DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE & ONLINE EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF JAMMU
JAMMU

SELF LEARNING MATERIAL
M. A. ENGLISH
2024

TITLE OF THE COURSE :-	**COURSE CODE : ENG–322**
AMERICAN LITERATURE - I	**UNIT : I - VI**
SEMESTER : III	**LESSON : 1 - 35**

Teacher Incharge :
Dr. Jasleen Kaur

Course Coordinator
Prof. Anupama Vohra

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M.A. ENGLISH - III SEMESTER

(ENG–322)

Lesson Compitation

– Dr. Sanjay Chawla
– Dr. Malti P. Sharma
– Dr. Jagruti Upadhyaya

Editing and Proof Reading :

– Dr. Jasleen Kaur

Course Co-ordinator
Prof. Anupama Vohra

Teacher Incharge
Dr. Jasleen Kaur

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We duly acknowledge the reference books/web/internet sources from where the material has been taken for the academic benefit of the distance learner.

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WELCOME MESSAGE

Dear Distance Learner,

I welcome you all to the third semester on the behalf of the Directorate of Distance & Online Education. This semester as compared with the previous two semesters is slightly vibrant in nature with inclusion from not only British Literature but also from Post-Colonial/Third World/ New World Literature. The idea of such inclusion is to bring to the knowledge of learners the vivid and kaleidoscopeic nature of literature itself.

Course Code ENG–322: American Literature-I, as such, tries to familarise the learners with not only History of American Literature but also with most important and prominent writers and their modes of writing through time. The course has been divided into six units, fairly distributed, with novels, short-stories and poetry of such writers who have managed to chisel the Great American Literary Tradition as we know today.

Although the Self-Learning Material (SLM) provided for this course is sufficient for any distance learner, nevertheless, we encourage the learners to make ample use of the Directorate Library.

All the distance learners are further advised to seriously follow the deadlines for the submission of the Internal Assessment Assignment (IAAs), provided on the IAA question booklet, failing which, one would not be allowed to sit in the semester end exams.

Wish you good luck !

Dr. Jasleen Kaur
Teacher Incharge PG English

COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **Duration of Examination : 3 hrs.**

Title of the Course : American Literature–I **Total Marks : 100**

Credits : 6 **(a) Semester Examination : 80**

(b) Sessional Assessment : 20

Detailed Syllabus for the examinations to be held in 2024, 2025 & 2026

Objectives : The objective of the course is to introduce the students to the growth and development of the American mind and imagination in Literary terms right from the imitative and optative phase of the 19th century to the innovative and purposeful phase of the 20th Century American Literature.

UNIT–I

Literary and Intellectual background of genesis and development of American Literature.

UNIT–II

Herman Melville : *Moby Dick*

UNIT–III

Ernest Hemingway : *A Farewell to Arms*

UNIT–IV

Mark Twain : Huckleberry Finn

E.A. Poe : The Purloined Letter
Oval Portrait

UNIT–V

Walt Whitman	:	The following sections of Songs of Myself prescribed : Sections - 1, 5, 16, 21, 44, 48

UNIT–VI

Emily Dickinson	:	Selected Poems : (a) Just lost when I was saved. (b) I taste liquor never brewed (c) Hope is a thing with feathers. (d) I felt a funeral in my brain (e) The Soul selects her own society. (f) Because I could not stop for death
Robert Frost	:	(a) West Running Brook (b) Birches (c) Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening (d) Home Burial

MODE OF EXAMINATION

The paper will be divided into Sections A, B and C.

SECTION A **Multiple Choice Questions** **M.M. = 80**

Q. No. 1. Will be an objective type question covering the entire syllabus.Twelve objectives from each unit, with four options each will be set and the candidate will be required to write the correct option and not specify by putting a tick mark (✓). Any ten out of twelve are to be attempted. Each objective will be for one mark. **(10x1= 10)**

SECTION B

Short Answer Questions

Q.No.2. Section B comprises short answer type questions covering the entire syllabus. Four questions will be set and the candidate will be required to attempt any two questions in about 80-100 words. Each answer will be evaluated for 5 marks.

(5x2=10)

SECTION C

Long Answer questions

Q.No. 3. Section C comprises long answer type questions covering the entire syllabus. Six questions one from each unit, will be set and the candidate will be required to attempt any five questions in about 300-350 words. Each answer will be evaluated for 12 marks.

(5x12 = 60)

SUGGESTED READINGS

Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker	:	*Critical Essays on Herman Melville's Moby Dick.*
R.W.B. Lewis	:	*The American Adam*
Marius Bewley	:	*The Eccentric Design*
Leslie Fiedler	:	*Love and Death in the American Novel*
Richard Chase	:	*The American Novel and its Tradition*
Donald Miles	:	*American Novel in the 20th Century*
Rod Horton, and Herbert Edwards	:	*Background of American*
Leo Marx	:	*The Machine in the Garden*
P.C. Kar and D. Ramakrsishana	:	*The American Classics Revisited.*
Vernon L. Parrington	:	*Main Currents in American Thought (3 Vols.)*


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COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 1**

AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT-I**

LITERARY AND INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

COLONIAL PERIOD

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Objectives

1.3 Centre of Early American Literature

1.4 The Revolutionary Period

1.4.1 Samuel Adams

1.4.2 Benjamin Franklin

1.4.3 Thomas Paine

1.5 Let Us Sum Up

1.6 Multiple Choice Questions

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

American literature is the literature written or produced in the area of the United States and its preceding colonies. During its early history, America was a series of British colonies on the eastern coast of the present-day United States. Therefore, its literary tradition begins as linked to the broader tradition of English

literature. However, unique American characteristics and the breadth of its production usually now cause it to be considered a separate path and tradition.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

In this lesson we shall study the literary and intellectual background to American literature during its early history. As it was a crucial period of the formative years of America, political writings gained prominence. So we shall take an overview of the prominent figures of the period whose literary, social and political views were influential with the people.

1.3 CENTRE OF EARLY AMERICAN LITERATURE

The New England colonies were the center of early American literature. The New England Colonies of British America included the colonies of Connecticut, Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Massachusetts, and Province of New Hampshire. They were part of the Thirteen Colonies. These were early colonies of what would later be the states in New England. Captain John Smith was the author of the 1616 works *A Description of New England (1616)*, and first applied the term 'New England' to coastal lands of North America from the Long Island Sound to Newfoundland.

Owing to the large immigration to Boston in the 1630s, the high articulation of Puritan cultural ideals, and the early establishment of a college and a printing press in Cambridge, the New England colonies have often been regarded as the center of early American literature.

The dominance of the English language was hardly inevitable. The first item printed in Pennsylvania was in German and was the largest book printed in any of the colonies before the American Revolution. Spanish and French had two of the strongest colonial literary traditions in the areas that now comprise the United States, and discussions of early American literature commonly include texts by Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and Samuel de Champlain alongside English language texts by Thomas Harriot and John Smith. Moreover, we are now aware of the wealth of oral literary traditions already existing on the continent among the numerous different Native

American groups. Political events, however, would eventually make English the *lingua franca* for the colonies at large as well as the literary language of choice. For instance, when the English conquered New Amsterdam in 1664, they renamed it New York and changed the administrative language from Dutch to English.

Some of the American literature were pamphlets and writings extolling the benefits of the colonies to both a European and colonist audience. Captain John Smith could be considered the first American author with his works: *A True Relation of Such Occurrences and Accidents of Noate as Hath Happened in Virginia*... (1608) and *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles* (1624).

As the colonies moved towards their break with England, perhaps one of the most important discussions of American culture and identity came from the French immigrant J. Hector St. John de Crèvecœur, whose *Letters from an American Farmer* addresses the question "What is an American?" by moving between praise for the opportunities and peace offered in the new society and recognition that the solid life of the farmer must rest uneasily between the oppressive aspects of the urban life (with its luxuries built on slavery) and the lawless aspects of the frontier, where the lack of social structures leads to the loss of civilized living.

This same period saw the birth of African American literature, through the poetry of Phillis Wheatley and, shortly after the Revolution, the slave narrative of Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*. This era also saw the birth of Native American literature, through the two published works of Samson Occom *A Sermon Preached at the Execution of Moses Paul and a popular hymnbook*, *Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, "*the first Indian best-seller*".

1.4 THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD

The revolutionary period also contained political writings, including those by colonists Samuel Adams, Josiah Quincy, John Dickinson, and Joseph Galloway, a loyalist to the crown. Two key figures were Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine. Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack* and *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* are esteemed works with their wit and influence toward the formation of a budding

American identity. Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense* and *The American Crisis* writings are seen as playing a key role in influencing the political tone of the time.

During the revolution itself, poems and songs such as *Yankee Doodle* and *Nathan Hale* were popular. Major satirists included John Trumbull and Francis Hopkinson. Philip Morin Freneau also wrote poems about the war's course.

During the 18th century, writing shifted focus from the Puritanical ideals of Winthrop and Bradford to the power of the human mind and rational thought. The belief that human and natural occurrences were messages from God no longer fit with the new human centered world. Many intellectuals believed that the human mind could comprehend the universe through the laws of physics as described by Isaac Newton, one of these was Cotton Mather. The first book published in North America that promoted Newton and natural theology was Mather's *The Christian Philosopher* (1721). The enormous scientific, economic, social, and philosophical, changes of the 18th century, called the 'Enlightenment', impacted the authority of clergyman and scripture, making way for democratic principles. The increase in population helped account for the greater diversity of opinion in religious and political life as seen in the literature of this time. In 1670, the population of the colonies numbered approximately 1,11,000. Thirty years later it was more than 2,50,000. By 1760, it reached 16,00,000. The growth of communities and therefore social life led people to become more interested in the progress of individuals and their shared experience on the colonies. These new ideals are accounted for in the widespread popularity of Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography.

The revolutionary period contained political writings by Samuel Adams, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine.

1.4.1 Samuel Adams (1722-1803) was an American statesman, political philosopher, and one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. As a politician in colonial Massachusetts, Adams was a leader of the movement that became the American Revolution, and was one of the architects of the principles of American republicanism that shaped the political culture of the United States.

Born in Boston, Adams was brought up in a religious and politically active family. As an influential official of the Massachusetts House of Representatives and the Boston Town Meeting in the 1760s, Adams was a part of a movement opposed to the British Parliament's efforts to tax the British American colonies without their consent. His 1768 Massachusetts Circular Letter calling for colonial non-cooperation prompted the occupation of Boston by British soldiers, eventually resulting in the Boston Massacre of 1770. To help coordinate resistance to what he saw as the British government's attempts to violate the British Constitution at the expense of the colonies, in 1772 Adams and his colleagues devised a committee of correspondence system, which linked like-minded Patriots throughout the Thirteen Colonies. Continued resistance to British policy resulted in the Boston Tea Party (1773) and the coming of the American Revolution.

After Parliament passed the **Coercive Acts** in 1774, Adams attended the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, which was convened to coordinate a colonial response. He helped guide Congress towards issuing the Continental Association in 1774, the Declaration of Independence in 1776, and helped draft the Articles of Confederation and the Massachusetts Constitution. Adams returned to Massachusetts after the American Revolution, where he served in the state senate and was eventually elected governor.

Samuel Adams later became a controversial figure in American history. Accounts written in the 19th century praised him as someone who had been steering his fellow colonists towards independence long before the outbreak of the Revolutionary War. This view gave way to negative assessments of Adams in the first half of the 20th century, in which he was portrayed as a master of propaganda who provoked mob violence to achieve his goals. Both of these interpretations have been challenged by some modern scholars, who argue that these traditional depictions of Adams are myths contradicted by the historical record.

1.4.2 Benjamin Franklin (1706 -1790) was one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. A renowned polymath, Franklin was a leading author, printer,

political theorist, politician, freemason, postmaster, scientist, inventor, civic activist, statesman, and diplomat.

Franklin earned the title of "The First American" for his early and indefatigable campaigning for colonial unity, initially as an author and spokesman in London for several colonies. As the first United States Ambassador to France, he exemplified the emerging American nation. Franklin was foundational in defining the American ethos as a marriage of the practical values of thrift, hard work, education, community spirit, self-governing institutions, and opposition to authoritarianism both political and religious, with the scientific and tolerant values of the Enlightenment. In the words of historian Henry Steele Commager, "In a Franklin could be merged the virtues of Puritanism without its defects, the illumination of the Enlightenment without its heat". To Walter Isaacson, this makes Franklin "the most accomplished American of his age and the most influential in inventing the type of society America would become".

Although he initially owned and dealt in slaves, by the 1750s he argued against slavery from an economic perspective and became one of the most prominent abolitionists.

In 1733, Franklin began to publish the noted Poor Richard's Almanack (with content both original and borrowed) under the pseudonym Richard Saunders, on which much of his popular reputation is based. ‘Poor Richard's Proverbs’, adages from this almanac, such as "*A penny saved is two pence dear*" (often misquoted as "A penny saved is a penny earned") and "Fish and visitors stink in three days", remain common quotations in the modern world. Wisdom in folk society meant the ability to provide an apt adage for any occasion, and Franklin's readers became well prepared.

Like the other advocates of republicanism, Franklin emphasized that the new republic could survive only if the people were virtuous. All his life he explored the role of civic and personal virtue, as expressed in Poor Richard's aphorisms. Franklin felt that organized religion was necessary to keep men good to their fellow men, but rarely attended religious services himself. When Franklin met Voltaire in Paris and asked his fellow member of the Enlightenment vanguard to bless his grandson, Voltaire

said in English, "God and Liberty", and added, "this is the only appropriate benediction for the grandson of Monsieur Franklin."

Franklin's parents were both pious Puritans. The family attended the Old South Church, the most liberal Puritan congregation in Boston, where Benjamin Franklin was baptized in 1706. Franklin's father, a poor chandler, owned a copy of a book, *Bonifacius: Essays to Do Good*, by the Puritan preacher and family friend Cotton Mather, which Franklin often cited as a key influence on his life. Franklin's first pen name, Silence Dogood, paid homage both to the book and to a widely known sermon by Mather. The book preached the importance of forming voluntary associations to benefit society. Franklin learned about forming do-good associations from Cotton Mather, but his organizational skills made him the most influential force in making voluntarism an enduring part of the American ethos.

Franklin formulated a presentation of his beliefs and published it in 1728. It did not mention many of the Puritan ideas as regards belief in salvation, the divinity of Jesus, and indeed most religious dogma. He clarified himself as a deist in his 1771 autobiography, although he still considered himself a Christian. He retained a strong faith in a God as the wellspring of morality and goodness in man, and as a Providential actor in history responsible for American independence.

Franklin retained a lifelong commitment to the Puritan virtues and political values he had grown up with, and through his civic work and publishing, he succeeded in passing these values into the American culture permanently. He had a "passion for virtue". These Puritan values included his devotion to egalitarianism, education, industry, thrift, honesty, temperance, charity and community spirit.

The classical authors read in the Enlightenment period taught an abstract ideal of republican government based on hierarchical social orders of king, aristocracy and commoners. It was widely believed that English liberties relied on their balance of power, but also hierarchal deference to the privileged class. "Puritanism ... and the epidemic evangelism of the mid-eighteenth century, had created challenges to the

traditional notions of social stratification" by preaching that the Bible taught all men are equal, that the true value of a man lies in his moral behavior, not in his class, and all men can be saved. Franklin, steeped in Puritanism and an enthusiastic supporter of the evangelical movement, rejected the salvation dogma, but embraced the radical notion of egalitarian democracy.

Franklin's commitment to teach these values was itself something he gained from his Puritan upbringing, with its stress on "inculcating virtue and character in themselves and their communities." These Puritan values and the desire to pass them on, were one of Franklin's quintessentially American characteristics which helped in shaping the character of the nation. Franklin's writings on virtue were derided by some European authors, such as Jackob Fugger in his critical work Portrait of American Culture. Max Weber considered Franklin's ethical writings a culmination of the Protestant ethic, which ethic created the social conditions necessary for the birth of capitalism.

One of Franklin's notable characteristics was his respect, tolerance and promotion of all churches. Although Franklin's parents had intended for him to have a career in the Church, Franklin as a young man adopted the Enlightenment religious belief in deism, that God's truths can be found entirely through nature and reason. After the disillusioning experience of seeing the decay in his own moral standards, and those of two friends in London whom he had converted to Deism, Franklin turned back to a belief in the importance of organized religion, on the pragmatic grounds that without God and organized churches, man will not be good. Moreover, because of his proposal that prayers be said in the Constitutional Convention of 1787, many have contended that in his later life Franklin became a pious Christian.

According to David Morgan, Franklin was a proponent of religion in general. He prayed to ‘Powerful Goodness’ and referred to God as ‘The Infinite’. John Adams noted that Franklin was a mirror in which people saw their own religion: "The Catholics thought him almost a Catholic. The Church of England claimed him as one of them. The Presbyterians thought him half a Presbyterian, and the Friends believed him a

wet Quaker." Whatever else Franklin was, concludes Morgan, "he was a true champion of generic religion".

Slavery

During Franklin's lifetime slaves were numerous in Philadelphia. In 1750, half the persons in Philadelphia who had established probate estates owned slaves. Dock workers in the city consisted of 15% slaves. Franklin owned as many as seven slaves, two males of whom worked in his household and his shop. Franklin, however, later became a 'cautious abolitionist' and became an outspoken critic of landed gentry slavery. In 1758, Franklin advocated the opening of a school for the education of black slaves in Philadelphia. After returning from England in 1762, Franklin became more anti-slavery in his view, believing that the institution promoted black degradation rather than the idea blacks were inherently inferior. By 1770, Franklin had freed his slaves and attacked the system of slavery and the international slave trade. Franklin, however, refused to publicly debate the issue of slavery at the 1787 Constitutional Convention. Franklin tended to take both sides of the issue of slavery, never fully divesting himself from the institution.

