". He is dutiful as a young sailor on the Rights-of-Man, the merchant ship, and his commanding officer, Captain Graveling becomes upset for letting one of his best men go. While boarding Officer Lieutenant Ratcliffe chooses Billy the ship's peacemaker out of his whole crew aboard the Rights-of Man for impressments. By his mere beauty and innocence, Billy generates positive spirits among the sailors. Having no choice the Captain allows Billy to leave. Billy wins the hearts of the fellow sailors on Billipotent. He does his duty as foretop man honestly. Billy is always honest to his position. When the man in disguise approaches him asking him to join the mutiny, Billy reacts violently. Billy wins the attention and admiration of his less gifted friends aboard for his good looks, honesty, sincerity kindness, gentleness, cheerfulness and masculine charm. He becomes popular wherever he goes. He is always surrounded by fellow seamen. With his blue eyes and youthful figure, Billy is a rare combination of beauty and innocence. The author has informed us of Billy's athletic body and his intense eyes and that nude Billy could pose as Adam before the Fall. Not only Adam, Billy is linked with Jesus Christ as well. He is the peacemaker, adored by all the crewmen. He is loved by all. Billy has no knowledge of his parents

or his family, which gives the character universality. He is a sailor, so by profession he is a journeyman/traveller.

The author does not present his hero as an all perfect man. Billy is not perfect—his major blemish being the tendency to stutter when he is under emotional stress. Though bright, he becomes unpredictable at times. At certain crucial moments, he becomes inarticulate. In the narrative, while he could have cleared the air by communicating, he actually fails to defend himself verbally before the accusers and the jury. Billy also lacks the awareness that evil exits. His inability to perceive ill or evil in men is a defect for which he pays dearly. He takes people at face value. Billy is blinded by his own openhearted nature. He fails to judge malice. Billy goes to the Dansker for advice when he seems to be having problems in the ship and receives warning from the old sailor. Despite the warnings, Billy just fails to distrust Claggart.

Billy's illiteracy brings him close to nature. He accepts his punishment with open arms; accepts the execution blessing the Captain. The (natural) primitive man returns to nature after his execution. In the narrative, Captain Vere compares Billy with the angel of God and the Bible says that Lucifer was an angel in heaven who fell from grace.

Claggart

John Claggart, master-at-arms, is the darkest character in the novel. He is evil personified. In his mid-thirties, Claggart masquerades as a devoted officer but is quite dangerous for anyone not getting along with him well. He has a corrupted self. Claggart comes from a shady family background. He joined the ship when it left its homeport to replace the former master-at-arms who was disabled. His position is equivalent to the Chief of Police on board the ship. The crew refers to him with the derogatory nickname "Jemmy Legs" behind him. He is an egocentric man. If Billy is the representative of innocence, Claggart is the epitome of malice.

Melville provides Claggart's physical description while outlining his character. He is lean and tall. His hands are small and sharp. He has a cleanly chiselled chin and cunning violet eyes. He has a real authoritative gaze. He is of pale skin with curly black hair. Because of his paleness, he tries his best to stay away from sunlight.

His hatred towards Billy remains largely unexplained. His jealously causes Billy's execution and his innate wickedness seems to rather emanate from an unknown source. So careful and perfect in hiding his evil, Claggart is kind towards the poor honest sailor only to mask his intentions. Claggart has a tendency to over/mis-interpret others' actions for himself to establish in his mind the fact that they bear evil intentions. When incidentally Billy spills the soup, Claggart assumes that Billy has purposely done this. On the contrary, Billy cannot even perceive the malice in Claggart's sarcastic comments on the act. Claggart hates Billy physical beauty, purity, innocence and popularity that Claggart can never attain. Therefore, he longs to destroy what he cannot have. He plans a plot by employing underhanded ways, falsely accusing Billy of mutiny to punish him heavily under the Mutiny Act. However, to his surprise and shock, Billy strikes him violently and he does not survive the assault. Thus Claggart gets his share of punishment for purposely dragging an innocent man and falsely accusing hm. However, in this process, Billy dies as Claggier desires. If one goes by the novel's Christian allegory, Claggart assumes the role of Satan by loathing nobility, goodness, morality, trust and virtue. He is like a serpent in Billy's Garden of Eden and serves as both tempter and destroyer. Claggart's false allegations provoke Billy to give up his virtues and commit a grievous sin. Billy's sad punishment comes as a double victory to Claggart. Billy is hanged and falls from moral grace. However, the author has referred to Claggart's corpse as a dead snake, quite befitting his character.

The author has effectively depicted the evil inside Claggart and has argued that his hatred towards Billy arises from the latter's "harmlessness". Claggart cannot stand virtues like purity,

truthfulness and has to corrupt innocence. Claggart knows "goodness", but he is "powerless" to embrace it, just like he cannot overcome or give up his own evil nature. He has to live with those.

Captain Edward Fairfax Vere

Known as "Starry Vere", his surname suggests two Latin words–verus (meaning true) and vir (meaning man). The name creates a picture of a very dependable, strong leader, which indeed is true. He is a bachelor of aristocratic lineage. He is a well read, efficient, intelligent, a dedicated naval officer in his fifties. Behind his back, people criticize him for being in love with abstractions and high ideas. He is linked with the most controversial act of the novel – the trail and execution of Billy who has been like a son to him. His sense of justice and duty toward his position, his commitment to his values and to the Crown of England leads to the execution of an innocent man. At the same time, Vere sympathises with Billy and knows that he is innocent, but has to set an example for the world. A frank commander, he represents the truthful blend of an undesigning heart and mind. The Captain who rules his ship by the book ignores his own sentiments and urges the jury to disregard their inner emotions while punishing Billy according to the laws. Captin Vere has a lot of dilemma within him. His character symbolises the clash between law and conscience, an individual's inner self and his role in the society. Vere dislikes Claggart but his position in the ship does not allow him to overlook Claggart's accusations against Billy. Vere feels pity for Billy but he cannot forget that Billy has committed a crime by murdering an officer. As an individual Vere is full of kindness and love for Billy but as the Captain of the ship, he finds himself duty-bound to punish Billy, crashing his emotions. If one goes by the novel's Christian allegory, Captain Vere's character is parallel to Pontius Pilate. The man puts so much trust in reason and rational philosophy; he is so dutiful that he does not hesitate a bit to sacrifice a man close to his heart.

The novel poses several questions for the readers – is Captain Vere responsible for Billy's sad demise? To a certain extent Captin Vere's inflexible nature, his insistence on following the law and placing principles above people are reasons enough for Billy's death. At the same time, no one can ignore the situation Captain Vere works in. The time is tense; there is a war going on and the captain cannot overlook his duty as the leader of the ship. To sentence one to death by hanging is the only punishment for murder, more so, since it is wartime and the murder hints at a conspiratorial plot of mutiny. In choosing to respect the law of the state and naval code and in the process the shouldering the burden of overlooking his conscience and knowledge to be morally right put a huge mental strain on the Captain. Before he dies, he appears to rue his decision – his last words being "Billy Budd". The fact that the Captain repeats Billy's name indicates he fact that he dies haunted by his perceived betrayal of the young sailor whom he loved as a son. He fails to let go of his sense of debt to Billy whom he admired so much. He turns out to be a tragic figure caught between love and duty.

Captain Vere is a distinguished sailor and his nickname Starry Vere befits this intellectual, aloof figure, who is so impaled towards his duty. He equates Billy with an "angel of God", but he also says if a real angel of God had committed a killing in his ship, the angel would have received the same punishment.

The Dansker

An elderly sailor, nicknamed "Board-Her-in-the-Smoke", who befriends Billy, "has a pale, jagged scar across his face, beady eyes and a blue-peppered complexion." A favourite among the crew, he is Billy's only confidant aboard the Bellipotent. The Dansker served under Lord Nelson on the ship the *Agamemnon*, and he has a scar to prove it. He has a "wizened face, time-tinted and weather-stained to the complexion of an antique parchment". The Dansker is the man of unsentimental wisdom. Whenever Billy asks for his opinion, the old man listens and gives oracular responses. He is the first to

warn Billy that Claggart is "down on him". The worldly man takes no time to see Claggart's evil intentions and his jealously towards Billy. However, he is decidedly unhelpful and reluctant to give any real advice to the young sailor in doubt. The first hint that Claggart hates him and he is Billy's enemy comes from the Dansker. The Dansker partly is guilty of Billy's premature death for he fails to guide Billy properly with accurate advice as being the only trusted aid and messenger of the poor sailor. A simple warning was not enough for Billy who cannot even perceive the malice behind Claggart's sarcastic comments about the soup accident. Dansker's eccentric behaviour is difficult for many of the sailors to handle; however, Billy respects him as a "salt hero," and always makes sure to salute him when he walks by.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: How do you find the character of Claggart? Is he fundamentally evil?

Q 8: Can one blame Captain Vere for Billy Budd's death?

Q 9: How and why does Melville interrupt the main narrative of *Billy Budd*?

14.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF *BILLY BUD*

Billy Budd remained unpublished long thirty years after the author's death in 1891. The critics and readers took *Billy Budd* seriously only in the mid 20th century only when the novelist began to gain wider acclaim. Since then Billy Budd has served as the kernel of stage plays, operas, musicals and even films. In 1949, *Billy Budd* was staged with the title 'Uniform of Flesh'. In the opera, *Billy Budd* was performed the same year. Then a four act musical version of the novel was performed. In 1962, the British film version appeared in black and white. The film lacked public support. In addition to these art products, poet W. H. Auden immortalised *Billy Budd* in his poem "Herman Melville", which appeared in 'Collected Shorter Poems

1927-1957'. Likewise, Helen Pinkerlon composed a four-line verse "Billy Budd" for South Review, in the summer of 1968.

Critics are also divided whether to approve or condemn Captain Vere's decision regarding Billy's execution for murdering an evil-minded officer. Due to its multi-faceted nature, like all great literature, each reading may uncover multiple new treasures or valid interpretations. The novel is actually a multi-levelled exploration of good and evil in the universe. The depth of the work has challenged innumerable critics to attempt at least a partial illumination of it. Lewis Mumford, who was the first literary historical proponent, found Billy Budd a testament to Melville's ultimate reconciliation with the injustices in his life. The young innocent sailor's underserved death at its climax portrays Melville's reconciliation with his own rejection and failures. *Billy Budd* is the last long delayed work of art of a long-silent author who had known only rejection. According to him, the book is the story of the world, the "spirit and the devil," with the message that "good and evil exist in the nature of things, each itself, each doomed to war with the other." Evil then has an equal place that it shares with good, which is "the fundamental ambiguity of life." This view of *Billy Budd* is widely accepted and promulgated by critics like F. O. Matthiessen and R. W. B. Lewis. While for Mumford, Billy Budd represents Melville's affirmation of true religious transcendence; for Thompson, Billy Budd is a bitter satire that satisfied Melville's earlier acerbity. These two major sharp, critical, opposite views – *Billy Budd* as a religious paean or *Billy Budd* as a jaded satire have fuelled the legend of Billy Budd and readers all over the world have been hooked to the novel.

Although other critics willingly admit Melville's use of religious symbolism in the working out of his tale, they insist that *Billy Budd* is "more political than theological or mythic." Most notable among these is Richard Chase, who argues that "society cannot be based on the contrary absolutes of evil and good represented by Billy Budd and his traducer Claggart." In addition, this interpretation appears to have some validity. Surely, Claggart and Billy are characters who represent the philosophic extremes of Rousseau and Hobbes. Billy is then the "natural man" free of the corruption caused by too long an association with the decadent institutions of organised

society, and thus ideally represents Rousseau's concept of the "noble savage." Claggart, on the other hand, is Hobbes' man "naturally depraved" and evil, kept in check only by the restraints of custom and law. Of course, then, as a result of this interpretation, Captain Vere becomes the hero of the novel since he is the representative of a social order whose ideal is the middle way, a reconciliation of the apparent contradiction of good and evil. He is someone who is neither good nor evil, but rather a man whose concept of "order, authority, and legality" makes him the "tragic hero", who, though conscious of good and evil, must act in obedience to the codes of an authority higher than himself. This interpretation, too, of course, represents a kind of reconciliation for the always-rebellious Melville. For, in that case, only the Veres of the world would be valid and continue to exist and not the Billys nor Claggarts, who are doomed to destroy each other through eternal conflict.

Still other critics, including Leonard Caspar, disagree that *Billy Budd* represents Melville's "testament of acceptance." Indeed, when Melville describes Claggart as an irrational being who hides behind a reasonable exterior, does not such a description apply equally to Captain Vere? Surely, Captain Vere's sudden change of attitude toward Billy, and his decision at Billy's summary trial are not the products of natural justice. Is not Vere's decision "a perversion as serious as Claggart's?" Nor does Billy's stoic acceptance of the consequences of Captain Vere's decision necessarily imply an acceptance of the injustice of that decision. He says, "I seem fated to die, right or wrong, I am ready." What then seems clear is that he does not accept the justice of the decision, but rather accepts his fate.

Another group of critics interpret *Billy Budd* as a Greek tragedy, and this too appears a valid possibility since most of the elements of tragedy are present. We have a hero, blemished only by a single "fatal flaw" which is to bring about his downfall. The story takes place over a short span of time, in a single place, and presents but a single action. In addition, Claggart appears as the human representative of a malevolent fate whose sole

function is the destruction of the hero. Moreover, Billy, like the tragic hero, is warned by the oracle or seer, the Dansker, of his possible fate, and like the tragic hero he cannot understand the warning until it is too late.



14.5 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, we have learnt that *Billy Budd* is the final novel by American writer Herman Melville. It was first published posthumously in London in 1924. Melville had begun writing the original work in November 1888, but left it unfinished at his death in 1891. Acclaimed by British critics as a masterpiece when published in London, it quickly took its place as a classic literary work in the United States. It is a symbolic tale built out of Melville's egalitarian meditations on the mutiny at Spithead in 1797 and a family story of how Melville's older brother presided over the court martial and execution of an insubordinate sailor. Billy, 'the handsome sailor', is wrongly accused by Claggart and unable to defend himself verbally because of a stammer, strikes Claggart dead. After being tried by the liberal Captain Vere, Billy is hanged, his last words being 'God bless Captain Vere!' Then, in apparently Christ-like apotheosis, 'the East was shot through with a soft glory as of the fleece of the Lamb of God', and the sailors question whether Billy has actually died.