1.4.3 Thomas Paine (1737 -1809) was an English-American political activist, philosopher, political theorist, and revolutionary. One of the Founding Fathers of the United States, he authored the two most influential pamphlets at the start of the American Revolution, and he inspired the rebels in 1776 to declare independence from Britain. His ideas reflected Enlightenment-era rhetoric of transnational human rights.

Born in Thetford, England, in the county of Norfolk, Paine emigrated to the British American colonies in 1774 with the help of Benjamin Franklin, arriving just in time to participate in the American Revolution. Virtually every rebel read (or listened to a reading of) his powerful pamphlet Common Sense (1776), proportionally the all-time best-selling American title which crystallized the rebellious demand for independence from Great Britain. His The American Crisis (1776-83) was a prorevolutionary pamphlet series. Common Sense was so influential that John Adams

said, "Without the pen of the author of Common Sense, the sword of Washington would have been raised in vain."

Paine lived in France for most of the 1790s, becoming deeply involved in the French Revolution. He wrote *Rights of Man* (1791), in part a defense of the French Revolution against its critics. His attacks on British writer Edmund Burke led to a trial and conviction in absentia in 1792 for the crime of seditious libel. In 1792, despite not being able to speak French, he was elected to the French National Convention.

In December 1793, he was arrested and was taken to Luxembourg Prison in Paris. While in prison, he continued to work on *The Age of Reason* (1793-94). Paine's imprisonment in France caused a general uproar in America, and future President James Monroe used all of his diplomatic connections to get Paine released in *November* 1794. He became notorious because of his pamphlets, *The Age of Reason*, in which he advocated deism, promoted reason and free thought, and argued against institutionalized religion in general and Christian doctrine in particular. He also published the pamphlet *Agrarian Justice* (1797), discussing the origins of property, and introduced the concept of a guaranteed minimum income.

Thomas Paine has a claim to the title, 'The Father of the American Revolution'. It rests on his pamphlets, especially *Common Sense*, which crystallized sentiment for independence in 1776. The pamphlet came into circulation in January 1776, after the Revolution had started. It was passed around, and often read aloud in taverns, contributing significantly to spreading the idea of republicanism, bolstering enthusiasm for separation from Britain, and encouraging recruitment for the Continental Army. Paine provided a new and convincing argument for independence by advocating a complete break with history. *Common Sense* is oriented to the future in a way that compels the reader to make an immediate choice. It offers a solution for Americans disgusted with and alarmed at the threat of tyranny.

Common Sense was the most widely read pamphlet of the American Revolution. It was a clarion call for unity against the corrupt British court, so as to realize America's providential role in providing an asylum for liberty. Written in a

direct and lively style, it denounced the decaying despotisms of Europe and pilloried hereditary monarchy as an absurdity. At a time when many still hoped for reconciliation with Britain, *Common Sense* demonstrated to many the inevitability of separation.

Paine was not, on the whole, expressing original ideas in *Common Sense*, but rather employing rhetoric as a means to arouse resentment of the Crown. To achieve these ends, he pioneered a style of political writing suited to the democratic society he envisioned, with *Common Sense* serving as a primary example. Part of Paine's work was to render complex ideas intelligible to average readers of the day, with clear, concise writing unlike the formal, learned style favored by many of Paine's contemporaries. Scholars have put forward various explanations to account for its success, including the historic moment, Paine's easy-to-understand style, his democratic ethos, and his use of psychology and ideology. Paine's great contribution was in initiating a public debate about independence which had previously been rather muted.

One distinctive idea in Common Sense is Paine's beliefs regarding the peaceful nature of republics; his views were an early and strong conception of what scholars would come to call the democratic peace theory.

Loyalists vigorously attacked Common Sense; one attack, titled *Plain Truth* (1776), by Marylander James Chalmers, said Paine was a political quack and warned that without monarchy, the government would "degenerate into democracy". Even some American revolutionaries objected to Common Sense; late in life John Adams called it a "crapulous mass". Adams disagreed with the type of radical democracy promoted by Paine (that men who did not own property should still be allowed to vote and hold public office), and published Thoughts on Government in 1776 to advocate a more conservative approach to republicanism.

Sophia Rosenfeld argues that Paine was highly innovative in his use of the commonplace notion of ‘common sense’. He synthesized various philosophical and political uses of the term in a way that permanently impacted American political thought. He used two ideas from Scottish Common Sense Realism: that ordinary people can indeed make sound judgments on major political issues, and that there exists a body of popular wisdom that is readily apparent to anyone. Paine also used a

notion of 'common sense' favored by philosophies in the Continental Enlightenment. They held that common sense could refute the claims of traditional institutions. Thus, Paine used 'common sense' as a weapon to delegitimize the monarchy and overturn prevailing conventional wisdom. Rosenfeld concludes that the phenomenal appeal of his pamphlet resulted from his synthesis of popular and elite elements in the independence movement.

According to historian Robert Middlekauff, Common Sense became immensely popular mainly because Paine appealed to widespread convictions. Monarchy, he said, was preposterous, and it had a heathenish origin. It was an institution of the devil. Paine pointed to the Old Testament, where almost all kings had seduced the Israelites to worship idols instead of God. Paine also denounced aristocracy, which together with monarchy were "two ancient tyrannies". They violated the laws of nature, human reason, and the "universal order of things", which began with God. That was, Middlekauff says, exactly what most Americans wanted to hear. He calls the Revolutionary generation "the children of the twice-born", because in their childhood they had experienced the Great Awakening, which, for the first time, had tied Americans together, transcending denominational and ethnic boundaries and giving them a sense of patriotism.

Back in London by 1787, Paine became engrossed in the ongoing French Revolution that began in 1789. He visited France in 1790. Meanwhile, conservative intellectual Edmund Burke launched a counter revolutionary blast against the French Revolution, entitled Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790); it strongly appealed to the landed class and sold 30,000 copies. Paine set out to refute it in his Rights of Man (1791). He wrote it not as a quick pamphlet but as a long, abstract political tract of 90,000 words that tore apart monarchies and traditional social institutions. The book appeared on March 13 and sold nearly a million copies. It was, eagerly read by reformers, Protestant dissenters, democrats, London craftsman, and the skilled factory-hands of the new industrial north.

Undeterred by the government campaign to discredit him, Paine issued his Rights of Man, Part the Second, Combining Principle and Practice in February 1792.

It detailed a representative government with enumerated social programs to remedy the numbing poverty of commoners through progressive tax measures. Radically reduced in price to ensure unprecedented circulation, it was sensational in its impact and gave birth to reform societies.

In 1800, Paine purportedly had a meeting with Napoleon. Napoleon claimed he slept with a copy of Rights of Man under his pillow and went so far as to say to Paine that "a statue of gold should be erected to you in every city in the universe." Paine discussed with Napoleon how best to invade England.

On noting Napoleon's progress towards dictatorship, he condemned him as, "the completest charlatan that ever existed". Paine remained in France until 1802, returning to the United States only at President Jefferson's invitation.

His last pamphlet, *Agrarian Justice*, opposed to Agrarian Law, and to Agrarian Monopoly, published in the winter of 1795, further developed his ideas in the *Rights of Man,* about how land ownership separated the majority of people from their rightful, natural inheritance and means of independent survival. The US Social Security Administration recognizes *Agrarian Justice* as the first American proposal for an old-age pension and basic income; *per Agrarian Justice:*

In advocating the case of the persons thus dispossessed, it is a right, and not a charity ... [Government must] create a national fund, out of which there shall be paid to every person, when arrived at the age of twenty-one years, the sum of fifteen pounds sterling, as a compensation in part, for the loss of his or her natural inheritance, by the introduction of the system of landed property. And also, the sum of ten pounds per annum, during life, to every person now living, of the age of fifty years, and to all others as they shall arrive at that age.

Lamb argues that Paine's analysis of property rights marks a distinct contribution to political theory. His theory of property defends a libertarian concern with private ownership that shows an egalitarian commitment. It demonstrates Paine's commitment to foundational liberal values of individual freedom and moral equality.

Religious views

Before his arrest and imprisonment in France, knowing that he would probably be arrested and executed, Paine, following in the tradition of early eighteenth-century British deism, wrote the first part of *The Age of Reason*, an assault on organized 'revealed' religion combining a compilation of the many inconsistencies he found in the Bible.

About his own religious beliefs, Paine wrote in The Age of Reason: "I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life. I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church. All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit".

Though there is no evidence he was himself a Freemason, upon his return to America from France, Paine also penned *An Essay on the Origin of Free-Masonry* (1803-1805), about Freemasonry being derived from the religion of the ancient Druids. In the essay, he stated that "The Christian religion is a parody on the worship of the sun, in which they put a man called Christ in the place of the sun, and pay him the adoration originally paid to the sun". Marguerite de Bonneville published the essay in 1810, after Paine's death, but she chose to omit certain passages from it that were critical of Christianity, most of which were restored in an 1818 printing.

While Paine never described himself as a deist, he did write the following:

"The opinions I have advanced ... are the effect of the most clear and long-established conviction that the Bible and the Testament are impositions upon the world, that the fall of man, the account of Jesus Christ being the Son of God, and of his dying to appease the wrath of God, and of salvation, by that strange means, are all fabulous inventions, dishonorable to the wisdom and power of the Almighty; that the only true religion is Deism, by which I then meant, and mean now, the belief of one God, and an imitation of his moral character, or the practice of what are called moral virtues -

and that it was upon this only (so far as religion is concerned) that I rested all my hopes of happiness hereafter. So say I now - and so help me God".

Legacy

Paine's writing greatly influenced his contemporaries and, especially, the American revolutionaries. His books provoked an upsurge in Deism in America, but in the long term inspired philosophic and working-class radicals in the UK and US. Liberals, libertarians, feminists, democratic socialists, social democrats, anarchists, free thinkers, and progressives often claim him as an intellectual ancestor. Paine's critique of institutionalized religion and advocacy of rational thinking influenced many British free thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as William Cobbett, George Holyoake, Charles Bradlaugh, Christopher Hitchens and Bertrand Russell.

The quote "*Lead, follow, or get out of the way*" is widely but incorrectly attributed to Paine. This can be found nowhere in his published works.

When Abraham Lincoln was 26 years old in 1835, he wrote a defense of Paine's deism; a political associate, Samuel Hill, burned it to save Lincoln's political career.

Historian Roy Basler, the editor of Lincoln's papers, said Paine had a strong influence on Lincoln's style he wrote, No other writer of the eighteenth century, with the exception of Jefferson, parallels more closely the temper or gist of Lincoln's later thought. In style, Paine above all others affords the variety of eloquence which, chastened and adapted to Lincoln's own mood, is revealed in Lincoln's formal writings.

The inventor Thomas Edison said: "I have always regarded Paine as one of the greatest of all Americans. Never have we had a sounder intelligence in this republic ... It was my good fortune to encounter Thomas Paine's works in my boyhood ... it was, indeed, a revelation to me to read that great thinker's views on political and theological subjects. Paine educated me, then, about many matters of which I had never before thought. I remember, very vividly, the flash of enlightenment that shone from Paine's writings, and I recall thinking, at that time, 'What a pity these works are not today the schoolbooks for all children!' My interest in Paine was not satisfied by

my first reading of his works. I went back to them time and again, just as I have done since my boyhood days."

In 1811, Venezuelan translator Manuel Garcia de Sena published a book in Philadelphia which consisted mostly of Spanish translations of several of Paine's most important works. The book also included translations of the *Declaration of Independence*, the *Articles of Confederation*, the *U.S. Constitution*, and the constitutions of five U.S. states. It subsequently circulated widely in South America, and through it, Uruguayan national hero José Gervasio Artigas became familiar with and embraced Paine's ideas. In turn, many of Artigas's writings drew directly from Paine's, including the Instructions of 1813, which Uruguayans consider to be one of their country's most important constitutional documents; it was one of the earliest writings to articulate a principled basis for an identity independent of Buenos Aires.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

American writing began with the work of English adventurers and colonists in the New World chiefly for the benefit of readers in the mother country. Some of these early works reached the level of literature. From the beginning, however, the literature of New England was also directed to the edification and instruction of the colonists themselves, intended to direct them in the ways of the godly.

1.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. The earlier administrative language of New York (erstwhile New Amsterdam) was:
   - (A) German
   - (B) Spanish
   - (C) Dutch
   - (D) English
2. Who of the following could be considered the first American author?
   - (A) Captain John Smith
   - (B) Thomas Harriot

(C) J. Hector St. John de Crèvecœur

(D) Samuel Adams

3. Who of the following French immigrants discussed American culture and identity, as the colonies moved towards their break with England?

(A) J. Hector St. John de Crèvecœur,

(B) Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville

(C) Robert de LaSalle

(D) Antoine LeClaire

4. The first book published in North America that promoted Newton and natural theology was:

(A) Common Sense

(B) The American Crisis

(C) The Christian Philosopher

(D) The Age of Reason

5. The enormous scientific, economic, social, and philosophical, changes of the 18th century are together known by the term:

(A) Renaissance

(B) Reformation

(C) Awakening

(D) Enlightenment

6. Who of the following earned the title of "The First American"?

(A) Samuel Adams

(B) Benjamin Franklin

(C) Thomas Paine

(D) Captain John Smith

7. Who of the following was the most influential force in making voluntarism an enduring part of the American ethos:

   (A) Samuel Adams

   (B) Benjamin Franklin

   (C) Thomas Paine

   (D) Captain John Smith

8. Who of the following has a claim to the title The Father of the American Revolution?

   (A) Samuel Adams

   (B) Benjamin Franklin

   (C) Thomas Paine

   (D) Captain John Smith

1.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Why have the New England colonies often been regarded as the center of early

   American literature?

2. Comment on the influence of the political writings of Samuel Adams, Benjamin

   Franklin and Thomas Paine.

3. What was the cause of the immense popularity of Common Sense?

4. 'My own mind is my own church'. Discuss this statement in the light of Paine's religious beliefs.

5. Write a note on Franklin as a "cautious abolitionist".

1.8 ANSWER KEY

Answers: 1. (C); 2. (A); 3. (A); 4. (C); 5. (D); 6. (B); 7. (B); 8. (C);

1.9 SUGGESTED READING

E. H. Emerson, ed., Major Writers of Early American Literature (1972)

R. W. B. Lewis, American Literature: The Makers and the Making (1973)

R. E. Spiller et al., ed., Literary History of the United States (4th ed., rev., 1974)

M. Klein, Foreigners: The Making of American Literature, 1900-1940 (1981)

R. N. Ludwig and C. A. Nault, Jr., ed., Annals of American Literature, 1602-1983 (1986)

E. Elliott et al., ed., Columbia Literary History of the United States (1988) and The Columbia History of the American Novel (1991)

P. J. Barrish, The Cambridge Introduction to American Literary Realism (2011)

L. Cassuto et al., ed., The Cambridge History of the American Novel (2011)

THE LATE EIGHTEENTH AND EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURIES

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Objectives

2.3 Thomas Jefferson

2.4 First American Novels

2.5 American Renaissance: Unique American Style

2.6 Early American Poetry

2.7 Realism, Twain and James

2.8 Let Us Sum Up

2.9 Multiple Choice Questions

2.10 Examination Orinted Questions

2.11 Answer Key

2.12 Suggested Reading

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the post-war period, Thomas Jefferson's United States *Declaration of Independence*, his influence on the United States Constitution, his autobiography, the *Notes on the State of Virginia*, and his many letters solidify his spot as one of the

most talented early American writers. The Federalist essays by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay presented a significant historical discussion of American government organization and republican values. Fisher Ames, James Otis, and Patrick Henry are also valued for their political writings and orations.

Much of the early literature of the new nation struggled to find a uniquely American voice in existing literary genre, and this tendency was also reflected in novels. European forms and styles were often transferred to new locales and critics often saw them as inferior.

2.2 OBJECTIVES

In this lesson we shall study the literary and intellectual background to the writings during the Post War period in America. We shall take an overview of the first novels and poetry written and the rise of realism during this period

2.3 THOMAS JEFFERSON

Thomas Jefferson (1743 -1826) was an American Founding Father who was principal author of the *Declaration of Independence* (1776). Jefferson was a proponent of democracy, republicanism, and individual rights, which motivated American colonists to break from Great Britain and form a new nation. He produced formative documents and decisions at both the state and national level. He shunned organized religion but was influenced by both Christianity and deism. His only full-length book, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), is considered the most important American book published before 1800.

Jefferson's preamble is regarded as an enduring statement of human rights, and the phrase "all men are created equal" has been called one of the best-known sentences in the English language containing the most potent and consequential words in American history.

Jefferson subscribed to the political ideals expounded by John Locke, Francis Bacon, and Isaac Newton whom he considered the three greatest men that ever lived. He was also influenced by the writings of Gibbon, Hume, Robertson, Bolingbroke, Montesquieu, and Voltaire. Jefferson thought the independent yeoman

and agrarian life were ideals of republican virtues. He distrusted cities and financiers, favored decentralized government power, and believed that the tyranny that had plagued the common man in Europe was due to corrupt political establishments and monarchies. Having supported efforts to disestablish the Church of England, and having authored the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, he pressed for a wall of separation between church and state.

Jefferson shared the common belief of his day that blacks were mentally and physically inferior, but argued they nonetheless had innate human rights. In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, he created controversy by calling slavery a moral evil for which the nation would ultimately have to account to God. He therefore supported colonization plans that would transport freed slaves to another country, such as Liberia or Sierra Leone, though he recognized the impracticability of such proposals.

Jefferson had a lifelong interest in linguistics, could speak, read and write in a number of languages, including French, Greek, Italian, and German. He claimed to have taught himself Spanish during his nineteen-day journey to France, using only a grammar guide and a copy of *Don Quixote*. Linguistics played a significant role in how Jefferson modeled and expressed political and philosophical ideas. He believed that the study of ancient languages was essential in understanding the roots of modern language. He collected and understood a number of American Indian vocabularies and instructed Lewis and Clark to record and collect various Indian dialects during their Expedition.