14.6 FURTHER READING

Delbanco, Andrew. (2005). *Melville: His World and Work*. Alfred A. Knopf.

Clark, Davis. (1995). *After the Whale: Melville in the Wake of Moby-Dick*. University of Alabama Press.

Laurie Robertson Lorant. (1996). *Melville: A Biography*. New York: Clarkson Potter.

Leon Howard. (1967). *Herman Melville: A Biography*. University of California Press.

Robert Milder. (2006). *Exiled Royalties: Melville and the Life We Imagine*. Oxford University Press.

14.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Perhaps yes... ... Bellipotent extracts innocent Billy from the Rights-of-Man... …explicitly symbolic... …law is all-powerful that compels men into participation in war with readily dispensing the rights of the citizen ... …suggestive names given by the novelist… …at the end the narrator explores various aspects of contradictions/obligations of serving one's country during war… ...rights and democracy are defended by law and the military hierarchy … ...readers are left to judge and accept an ethical choice.

Ans to Q 2: Billy Budd poses moral and ethical questions... …Captain Vere's dilemma moves around the philosophy of ethics... …the Captain makes the decision between right and wrong and not between good and evil... …Billy's execution is a legally right action though may not be a morally good one... …military law vs moral sensibility.

Ans to Q 3: Melville draws a parallel between Billy and Christ … to the sailors Billy is a kind of Christ … the uncanny songs of the sailors do not imagine Billy waking up in heaven.

Ans to Q 4: Central conflict between Claggart and the innocent Billy… ...the author's roping in the serious issues emanating from the tussle between good and evil… ...John Claggart accuses Billy of mutiny… …actions aftermath lead to his execution... …reasons of Claggart's evil intentions towards Billy are not made clear... …novel delves into the mysteries of human motivation.

Ans to Q 5: At the beginning of the book, the narrator praises the heroics of Nelson and the glories of naval victory... …glorifies war and soldiers… …towards the end, he mentions business profits of war… …defies ugly machinery of war... … suggests ambition as part of the makeup of even the most dutiful and honourable man … shows the biased

and unjust reporting of officially sanctioned wartime papers... …but no anti-war polemic.

Ans to Q 6: Billy compared to Hercules, Apollo, Alexander the Great for strength, good looks, noble nature… …compared to Caspar Hauser, Adam before his fall… …evil that is to befall him is foreshadowed… …Claggart compared to Shawnee, Titus Oates, Ananias, reveal evil and treacherous nature. Claggart and Billy compared to Chang and Eng… …Captain Vere compared to Admiral Nelson, Don John of Austria, and Andrea Doria… …his unusual ability and inflexible nature… …allusions to the Dansker, to the seers and oracles of old… …mysterious nature of character and foretell fulfilment of his veiled warnings.

Ans to Q 7: Claggart is the most complex character ... …Claggart nurses a hatred towards Billy as one who represents all that is good in contrast to his own evil nature ... ... the serpent in Billy's Eden … tempter as well as Billy's destroyer ... … symbolic of the extreme evil.

Ans to Q 8: One can partly blame the Captain… …somehow Vere's early death that cuts off the possibility of his participation in the great battles at Trafalgar and the Nile seem to be an apt punishment… … Vere mumbles Billy's name on his deathbed... ...suggests his repentance… …we need to determine a man's guilt not just based on his actions, but also his intentions.

Ans to Q 9: Because, he supplies readers with necessary background material in places closer to sections… …at every instance the interjected material foreshadow impending events … …immediately following Captain Vere's introduction, long descriptive section on his background and so on.



14.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How is the relation between military law and morality presented in the story?

Q 2: How do you interpret the events surrounding Billy Budd's trial and execution?

Q 3: Critically comment on the use of religious imagery in the novel?

Q 4: Consider Captain Vere's role in Billy's execution.

Q 5: How does Melville use literary, Biblical, historical, and mythological allusions to reinforce his story?

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UNIT 15: MARK TWAIN*: THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN*

UNIT STRUCTURE

15.1 Learning objectives

15.2 Introduction

15.3 Mark Twain: Life and Works

15.4 Reading of the Novel

- 15.4.1 Story of the Novel
- 15.4.2 Major Themes
- 15.4.3 Mark Twain's Art of Characterisation
- 15.4.4 Mark Twain's Narrative Style

15.5 Critical Reception of Mark Twain

15.6 Let us sum up

15.7 Further reading

15.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

15.9 Possible Questions

15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

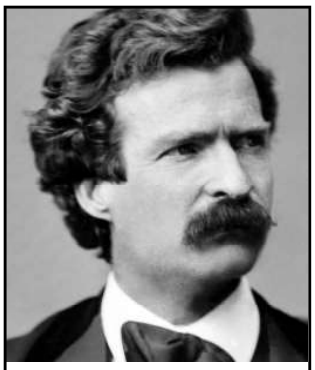
- discuss the life and works of Mark Twain
- read and understand *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in its proper context
- trace the main story line of the novel emphasizing its major themes
- get an idea of Mark Twain's Art of Characterisation and Narrative Style
- situate Mark Twain in the context of American Novels

15.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of the Course on American literature. This unit introduces us to Mark Twain who occupies a unique position in the history of the American novel. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures Huckleberry Finn* are two famous novels by Mark Twain that have fascinated

readers for over a century now. The publication of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in 1885 was a great event in the literary history of America. The basic inspiration for the novel lies in the search for identity, and the fulfilment of the great American dream. Mark Twain along with other novelists like Hawthorne, Melville, Henry James, Hemmingway, Faulkner and Steinbeck continues this tradition. Twain began work on *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as a sequel to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,* and his main focus was on the institution of slavery and the realistic portrayal of frontier society in the South. However, harassed by troubles in his personal life and prevalent national conflicts in 1880's, he was forced to abandon this work for a short period. He finally finished the draft of *Huckleberry Finn* in 1883, and it received immense critical acclaim when it was published in 1885. By the time we finish reading this unit, we shall learn that this novel is highly significant due to its deep study and analysis, of issues relating to racism and morality. The novel has been a subject of controversy and debate throughout the years.

15.3 MARK TWAIN: LIFE AND WORKS



Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Mark_Twain

Samuel Langhorne Clemens popularly known as Mark Twain was born in the small river town of Florida, Missouri on November 30, 1835. He was the sixth child of John Marshall Clemens, a legal practitioner and Jane Lampton. When he was four years old, his family shifted to Hannibal, another riverside town with the hope of increasing the family income. Mark Twain grew up amidst the slave- holding community of Hannibal, which provided a mixture of rugged frontier life and the southern tradition, a lifestyle that influenced his later writings. In Hannibal, the black slaves were mostly engaged in household and farm works, but they were still very much under the obligations of slavery. Twain spent a major part of his childhood near the Mississippi River, and the impact of this great river on the imagination of the novelist can be seen in all his novels. His father

died in 1847 when he was only twelve years old, and he had no option but to leave school in order to help with the family finances.

Twain initially joined a printing press as an apprentice, and his job included travelling throughout America. After completing his apprenticeship, he worked for many newspapers in St. Louis, New York and Philadelphia. Twain flourished in his career as a journalist indulging in tales and satirical humour. However, he reali that journalism was not very lucrative and he left his job. He travelled south, and happened to meet a steamboat captain who made him realize his boyhood dream of becoming a river pilot. Twain received rigorous training and became a licen pilot at the age of 24, and the bond that he shared with the river became deeper, when he started navigating the river waters. This profession also provided him with his pen name Mark Twain, derived from the riverboat leadsman's signal, "by the mark, twain" meaning the river was deep enough for safe travel. The humdrum life on the banks of the river, the strange and mysterious movements of the river and the incessant floods that cau havoc, all had a permanent imprint on the mind of the young novelist.

The beginning of the Civil War in 1861 led to the end of Mark Twain's piloting career, and being in favour with the South, he joined the Confederate forces for a short time. The discovery of gold and silver led him to Neveda, to try his luck in mining. However, life in Neveda was too hard and rough for Mark Twain, and he once again moved towards journalism. He became a correspondent in Virginia City and San Francisco, establishing himself as a reporter, speculator, humourist and a full time writer of travelogues, sketches, articles, tales, memoirs, and novels. His expertise in language, and distinctive witty style brought him immense fame as a writer.

All his works were mostly ba on his personal experiences in various parts of United States and travels abroad. *The Jumping Frog of Calaversas County and other Sketches* was published in1867. Mark Twain suddenly shot into fame with this book ba on his experiences in the mining operations in Neveda. The jumping frog is u as a symbol of an adventurer who with a single jump gets popularity. His next work *The Innocents Abroad* was published in the form of letters in 1869. It is a satirical account of a cruise in

the Mediterranean with a company of Americans. The satire lies in observing the scenes, customs, religious rites and attitudes of Europe, through the irreverent and chauvinist lens of an American 'innocent'.

When Mark Twain was 35 years old, he married Olivia in 1870, and settled down in Hartford, where he lived for more than two decades and published the best of his works. In the same year, their son Langdon Clemens was born prematurely. They also had three daughters Susan, Clara and Jean. Mark Twain was a child of the frontier and his dream for wealth made him invest in business adventures in which he suffered heavy losses. Twain did not lose hope but arranged a series of lectures within the country as well as abroad. These lectures brought the funds with which he managed to pay off all his debts.

His third book *Roughing It* published in 1872, is an account of his Westward journey in the early 1860's, from St Louis through Neveda to San Francisco, and to the Sandwich Islands. Twain became successful as a writer and with growing finances; the family seemed to have overcome the struggle in life. However, his son Langdon suddenly pas away after a sudden attack of diphtheria, this loss left a deep scar on the fertile mind of Mark Twain. *The Gilded Age* published in 1874 deals with the adventures of a beautiful girl Laura who after being uced by the colonel is taken to Washington under the patronage of another Senator where she has to act as an agent in his dirty deals. Laura later kills him and is acquitted of the murder charge but dies out of shock due to cruel public reception. The centre of interest in the novel are the characters particularly the colonel drawn after his mother's cousin who is destroyed but not ready to accept defeat.

His next book *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is full of native humour and a shrewd observation of human character. Published in 1876 it tells the story of a lively and adventurous boy Tom who lives with his brother Sid and his good-hearted Aunt Polly in the town of St. Petersburg, Missouri. He and his companion Huckleberry Finn embark on a journey of exploits during which they undergo many adventures. The study of Tom's character is the prime concern in the novel. *A Tramp Abroad* is a travelogue ba on the account of Twain's trip to Europe with his family in 1869. Published in 1880, the

book presents scenic locales and interesting characters. In 1882, he published *The Prince and the Pauper,* a historical satire evaluating the past in terms of modern sense of morality. The plot is set in Henry VIII's reign, and there is an attack on social injustice, monarchical system and class distinctions. After a lapse of many years, he returns to his favourite subject the 'river' in his book *Life on the Mississippi*, which was published in 1883. This is an autobiographical account of Twain's life on the Mississippi River, highlighting features of on-shore life, anecdotes and descriptions of the river in a vivid manner.

Written as a sequel to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* the next work of Twain is his masterpiece *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* published in 1885. It narrates the adventures of Huckleberry Finn through the picaresque device of a journey that introduces a variety of characters and events. By this time, he had written the best of his works and his fame touched the four corners of the world, earning him the title of the most cosmopolitan novelist of America. The satire *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) is about a mechanic who wakes up in the court of King Arthur. Mark Twain here uses humour to satirize the romantici Arthurian legends that were full of superstition and privileges of the Church. *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* published in 1894 is an attack on slavery; highlighting the treatment meted out to the black slaves by the whites. Twain's next work *The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg* contains bitter comments on the human race. Published in 1900, it is a bitter satire on human greed, which has no limits, and its consequent effects on man.

Mark Twain died in1910 and was buried in Elmira. *The Mysterious Stranger* (1916) and *Mark Twain's Autobiography* (1924) were published after the death of the novelist. The first deals with a mysterious stranger pitted against young boys who have a great moral sense. The second book is a collection of speculations, anecdotes, recollections, diatribes and character all interwoven together by a play of humour and rapid change in mood. As the nation moved forward economically in the post Civil War period towards the Gilded Age, a term coined by him in 1873 so did Mark Twain. He became a famous writer and a wealthy businessman and his fame

touched the highest point of glory. Apart from being honoured by various American Universities, Mark Twain was also honoured with a D.Litt (Hon) by the University of Oxford in recognition of his contribution to the world of English literature.



LET US KNOW

Slavery or trade in human beings dates from prehistoric times and all ancient civilisations u slaves. The history of slavery in the United States can be divided into two phases—1660 to1790 and 1790 to 1865. Slaves worked in unknown, often dangerous territory, beset by disease and hostile inhabitants. They were made to perform hard, laborious work as well as cultivate and harvest crops for the market. The life span of a slave from initial purchase to death was usually seven years. In the United States, slavery was the sectional deadlock between North America and South America in 1860, and it was also one of the causes of Civil War that began in 1861.

The Picaresque novel presents a realistic portrayal of society. It had its origin in Spain, and the protagonist is a rogue, who passes comments on men, manners and morality of the society. They lack a proper plot structure, and through various episodes highlight the ugly and absurd in society.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: When and where was Mark Twain born?

Q 2: Where did he spend his childhood?

Q 3: What is a picaresque novel?

15.4 READING THE NOVEL

15.4.1 Story of The Novel

The story of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* opens with the protagonist Huck Finn narrating his story. He begins by referring to an earlier novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,* where he and

his companion find a treasure house and a sum of twelve thousand dollars. The sum is divided equally between them.