Jefferson is an icon of individual liberty, democracy, and republicanism, hailed as the author of the *Declaration of Independence*, an architect of the American Revolution, and a renaissance man who promoted science and scholarship. The participatory democracy and expanded suffrage he championed defined his era and became a standard for later generations.

2.4 FIRST AMERICAN NOVELS

It was in the late 18th and early 19th centuries that the nation's first novels were published. These fictions were too lengthy to be printed as manuscript or public

reading. Publishers took a chance on these works in hopes they would become steady sellers and need to be reprinted. This was a good bet as literacy rates soared in this period among both men and women. Here is a brief description of some of the prominent writers of the period.

William Hill Brown (1765 -1793) was the author of what is usually considered the first American novel, *The Power of Sympathy* (1789) and *Harriot*, Or *The Domestick Reconciliation* as well as the serial essay *The Reformer* published in Isaiah Thomas' Massachusetts Magazine. In both, Brown proves an extensive knowledge of European literature for example of *Clarissa* by Samuel Richardson but tries to lift the American literature from the British corpus by the choice of an American setting. Brown's novel depicts a tragic love story between siblings who fell in love without knowing they were related. This epistolary novel belongs to the Sentimental novel tradition, as do the two following.

Susanna Rowson (1762 -1824) was the author of the 1791 novel *Charlotte Temple*, the most popular best-seller in American literature until Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published in 1852.

Hannah Webster Foster (1758 -1840) wrote an epistolary novel, *The Coquette*; or, *The History of Eliza Wharton*, published anonymously in 1797. *The Coquette* is praised for its demonstration of this era's contradictory ideals of womanhood. In 1798, she published *The Boarding School*; or, *Lessons of a Preceptress to Her Pupils*, a commentary on female education in the United States.

Both The Coquette and The Charlotte Temple are novels that treat the right of women to live as equals as the new democratic experiment. These novels are of the Sentimental genre, characterized by over indulgence in emotion, an invitation to listen to the voice of reason against misleading passions, as well as an optimistic overemphasis on the essential goodness of humanity. Sentimentalism is often thought to be a reaction against the Calvinistic belief in the depravity of human nature.

Charles Brockden Brown (1771 -1810) is generally regarded by scholars as the most important American novelist before James Fenimore Cooper. He is the most

frequently studied and republished practitioner of the 'Early American novel,' or the 'US Novel' between 1789 and roughly 1820. Although Brown was not the first American novelist, the breadth and complexity of his achievement as a writer in multiple genres (novels, short stories, essays and periodical writings of every sort, poetry, historiography, reviews) makes him a crucial figure in US literature and culture of the 1790s and first decade of the 19th century, and a significant public intellectual in the wider Atlantic print culture and public sphere of the era of the French Revolution. He published *Wieland* in 1798, and in 1799 published *Ormond, Edgar Huntly,* and *Arthur Mervyn*. These novels are of the Gothic genre.

Brown developed a widespread and influential reputation as a 'writer's writer.' His novels were the first American novels translated into other European languages. The most important group of writers influenced by Brown during this period was the Godwin-Shelley circle, but Brown was read and recommended by many other major British writers of this era, notably William Hazlitt, Thomas Love Peacock, John Keats, and Walter Scott. Among American writers, Margaret Fuller, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and John Greenleaf Whittier were notable in regarding Brown as a particularly influential and significant predecessor.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Brown is widely acknowledged as a key figure in American literary history whose writings provide insight into the major ideological, intellectual, and artistic struggles and transformations of the Atlantic revolutionary era, even if not as aesthetically rewarding as core works of the traditional American literary canon. Joyce Carol Oates calls Brown "the first American novelist of substance".

Washington Irving (1783 -1859) was best known for his short stories *Rip Van Winkle* (1819) and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1820), both of which appear in his book *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon*, Gent. His historical works include biographies of George Washington, Oliver Goldsmith and Muhammad, and several histories of 15th-century Spain dealing with subjects such as Christopher Columbus, the Moors and the Alhambra.

Irving encouraged American authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Edgar Allan Poe. Irving was also admired by some European writers, including Walter Scott, Lord Byron, Thomas Campbell, Francis Jeffrey, and Charles Dickens. As America's first genuine internationally best-selling author, Irving advocated for writing as a legitimate profession, and argued for stronger laws to protect American writers from copyright infringement.

Irving is largely credited as the first American Man of Letters, and the first to earn his living solely by his pen. Eulogizing Irving, his friend, the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, acknowledged Irving's role in promoting American literature.

Irving perfected the American short story, and was the first American writer to place his stories firmly in the United States. He is also generally credited as one of the first to write both in the vernacular, and without an obligation to the moral or didactic in his short stories, writing stories simply to entertain rather than to enlighten. Irving also encouraged would-be writers.

Irving popularized the nickname ‘Gotham’ for New York City, later used in Batman comics and movies as the name of ‘Gotham City’, and is credited with inventing the expression "*the almighty dollar*".

One of Irving's most lasting contributions to American culture is in the way Americans perceive and celebrate Christmas. In his 1812 revisions to *A History of New York*, Irving inserted a dream sequence featuring St. Nicholas soaring over treetops in a flying wagon-a creation others would later dress up as Santa Claus. In his five Christmas stories in *The Sketch Book*, Irving portrayed an idealized celebration of old-fashioned Christmas customs at a quaint English manor that depicted harmonious warm-hearted English Christmas festivities he experienced while staying in Aston Hall, Birmingham, England, that had largely been abandoned. He used text from *The Vindication of Christmas* (London 1652) of old English Christmas traditions, he had transcribed into his journal as a format for his stories. The book contributed to the revival and reinterpretation of the Christmas holiday in the United States.

William Gilmore Simms (1806 -1870) was a poet, novelist and historian

from the American South. His writings achieved great prominence during the 19th century, with Edgar Allan Poe pronouncing him the best novelist America had ever produced. He is still known among literary scholars as a major force in antebellum Southern literature. He is also remembered for his strong support of slavery and for his opposition to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in response to which he wrote reviews and a pro-slavery novel.

Lydia Maria Francis Child (1802 -1880), was an American abolitionist, women's rights activist, Native American rights activist, novelist, journalist, and opponent of American expansionism. Her journals, both fiction and domestic manuals reached wide audiences from the 1820s through the 1850s. At times she shocked her audience as she tried to take on issues of both male dominance and white supremacy in some of her stories. She wrote *Hobomok* in 1824 and *The Rebels* in 1825.

John Neal (1793 -1876), was an author and art/literary critic. He was a man of diverse talents and objectives, many of which were pioneering in his day. For example, he is credited as being the first American author to employ colloquialism in his writing, breaking with more formal traditions in literature. He wrote *Logan, A Family History* in 1822, *Rachel Dyer* in 1828, and *The Down-Eaters* in 1833.

Catharine Maria Sedgwick (1789 -1867), was an American novelist of what is sometimes referred to as 'domestic fiction'. She promoted Republican motherhood. She wrote *A New England Tale* in 1822, *Redwood* in 1824, *Hope Leslie* in 1827, and *The Linwoods* in 1835.

James Fenimore Cooper (1789 -1851) was a prolific and popular American writer of the early 19th century. His historical romances of frontier and Indian life in the early American days created a unique form of American literature. He was best known for his novel, *The Last of the Mohicans* written in 1826.

2.5 AMERICAN RENAISSANCE: UNIQUE AMERICAN STYLE

The War of 1812 was a military conflict fought between the United States of America and the United Kingdom, its North American colonies, and its North American Indian allies. With the War of 1812 and an increasing desire to produce uniquely

American literature and culture, a number of key new literary figures emerged, perhaps most prominently Washington Irving, William Cullen Bryant, James Fenimore Cooper, and Edgar Allan Poe. Bryant wrote early romantic and nature-inspired poetry, which evolved away from their European origins. The period in American Literature from about 1830 to around the Civil War is termed as 'American Renaissance', which is a central term in American studies. It was for awhile considered synonymous with 'American Romanticism' and was closely associated with 'Transcendentalism'. The thematic center of the American Renaissance was the "devotion" of all the writers to "the possibilities of democracy." Often considered a movement centered in New England, 'the American Renaissance' was inspired in part by a new focus on 'Humanism' as a way to move from 'Calvinism'. Literary nationalists at this time were calling for a movement that would develop a unique American literary style to distinguish American literature from British literature.

Edgar Allan Poe (1809 -1849) was best known for his poetry and short stories, particularly his tales of mystery and the macabre. He is widely regarded as a central figure of Romanticism in the United States and American literature as a whole, and he was one of the country's earliest practitioners of the short story. Poe is generally considered the inventor of the 'detective fiction' genre and is further credited with contributing to the emerging genre of 'science fiction'. He was the first well-known American writer to try to earn a living through writing alone, resulting in a financially difficult life and career. In 1832, Poe began writing short stories - including *The Masque of the Red Death*, *The Pit and the Pendulum*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, and *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* - that explore previously hidden levels of human psychology and push the boundaries of fiction toward mystery and fantasy.

Poe's best known fiction works are Gothic, a genre that he followed to appease the public taste. His most recurring themes deal with questions of death, including its physical signs, the effects of decomposition, concerns of premature burial, the reanimation of the dead, and mourning. Many of his works are generally considered part of the dark romanticism genre, a literary reaction to transcendentalism which Poe strongly disliked. Poe also reinvented science fiction, responding in his writing to emerging technologies such as hot air balloons in *The Balloon-Hoax*.

Poe's early detective fiction tales featuring C. Auguste Dupin laid the groundwork for future detectives in literature. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle said, "*Each of Poe's detective stories is a root from which a whole literature has developed*". Poe's work also influenced science fiction, notably Jules Verne, who wrote a sequel to Poe's novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket called An Antarctic Mystery*, also known as *The Sphinx of the Ice Fields*. Science fiction author H. G. Wells noted, "Pym tells what a very intelligent mind could imagine about the south polar region a century ago".

Poe's writing reflects his literary theories, which he presented in his criticism and also in essays such as The Poetic Principle. He disliked didacticism and allegory, though he believed that meaning in literature should be an undercurrent just beneath the surface. Works with obvious meanings, he wrote, cease to be art. He believed that work of quality should be brief and focus on a specific single effect. To that end, he believed that the writer should carefully calculate every sentiment and idea.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 -1882), known professionally as Waldo Emerson led the Transcendentalist movement of the mid-19th century. He was seen as a champion of individualism and a prescient critic of the countervailing pressures of society.

Emerson gradually moved away from the religious and social beliefs of his contemporaries, formulating and expressing the philosophy of Transcendentalism in his 1836 essay, *Nature*. Following this ground-breaking work, he gave a speech entitled '*The American Scholar*' in 1837, which Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. considered to be America's "*Intellectual Declaration of Independence*".

Emerson wrote most of his important essays as lectures first, then revised them for print. His first two collections of essays *Essays: First Series* and *Essays: Second Series*, published respectively in 1841 and 1844-represent the core of his thinking, and include such well-known essays as *Self-Reliance*, *The Over-Soul*, *Circles*, *The Poet* and *Experience*. Together with *Nature*, these essays made the decade from the mid-1830s to the mid-1840s Emerson's most fertile period.

Emerson wrote on a number of subjects, never espousing fixed philosophical tenets, but developing certain ideas such as individuality, freedom, the ability for humankind to realize almost anything, and the relationship between the soul and the surrounding world. Emerson's "nature" was more philosophical than naturalistic: ‘Philosophically considered, the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul’. Emerson is one of several figures who took a more pantheist or pandeist approach by rejecting views of God as separate from the world.

He remains among the linchpins of the American Romantic Movement, and his work has greatly influenced the thinkers, writers and poets that have followed him. When asked to sum up his work, he said his central doctrine was "the infinitude of the private man". Emerson is also well known as a mentor and friend of fellow Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau.

Emerson was introduced to Indian philosophy when reading the works of French philosopher Victor Cousin. In 1845, Emerson's journals show he was reading the *Bhagavad Gita* and Henry Thomas Colebrooke's *Essays on the Vedas*. Emerson was strongly influenced by *Vedanta*, and much of his writing has strong shades of nondualism. One of the clearest examples of this can be found in his essay *The Over-soul*.

As a lecturer and orator, Emerson-nicknamed the Concord Sage-became the leading voice of intellectual culture in the United States. James Russell Lowell, editor of the Atlantic Monthly and the North American Review, commented in his book *My Study Windows* (1871), that Emerson was not only the "most steadily attractive lecturer in America,*" but also* "one of the pioneers of the lecturing system." Theodore Parker, a minister and Transcendentalist, noted Emerson's ability to influence and inspire others.

Emerson's work not only influenced his contemporaries, such as Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau, but would continue to influence thinkers and writers in the United States and around the world down to the present.

Henry David Thoreau (1817 - 1862) was a leading transcendentalist. Thoreau

is best known for his book *Walden*, a reflection upon simple living in natural surroundings, and his essay *Resistance to Civil Government* (also known as *Civil Disobedience*), an argument for disobedience to an unjust state. His literary style interweaves close natural observation, personal experience, pointed rhetoric, symbolic meanings, and historical lore, while displaying a poetic sensibility, philosophical austerity, and 'Yankee' love of practical detail. He was also deeply interested in the idea of survival in the face of hostile elements, historical change, and natural decay; at the same time he advocated abandoning waste and illusion in order to discover life's true essential needs.

He was a lifelong abolitionist, delivering lectures that attacked the 'Fugitive Slave Law' while praising the writings of Wendell Phillips and defending abolitionist John Brown. Thoreau's philosophy of civil disobedience later influenced the political thoughts and actions of such notable figures as Leo Tolstoy, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Thoreau was influenced by Indian spiritual thought. In Walden, there are many overt references to the sacred texts of India. An Encyclopedia classes him as one of several figures who "took a more pantheist or pandeist approach by rejecting views of God as separate from the world", also a characteristic of Hinduism.

Furthermore, in *The Pond in Winter*, he equates Walden Pond with the sacred Ganges River. Additionally, Thoreau followed various Hindu customs, including following a diet of rice, flute playing (reminiscent of the favorite musical pastime of Krishna), and yoga.

Thoreau's writings went on to influence many public figures. Political leaders and reformers like Mohandas Gandhi, U.S. President John F. Kennedy, American civil rights activist Martin Luther King, Jr., U.S. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, and Russian author Leo Tolstoy all spoke of being strongly affected by Thoreau's work, particularly *Civil Disobedience*.

Thoreau also influenced many artists and authors including William Butler Yeats, Sinclair Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, Upton Sinclair, E. B. White, Lewis

Mumford, and Gustav Stickley. Thoreau also influenced naturalists like John Burroughs, John Muir, E. O. Wilson, B. F. Skinner, David Brower and Loren Eiseley, whom Publishers Weekly called "*The modern Thoreau*." English writer Henry Stephens Salt wrote a biography of Thoreau in 1890, which popularized Thoreau's ideas in Britain: George Bernard Shaw, Edward Carpenter and Robert Blatchford were among those who became Thoreau enthusiasts as a result of Salt's advocacy. Mohandas Gandhi first read *Walden* in 1906 while working as a civil rights activist in Johannesburg, South Africa. He first read *Civil Disobedience*. The essay galvanized Gandhi, who wrote and published a synopsis of Thoreau's argument, referring to Thoreau as "one of the greatest and most moral men America has produced".

Martin Luther King, Jr. noted in his autobiography that his first encounter with the idea of nonviolent resistance was on reading *Civil Disobedience* in 1944 while attending Morehouse College. American psychologist B. F. Skinner wrote that he carried a copy of Thoreau's *Walden* with him in his youth.

The political conflict surrounding abolitionism inspired the writings of William Lloyd Garrison and his paper *The Liberator*, along with poet John Greenleaf Whittier and Harriet Beecher Stowe in her world-famous *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. These efforts were supported by the continuation of the slave narrative autobiography, of which the best known examples from this period include Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, *an American Slave*, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896): *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; *or*, *Life Among the Lowly*, is an anti-slavery novel by American author Harriet Beecher Stowe. Published in 1852, the novel "helped lay the groundwork for the Civil War", according to Will Kaufman.

Stowe featured the character of Uncle Tom, a long-suffering black slave around whom the stories of other characters revolve. The sentimental novel depicts the reality of slavery while also asserting that Christian love can overcome something as destructive as enslavement of fellow human beings.

Uncle Tom's Cabin was the best-selling novel of the 19th century and the second best-selling book of that century, following the Bible. It is credited with helping fuel the abolitionist cause in the 1850s. In 1855, three years after it was published, it was called "the most popular novel of our day." The book and the plays it inspired helped popularize a number of stereotypes about black people. These include the affectionate, dark-skinned "mammy"; the "pickaninny" stereotype of black children; and the "Uncle Tom", or dutiful, long-suffering servant faithful to his white master or mistress.

Uncle Tom's Cabin has exerted an influence equaled by few other novels in history. Upon publication, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* ignited a firestorm of protest from defenders of slavery (who created a number of books in response to the novel) while the book elicited praise from abolitionists. As a best-seller, the novel heavily influenced later protest literature.

By 1857, the novel had been translated into 20 languages. The book was so widely read that Sigmund Freud reported a number of patients with sado-masochistic tendencies who he believed had been influenced by reading about the whipping of slaves in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

As the first widely read political novel in the United States, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* greatly influenced development of not only American literature but also protest literature in general.

Feminist theory can also be seen at play in Stowe's book, with the novel as a critique of the patriarchal nature of slavery. For Stowe, blood relations rather than paternalistic relations between masters and slaves formed the basis of families. Moreover, Stowe viewed national solidarity as an extension of a person's family, thus feelings of nationality stemmed from possessing a shared race. Consequently, she advocated African colonization for freed slaves and not amalgamation into American society.