Huck is considered an outcast as he is always clothed in rags and sleeps in hogsheads. He has a father who indulges in drinking and is not seen in his village for long spells of time. Huck therefore is virtually an orphan, as he is totally undervalued by the villagers. However, this changes when Huck becomes the owner of six thousand dollars. Many families come forward to look after him, but it is the Widow Douglas and Miss Watson who finally adopt him, and take the responsibility to civilize him. Huck has already invested his money with Judge Thatcher, and this brings him one dollar every day. The Widow sends him to school and starts teaching him manners, which includes many restrictions. Huck becomes tired of his new life, and thinks about the freedom and enjoyment of his past life. He finally runs away and decides to join the band of Tom, to once again enjoy a life of thrill and adventure. He is overjoyed to know that Tom is planning to rob the caravan of Arabs, and to keep them imprisoned until the ransom is paid. Most of the band members have no idea what is the meaning of the word 'ransom', and Tom's naïve answer is "it means we keep them till they are dead". However, to Huck the whole plan of robbing the caravan appeared to be a boring Sunday school picnic, and being disgusted he quits from the band.

Soon thereafter Huck notices footprints in the snow and recognises them as his aggressive, cruel and brutal Pap's. He realises that his father has come to claim his money, and he runs to Judge Thatcher, to sign off all his money for a 'consideration' of a dollar. When he reaches home, he finds his Pap waiting for him. He catches him by the collar and compels him to hand over the money. Huck gives him the money knowing that if he refu his Pap would reward him with a beating. Pap's next plan is to get custody of Huck and the new judge in town helps him in this plan. Pap criticises Huck for going to school and drags him off to a cabin in the wilderness

where he is imprisoned. Initially Huck begins to love the cabin life but frequent beatings from Pap compel him to run away. When Pap goes to town, Huck saws himself out of the cabin, kills a pig and spreads its blood on the floor to prove it was his own. He then takes a canoe and floats downstream to Jackson Island, in the middle of the wide Mississippi River. Once there, he hides the canoe in the bushes of the Island and sets camp. For a day or two, he sustains himself on fish and tries to find a better hiding place. During his exploration, he stumbles upon a campfire and though a little frightened decides to look for his fellow inhabitant.

The next day he discovers that his fellow inhabitant is none other than Jim, Miss Watson's slave. Jim had run away after overhearing the plan of the Widow to sell him to a slave trader. Along with the rest of the villagers, Jim also believes that Huck is dead, and he is frightened to see him. Huck is full of sympathy for Jim and they both share their escape stories, happy to have the company of each other. They both manage to find a cavern near the top of the Island, which they believe, is safer for hiding. While they live on the Island, the river rises significantly and there is a sudden flood. The gushing waters engulf and wreck many boats and houses. They happen to see one such house and climb aboard to see what they can retrieve, and see a dead man in the corner of the house. Jim climbs over and discovers that it is the body of Pap, Huck's father but he decides not to reveal this fact to Huck.

Soon Huck returns to the town dres as a girl in order to gather news. He comes to know from a woman named Judith Loftus that both Pap and Jim are suspects for the murder of Huck. She also tells him that she believes that Jim is hiding in Jackson Island and people are getting ready to search the Island. Hearing this Huck rushes back and they both immediately leave the Island. They use a large raft to float during nights and hide during the day near the shore. When they reach St. Louis, they face a violent storm and heavy fog overpowers them. They see the wreck of a ship called

Walter Scott, and when they board it they find themselves face to face with three thieves, two of them discussing whether to kill the third. When they come out, they are dismayed to find their raft broken, so they decide to steal the canoe belonging to the robbers, which is already filled with the valuables, and quickly float down the river. As they float downstream they become closer to one another, and they plan to reach Cairo, from where they plan to take a steamship by selling their canoe for the journey to reach free states via the Ohio River.

However, they are once again enveloped by a dense fog, and they both are separated. When the fog finally clears, they find each other and realise that in the mist they pas Cairo. After travelling for a few more nights, a steamboat coming northwards once again hits the canoe, and as they jump into the water for safety, they are once again separated from each other. Huck is not able to trace Jim and he presumes that Jim is drowned. He walks to a log house and introduces himself as George Jackson. After searching him thoroughly the Grangerford family invite him to live with them. They treat him warmly and also provide him with a slave who helps him to find Jim. Days pass in a peaceful manner until an old family conflict is rekindled, and the entire Grangerford family is killed.

Amidst this chaos, Huck somehow manages to escape, and once again, Jim and Huck start a journey downwards. After travelling for a mile, they are accosted by two frauds who pose as the King and the Duke. They take full control of the raft and force Huck and Jim to follow their commands. They then enter a horse town leaving Jim behind on the raft. When they reach the village, they find that the village is empty because the people have gone to listen to a sermon. The preacher informs the crowd that he had once been a pirate but was now a reformed man and his mission was to reform other pirates but he had no money to cover his expenses. The crowd applauds him for his mission and readily helps him with money. The King and the Duke plan to stage a dramatic show titled *Royal*

Nonesuch in the next village Bricksville. They become busy printing bills, preparing the stage and selling tickets, but on the first day, the show gets over quickly, and the villagers feel cheated. They want everyone to feel the same so the second day is a grand success with a houseful audience. On the third day, the villagers come prepared to take revenge, but the King and the Duke manage to flee with their profits. They start travelling again and in order to remain free from any risk they paint Jim blue and hang a placard on his neck with the words "A Sick Arab-harmless except when out of mind etc". A few miles down, they once again try to repeat the show in the next village and wait for a boat after hiding their raft. They meet a stranger who informs them about the death of Peter Wilks, and the expected arrival of his brothers from England. The King engages in a long conversation with the stranger and comes to know about a huge inheritance meant for three recently orphaned girls. He then decides to pose as travellers who have come from abroad.

On reaching the village, they search for the house of Peter Wilks and inform the villagers that they had come to pay their last respects to their brother Peter Wilks. They pretended to be in intense grief and promi to look after the three daughters after disposing off their land and other properties. The girls are happy to see their uncles and do not realize that they are being duped. Their loving treatment towards Huck makes him reveal the real intention of the rogues. The eldest daughter in angry but she agrees to leave the house for a few days so that Huck can escape. Meanwhile, the real brothers arrive but they are unable to prove their identity because they have lost their baggage. The town lawyer tries to determine who is lying but the King and the Duke play their roles so well that it becomes difficult to find out the truth. One of the uncles challenges the King to identify the tattoo on the chest of Peter Wilks, and the villagers decide to exhume the body. In the ensuing chaos, Huck manages to run and join Jim in the raft and they once again push off into the river, where they are joined by the King and the Duke.