The book has also been seen as an attempt to redefine masculinity as a necessary step toward the abolition of slavery. In this view, abolitionists had begun to resist the vision of aggressive and dominant men that the conquest and colonization of the

early 19th century had fostered. In order to change the notion of manhood so that men could oppose slavery without jeopardizing their self-image or their standing in society, some abolitionists drew on principles of women's suffrage and Christianity as well as passivism, and praised men for cooperation, compassion, and civic spirit. Others within the abolitionist movement argued for conventional, aggressive masculine action. All the men in Stowe's novel are representations of either one kind of man or the other.

Modern scholars and readers have criticized the book for what are seen as condescending racist descriptions of the book's black characters, especially with regard to the characters' appearances, speech, and behavior, as well as the passive nature of Uncle Tom in accepting his fate. The novel's creation and use of common stereotypes about African Americans is significant because *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the best-selling novel in the world during the 19th century. As a result, the book played a major role in permanently ingraining these stereotypes into the American psyche.

The negative associations have to a large degree overshadowed the historical impact of Uncle Tom's Cabin as a "vital antislavery tool". The beginning of this change in the novel's perception had its roots in an essay by James Baldwin titled *Everybody's Protest Novel*. In the essay, Baldwin called *Uncle Tom's Cabin* a "very bad novel" which was also racially obtuse and aesthetically crude. In the 1960s and 1970s, the 'Black Power' and 'Black Arts Movements' attacked the novel, saying that the character of Uncle Tom engaged in "*race betrayal*", and that Tom made slaves out to be worse than slave owners. Criticisms of the other stereotypes in the book also increased during this time. In recent years, however, scholars such as Henry Louis Gates Jr. have begun to re-examine *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, stating that the book is a "central document in American race relations and a significant moral and political exploration of the character of those relations".

In response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, writers in the Southern United States produced a number of books to rebut Stowe's novel. This so-called Anti-Tom literature generally took a pro-slavery viewpoint, arguing that the issues of slavery as depicted in Stowe's book were overblown and incorrect. The novels in this genre tended to

feature a benign white patriarchal master and a pure wife, both of whom presided over childlike slaves in a benevolent extended family style plantation. The novels either implied or directly stated that African Americans were a childlike people unable to live their lives without being directly overseen by white people.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804 -1864) was an American novelist, 'Dark Romantic', and short story writer. He published several short stories in periodicals, which he collected in 1837 as *Twice-Told Tales*. *The Scarlet Letter* was published in 1850, followed by a succession of other novels.

His fiction works are considered part of the Romantic Movement and, more specifically, Dark romanticism. His themes often center on the inherent evil and sin of humanity, and his works often have moral messages and deep psychological complexity.

Many of his works are inspired by Puritan New England, combining historical romance loaded with symbolism and deep psychological themes, bordering on surrealism. His depictions of the past are a version of historical fiction used only as a vehicle to express common themes of ancestral sin, guilt and retribution. His later writings also reflect his negative view of the Transcendentalism movement.

Hawthorne defined a romance as being radically different from a novel by not being concerned with the possible or probable course of ordinary experience.

Critics have applied feminist perspectives and historicist approaches to Hawthorne's depictions of women. Contemporary response to Hawthorne's work praised his sentimentality and moral purity while more modern evaluations focus on the dark psychological complexity. Beginning in the 1950s, critics have focused on symbolism and didacticism.

Herman Melville (1819 -1891) was a novelist, short story writer, and poet of the American Renaissance period best known for *Typee* (1846), a romantic account of his experiences in Polynesian life, and his whaling novel *Moby-Dick* (1851). His writing draws on his experience at sea as a common sailor, exploration of literature and philosophy, and engagement in the contradictions of American society in a period of rapid change. He developed a complex, baroque style: the vocabulary is rich and

original, a strong sense of rhythm infuses the elaborate sentences, the imagery is often mystical or ironic, and the abundance of allusion extends to Scripture, myth, philosophy, literature, and the visual arts.

Melville, says recent literary critic Lawrence Buell, "is justly said to be nineteenth-century America's leading poet after Whitman and Dickinson." Some critics now place him as the first modernist poet in the United States; others assert that his work more strongly suggests what today would be a postmodern view.

Melville's writings did not attract the attention of women's studies scholars of the 1970s and 1980s, though his preference for sea-going tales that involved almost only males has since then been of interest to scholars in men's studies and especially gay and queer studies. Melville was remarkably open in his exploration of sexuality of all sorts. Rosenberg says that Melville fully explores the theme of sexuality in his major epic poem, *Clarel*. In the course of the poem, "he considers every form of sexual orientation - celibacy, homosexuality, hedonism, and heterosexuality - raising the same kinds of questions as when he considers Islam or Democracy".

2.6 EARLY AMERICAN POETRY

'The Fireside Poets' (also known as the 'Schoolroom' or 'Household Poets') were some of America's first major poets domestically and internationally. They were known for their poems being easy to memorize due to their general adherence to poetic form (standard forms, regular meter, and rhymed stanzas) and were often recited in the home (hence the name) as well as in school, as well as working with distinctly American themes, including some political issues such as abolition. They included Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, William Cullen Bryant, John Greenleaf Whittier, James Russell Lowell, and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.. Longfellow achieved the highest level of acclaim and is often considered the first internationally acclaimed American poet, being the first American poet given a bust in Westminster Abbey's Poets' Corner.

Walter "Walt" Whitman (1819-1892) was a part of the transition between transcendentalism and realism, incorporating both views in his works. Whitman is

among the most influential poets in the American canon, often called the father of 'free verse'. His work was very controversial in its time, particularly his poetry collection 'Leaves of Grass', which was described as obscene for its overt sexuality.

Whitman's major work, *Leaves of Grass*, was first published in 1855 with his own money. The work was an attempt at reaching out to the common person with an American epic.

Whitman's work breaks the boundaries of poetic form and is generally prose-like. He also used unusual images and symbols in his poetry, including rotting leaves, tufts of straw, and debris. He also openly wrote about death and sexuality, including prostitution. He is often labeled as the father of free verse, though he did not invent it.

Whitman believed there was a vital, symbiotic relationship between the poet and society. *Leaves of Grass* also responded to the impact that recent urbanization in the United States had on the masses. Walt Whitman has been claimed as America's first '*Poet of Democracy*', a title meant to reflect his ability to write in a singularly American character. Modernist poet Ezra Pound called Whitman "America's poet... He is America."

In his own time, Whitman attracted an influential coterie of disciples and admirers. Some, like Oscar Wilde and Edward Carpenter, viewed Whitman both as a prophet of a utopian future and of same-sex desire - the passion of comrades. This aligned with their own desires for a future of brotherly socialism. Whitman also influenced Bram Stoker, author of *Dracula*, and was the model for the character of Dracula.

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson (1830 -1886) was a prolific private poet, fewer than a dozen of her nearly 1,800 poems were published during her lifetime. The work that was published during her lifetime was usually altered significantly by the publishers to fit the conventional poetic rules of the time. Dickinson's poems are unique for the era in which she wrote; they contain short lines, typically lack titles, and often use slant rhyme as well as unconventional capitalization and punctuation. Many of her

poems deal with themes of death and immortality, two recurring topics in letters to her friends.

A young attorney by the name of Benjamin Franklin Newton introduced her to the writings of William Wordsworth, and his gift to her of Ralph Waldo Emerson's first book of collected poems had a liberating effect.

Dickinson was familiar not only with the Bible but also with contemporary popular literature. She was probably influenced by Lydia Maria Child's *Letters from New York*, another gift from Newton and a friend lent her Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* in late 1849. William Shakespeare was also a potent influence in her life.

Emily Dickinson is now considered a powerful and persistent figure in American culture. Although much of the early reception concentrated on Dickinson's eccentric and secluded nature, she has become widely acknowledged as an innovative, pre-modernist poet. Twentieth-century critic Harold Bloom has placed her alongside Walt Whitman, Wallace Stevens, Robert Frost, T. S. Eliot, and Hart Crane as a major American poet, and in 1994 listed her among the 26 central writers of Western civilization.

2.7 REALISM, TWAIN AND JAMES

Literary 'Realism' is part of the realist art movement beginning with mid nineteenth-century French literature (Stendhal), and Russian literature (Alexander Pushkin) and extending to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Literary 'Realism', in contrast to 'Idealism', attempts to represent familiar things as they are. Realist authors chose to depict everyday and banal activities and experiences, instead of using a romanticized or similarly stylized presentation. Literary critic Ian Watt, however, dates the origins of realism in United Kingdom to the early 18th-century novel. Subsequent related developments in the arts are naturalism, social realism, and in the 1930s, socialist realism.

William Dean Howells (1837-1920) was the first American author to bring a realist aesthetic to the literature of the United States. His stories of middle and upper class life set in the 1880s and 1890s are highly regarded among scholars of

American fiction. His most popular novel, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885), depicts a man who, ironically, falls from materialistic fortune by his own mistakes.

Stephen Crane (1871 -1900) wrote notable works in the Realist tradition as well as early examples of 'American Naturalism' and 'Impressionism'. He is recognized by modern critics as one of the most innovative writers of his generation. Beginning with the publication of *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* in 1893, Crane was recognized by critics mainly as a novelist. The main character, Maggie, descends into prostitution after being led astray by her lover. Although the novel's plot is simple, its dramatic mood, quick pace and portrayal of Bowery life have made it memorable. Maggie is not merely an account of slum life, but also represents eternal symbols. In his first draft, Crane did not give his characters proper names. Instead, they were identified by epithets: Maggie, for example, was the girl who "blossomed in a mud-puddle" and Pete, her seducer, was a "knight". The novel is dominated by bitter irony and anger, as well as destructive morality and treacherous sentiment. Critics would later call the novel "the first dark flower of American Naturalism" for its distinctive elements of naturalistic fiction. *The Red Badge of Courage* was innovative stylistically as well as psychologically. Often described as a war novel, it focuses less on battle and more on the main character's psyche and his reactions and responses in war. Since the resurgence of Crane's popularity in the 1920s, *The Red Badge of Courage* has been deemed a major American text. The novel has been anthologized numerous times, including in Ernest Hemingway's 1942 collection *Men at War: The Best War Stories of All Time*.

Horatio Alger, Jr. (1832 - 1899) was a prolific 19th-century American author whose principal output was formulaic rags-to-riches juvenile novels that followed the adventures of bootblacks, newsboys, peddlers, buskers, and other impoverished children in their rise from humble backgrounds to lives of respectable middle-class security and comfort. His novels, of which *Ragged Dick* is a typical example, were hugely popular in their day. Alger scholar Gary Scharnhorst describes Alger's style as "anachronistic", "often laughable", "distinctive", and "distinguished by the quality of its literary allusions". Ranging from the Bible and William Shakespeare (half of Alger's books contain Shakespearean references) to John Milton and Cicero, the allusions he

employed were a testament to his erudition. Scharnhorst credits these allusions for distinguishing Alger's novels from pulp fiction.

Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835 -1910), better known by his pen name Mark Twain, was an American author and humorist. Among his writings are *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and its sequel, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), the latter often called 'The Great American Novel'. He was lauded as the "greatest American humorist of his age", and William Faulkner called Twain "the father of American literature".

Twain began his career writing light, humorous verse, but evolved into a chronicler of the vanities, hypocrisies and murderous acts of mankind. At mid-career, with Huckleberry Finn, he combined rich humor, sturdy narrative and social criticism. Twain was a master at rendering colloquial speech and helped to create and popularize a distinctive American literature built on American themes and language.

Twain's style - influenced by journalism, wedded to the vernacular, direct and unadorned but also highly evocative and irreverently humorous - changed the way Americans write their language. His characters speak like real people and sound distinctively American, using local dialects, newly invented words, and regional accents. For Twain and other American writers of the late 19th century, realism was not merely a literary technique: It was a way of speaking truth and exploding worn-out conventions.

Henry James (1843 -1916) is regarded as one of the key figures of 19th-century literary realism. He is best known for a number of novels showing Americans encountering Europe and Europeans. His method of writing from a character's point of view allowed him to explore issues related to consciousness and perception, and his style in later works has been compared to impressionist painting. His imaginative use of point of view, interior monologue and unreliable narrators brought a new depth to narrative fiction.

James contributed significantly to literary criticism, particularly in his insistence that writers be allowed the greatest possible freedom in presenting their view of the

world. James claimed that a text must first and foremost be realistic and contain a representation of life that is recognizable to its readers. Good novels, to James, show life in action and are, most importantly, interesting.

In addition to his voluminous works of fiction he published articles and books of travel, biography, autobiography, and criticism, and wrote plays.

In its intense focus on the consciousness of his major characters, James's later work foreshadows extensive developments in 20th century fiction. Indeed, he might have influenced 'stream-of-consciousness' writers such as Virginia Woolf, who not only read some of his novels but also wrote essays about them.

One would be in a position to appreciate James better if one compared him with the dramatists of the seventeenth century-Racine and Molière, whom he resembles in form as well as in point of view, and even Shakespeare, when allowances are made for the most extreme differences in subject and form.

It is also possible to see many of James's stories as psychological thought-experiments. *The Portrait of a Lady* may be an experiment to see what happens when an idealistic young woman suddenly becomes very rich. James is now valued for his psychological and moral realism, his masterful creation of character, his low-key but playful humor, and his assured command of the language.

William Dean Howells saw James as a representative of a new realist school of literary art which broke with the English romantic tradition epitomized by the works of Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray. Realism also influenced American drama of the period, in part through the works of Howells but also through the works of such Europeans as Ibsen and Zola. Although realism was most influential in terms of set design and staging-audiences loved the special effects offered up by the popular melodramas-and in the growth of local color plays, it also showed up in the more subdued, less romantic tone that reflected the effects of the Civil War and continued social turmoil on the American psyche.

2.8 LET US SUM UP

There was a wave of literary nationalism in America for much of the 1820s that saw writers such as Washington Irving, William Cullen Bryant, and James Fenimore Cooper become the identity of writers worthy of American literature. Authors during this period are seen as taking styles and ideas from past movements and culture and reforming them into new, contemporary works. Most often associated with the American Renaissance movement are Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Representative Men* and *Self-Reliance*, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of Seven Gables*, Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Henry David Thoreau's Walden, and Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* was, in fact, the match that lit all of the creative fires of their time.

2.9 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Who is credited with giving us the phrase "all men are created equal"?
   - (A) George Orwell
   - (B) Old Major
   - (C) Jefferson
   - (D) Thomas Paine
2. The first American novel, *The Power of Sympathy* is an example of:
   - (A) Picaresque novel
   - (B) Epistolary novel
   - (C) Fantasy novel
   - (D) Adventure novel
3. The novels Wieland, Ormond, Edgar Huntly, and Arthur Mervyn are of:
   - (A) Gothic genre
   - (B) Graphic genre
   - (C) Bildungsromans genre

(D) Speculative fiction novel

4. Who of the following popularized the nickname "Gotham" for New York City is credited with inventing the expression "the almighty dollar"?

(A) Jefferson

(B) George Washington

(C) Abraham Lincoln

(D) Irving

5. Which of the following is considered America's "Intellectual Declaration of Independence"?

(A) The Over soul

(B) Self Reliance

(C) The American Scholar

(D) Nature

6. Which American writer's work more strongly suggests what today would be a postmodern view?

(A) Henry Melville

(B) Walt Whitman

(C) Emily Dickinson

(D) Hawthorne

7. What was strange about Emily Dickinson?

(A) She rarely left home

(B) She wrote in code

(C) She never attempted to publish her poetry

(D) She wrote her poems in invisible ink

8. Which thinker had a major impact on early-twentieth-century writers, leading them to re-imagine human identity in radically new ways?

(A) Sigmund Freud

(B) Sir James Frazer

(C) Friedrich Nietzsche

(D) All of these

2.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. What were Jefferson's views regarding Blacks and the institution of Slavery?
2. Estimate the position of Charles Brockden Brown in American literary history.
3. Write a note on Irving's contributions to American culture.
4. Write an essay on the abolitionists, women's rights activists of the Post War America.
5. Write a note on literary influences on Henry James.
6. For the American writers of the late 19th century, realism was not merely a literary technique: It was a way of speaking truth and exploding worn-out conventions. Elaborate.
7. What literary influences molded Emily Dickinson as an innovative, pre-modernist poet?
8. Write a note on Uncle Tom's Cabin as a "central document in American race relations".
9. How does Indian philosophy form as intellectual background to the works of Emerson and Thoreau?

2.11 ANSWER KEY : 1. (C); 2. (B); 3. (A); 4. (D); 5 (C); 6. (A); 7 (A); 8. (D)

2.12 SUGGESTED READING

1. E. H. Emerson, ed., Major Writers of Early American Literature (1972)
2. R. W. B. Lewis, American Literature: The Makers and the Making (1973)

3. R. E. Spiller et al., ed., Literary History of the United States (4th ed., rev., 1974)

4. E. Elliott et al., ed., Columbia Literary History of the United States (1988) and The Columbia History of the American Novel (1991)

5. G. Marcus and W. Sollors, ed., A New Literary History of America (2009)

6. E. Whitley, American Bards (2010)

7. P. J. Barrish, The Cambridge Introduction to American Literary Realism (2011)

8. R. Fuller, From Battlefields Rising: How the Civil War Transformed American Literature (2011)

9. M. Graham and J. W. Ward, Jr., ed., The Cambridge History of African American Literature (2011)

EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Introduction

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3.1 INTRODUCTION

From the late 19th to the early 20th centuries, the United States experienced enormous industrial, economic, social and cultural change. A continuous wave of European immigration and the rising potential for international trade brought increasing growth and prosperity to America. Through art and artistic expression (through all mediums including painting, literature and music), American Realism attempted to portray the exhaustion and cultural exuberance of the figurative American landscape and the life of ordinary Americans at home. Artists used the feelings, textures and sounds of the city to influence the color, texture and look of their creative projects. Writers and authors told a new story about Americans; boys and girls real Americans could have grown up with. Pulling away from fantasy and focusing on the now, American Realism presented a new gateway and a breakthrough-introducing modernism, and what it means to be in the present. At the beginning of the 20th century, American novelists were expanding fiction's social spectrum to encompass both high and low life and sometimes connected to the naturalist school of realism.