Further, down the river the King and the Duke sell Jim into slavery claiming that he is a runaway slave from New Orleans. Huck decides to help Jim and he goes to the house where Jim is kept and is lucky to find that the owner is Tom Sawyer's Aunt Sally. Huck pretends to be Tom and when the real Tom arrives, he pretends to be his brother Sid Sawyer. They both chalk out a plan to free Jim from his prison, and they convince the town that a group of thieves are planning to steal Jim. That night they free Jim and try to run away, but local farmers follow them with guns. Jim, Tom and Huck manage to escape, but Tom is shot in his leg. Huck then returns and sends a doctor, but he returns with Tom on a stretcher and Jim in chains. Jim is treated badly but when Tom awakens, he demands that they let Jim go free. At that point, Aunt Sally arrives after a long travel down the river and realises that something is wrong when she receives the news that both Tom and Sid had arrived. She then informs them that Jim is free as the Widow had pas away, and had left him free in her will. After getting to know about his freedom, Jim informs Huck about the death of his Pap. Aunt Sally offers to adopt Huck, but he refuses with the excuse that her lifestyle did not suit him. The story concludes with Huck stating that he would never have under taken the work of writing a story, had he known that it would take this long to complete it.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Who is Pap?

Q 5: Why is Huck tired of his new life?

Q 6: Who accompanies Huck in his journey down the Mississippi River?

Q 7: How does Huck escape from the log cabin?

Q 8: What is the name of the dramatic show staged at Bricksville?

15.4.2 Major Themes

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is not a simple tale, narrating the escapades of the protagonist Huck. It is a novel that unravels a variety of themes through the course of Huck's journey on the Mississippi River. The novel is an excellent example of human inventiveness and creativity, displaying a magnificent blossoming of the human mind.

Freedom

The primary theme of the novel is the search for freedom. Huck and Jim are running away from a restricted life seeking independence and freedom. Huck is unable to adjust to a disciplined life with Widow Douglas and Jim fears the life of a slave. Jim search is personal freedom, but Huck's rebellion is against the Southern culture. Being independent in nature, he cannot establish a rapport with the people around him. Huck tries to find his freedom by joining Tom's gang but he is disillusioned. When his father imprisons him in a log cabin, he is happy for a short time. The mock self-murder that he arranges to escape from his father symbolises his final break from society. Jackson Island too does not satisfy his thirst for freedom and he prepares to face the worst when he starts travelling with Jim. Jim is a loyal slave but when he overhears his owner's plan to sell him he escapes. At the end of the novel, Jim is free, but Huck's freedom is still far away.

Innocence versus Experience

Another important theme of the novel is the rift between 'innocence' and 'experience'. Huck symbolises 'innocence 'and his world comprises of love, compassion and sympathy. Untouched by the artificial distinctions between man and man, Huck represents these values through his uncivili and wild ways. As a child of Nature, he has been brought up without any restrictions and discipline. In addition, his freedom of spirit demands an intense desire to escape from civilisation. Thus, he has a strong aversion towards anything

that might “sivilize” him. This resistance is introduced in the first chapter of the novel through the efforts of Widow Douglas, who tries to educate and teach him good manners. She compels him to wear clean clothes, give up smoking and cultivate the habit of reading the Bible. Huck suddenly comes face to face with ‘experience’ and this comes into conflict with his freedom and innocence. Throughout the novel, Twain seems to put forward the idea that the innocent uncivili path of life is attractive, alluring and morally superior than the world of experience.

Slavery and Racism

Mark Twain wrote this novel after the abolition of slavery but set it several decades earlier when slavery was still an important aspect of society. Twain’s attitude towards slavery and racism is revealed through the character of Jim. The story is an allegory that represents the condition of the black slaves in the United States. Representing Jim as one of the most reliable, honest and caring characters in the novel, the writer makes a statement about the hypocrisy of the institution of slavery. Twain uses the character of Jim as a mouthpiece to convey his message regarding this institution. The novel also traces the oppression of the slaves on the grounds of racism. Jim symbolises the human traits inherent in a slave, representing the trials, tribulations and oppression that a slave faces in the hands of the whites. He runs away, horrified with the fear of being sold by his owner Miss Watson. Twain calls out to the readers to be sympathetic towards Jim, and to question society for enslaving him. It is only in the end that the topic of slavery is addres when Jim and Huck debate on the issue of slavery. In the final section of the novel Huck chooses the morality of innocence over that of experience, when he decides to free Jim from slavery.

Mississippi River

The Mississippi River plays an important role in the novel. For Huck and Jim, it symbolises freedom and independence, to

take their own decisions and determine their future course of action. Jim is looking forward to reach the free states, and Huck is happy to escape from the world of 'experience' in Miss Watson's home. They are influenced by the life of the towns along the river, and eventually meet the word of experience comprising of criminals, shipwrecks, dishonesty and danger. Initially the river stands for safety and absolute freedom, but as they move forward, the consequences of their runaway lives create obstacles in their journey towards freedom. The river thereafter becomes a route for short-term escape and their journey ends on land, where finally both find the freedom they are hankering for.

Money and Food

The theme of money is present throughout the novel bringing into focus the distinction between the rich and the poor. Money plays a crucial part behind different shifts in the action of the novel. The story begins with the announcement that Huck has over six thousand dollars in his name. He becomes a pri figure in the civili world and sophisticated members of this society adopt him. Pap also comes back suddenly to fulfil the responsibilities of a father when he hears about the money. However in the eyes of Huck, money is a luxury rather than a necessity, and the fact that he is the owner of so much wealth makes no difference to him. On the other hand, for Jim, money is the means to freedom and position in society. This is the reason why Jim is on a constant search for wealth whereas Huck's attitude is completely lackadaisical. The theme of food is also another important theme of the novel. When Huck is a child, he had to "eat out of a barrel of odds and ends" and food symbolises the love, care and protection that are given to him by the people who feed him. Widow Douglas is the first to provide him with food and later Jim becomes his symbolic caretaker looking after his basic needs on Jackson Island.

Religion and Superstition

Mark Twain represents his personal views on religion through the sardonic character of Huck. In the first chapter, Huck ridicules religion when he remarks that Hell seems to be more fun than Heaven. Miss Watson's prayers make Huck uneasy because she often does not practice what she preaches. Later in a very important scene the King who is a liar and a cheat, is able to convince members of a religious community to give him money so that he would be able to convert his wayward pirate friends. Through King's ability to dupe religious people, Mark Twain is mocking at their belief and devotion to God. The mockery of religion can also be seen in the Grangerford- Shepherdson episode, where the two families go to the church loaded with guns. Both families fight with each other over an old family dispute leading to the death of all the members. Twain here is showcasing the false code of honour observed by the genteel society in the name of religion. When the preacher is delivering a sermon in the camp meeting, old women are busy knitting and young couples are courting on the sly. The people do not pay attention, as they hardly understand what the sermon is about. The theme of superstition is seen throughout the novel. Huck and Jim appear to be sagacious characters, yet the powers of superstition overpower them. In certain encounters and incidents, they appear to be childlike despite their apparent maturity. Their belief is further strengthened, when superstition foreshadows certain incidents in the plot. When Huck accidently spills salt, Pap returns and when Huck touches a snakeskin, Jim is bitten by a rattlesnake. Superstition thus plays an important role in moving the story forward.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: Mention some of the important themes in the novel.

Q 10: What role does the Mississippi River play in the novel?

15.4.3 Mark Twain's Art of Characterisation

In the novel, Mark Twain uses a very innovative way of building up the character of the protagonist Huck. Twain chooses him as the narrator, because he believed this would be the best way to expose the hypocrisy of Southwestern American society in which he grew up. A multidimensional view of frontier life would not have been possible, if Twain or any other adult had been the narrator. The comments given by Huck are the comments given by the novelist in the guise of a young boy. The protagonist is untouched by outside forces, and his innocence prevents him from distorting facts. This enhances the authenticity of the experience, which is an added feature of a good narrative. Huck is a boy of fourteen years, and Twain feels he is a safe reporter, as his illiteracy and lack of decorum, shields him from the onslaught of criticism that would have targeted any other narrator. Thus, Huck is u as a mask, to expose the real facts about the frontier society. The positive aspects of this kind of a narrator are his native shrewdness, a sharp eye and a clear heart, which are untouched by the inherent hypocrisy of the society. He cannot distort the truth, nor can he invent anything on his own, and his simplicity and disjointed narration, gives an authentic touch, as there is no philosophizing of thoughts.

The journey of Huck is a mirror reflecting the frontier world of scoundrels, dupes, frauds and imposters. The 'boy narrator' is a masterstroke of the novelist, as his narration is not just the voice of the character Huck, but also the voice of the novel. An innocent orphan like Huck has potentialities of growing into a symbolic figure, and this enriches and enhances the appeal of the novel. His other character Jim plays a passive role, but is significant for the action of the novel to move forward. Twain uses his escape as a satire on the institution of slavery that flourished in the frontier society of the Southwestern America. Mark Twain's art of characterisation interweaves action and description. It is through their narration,

that the characters in Twain's novel gradually take shape and grow into individuals. This is a unique technique evolved by Mark Twain in the delineation of his characters. It is through their actions that the characters reveal themselves in the course of the novel. These characters are also u to analyze the major themes and issues of the novel. This method of revealing real facts through these young innocent characters seemed the best technique of spreading Twain's moral vision across the masses. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has three major characters.

Huckleberry Finn

The novel introduces Huck as a boy belonging to the lowest level of society. The son of a vagabond drunkard and ruffian, Huck is always dirty and unkempt, and all attempts of Widow Douglas to reform him ends in vain, when refuses to give up his independence. Education and religion have no meaning for him, and he loves to roam free without any restrictions. Huck is honest and sensitive to other people's feelings, but the incessant troubles that hound him in the course of his journey, make him question certain things in society. As a child of Nature, he symbolises innocence and purity of the mind, and cannot stand any kind of cruelty or violence. The world is new to him and everything he encounters gives him food for thought, as every phase or event is an integral part of his life. His natural intelligence makes him create his own rules, and this leads him to free Jim from slavery in the end. Huck possesses traits that are necessary for a life in the frontier. He is practical and natural and has the ability to adapt to any situation. This enables him to adjust with the disciplined life of Widow Douglas and the Grangerfords, even though he loves his wild ways. He is intelligent and clever enough to survive all kinds of pressure tactics. He has grown up in the Mississippi Valley, but his heart is free from the commercialism ingrained in that society. The negative feelings that arise in him stem from the belief that certain qualities make people good. He fails to

realize that goodness is an inner quality and that is why he runs from changes in society and considers himself to be an outsider.

Jim

Jim is an interesting and important character, through which Twain portrays the institution of slavery. He is the catalyst that carries the story forward and controls the movement of the plot. Jim is the illiterate, domesticated, superstitious and docile slave owned by Miss Watson, the sister of Widow Douglas who has adopted Huck. Jim has a family and the thought of being separated from them, makes him run away from his owner when he overhears her plan to sell him. He is sensitive, loyal and capable of deep caring and love. He becomes a surrogate father to Huck on Jackson's Island, looking after his needs, protecting him from the worst horrors that they encounter. Initially Jim appears to be superstitious but this represents his deep knowledge about the natural world. His willingness to sacrifice himself for others, allows Huck to understand the inherent qualities of Jim. In spite of his physical capacity, Jim believes that white men are superior to him, and this betrays a slavish mentality, which affects his conviction and confidence. He depends on an outside agency to guide and govern him, but this does not mean that Jim is not intelligent. He has intense knowledge in practical matters and does not wait for Huck when situation demands it. Many critics have remarked that Jim is a passive character but this is because he is always at the mercy of others. Despite restrictions and constant fear, he finds ways of accomplishing his goals without hurting the sentiments of his benefactors. His emotions and desires enable us to see him in the human context.

Tom Sawyer

Tom is Huck's best friend but has been brought up in comfort. He loves reading romance and adventure novels and his beliefs are ba on them. Tom's strict adherence to rules sets him apart from Huck. His belief in fantasy often leads him to commit acts of stupidity,

and he fails to adjust to the real world. Tom represents those values of society that Huck is running away from. His plans are extravagant, absurd and often ridiculous. Tom symbolises the self-cantered dominant white man of the society of that time.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: Give a brief character sketch of Huck.

Q 12: What is the significance of Jim in the novel?

15.4.4 Mark Twain's Narrative Style

The novel marks a departure from the traditional narrative technique of American novelists, as Mark Twain uses the first person narrative in telling the story of Huck Finn. He writes in a conversational and colloquial style, which exemplifies his talent for storytelling. For the first time echoes of the vernacular tongue touched the hearts of millions of readers. Twain's wide and multifaceted canvass of experience, lends an aura of enchantment to his narration. His narratives have a deep connection with the native soil, and are representations of the American panorama. His narration is vivid, concrete and realistic, and his use of the dialect or the vernacular is without any trace of conventionalism. Twain wrote for the masses, and believed that addressing them in the native tongue would create a bond of affection and intimacy. This illustrates Twain's capacity of entering the mindset of a vast majority of readers. His narrative art intermingled adventure, satire, irony and paradox to highlight his moral vision. In the novel, he uses all these elements to comment on the myth of frontier life, and the institution of slavery. His narrative voice endeared him to the pioneers whose emotions, grief and joys found expression through this representative. Twain has often been regarded as the greatest humorist of America, and this quality enables him to convey essential truths that expose the hypocrisy of conventional values cherished by the society. He is fascinated by

the varied and disjointed world around him, and he portrays it in the form of independent episodes, building parallels and contrasts, that are thematically integral to the emotional pattern of his novels. Twain usually does not describe his characters, but introduces the reader to their activities and actions, which help in evaluating the character. The abundant use of symbolism, imagery and the supernatural lends a special touch to the narrative style of Mark Twain as a writer.



LET US KNOW

A first person narrative is a technique of telling stories in which the narrator relates events from his own point of view using the first person. It may be narrated by the first person protagonist, first person witness, and first person re- teller. The technique allows the reader to see the mind of the narrator but the experience is limited to the narrator's awareness of the true state of affairs.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 13: Comment briefly on the narrative style of Mark Twain.