American modernism is a trend of philosophical thought arising from the widespread changes in culture and society in the age of modernity. American modernism is an artistic and cultural movement in the United States beginning at the turn of the 20th century, with a core period between World War I and World War II. Like its European counterpart, American modernism stemmed from a rejection of Enlightenment thinking, seeking to better represent reality in a new, more industrialized world.

3.2 OBJECTIVES

In this lesson we shall study the literary and intellectual background of the first half of the twentieth century America in the light of American Realism and Modernism.

3.3 EARLY INFLUENCES

3.3.1 Naturalism

Naturalism was a mainly unorganized literary movement that sought to depict

believable everyday reality, as opposed to such movements as Romanticism or Surrealism, in which subjects may receive highly symbolic, idealistic or even supernatural treatment. Naturalism was an outgrowth of literary realism, a prominent literary movement in mid-19th-century France and elsewhere. Naturalistic writers were influenced by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. They often believed that one's heredity and social environment largely determine one's character. Whereas realism seeks only to describe subjects as they really are, naturalism also attempts to determine scientifically the underlying forces (e.g. the environment or heredity) influencing the actions of its subjects. Naturalistic works often include uncouth or sordid subject matter. Naturalistic works exposed the dark harshness of life, including poverty, racism, violence, prejudice, disease, corruption, prostitution, and filth. As a result, naturalistic writers were frequently criticized for focusing too much on human vice and misery.

3.3.2 Impressionism

Impressionistic literature can be defined as a work created by an author that centers on the thinking and feelings of the characters and allows the reader to draw his or her own interpretations and conclusions about their meaning. In literature, impressionist writers exhibit some or all of these characteristics:

(i) They use a narrative style that is intentionally ambiguous, placing more responsibility on the reader to form his or her own conclusions about events within the novel, rather than relying on the narrator.

(ii) They often describe the action through the eyes of the character while the events are occurring, rather than providing details after the character has already processed the action. The result is sometimes like being in an accident - where everything appears to be moving in slow motion. All of the details seem unclear.

(iii) They are concerned with the emotional landscape of the setting. They're interested in the ways the setting evokes certain emotional responses from both the characters and the reader.

(iv) They employ details in such a way that it is sometimes difficult to see a clear picture of events if you focus on the details too closely. Much like an impressionistic painting, it is only possible to get a full picture once you stand back from the novel and view it in its entirety.

(v) They often avoid a chronological telling of events. Instead, they give the reader information in a way that forces them to focus on how and why things happen, rather than on the order in which they occur.

3.3.3 Socialism

Socialism is a range of economic and social systems characterized by social ownership and democratic control of the means of production, as well as the political ideologies, theories, and movements that aim at their establishment. Social ownership may refer to public ownership, cooperative ownership, citizen ownership of equity, or any combination of these. Although there are many varieties of socialism and there is no single definition encapsulating all of them, social ownership is the common element shared by its various forms.

3.3.4 Symbolism

Symbolism was a late nineteenth-century art movement of French, Russian and Belgian origin in poetry and other arts. In literature, the style originates with the 1857 publication of Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*. The works of Edgar Allan Poe, which Baudelaire admired greatly and translated into French, were a significant influence and the source of many stock tropes and images. The aesthetic was developed by Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Verlaine during the 1860s and 1870s. In the 1880s, the aesthetic was articulated by a series of manifestos and attracted a generation of writers. The name 'symbolist' itself was first applied by the critic Jean Moréas, who invented the term to distinguish the symbolists from the related decadents of literature and of art. Distinct from, but related to, the style of literature, symbolism of art is related to the gothic component of Romanticism.

Symbolism was largely a reaction against 'Naturalism' and 'Realism', anti-idealistic styles which were attempts to represent reality in its gritty particularity, and

to elevate the humble and the ordinary over the ideal. Symbolism was a reaction in favour of spirituality, the imagination, and dreams. Some writers, such as Joris-Karl Huysmans, began as naturalists before becoming symbolists; for Huysmans, this change represented his increasing interest in religion and spirituality. Certain of the characteristic subjects of the decadents represent naturalist interest in sexuality and taboo topics, but in their case this was mixed with Byronic romanticism and the world-weariness characteristic of the *fin de siècle* period.

The symbolist poets wished to liberate techniques of versification in order to allow greater room for 'fluidity', and as such were sympathetic with the trend toward 'free verse', as evident in the poems of Gustave Kahn and Ezra Pound. Symbolist poems were attempts to evoke, rather than primarily to describe; symbolic imagery was used to signify the state of the poet's soul. T. S. Eliot was influenced by the poets Jules Laforgue, Paul Valéry and Arthur Rimbaud who used the techniques of the Symbolist school, though it has also been said that 'Imagism' was the style to which both Pound and Eliot subscribed.

3.4 NOVELISTS OF THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

Edith Wharton (1862-1937) combined her insider's view of America's privileged classes with a brilliant, natural wit to write humorous, incisive novels and short stories of social and psychological insight. She was well acquainted with many of her era's other literary and public figures, including Theodore Roosevelt. Many of Wharton's novels are characterized by a subtle use of dramatic irony. Having grown up in upper-class, late-nineteenth-century society, Wharton became one of its most astute critics, in such works as *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*, which was one of her finest books. It centers on a man who chooses to marry a conventional, socially acceptable woman rather than a fascinating outsider.

Theodore Herman Albert Dreiser (1871-1945) belonged to the naturalist school. His novels often featured main characters who succeeded at their objectives despite a lack of a firm moral code, and literary situations that more closely resemble studies of nature than tales of choice and agency. Dreiser's best known novels include *Sister Carrie* (1900) and *An American Tragedy* (1925). Dreiser published his first

novel, *Sister Carrie*, in 1900. Portraying a changing society, he wrote about a young woman who flees rural life for the city (Chicago) and struggles with poverty, complex relationships with men, and prostitution. It sold poorly and was considered controversial because of moral objections to his featuring a country girl who pursues her dreams of fame and fortune through relationships with men. The book has since acquired a considerable reputation. It has been called the "greatest of all American urban novels". Dreiser's first commercial success was *An American Tragedy*, published in 1925. Dreiser was often forced to battle against censorship, because his depiction of some aspects of life, such as sexual promiscuity, offended authorities and challenged popular standards of acceptable opinion. Dreiser was a committed socialist and wrote several nonfiction books on political issues. Dreiser had an enormous influence on the generation that followed his. Renowned mid-century literary critic Irving Howe spoke of Dreiser as "among the American giants, one of the very few American giants we have had".

More directly political writings discussed social issues and power of corporations. Some like Edward Bellamy in Looking Backward outlined other possible political and social frameworks. Upton Sinclair, most famous for his muck-raking novel *The Jungle*, advocated socialism. Other political writers of the period included Edwin Markham, William Vaughn Moody. Journalistic critics, including Ida M. Tarbell and Lincoln Steffens were labeled 'The Muckrakers'. Henry Brooks Adams' literate autobiography, *The Education of Henry Adams* also depicted a stinging description of the education system and modern life.

Race was a common issue as well, as seen in the work of Pauline Hopkins, an African-American woman who published five influential works from 1900 to 1903 discussing racial and sexual inequalities. Similarly, Sui Sin Far wrote about Chinese-American experiences, Maria Cristina Mena wrote about Mexican-American experiences, and Zitkala-Sa wrote about Native American experiences.

3.5 WRITERS OF NINETEEN TWENTIES

The 1920s brought in effervescence of American literature, both in the states

and in Paris and London. Many writers had direct experience of the World War, and used it to frame their writings. Experimentation in style and form soon joined the new freedom in subject matter.

Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) Born in Pennsylvania and raised in California, Stein moved to Paris in 1903, and made France her home for the remainder of her life. She hosted a Paris salon, where the leading figures in modernism in literature and art would meet, such as Pablo Picasso, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sinclair Lewis, Ezra Pound, and Henri Matisse. Her books include *Q.E.D. (Quod Erat Demonstrandum)* (1903), about a lesbian romantic affair involving several of Stein's female friends; *Fernhurst*, a fictional story about a romantic affair; *Three Lives* (1905-06); *The Making of Americans* (1902-1911) and *Tender Buttons*. In the latter work, Stein comments on lesbian sexuality.

Ezra Weston Loomis Pound (1885-1972) was an expatriate American poet and critic, and a major figure in the early modernist movement. His contribution to poetry began with his development of Imagism, a movement derived from classical Chinese and Japanese poetry, stressing clarity, precision and economy of language. His best-known works include *Ripostes* (1912), *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920) and the unfinished 120-section epic, *The Cantos* (1917-69).

Working in London in the early 20th century as foreign editor of several American literary magazines, Pound helped discover and shape the work of American and Irish contemporaries such as T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Robert Frost, and Ernest Hemingway. He arranged for the 1915 publication of Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and the serialization from 1918 of Joyce's *Ulysses*. Hemingway wrote of him in 1925: "He defends his friends when they are attacked, he gets them into magazines and out of jail. ... He introduces them to wealthy women. He gets publishers to take their books. He sits up all night with them when they claim to be dying ... he advances them hospital expenses and dissuades them from suicide".

While living at Church Walk in 1912, Pound, Aldington and Hilda Doolittle started working on ideas about language. While in the British Museum tearoom one

afternoon, they decided to begin a movement in poetry, called ‘Imagism’. Pound would write in *Riposte*, is "concerned solely with language and presentation". The aim was clarity: a fight against abstraction, romanticism, rhetoric, inversion of word order, and over-use of adjectives. They agreed in the spring or early summer of 1912 on three principles:

1. Direct treatment of the "thing" whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in equence of a metronome.

Superfluous words, particularly adjectives, should be avoided, as well as expressions like "dim lands of peace", which Pound thought dulled the image by mixing the abstract with the concrete. He wrote that the natural object was always the "adequate symbol". Poets should "go in fear of abstractions", and should not re-tell in mediocre verse what has already been told in good prose.

A typical example is Pound's *In a Station of the Metro* (1913). He worked on the poem for a year, reducing it to its essence in the style of a Japanese haiku. Like other modernist artists of the period, Pound was inspired by Japanese art, but the aim was to re-make - or as Pound said, "make it new" - and blend cultural styles instead of copying directly or slavishly. He may have been inspired by a Suzuki Harunobu print he almost certainly saw in the British Library (Richard Aldington mentions the specific prints he matched to verse), and probably attempted to write haiku-like verse during this period. *Ripostes*, published in October 1912, begins Pound's shift toward minimalist language. Michael Alexander describes the poems as showing a greater concentration of meaning and economy of rhythm than his earlier work. It was published when Pound had just begun his move toward Imagism.

Drawing on literature from a variety of disciplines, Pound intentionally layered often confusing juxtapositions, yet led the reader to an intended conclusion, believing the "thoughtful man" would apply a sense of organization and uncover the underlying symbolism and structure. Ignoring Victorian and Edwardian grammar and structure,

he created a unique form of speech, employing odd and strange words, jargon, avoiding verbs, and using rhetorical devices such as parataxis.

Pound's relationship to music is essential to his poetry. Although he was tone deaf and his speaking voice is described as "raucous, nasal, scratchy", Michael Ingam writes that Pound is on a short list of poets possessed of a sense of sound, an 'ear' for words, imbuing his poetry with melopoeia. His study of troubadour poetry - words written to be sung - led him to think modern poetry should be written similarly. He wrote that rhythm is "the hardest quality of a man's style to counterfeit". Ingham compares the form of The Cantos to a fugue; without adhering strictly to the traditions of the form, nevertheless multiple themes are explored simultaneously. He goes on to write that Pound's use of counterpoint is integral to the structure and cohesion of *The Cantos*, which show multi-voiced counterpoint and, with the juxtaposition of images, non-linear themes. The pieces are presented in fragments "which taken together, can be seen to unfold in time as music does".

Pound helped advance the careers of some of the best-known modernist writers of the early 20th century. In addition to Eliot, Joyce, Lewis, Frost, Williams, Hemingway and Conrad Aiken, he befriended and helped Marianne Moore, Louis Zukofsky, Jacob Epstein, Basil Bunting, E.E. Cummings, Margaret Anderson, George Oppen, and Charles Olson. Hugh Witemeyer argues that the Imagist movement was the most important in 20th-century English-language poetry because it affected all the leading poets of Pound's generation and the two generations after him. In 1917 Carl Sandburg wrote in Poetry: "All talk on modern poetry, by people who know, ends with dragging in Ezra Pound somewhere. He may be named only to be cursed as wanton and mocker, poseur, trifler and vagrant. Or he may be classed as filling a niche today like that of Keats in a preceding epoch. The point is, he will be mentioned".

Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965), better known by his pen name T. S. Eliot, was an American-born British essayist, publisher, playwright, literary and social critic and one of the twentieth century's major poets. He moved to England in 1914 at age 25, settling, working and marrying there. He was eventually naturalized as a British subject in 1927 at age 39, renouncing his American citizenship.

Eliot attracted widespread attention for his poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1915), which is seen as a masterpiece of the Modernist movement. It was followed by some of the best-known poems in the English language, including *The Waste Land* (1922), *The Hollow Men* (1925), *Ash Wednesday* (1930) and *Four Quartets* (1945). He is also known for his seven plays, particularly *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935). He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948, for his outstanding, pioneer contribution to present-day poetry.

The poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* follows the conscious experience of a man, Prufrock (relayed in the 'stream of consciousness' form characteristic of the Modernists), lamenting his physical and intellectual inertia with the recurrent theme of carnal love unattained. The locations described can be interpreted either as actual physical experiences, mental recollections, or as symbolic images from the unconscious mind, as, for example, in the refrain 'In the room the women come and go'. The poem's structure was heavily influenced by Eliot's extensive reading of Dante and refers to a number of literary works, including Hamlet and those of the French Symbolists.

The poem The Waste Land is known for its obscure nature-its slippage between satire and prophecy; its abrupt changes of speaker, location, and time. This structural complexity is one of the reasons that the poem has become a touchstone of modern literature, a poetic counterpart to a novel published in the same year, James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Among its best-known phrases are 'April is the cruellest month', 'I will show you fear in a handful of dust' and 'Shantih shantih shantih'. The Sanskrit mantra ends the poem.

The Hollow Men is Eliot's major poem of the late 1920s. Similar to Eliot's other works, its themes are overlapping and fragmentary. Allen Tate perceived a shift in Eliot's method, writing that, "The mythologies disappear altogether in The Hollow Men".

With the important exception of *Four Quartets*, Eliot directed much of his creative energies after *Ash Wednesday* to writing plays in verse, mostly comedies or plays with redemptive endings. He was long a critic and admirer of Elizabethan and Jacobean

verse drama; witness his allusions to Webster, Thomas Middleton, William Shakespeare and Thomas Kyd in The Waste Land.

Eliot is considered by some to be one of the greatest literary critics of the twentieth century. In his critical essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, Eliot argues that art must be understood not in a vacuum, but in the context of previous pieces of art. "In a peculiar sense an artist or poet ... must inevitably be judged by the standards of the past." This essay was an important influence over the New Criticism by introducing the idea that the value of a work of art must be viewed in the context of the artist's previous works, a "*simultaneous order*" of works (i.e., 'Tradition'). Eliot himself employed this concept on many of his works, especially on his long-poem *The Waste Land*. Also important to New Criticism was the idea-as articulated in Eliot's essay *Hamlet and His Problems*-of an 'Objective Correlative', which posits a connection among the words of the text and events, states of mind, and experiences. This notion concedes that a poem means what it says, but suggests that there can be a non-subjective judgment based on different readers' different-but perhaps corollary-interpretations of a work.

More generally, New Critics took a cue from Eliot in regard to his classical ideals and his religious thought; his attention to the poetry and drama of the early seventeenth century; his deprecation of the Romantics, especially Shelley; his proposition that good poems constitute "not a turning loose of emotion but an escape from emotion"; and his insistence that "poets... at present must be difficult".

Eliot's essays were a major factor in the revival of interest in the metaphysical poets. Eliot particularly praised the metaphysical poets' ability to show experience as both psychological and sensual, while at the same time infusing this portrayal with-in Eliot's view-wit and uniqueness. Eliot's essay *The Metaphysical Poets*, along with giving new significance and attention to metaphysical poetry, introduced his now well-known definition of 'Unified Sensibility', which is considered by some to mean the same thing as the term 'Metaphysical'.

His 1922 poem *The Waste Land* also can be better understood in light of his work as a critic. He had argued that a poet must write "programmatic criticism", that

is, a poet should write to advance his own interests rather than to advance "*historical scholarship*". Viewed from Eliot's critical lens, *The Waste Land* likely shows his personal despair about World War I rather than an objective historical understanding of it.

Late in his career, Eliot focused much of his creative energy on writing for the theatre, and some of his critical writing, in essays like *Poetry and Drama*, *Hamlet and his Problems*, and *The Possibility of a Poetic Drama*, focused on the aesthetics of writing drama in verse. Eliot additionally influenced, among many others, Virginia Woolf, Ezra Pound, Hart Crane, William Gaddis, Allen Tate, Ted Hughes, Geoffrey Hill, Seamus Heaney, Kamau Brathwaite, Russell Kirk, George Seferis (who in 1936 published a modern Greek translation of *The Waste Land*,) and James Joyce.

Stein, Pound and Eliot, along with Henry James before them, demonstrate the growth of an international perspective in American literature, and not simply because they spend long periods of time overseas. American writers had long looked to European models for inspiration, but whereas the literary breakthroughs of the mid-19th century came from finding distinctly American styles and themes, writers from this period were finding ways of contributing to a flourishing international literary scene, not as imitators but as equals. Something similar was happening back in the States, as Jewish writers (such as Abraham Cahan) used the English language to reach an international Jewish audience.

American writers also expressed the disillusionment following upon the war. The stories and novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) capture the restless, pleasure-hungry, defiant mood of the 1920s. Fitzgerald's characteristic theme, expressed poignantly in *The Great Gatsby*, is the tendency of youth's golden dreams to dissolve in failure and disappointment. Fitzgerald also elucidates the collapse of some key American Ideals, such as liberty, social unity, good governance and peace, features which were severely threatened by the pressures of modern early 20th century society. Sinclair Lewis and Sherwood Anderson also wrote novels with critical depictions of American life. John Dos Passos wrote about the war and also the U.S.A. trilogy which extended into the Depression.

Ernest Miller Hemingway (1899-1961) was an American novelist, short story writer, and journalist. His economical and understated style had a strong influence on 20th-century fiction, while his life of adventure and his public image influenced later generations. Hemingway produced most of his work between the mid-1920s and the mid-1950s. Many of his works are considered classics of American literature.

The New York Times wrote in 1926 of Hemingway's first novel, "*No amount of analysis can convey the quality of The Sun Also Rises. It is a truly gripping story, told in a lean, hard, athletic narrative prose that puts more literary English to shame*". *The Sun Also Rises* is written in the spare, tight prose that made Hemingway famous, and, according to James Nagel, "*changed the nature of American writing*". In 1954, when Hemingway was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, it was for his mastery of the art of narrative, most recently demonstrated in *The Old Man and the Sea*, and for the influence that he has exerted on contemporary style. Paul Smith writes that Hemingway's first stories, collected as In Our Time, showed he was still experimenting with his writing style. He avoided complicated syntax. About seventy percent of the sentences are simple sentences-a childlike syntax without subordination.

Henry Louis Gates believes Hemingway's style was fundamentally shaped "*in reaction to his experience of world war*". After World War I, he and other modernists "*lost faith in the central institutions of Western civilization*" by reacting against the elaborate style of 19th-century writers and by creating a style "*in which meaning is established through dialogue, through action, and silences-a fiction in which nothing crucial-or at least very little-is stated explicitly*".

Developing this connection between Hemingway and other modernist writers, Irene Gammel believes his style was carefully cultivated and honed with an eye toward the ‘avant-garde’ of the era. Hungry for "*vanguard experimentation*" and rebelling against Ford Madox Ford's ‘staid modernism’, Hemingway published the work of Gertrude Stein and Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven in *The Transatlantic Review*. As Gammel notes, Hemingway was introduced to the Baroness's experimental style during a time when he was actively trimming the verbal 'fat' off his own style, as well as flexing his writer's muscles in assaulting conventional taste.

Because he began as a writer of short stories, Baker believes Hemingway learned to get the most from the least, how to prune language, how to multiply intensities and how to tell nothing but the truth in a way that allowed for telling more than the truth. Hemingway called his style the 'Iceberg Theory': the facts float above water; the supporting structure and symbolism operate out of sight. The concept of the iceberg theory is sometimes referred to as the 'Theory of Omission'. Hemingway believed the writer could describe one thing (such as Nick Adams fishing in *The Big Two-Hearted River*) though an entirely different thing occurs below the surface (Nick Adams concentrating on fishing to the extent that he does not have to think about anything else).

Hemingway offers a 'multi-focal' photographic reality. His iceberg theory of omission is the foundation on which he builds. The syntax, which lacks subordinating conjunctions, creates static sentences. The photographic 'snapshot' style creates a collage of images. Many types of internal punctuation (colons, semicolons, dashes, parentheses) are omitted in favor of short declarative sentences. The sentences build on each other, as events build to create a sense of the whole. Multiple strands exist in one story; an 'embedded text' bridges to a different angle. He also uses other cinematic techniques of 'cutting' quickly from one scene to the next; or of 'splicing' a scene into another. Intentional omissions allow the reader to fill the gap, as though responding to instructions from the author, and create three-dimensional prose.

In his literature, and in his personal writing, Hemingway habitually used the word 'and' in place of commas. This use of 'Polysyndeton' may serve to convey immediacy. Hemingway's polysyndetonic sentence-or in later works his use of subordinate clauses-uses conjunctions to juxtapose startling visions and images; Jackson Benson compares them to haikus. Many of Hemingway's followers misinterpreted his lead and frowned upon all expression of emotion; Saul Bellow satirized this style as "Do you have emotions? Strangle them." However, Hemingway's intent was not to eliminate emotion, but to portray it more scientifically. Hemingway thought it would be easy, and pointless, to describe emotions; he sculpted collages of images in order to grasp the real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made

the emotion and which would be as valid in a year or in ten years or, with luck and if you stated it purely enough, always. This use of an image as an objective correlative is characteristic of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Proust. Hemingway's letters refer to Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* several times over the years, and indicate he read the book at least twice.

Hemingway's legacy to American literature is his style: writers who came after him emulated it or avoided it. After his reputation was established with the publication of *The Sun Also Rises*, he became the spokesperson for the post-World War I generation, having established a style to follow. Reynolds asserts the legacy is that he left stories and novels so starkly moving that some have become part of our cultural heritage. In a 2004 speech at the John F. Kennedy Library, Russell Banks declared that he, like many male writers of his generation, was influenced by Hemingway's writing philosophy, style, and public image. Müller reports that Hemingway "has the highest recognition value of all writers worldwide".

William Cuthbert Faulkner (1897-1962) was an American writer and Nobel Prize laureate from Oxford, Mississippi. Faulkner wrote novels, short stories, a play, poetry, essays, and screenplays. He recorded his characters' seemingly unedited ramblings in order to represent their inner states, a technique called 'Stream of Consciousness'. In fact, these passages are carefully crafted, and their seemingly chaotic structure conceals multiple layers of meaning. He also jumbled time sequences to show how the past - especially the slave-holding era of the Deep South - endures in the present. Among his great works are *Absalom, Absalom!, As I Lay Dying*, *The Sound and the Fury* and *Light in August*.

Faulkner was known for his experimental style with meticulous attention to diction and cadence. In contrast to the minimalist understatement of his contemporary Ernest Hemingway, Faulkner made frequent use of stream of consciousness in his writing, and wrote often highly emotional, subtle, cerebral, complex, and sometimes Gothic or grotesque stories of a wide variety of characters including former slaves or descendants of slaves, poor white, agrarian, or working-class Southerners, and Southern aristocrats.

Faulkner's work has been examined by many critics from a wide variety of critical perspectives. The New Critics became much interested in Faulkner's work. Since then, critics have looked at Faulkner's work using other approaches, such as feminist and psychoanalytic methods. Faulkner's works have been placed within the literary traditions of modernism and the Southern Renaissance.

Robert Lee Frost (1874-1963) is highly regarded for his realistic depictions of rural life and his command of American colloquial speech. His work frequently employed settings from rural life in New England in the early twentieth century, using them to examine complex social and philosophical themes. Frost's poetry was less literary and that this was possibly due to the influence of English and Irish writers like Thomas Hardy and W.B. Yeats. They note that Frost's poems show a successful striving for utter colloquialism and always try to remain down to earth, while at the same time using traditional forms despite the trend of American poetry towards free verse which Frost famously said was "like playing tennis without a net". Frost believed that the self-imposed restrictions of meter in form was more helpful than harmful because he could focus on the content of his poems instead of concerning himself with creating innovative new verse forms.

3.6 THE RISE OF AMERICAN DRAMA

Although the United States' theatrical tradition can be traced back to the arrival of Lewis Hallam's troupe in the mid-18th century and was very active in the 19th century, as seen by the popularity of minstrel shows and of adaptations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, American drama attained international status only in the 1920s and 1930s, with the works of Eugene O'Neill, who won four Pulitzer Prizes and the Nobel Prize.

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill (1888 -1953) was an American playwright and Nobel laureate in Literature. His poetically titled plays were among the first to introduce into American drama techniques of realism earlier associated with Russian playwright Anton Chekhov, Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, and Swedish playwright August Strindberg. The drama *Long Day's Journey Into Night* is often numbered on the short list of the finest American plays in the 20th century, alongside

Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*.

O'Neill's plays were among the first to include speeches in American vernacular and involve characters on the fringes of society. They struggle to maintain their hopes and aspirations, but ultimately slide into disillusionment and despair. He was also part of the modern movement to partially revive the classical heroic mask from ancient Greek theatre and Japanese Noh theatre in some of his plays, such as *The Great God Brown* and *Lazarus Laughed*.

Thomas Lanier "Tennessee" Williams III (1911-1983) was an American playwright and author of many stage classics. Along with Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller he is considered among the three foremost playwrights in 20th-century American drama. His drama *A Streetcar Named Desire* is often numbered on the short list of the finest American plays of the 20th century alongside *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *Death of a Salesman*. Williams' writings include mention of some of the poets and writers he most admired in his early years: Hart Crane, Arthur Rimbaud, Anton Chekhov, William Shakespeare, D. H. Lawrence, August Strindberg, William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, and Emily Dickinson. In later years the list grew to include William Inge, James Joyce, and Ernest Hemingway; of Hemingway, he said "his great quality, aside from his prose style, is this fearless expression of brute nature".

Arthur Asher Miller (1915 -2005) was a prolific American playwright, essayist, and prominent figure in twentieth-century American theatre. Among his most popular plays are *All My Sons* (1947), *Death of a Salesman* (1949), *The Crucible* (1953) and *4A View from the Bridge* (1955).

Miller uses successfully diverse dramatic styles and movements, in the belief that a play should embody a delicate balance between the individual and society, between the singular personality and the polity, and between the separate and collective elements of life. He thought himself a writer of social plays with a strong emphasis on moral problems in American society and often questioned psychological causes of behavior. He also built on the realist tradition of Henrik Ibsen in his exploration of the individual's conflict with society but also borrowed Symbolist and expressionist

techniques from Bertolt Brecht and others. Some critics attempt to interpret his work from either an exclusively political or an exclusively psychological standpoint but fail to pierce the social veil that Miller creates in his work. Miller often stressed that society made his characters what they are and how it dictated all of their fears and choices.

3.7 DEPRESSION ERA LITERATURE

The Great Depression was a severe worldwide economic depression that took place during the 1930s. The timing of the Great Depression varied across nations; however, in most countries it started in 1929 and lasted until the late 1930s. It was the longest, deepest, and most widespread depression of the 20th century. The depression originated in the United States, after a fall in stock prices that began around September 4, 1929, and became worldwide news with the stock market crash of October 29, 1929 (known as Black Tuesday). The Great Depression has been the subject of much writing, as authors have sought to evaluate an era that caused financial as well as emotional trauma. Depression era literature was blunt and direct in its social criticism.

John Ernst Steinbeck, Jr. (1902-1968) was an American author widely known for the comic novels *Tortilla Flat* (1935) and *Cannery Row* (1945), the multi-generation epic *East of Eden* (1952), and the novellas *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *The Red Pony* (1937). The Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) is considered Steinbeck's masterpiece and part of the American literary canon. His works frequently explored the themes of fate and injustice, especially as applied to downtrodden or everyman protagonists. Most of his early work dealt with subjects familiar to him from his formative years. In his novels, Steinbeck used actual American conditions and events in the first half of the 20th century, which he had experienced first-hand as a reporter. Steinbeck often populated his stories with struggling characters; his works examined the lives of the working class and migrant workers during the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression. His later work reflected his wide range of interests, including marine biology, politics, religion, history and mythology. One of his last published works was Travels with Charley, a travelogue of a road trip he took in 1960 to rediscover America.

Henry Valentine Miller (1891-1980) was known for breaking with existing literary forms, developing a new sort of semi-autobiographical novel that blended character study, social criticism, philosophical reflection, explicit language, sex, surrealist free association and mysticism. His most characteristic works of this kind are *Tropic of Cancer* (1934), *Black Spring* (1936), *Tropic of Capricorn* (1939) and *The Rosy Crucifixion trilogy* (1949-59), all of which are based on his experiences in New York and Paris, and all of which were banned in the United States until 1961. He also wrote travel memoirs and literary criticism, and painted watercolors.

The publication of Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* in the United States in 1961 by Grove Press led to a series of obscenity trials that tested American laws on pornography. The U.S. Supreme Court overruled the state court findings of obscenity and declared the book a work of literature; it was one of the notable events in what has come to be known as the sexual revolution.

Miller is considered a literary innovator in whose works actual and imagined experiences became indistinguishable from each other. His books did much to free the discussion of sexual subjects in American writing from both legal and social restrictions. He influenced many writers, including Jack Kerouac, Norman Mailer, Philip Roth, Cormac McCarthy, Paul Theroux and Erica Jong. Throughout his novels he makes references to literature; he cites Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Balzac and Nietzsche as having a formative impact on him.

3.8 LET US SUM UP

Pulling away from fantasy and focusing on the now, American Realism presented a new gateway and a breakthrough-introducing modernism, and what it means to be in the present. American modernism benefited from the diversity of immigrant cultures. Artists were inspired by African, Caribbean, Asian and European folk cultures and embedded these exotic styles in their works. The Modernist American movement is a reflection of American life in the 20th century. In this quickly industrializing world and hastened pace of life, it is easy for the individual to be swallowed up by the vastness of things; left wandering, devoid of purpose. Social boundaries in race, class, sex, wealth, and religion are all being challenged. As the

social structure is challenged by new incoming views the bounds of traditional standards and social structure dissolve and a loss of identity is all that remains; translating later into isolation, alienation, and an overall feeling of separateness from any kind of "whole". The Great Depression at the end of the '20s and during the '30s disillusioned people about the economic stability of the country and eroded utopianist thinking.

3.9 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Which of the following has been called "greatest of all American urban novels":
   (A) The House of Mirth
   (B) The Age of Innocence
   (C) Sister Carrie
   (D) An American Tragedy
2. Imagism was a movement derived from:
   (A) Classical Chinese and Japanese poetry
   (B) Ancient Greek poetry
   (C) Keats's Sensuousness
   (D) Impressionism
3. In which of the works of T.S. Eliot do mythologies disappear altogether?
   (A) The Waste Land
   (B) The Hollow Men
   (C) Ash Wednesday
   (D) Four Quartets
4. Depression era literature:
   (A) used 'stream of consciousness technique'
   (B) used 'symbolism' extensively

(C) was mostly realistic

(D) was blunt and direct in social criticism

5. Which of the following words describe the prevailing attitude of High-Modern Literature?

(A) Skeptical

(B) Authoritative

(C) Impressionistic

(D) Both A & C

6. Which best describes the imagist movement, exemplified in the work of T. E. Hulme and Ezra Pound?

(A) a poetic aesthetic vainly concerned with the way words appear on the page

(B) an effort to rid poetry of romantic fuzziness and facile emotionalism, replacing it with a precision and clarity of imagery

(C) an attention to alternate states of consciousness and uncanny imagery

(D) a neo-platonic poetics that stresses the importance of poetry aiming to achieve its ideal "form"

7. What characteristics of seventeenth-century Metaphysical poetry sparked the enthusiasm of modernist poets and critics?

(A) its intellectual complexity

(B) its union of thought and passion

(C) its uncompromising engagement with politics

(D) A & B

8. Which phrase indicates the interior flow of thought employed in high-modern literature?

(A) automatic writing

(B) confused daze

(C) total recall

(D) stream of consciousness

9. Which of the following is not associated with high modernism in the novel?

(A) stream of consciousness

(B) free indirect style

(C) the "mythical method"

(D) narrative realism

3.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Discuss how American Realism presented a new gateway and a breakthrough.
2. Write short notes on the following literary movements:

   (i) Naturalism

   (ii) Impressionism

   (iii) Symbolism

3. Comment on the significance of 'Imagism' as a movement in poetry.
4. Comment on the literary background that shaped T.S. Eliot's works.
5. What do you understand by Hemingway's 'Iceberg Theory'?
6. How was Faulkner's style different from Hemingway's?
7. Write short notes on literary backgrounds of the dramatists: O' Neill, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller.

3.11 Answer Key : 1. (C); 2. (A); 3. (B); 4. (D); 5. (D); 6. (B); 7. (D); 8. (D); 9. (D);

3.12 SUGGESTED READING

1. E. H. Emerson, ed., Major Writers of Early American Literature (1972)
2. R. E. Spiller et al., ed., Literary History of the United States (4th ed., rev., 1974)
3. R. N. Ludwig and C. A. Nault, Jr., ed., Annals of American Literature, 1602-1983 (1986)
4. E. Elliott et al., ed., Columbia Literary History of the United States (1988) and The Columbia History of the American Novel (1991)
5. P. Fisher, Still the New World: American Literature in a Culture of Creative Destruction (1999)
6. G. Marcus and W. Sollors, ed., A New Literary History of America (2009)
7. E. Whitley, American Bards (2010)
8. P. J. Barrish, The Cambridge Introduction to American Literary Realism (2011)
9. L. Cassuto et al., ed., The Cambridge History of the American Novel (2011)
10. R. Fuller, From Battlefields Rising: How the Civil War Transformed American Literature (2011)

POST-WORLD WAR II

UNIT STRUCTURE

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Objectives

4.3 The Novel and Short Story: Realism and "Metafiction"

4.4 The Beat Generation

4.5 African-American Literature

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4.7 Poetry

4.8 Multicultural Writing

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4.10 Multiple Choice Questions

4.11 Examination Oriented Questions

4.12 Answer Key

4.13 Suggested Reading

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The literary historian Malcolm Cowley described the years between the two world wars as a ‘second flowering’ of American writing. Certainly American literature at-

tained a new maturity and a rich diversity in the 1920s and '30s, and significant works by several major figures from those decades were published after 1945. Faulkner, Hemingway, Steinbeck, and Katherine Anne Porter wrote memorable fiction, though not up to their prewar standard; and Frost, Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, E.E. Cummings, William Carlos Williams, and Gwendolyn Brooks published important poetry. Eugene O'Neill's most distinguished play, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, appeared posthumously in 1956. Before and after World War II, Robert Penn Warren published influential fiction, poetry, and criticism. His *All the King's Men*, one of the best American political novels, won the 1947 Pulitzer Prize. *Mary McCarthy* became a widely read social satirist and essayist. When it first appeared in the United States in the 1960s, Henry Miller's fiction was influential primarily because of its frank exploration of sexuality. But its loose, picaresque, quasi-autobiographical form also meshed well with post-1960s fiction. Impressive new novelists, poets, and playwrights emerged after the war. There was, in fact, a gradual changing of the guard.