15.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF MARK TWAIN

Very few writers in the world have been able to endear themselves to readers of all age groups. Literary criticism has placed Mark Twain on a pedestal that is both national and international, and his greatness as a writer is now an accepted fact. His reputation has survived the onslaught of bitter criticisms, and his hold on the common people has left professional critics baffled. Criticism after the' fifties' recognises his merits and broadly illustrates his moral concerns. His books *Innocents Abroad* (1869), *Roughing It* (1872) and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) made him immensely popular among the Americans. His friends also spoke about the qualities of his writings in literary circles. The publication of *The Adventures of Huckleberry*

Finn (1885) was a great event in the history of American literature. It shocked the sensibilities of the intellectuals, and landed him into controversies that were to hound him for a long time. There was a rebellion against the writer and a reviewer writing in the *Century* could not stop himself from remarking that Huck was an incarnation of the better side of ruffianism that was the result of the independence of Americans. By the 19th century, Twain was able to emerge out of the censure, and in 1899, the *London Times* described Twain as the 'Ambassador of America'. William Dean Howell's spoke about the endearing qualities of Twain as a humourist. Van Wyck Brooks established Twain as a frontier humourist, but charged him with the sins and vices of the pioneers. The year 1935 saw the appearance of tributes in various magazines and books. Ernest Hemmingway's statement that 'all American books come from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn'* gave a new direction to critical trends. Lionel Trilling and T.S Eliot's introduction to this novel marks a radical shift in criticism. F. R. Leavis emphasises the ethical and moral concern of Twain and Kenneth Lynn analy the originality of his humour. The ending of the novel has been subject of immense criticism. Phillip Young considered the ending as 'chilling descent' and 'flimsy contrivance'. Hemmingway remarked that the ending is nothing but 'mere cheating'. Perhaps the greatness of the novel is accepted by all, but the ending is a subject matter of constant criticism. The reputation of Mark Twain has seen a continuous growth and he is regarded as the image of the American dream.



15.6 LET US SUM UP

By this time, we have come to know that Mark Twain in one the most famous writers of American literature. He has set new trends in narration by using the local dialect for the first time. He engages the boy-narrator to express his views regarding the society, and this is a unique technique of his art of characterisation. Twain has a moral vision, and he writes to fulfil this aim despite the criticisms that came his way. He shared

a deep bond with the Mississippi River, and most of his stories are set along the river, portraying glimpses of frontier life in Southern American society. He was against the institution of slavery, and he extensively criticises the hypocrisy of slavery. Issues regarding the portrayal of racism and morality in his novels continue to provide scope for debate thereby giving the stamp of continued interest in his works.



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15.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Mark Twain… …in Missouri… in 1835.

Ans to Q 2: Twain Grew up… …in Hannibal… …Slave holding society… …Mississippi River.

Ans to Q 3: Picaresque novel… …origin Spain… …protagonist rogue… …lacks proper plot structure.

Ans to Q 4: Pap is… …father of Huck… …cruel, greedy and violent ruffian… …remains absent from home… …indulges in drinking… …not ready to take responsibility of his son.

Ans to Q 5: Huck is a child of Nature… …likes to live independently… …adopted by Widow Douglas… …teaches him manners and discipline… …Huck not u to restrictions… …tired of his new life.

Ans to Q 6: Jim… …slave of Miss Watson... …scared of being sold… …runs away… …accompanies Huck… …in search of freedom.

Ans to Q 7: Huck saws himself… …kills a pig… …spills blood… …takes a canoe… …escapes to Jackson Island.

Ans to Q 8: Name of show… …staged by King and Duke… … *Royal Nonesuch*.

Ans to Q 9: Major themes… …innocence and Experience... …deals with the innocence of Huck… …the child of Nature… …hypocrisy of civili society… …slavery and Racism… ….highlights the life of Jim… …attitude of the whites… …Mississippi River… …stands for freedom… …Money and Food… …symbolises care and protection… …Religion and Superstition… …mocks the beliefs of the society.

Ans to Q 10: The Mississippi River stands for freedom… …it carries Jim and Huck towards free states… …they are influenced by the life along the river… …they meet the world of experience… …transition from innocence to experience takes place… …a place of shelter turns to a place of trouble… …portrays the tough life of the South… …river turns to short term escape.

Ans to Q 11: Huck is the protagonist and narrator….son of a violent and abusive ruffian… …is an outcast neglected by society… …forced to survive by himself… …uneducated but intelligent… …takes his own decisions… …contradicts the norms of society… …practical and natural with a good common sense… …is adaptable to any situation… …possesses an inventive capacity… …sympathetic towards other human beings.

Ans to Q 12: Jim is a slave of Miss Watson… …illiterate and deeply superstitious… …runs away because he is afraid of being sold… …is sentimental about his family… …father figure and friend to Huck… …acts as a catalyst for Huck's development… …practical about the ways of life… …has a knowledge of natural surroundings… …without him Huck would have no reason to travel.

Ans to Q 13: Twain uses first person narrative technique… …conversational and colloquial style… …language has traces of local dialect… …appealed to the masses… …experience lends an enchanting flavour… …is realistic and concrete with no trace of misrepresentation… …combines romance, irony and satire… …uses irony and paradox to highlight a situation… …builds up contrasts and parallels.



15.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as a panorama of American life.

Q 2: Analyse the thematic patterns in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Q 3: Consider and evaluate *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as a social satire.

Q 4: Critically assess the relationship between Huck and Jim.

Q 5: What is the significance of the Mississippi River in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn?*

Q 6: In what sense and to what extent does Huck grow in the novel?

Q 7: Discuss the role of Jim in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Q 8: Comment on the ending of the novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*

Q 9: Write a note on Mark Twain's art of characterization with reference to the major characters in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*

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https://www.britannica.com/biography/Eugene-ONeill

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugene_O%27Neill

Name of the Paper: Course Code:

Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA)
Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University
City Office, Housefed Complex, Guwahati- 06

Learner's Feedback on Course

Dear Learner,

Regarding the course as mentioned above, we would like to know your opinions and comments so as to improve the quality of self learning materials in future. Please respond to the following statements by ticking the number you feel most reflect your opinion. After completion of the additional comments, please detach the page and send/mail the same to us at the address given below.

The Director, Centre for Internal Quality Assurance, KKHandiqui State Open University
Housefed Complex, Dispur, Guwahati- 781006
(E-mail id: ciqa@kkhsou.in)

1. Approximately how many hours did you spend for studying the units in the course? | | | |
2. Please give your opinions (by √ mark) to the following items based on your reading of the block:

Sl. No.	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I.	The SLMs of the course fulfil the learning objectives set out in the beginning of each unit					
II.	The units of the SLM could satisfy my academic needs and expectations					
III.	The Unit writers have excellent knowledge about the course contents					
IV.	Language and contents of the units were presented at a level which I could readily understand					
V.	Ample opportunity for participation in the activities provided in the units					
VI.	Used enough Illustrations (Diagrams, tables etc.) for conceptual clarity					
VII.	Quality of content is engaging, relevant, and up-to-date					
VIII.	The self check questions are very helpful					
IX.	The Possible/model questions and the answers to check my progress have benefited me a lot					

Additional Comments: *(Please feel free to provide your open comments)*

1. Which aspects of the SLM, according to you, worked well?

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2. What sort of changes/improvements do you feel KKHSOU could implement to improve the overall quality of the SLM?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form.

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