Not only did a new generation come out of the war, but its ethnic, regional, and social character was quite different from that of the preceding one. Among the younger writers were children of immigrants, many of them Jews; African Americans, only a few generations away from slavery; and, eventually, women, who, with the rise of feminism, were to speak in a new voice. Though the social climate of the postwar years was conservative, even conformist, some of the most hotly discussed writers were homosexuals or bisexuals, including Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, Paul Bowles, Gore Vidal, and James Baldwin, whose dark themes and experimental methods cleared a path for Beat writers such as Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, and Jack Kerouac.

4.2 OBJECTIVES

In this lesson we shall study the literary and intellectual background to American literature during the Post World War II period.

4.3 THE NOVEL AND SHORT STORY: REALISM AND "METAFICTION"

Two distinct groups of novelists responded to the cultural impact, and especially the technological horror, of World War II. Norman Mailer's *The Naked*

and the Dead (1948) and Irwin Shaw's *The Young Lions* (1948) were realistic war novels, though Mailer's book was also a novel of ideas, exploring fascist thinking and an obsession with power as elements of the military mind. James Jones, amassing a staggering quantity of closely observed detail, documented the war's human cost in an ambitious trilogy (*From Here to Eternity* [1951], *The Thin Red Line* [1962], and *Whistle* [1978]) that centered on loners who resisted adapting to military discipline. Younger novelists, profoundly shaken by the bombing of Hiroshima and the real threat of human annihilation, found the conventions of realism inadequate for treating the war's nightmarish implications. In *Catch-22* (1961), Joseph Heller satirized the military mentality with surreal black comedy but also injected a sense of Kafkaesque horror. Surreal comedy is a form of humor predicated on deliberate violations of causal reasoning, producing events and behaviors that are obviously illogical. Constructions of surreal humor tend to involve bizarre juxtapositions, non-sequiturs, irrational or absurd situations and expressions of nonsense. The humor arises from a subversion of reader's expectations, so that amusement is founded on unpredictability, separate from a logical analysis of the situation. The humor derived gets its appeal from the fact that the situation described is so ridiculous or unlikely. The genre has roots in Surrealism in the arts. Kafkaesque horror is when you enter a surreal world in which all your control patterns, all your plans, the whole way in which you have configured your own behavior, begins to fall to pieces, when you find yourself against a force that does not lend itself to the way you perceive the world.

A sequel, *Closing Time* (1994), was an elegy for the World War II generation. Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., in *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), described the Allied firebombing of the German city of Dresden with a mixture of dark fantasy and numb, loopy humor. 'Dark fantasy' is a subgenre of fantasy which can refer to literary works that incorporate darker and frightening themes of fantasy. It also often combines fantasy with elements of horror. The term can be used broadly to refer to fantastical works that have a dark, gloomy atmosphere or a sense of horror and dread. Later this method was applied brilliantly to the portrayal of the Vietnam War-a conflict that seemed in itself surreal-by Tim O'Brien in *Going After Cacciato* (1978) and the short-story collection *The Things They Carried* (1990).

In part because of the atomic bomb, American writers turned increasingly to black humor and absurdist fantasy. Many found the naturalistic approach incapable of communicating the rapid pace and the sheer implausibility of contemporary life. A highly self-conscious fiction emerged, laying bare its own literary devices, questioning the nature of representation, and often imitating or parodying earlier fiction rather than social reality. Russian-born Vladimir Nabokov and the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges were strong influences on this new 'Metafiction'.

Metafiction is a literary device used self-consciously and systematically to draw attention to a work's status as an artifact. It poses questions about the relationship between fiction and reality, usually using irony and self-reflection. It can be compared to presentational theatre, which does not let the audience forget it is viewing a play; metafiction forces readers to be aware that they are reading a fictional work. Metafiction is primarily associated with Modernist literature and Postmodernist literature, but is found at least as early as Homer's *Odyssey*, Chaucer's 14th century *Canterbury Tales*, and Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1756). Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, published in the 17th century, is a metafictional novel.

Common metafictive devices in literature include:

(i) A story about a writer who creates a story; for example, John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*, a thoroughly fictional account of the life of real person Ebenezer Cooke, a Maryland colonist who in 1708 wrote the real satirical poem *The Sotweed Factor*. Barth's Cooke is a naive innocent who sets out to write a heroic epic, becomes disillusioned and ends up writing a biting satire.

(ii) A story that features itself as a narrative or as a physical object; a notable example is Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, which is ostensibly a 999-line poem of the same name, but with a foreword, index and extensive commentary in footnotes, from which so much detail is revealed of the lives of both poet and editor that a plot gradually emerges.

(iii) A story containing another work of fiction within itself; e.g. Nabokov's *Pale Fire*

(iv) Narrative footnotes, which continue the story while commenting on it; e.g. again, *Pale Fire*.

(v) A story that reframes or suggests a radically different reading of another story; for example, Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which retells the story of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* from the point of view of the madwoman in the attic; or J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, which recounts a battle of wills between Daniel Defoe and a castaway survivor over the writing of the story that would be eventually become *Robinson Crusoe*.

(vi) A story addressing the specific conventions of story, such as title, character conventions, paragraphing or plots; e.g. *Foe*, by J. M. Coetzee

(vii) A novel where the narrator intentionally exposes him or herself as the author of the story; e.g. Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions*, in which the first-person narrator-presumably Vonnegut himself, since he even shares Vonnegut's birthday-regularly reminds the reader that the characters in the novel are fictions of his own creation:

(viii) A story in which the author refers to elements of the story as both fact and fiction; for example, in Joseph Conrad's *Author's Preface to Nostromo*, most of which provides a factual account of how he came to write the novel. Conrad, in a putatively factual context, attributes his intimate knowledge of the fictional country in which his story is set, to a fictional book written by one of his book's characters.

(ix) A book in which the book itself seeks interaction with the reader

(x) A story in which the readers of the story itself force the author to change the story

(xi) A story in which the characters are aware that they are in a story

(xii) A story in which the characters make reference to the author or his previous work

Nabokov, who became a U.S. citizen in 1945, produced a body of exquisitely

wrought fiction distinguished by linguistic and formal innovation. Despite their artificiality, his best novels written in English-including *Lolita* (1955), *Pnin* (1957), and *Pale Fire* (1962)-are highly personal books that have a strong emotional thread running through them.

In an important essay, *The Literature of Exhaustion* (1967), John Barth declared himself an American disciple of Nabokov and Borges. After dismissing realism as a "*used up*" tradition, Barth described his own work as novels which imitate the form of the novel, by an author who imitates the role of Author. In fact, Barth's earliest fiction, *The Floating Opera* (1956) and *The End of the Road* (1958), fell partly within the realistic tradition, but in later, more-ambitious works he simultaneously imitated and parodied conventional forms-the historical novel in *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960), Greek and Christian myths in *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966), and the epistolary novel in *LETTERS* (1979). Similarly, Donald Barthelme mocked the fairy tale in *Snow White* (1967) and Freudian fiction in *The Dead Father* (1975). Barthelme was most successful in his short stories and parodies that solemnly caricatured contemporary styles, especially the richly suggestive pieces collected in Unspeakable Practices, *Unnatural Acts* (1968), *City Life* (1970), and *Guilty Pleasures* (1974).

Thomas Pynchon emerged as the major American practitioner of the absurdist fable. His novels and stories were elaborately plotted mixtures of historical information, comic-book fantasy, and countercultural suspicion. Using paranoia as a structuring device as well as a cast of mind, Pynchon worked out elaborate conspiracies in *V.* (1963), *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), and *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973). Paranoia is a thought process believed to be heavily influenced by anxiety or fear, often to the point of delusion and irrationality. Paranoid thinking typically includes beliefs of conspiracy concerning a perceived threat towards oneself (e.g. "Everyone is out to get me"). Paranoia is distinct from phobias, which also involve irrational fear, but usually no blame. Making false accusations and the general distrust of others also frequently accompany paranoia. For example, an incident most people would view as an accident or coincidence, a paranoid person might believe was intentional. The underlying assumption of Pynchon's fiction was the inevitability of entropy, that is,

the disintegration of physical and moral energy. Pynchon's technique was later to influence writers as different as Don DeLillo and Paul Auster. In *The Naked Lunch* (1959) and other novels, William S. Burroughs, abandoning plot and coherent characterization, used a drug addict's consciousness to depict a hideous modern landscape. Vonnegut, Terry Southern, and John Hawkes were also major practitioners of black humor and the absurdist fable.

Though writers such as Barth, Barthelme, and Pynchon rejected the novel's traditional function as a mirror reflecting society, a significant number of contemporary novelists were reluctant to abandon Social Realism, which they pursued in much more personal terms. In novels such as *The Victim* (1947), *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), *Herzog* (1964), *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970), and *Humboldt's Gift* (1975), Saul Bellow tapped into the buoyant, manic energy and picaresque structure of black humor while proclaiming the necessity of "being human." Though few contemporary writers saw the ugliness of urban life more clearly than Bellow, his central characters rejected the "Wasteland outlook" that he associated with Modernism. A spiritual vision, derived from

sources as diverse as Judaism, Transcendentalism, and Rudolph Steiner's cultish theosophy, found its way into Bellow's later novels, but he also wrote darker fictions such as the novella *Seize the Day* (1956), a study in failure and blocked emotion that was perhaps his best work. With the publication of *Ravelstein* (2000), his fictional portrait of the scholar-writer Allan Bloom, and of *Collected Stories* (2001), Bellow was acclaimed as a portraitist and a poet of memory.

Four other major Jewish writers-Bernard Malamud, Grace Paley, Philip Roth, and Isaac Bashevis Singer-treated the human condition with humor and forgiveness. Malamud's gift for dark comedy and Hawthornean fable was especially evident in his short-story collections *The Magic Barrel* (1958) and *Idiots First* (1963). His first three novels, *The Natural* (1952), *The Assistant* (1957), and *A New Life* (1961), were also impressive works of fiction; *The Assistant* had the bleak moral intensity of his best stories. Paley's stories combined an offbeat, whimsically poetic manner with a wry understanding of the ironies of family life and progressive politics. While Roth

was known best for the wild satire and sexual high jinks of *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), a hilarious stand-up routine about ethnic stereotypes, his most-lasting achievement may be his later novels built around the misadventures of a controversial Jewish novelist named Zuckerman, especially *The Ghost Writer* (1979), *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983), and, above all, *The Counterlife* (1987). Like many of his later works, from *My Life as a Man* (1974) to *Operation Shylock* (1993), *The Counterlife* plays ingeniously on the relationship between autobiography and fiction. His best later work was his bitter, deliberately offensive story of a self-destructive artist, *Sabbath's Theater* (1995). Returning to realism, but without his former self-absorption, Roth won new readers with his trilogy on 20th-century American history-*American Pastoral* (1997), *I Married a Communist* (1998), and *The Human Stain* (2000)-and with *The Plot Against America* (2004), a counter-historical novel about the coming of fascism in the United States during World War II. The Polish-born Singer won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1978 for his stories, written originally in Yiddish. They evolved from fantastic tales of demons and angels to realistic fictions set in New York City's Upper West Side, often dealing with the haunted lives of Holocaust survivors. These works showed him to be one of the great storytellers of modern times.

Another great storyteller, John Cheever, long associated with The New Yorker magazine, created in his short stories and novels a gallery of memorable eccentrics.

He documented the anxieties of upper-middle-class New Yorkers and suburbanites in the relatively tranquil years after World War II. The sexual and moral confusion of the American middle class was the focus of the work of J.D. Salinger and Richard Yates, as well as of John Updike's Rabbit series (four novels from *Rabbit, Run* [1960] to *Rabbit at Rest* [1990]), *Couples* (1968) and *Too Far to Go* (1979), a sequence of tales about the quiet disintegration of a civilized marriage, a subject Updike revisited in a retrospective work, Villages (2004). In the mid-1960s, J. D. Salinger was himself drawn to Sufi mysticism through the writer and thinker Idries Shah's seminal work *The Sufis*. Salinger also read the Taoist philosopher Lao Tse and the Hindu Swami Vivekananda who introduced the Indian philosophies of Vedanta and Yoga to the Western world.

In sharp contrast, Nelson Algren (*The Man with the Golden Arm* [1949]) and Hubert Selby, Jr. (*Last Exit to Brooklyn* [1964]), documented lower-class urban life with brutal frankness. Similarly, John Rechy portrayed America's urban homosexual subculture in *City of Night* (1963). As literary and social mores were liberalized, Cheever himself dealt with homosexuality in his prison novel *Falconer* (1977) and even more explicitly in his personal journals, published posthumously in 1991.

In the postwar period, the art of the short story again flourished. Among its most respected practitioners was Flannery O'Connor (1925-1964), who renewed the fascination of such giants as Faulkner and Twain with the American south, developing a distinctive Southern gothic esthetic wherein characters acted at one level as people and at another as symbols. A devout Catholic, O'Connor often imbued her stories, among them the widely studied *A Good Man is Hard to Find* and *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, and two novels, *Wise Blood* (1952); *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960), with deeply religious themes, focusing particularly on the search for truth and religious skepticism against the backdrop of the nuclear age. Other important practitioners of the form include Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, John Cheever, Raymond Carver, Tobias Wolff, and the more experimental Donald Barthelme.

4.4 THE BEAT GENERATION

The Beat Generation was a group of authors whose literature explored and influenced American culture in the post-World War II era. The bulk of their work was published and popularized throughout the 1950s. Central elements of Beat culture are rejection of standard narrative values, the spiritual quest, exploration of American and Eastern religions, rejection of materialism, explicit portrayals of the human condition, experimentation with psychedelic drugs, and sexual liberation and exploration.

Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* (1956), William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1959) and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) are among the best known examples of Beat literature. Both *Howl* and *Naked Lunch* were the focus of obscenity trials that ultimately helped to liberalize publishing in the United States. The members of the Beat Generation developed a reputation as new bohemian hedonists, who celebrated non-

conformity and spontaneous creativity. In the 1960s, elements of the expanding Beat movement were incorporated into the hippie and larger counterculture movements.

Gregory Corso worshiped Percy Bysshe Shelley as a hero and was buried at the foot of Shelley's Grave in the Protestant Cemetery, Rome. Ginsberg mentions Shelley's Adonais at the beginning of Kaddish, and cites it as a major influence on the composition of one of his most important poems. Michael McClure compared Ginsberg's *Howl* to Shelley's breakthrough poem *Queen Mab*. Ginsberg's most important Romantic influence was William Blake. Important American inspirations for the Beats included Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Herman Melville and especially Walt Whitman, who is addressed as the subject of one of Ginsberg's most famous poems *A Supermarket in California*. Edgar Allan Poe is occasionally acknowledged, and Ginsberg claimed Emily Dickinson was an influence on Beat poetry. Philip Lamantia introduced surrealist poetry to the original Beats. The poetry of Gregory Corso and Bob Kaufman shows the influence of Surrealist poetry with its dream-like images and its random juxtaposition of dissociated images, and this influence can also be seen in more subtle ways in Ginsberg's poetry. Though the Beat aesthetic posited itself against T. S. Eliot's creed of strict objectivity and literary modernism's new classicism, certain modernist writers were major influences on the Beats, including Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and H.D. Pound was specifically important to Gary Snyder and Allen Ginsberg.

William Carlos Williams was an influence on many of the Beats, with his encouragement to speak with an American voice instead of imitating the European poetic voice and European forms.

4.5 AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITERATURE

Black writers of this period found alternatives to the Richard Wright tradition of angry social protest. James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison, both protégés of Wright, wrote polemical essays calling for a literature that reflected the full complexity of black life in the United States. In his first and best novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), Baldwin portrayed the Harlem world and the black church through his own adolescent religious experiences. Drawing on rural folktale, absurdist humor, and a

picaresque realism, Ralph Ellison wrote a deeply resonant comic novel that dealt with the full range of black experience-rural sharecropping, segregated education, northward migration, ghetto hustling, and the lure of such competing ideologies as nationalism and communism. Many considered his novel *Invisible Man* (1952) the best novel of the postwar years.

Later two African American women published some of the most important post-World War II American fiction. In *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), and *Paradise* (1998), Toni Morrison created a strikingly original fiction that sounded different notes from lyrical recollection to magic realism. Like Ellison, Morrison drew on diverse literary and folk influences and dealt with important phases of black history, that is, slavery in *Beloved* and the 'Harlem Renaissance' in *Jazz*. She was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. Alice Walker, after writing several volumes of poetry and a novel dealing with the civil rights movement (Meridian [1976]), received the Pulitzer Prize for her black feminist novel *The Color Purple* (1982). African American men whose work gained attention during this period included Ishmael Reed, whose wild comic techniques resembled Ellison's; James Alan McPherson, a subtle short-story writer in the mold of Ellison and Baldwin; Charles Johnson, whose novels, such as *The Oxherding Tale* (1982) and *The Middle Passage* (1990), showed a masterful historical imagination; Randall Kenan, a gay writer with a strong folk imagination whose style also descended from both Ellison and Baldwin; and Colson Whitehead, who used experimental techniques and folk traditions in *The Intuitionist* (1999) and *John Henry Days* (2001).

4.6 NEW FICTIONAL MODES

The horrors of World War II, the Cold War and the atomic bomb, the bizarre feast of consumer culture, and the cultural clashes of the 1960s prompted many writers to argue that reality had grown inaccessible, undermining the traditional social role of fiction. Writers of novels and short stories therefore were under unprecedented pressure to discover, or invent, new and viable kinds of fiction. One response was the postmodern novel of William Gaddis, John Barth, John Hawkes, Donald Barthelme, Thomas Pynchon, Robert Coover, Paul Auster, and Don DeLillo-technically

sophisticated and highly self-conscious about the construction of fiction and the fictive nature of reality itself. These writers dealt with themes such as imposture and paranoia; their novels drew attention to themselves as artifacts and often used realistic techniques ironically. Other responses involved a heightening of realism by means of intensifying violence, amassing documentation, or resorting to fantasy. A brief discussion of writers as different as Norman Mailer and Joyce Carol Oates may serve to illustrate these new directions.

In his World War II novel, *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), Mailer wrote in the Dos Passos tradition of social protest. Feeling its limitations, he developed his own brand of surreal fantasy in fables such as *An American Dream* (1965) and *Why Are We in Vietnam*? (1967). As with many of the postmodern novelists, his subject was the nature of power, personal as well as political. However, it was only when he turned to nonfiction fiction or fiction as history in *The Armies of the Night* and *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* (both 1968) that Mailer discovered his true voice-grandiose yet personal, comic yet shrewdly intellectual. He refined this approach into a new objectivity in the Pulitzer Prize-winning 'true life novel' *The Executioner's Song* (1979). When he returned to fiction, his most effective work was Harlot's Ghost (1991), about the Central Intelligence Agency. His final novels took Jesus Christ (*The Gospel According to the Son* [1997]) and *Adolf Hitler* (The Castle in the Forest [2007]) as their subjects.

In her early work, especially *A Garden of Earthly Delights* (1967), Joyce Carol Oates worked naturalistically with violent urban materials, such as the Detroit riots. Incredibly prolific, she later experimented with 'Surrealism' in *Wonderland* (1971) and 'Gothic fantasy' in *Bellefleur* (1980) before returning in works such as *Marya* (1986) to the bleak blue-collar world of her youth in upstate New York. Among her later works was *Blonde: A Novel* (2000), a fictional biography of Marilyn Monroe. While Mailer and Oates refused to surrender the novel's gift for capturing reality, both were compelled to search out new fictional modes to tap that power.

The surge of feminism in the 1970s gave impetus to many new women writers, such as Erica Jong, author of the sexy and funny *Fear of Flying* (1974), and Rita

Mae Brown, who explored lesbian life in *Rubyfruit Jungle* (1973). Other significant works of fiction by women in the 1970s included Ann Beattie's account of the post-1960s generation in *Chilly Scenes of Winter* (1976) and many short stories, Gail Godwin's highly civilized *The Odd Woman* (1974), Mary Gordon's portraits of Irish Catholic life in *Final Payments* (1978), and the many social comedies of Alison Lurie and Anne Tyler.

4.7 POETRY

Among the most respected of the postwar American poets are John Ashbery, the key figure of the surrealistic New York School of poetry, and his celebrated Self-portrait in a *Convex Mirror* (1976). The New York School (synonymous with abstract expressionist painting) was an informal group of American poets, painters, dancers, and musicians active in the 1950s and 1960s in New York City. They often drew inspiration from surrealism and the contemporary avant-garde art movements, in particular action painting, abstract expressionism, jazz, improvisational theater, experimental music, and the interaction of friends in the New York City art world's vanguard circle. Concerning the New York School poets, critics argued that their work was a reaction to the Confessionalist movement in Contemporary Poetry. Their poetic subject matter was often light, violent, or observational, while their writing style was often described as cosmopolitan and world-traveled. The poets often wrote in an immediate and spontaneous manner reminiscent of stream of consciousness writing, often using vivid imagery.

Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979) was Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 1949 to 1950. Bishop did not see herself as a 'lesbian poet' or as a female poet. Despite her insistence on being excluded from female poetry anthologies, she still considered herself to be a strong feminist but that she only wanted to be judged based on the quality of her writing and not on her gender or sexual orientation.

John Allyn Berryman (1914-1972) was a major figure in American poetry in the second half of the 20th century. His best-known work is *The Dream Songs*. Berryman's poetry, which often revolved around the sordid details of his personal problems, is closely associated with the Confessional poetry movement. The editors

of The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry note that the influence of Yeats, Auden, Hopkins, Crane, and Pound on him was strong, and Berryman's own voice-by turns nerve-racked and sportive-took some time to be heard.

Archie Randolph Ammons (1926 -2001) wrote about humanity's relationship to nature in alternately comic and solemn tones. His poetry often addresses religious and philosophical matters and scenes involving nature, almost in a Transcendental fashion. According to reviewer Daniel Hoffman, his work is founded on an implied Emersonian division of experience into Nature and the Soul, adding that it sometimes consciously echoes familiar lines from Emerson, Whitman and Emily Dickinson.

Ammons often writes in two or three line stanzas. Poet David Lehman notes a resemblance between Ammons's terza libre (unrhymed three-line stanzas) and the terza rima of Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*. Lines are strongly enjambed.

Some of Ammons's poems are very short, one or two lines only, a form known as monostich (effectively, including the title, a kind of couplet), while others are hundreds of lines long, and sometimes composed on adding-machine tape or other continuous strips of paper. His National Book Award-winning volume Garbage is a long poem consisting of a single extended sentence, divided into eighteen sections, arranged in couplets. Ammons's long poems tend to derive multiple strands from a single image.

Many readers and critics have noted Ammons's idiosyncratic approach to punctuation. Lehman has written that Ammons bears out T. S. Eliot's observation that poetry is a 'system of punctuation'. Instead of periods, some poems end with an ellipsis; others have no terminal punctuation at all. The colon is an Ammons signature ; he uses it as an all-purpose punctuation mark.

Theodore Huebner Roethke (1908-1963) is regarded as one of the most accomplished and influential poets of his generation. Roethke's work is characterized by its introspection, rhythm and natural imagery. Former U.S. Poet Laureate and author James Dickey wrote Roethke was: "*i*n my opinion the greatest poet this country has yet produced." James Dickey defended his choice of Roethke as the greatest of

all American poets. Dickey states: "I don't see anyone else that has the kind of deep, gut vitality that Roethke's got. Whitman was a great poet, but he's no competition for Roethke."

James Ingram Merrill (1926-1995). His poetry falls into two distinct bodies of work: the polished and formalist lyric poetry of his early career, and the epic narrative of occult communication with spirits and angels, titled *The Changing Light at Sandover* (published in three volumes from 1976 to 1980), which dominated his later career. A writer of elegance and wit, highly adept at wordplay and puns, Merrill was a master of traditional poetic meter and form who also wrote a good deal of free and blank verse. *The Changing Light at Sandover* is one of the longest epics in any language, and features the voice of recently deceased poet W. H. Auden

William Stanley Merwin (1927-) During the 1960s anti-war movement, Merwin's unique craft was thematically characterized by indirect, unpunctuated narration. In the 1980s and 1990s, Merwin's writing influence derived from his interest in Buddhist philosophy and deep ecology. Merwin is probably best known for his poetry about the Vietnam War, and can be included among the canon of Vietnam War-era poets. Besides being a prolific poet, he is also a respected translator of Spanish, French, Latin and Italian poetry (including Dante's *Purgatorio*) as well as poetry from Sanskrit, Yiddish, Middle English, Japanese and Quechua.

Mark Strand (1934-2014) was a Canadian-born American poet, essayist and translator. Strand has been compared to Robert Bly in his use of surrealism, though he attributes the surreal elements in his poems to an admiration of the works of Max Ernst, Giorgio de Chirico, and René Magritte. Strand's poems use plain and concrete language, usually without rhyme or meter. In a 1971 interview, Strand said, "I feel very much a part of a new international style that has a lot to do with plainness of diction, a certain reliance on surrealist techniques, and a strong narrative element."

Robert L. Hass (1941-) served as Poet Laureate of the United States from 1995 to 1997. Hass's poems tend to vary in structure as he alternates between prose-like blocks and free verse. His poems have been described to have a stylistic clarity, seen in his simple, clear language and precise imagery. His collection, Praise, features

running themes of seasons, nature, location, and transformation as well as a running motif of blackberries. Poet Stanley Kunitz said of Hass's work, "Reading a poem by Robert Hass is like stepping into the ocean when the temperature of the water is not much different from that of the air. You scarcely know, until you feel the undertow tug at you that you have entered into another element".

Robert Traill Spence Lowell IV (1917-1977) was born into a Boston Brahmin. Lowell stated, "The poets who most directly influenced me ... were Allen Tate, Elizabeth Bishop, and William Carlos Williams. An unlikely combination! ... but you can see that Bishop is a sort of bridge between Tate's formalism and Williams's informal art".

Lowell was capable of writing both formal, metered verse as well as free verse; his verse in some poems from Life Studies and Notebook fell somewhere in between metered and free verse. He was considered an important part of the confessional poetry movement. He is widely considered one of the most important American poets of the postwar era. His biographer Paul Mariani called him "*the poet-historian of our time*" and "*the last of America's influential public poets*". The Academy of American Poets named Life Studies one of their Groundbreaking Books of the 20th century, stating that it had a profound impact, particularly over the confessional poetry movement that the book helped launch. The editors of Contemporary Literary Criticism wrote that the book exerted a profound influence on subsequent American poets, including other first generation confessionalists such as Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton.

4.8 MULTICULTURAL WRITING

The dramatic loosening of immigration restrictions in the mid-1960s set the stage for the rich multicultural writing of the last quarter of the 20th century. New Jewish voices were heard in the fiction of E.L. Doctorow, noted for his mingling of the historical with the fictional in novels such as *Ragtime* (1975) and *The Waterworks* (1994) and in the work of Cynthia Ozick, whose best story, *Envy*; or, *Yiddish in America* (1969), has characters modeled on leading figures in Yiddish literature. Her story *The Shawl* (1980) concerns the murder of a baby in a Nazi concentration camp.

David Leavitt introduced homosexual themes into his portrayal of middle-class life in *Family Dancing* (1984). At the turn of the 21st century, younger Jewish writers from the former Soviet Union such as Gary Shteyngart and Lara Vapnyar dealt impressively with the experience of immigrants in the United States.

Novels such as N. Scott Momaday's House *Made of Dawn*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1969, James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* (1974) and *Fools Crow* (1986), Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), and Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984), *The Beet Queen* (1986), and *The Antelope Wife* (1998) were powerful and ambiguous explorations of Native American history and identity. Mexican Americans were represented by works such as Rudolfo A. Anaya's *Bless Me*, *Ultima* (1972), Richard Rodriguez's autobiographical *Hunger of Memory* (1981), and Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1983) and her collection *Woman Hollering Creek*, and *Other Stories* (1991).

Some of the best immigrant writers, while thoroughly assimilated, nonetheless had a subtle understanding of both the old and the new culture. These included the Cuban American writers Oscar Hijuelos; the Antigua-born Jamaica Kincaid, author of *Annie John* (1984), *Lucy* (1990), the AIDS memoir *My Brother* (1997), and *See Now Then* (2013).

Chinese Americans found an extraordinary voice in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976) and *China Men* (1980), which blended old Chinese lore with fascinating family history. Her first novel, *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (1989), was set in the bohemian world of the San Francisco Bay area during the 1960s. Other important Asian American writers included Gish Jen, whose *Typical American* (1991) dealt with immigrant striving and frustration; the Korean American Chang-rae Lee, who focused on family life, political awakening, and generational differences in *Native Speaker* (1995) and *A Gesture Life* (1999); and Ha Jin, whose *Waiting* (1999), set in rural China during and after the Cultural Revolution, was a powerful tale of timidity, repression, and botched love, contrasting the mores of the old China and the new. Bharati Mukherjee beautifully explored contrasting lives in India and North America in *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988), *Jasmine* (1989), *Desirable Daughters*

(2002), and *The Tree Bride* (2004). While many multicultural works were merely representative of their cultural milieu, books such as these made remarkable contributions to a changing American literature.

The memoir vogue did not prevent writers from publishing huge, ambitious novels, including David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996), an encyclopaedic mixture of arcane lore, social fiction, and postmodern irony; Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* (2001) and *Freedom* (2010), both family portraits; and Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997), a brooding, resonant, oblique account of the Cold War era as seen through the eyes of both fictional characters and historical figures. All three novels testify to a belated convergence of Social Realism and Pynchonesque invention. Pynchon himself returned to form with sprawling, picaresque historical novels: *Mason & Dixon* (1997), about two famous 18th-century surveyors who explored and mapped the American colonies, and *Against the Day* (2006), set at the turn of the 20th century.

4.9 LET US SUM UP

Certainly American literature attained a new maturity and a rich diversity in the 1920s and '30s, and significant works by several major figures from those decades were published after 1945.

4.10 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Bernard Malamud, Grace Paley, Philip Roth, and Isaac Bashevis Singer- are all:

   (A) African- American writers

   (B) Writers of the Beat generation

   (C) Major Jewish writers

   (D) Writers from New England

2. Which of the following is not a part of the trilogy on 20th-century American history by Roth:

   (A) American Pastoral

(B) I Married a Communist

(C) The Human Stain

(D) The Plot Against America

3. Which of the following American writers was influenced by Swami Vivekananda?

(A) J.D. Salinger

(B) Richard Yates

(C) John Updike

(D) John Cheever

4. Archie Randolph Ammons sometimes consciously echoes familiar lines from:

(A) Emerson

(B) Whitman

(C) Emily Dickinson

(D) All of these

5. The Middleman and Other Stories, Jasmine , Desirable Daughters , and The Tree Bride are all works by:

(A) Chang-rae Lee

(B) Bharati Mukherjee

(C) David Foster Wallace

(D) Jonathan Franzen

6. By which poetess was the first book of poems 'The Colossus' published in 1960?

(A) Elizabeth Bishop

(B) Sylvia Plath

(C) Marianne Moore

(D) Laura Jackson

4.11 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. What did the Younger novelists take recourse to after finding the conventions of realism inadequate for treating the war's nightmarish implications?
2. What genre was employed to describe the Allied firebombing of the German city of Dresden and to the portrayal of the Vietnam War by young authors?
3. What do you understand by 'metafiction'? How was this literary device exploited by the American writers?
4. Write a note on Thomas Pynchon as the major American practitioner of the absurdis fable.
5. What do you know about the literary background of the Beat Generation?
6. What were the new fictional modes exploited by writers that argued that reality had grown inaccessible?
7. Write a short note on the New York School of poetry.

4.12 ANSWER KEY: 1. (C); 2. (D); 3. (A); 4. (D); 5. (B); 6. (B)

4.13 SUGGESTED READING

1. E. H. Emerson, ed., Major Writers of Early American Literature (1972)
2. R. E. Spiller et al., ed., Literary History of the United States (4th ed., rev., 1974)
3. R. N. Ludwig and C. A. Nault, Jr., ed., Annals of American Literature, 1602-1983 (1986)
4. E. Elliott et al., ed., Columbia Literary History of the United States (1988) and The Columbia History of the American Novel (1991)
5. G. Marcus and W. Sollors, ed., A New Literary History of America (2009)

6. E. Whitley, American Bards (2010)

7. L. Cassuto et al., ed., The Cambridge History of the American Novel (2011)

8. M. Graham and J. W. Ward, Jr., ed., The Cambridge History of African American Literature (2011)

CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

UNIT STRUCTURE

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5.1 INTRODUCTION

The United States is one of the most diverse nations in the world. Its dynamic population of about 300 million boasts more than 30 million foreign-born individuals who speak numerous languages and dialects. Some one million new immigrants arrive each year, many from Asia and Latin America.

Literature in the United States today is likewise dazzlingly diverse, exciting, and evolving. New voices have arisen from many quarters, challenging old ideas and adapting literary traditions to suit changing conditions of the national life. Social and economic advances have enabled previously underrepresented groups to express themselves more fully, while technological innovations have created a fast-moving public forum. Reading clubs proliferate, and book fairs, literary festivals, and 'poetry slams' (events where youthful poets compete in performing their poetry) attract enthusiastic audiences. Selection of a new work for a book club can launch an unknown writer into the limelight overnight.

American literature at the turn of the 21st century has become democratic and heterogeneous. Regionalism has flowered, and international, or global, writers refract U.S. culture through foreign perspectives. Multiethnic writing continues to mine rich veins, and as each ethnic literature matures, it creates its own traditions. Creative nonfiction and memoir have flourished. The short story genre has gained luster, and the short story has taken root. A new generation of playwrights continues the American tradition of exploring current social issues on stage.

5.2 OBJECTIVES

In this lesson, we shall survey the literary and intellectual background to American literature at the turn of the 21st century. As there is not space here in this brief survey to do justice to the glittering diversity of American literature today, we shall consider general developments and representative figures.

5.3 POSTMODERNISM

Postmodernism asserts that knowledge and truth are the product of unique systems of social, historical, and political discourse and interpretation, and are therefore contextual and constructed. The term postmodernism has been applied both to the era following modernity, and to a host of movements within that era that reacted against tendencies in modernism.

Literary postmodernism was officially inaugurated in the United States with the first issue of *boundary 2*, subtitled Journal of Postmodern Literature and Culture, which appeared in 1972. *boundary 2* remains an influential journal in postmodernist circles today.

Jorge Luis Borges's (1939) short story *Pierre Menard*, Author of the *Quixote*, is often considered as predicting postmodernism and conceiving the ideal of the ultimate parody. Samuel Beckett is sometimes seen as an important precursor and influence.

In 1971, the Arab-American scholar Ihab Hassan published *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature*, an early work of literary criticism from a postmodern perspective, in which the author traces the development of what he calls 'Literature of Silence' through Marquis de Sade, Franz Kafka, Ernest Hemingway, Beckett, and many others, including developments such as the Theatre of the Absurd and the nouveau roman. In *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), Brian McHale details the shift from modernism to postmodernism, arguing that the former is characterized by an epistemological dominant, and that postmodern works have developed out of modernism and are primarily concerned with questions of ontology. In *Constructing Postmodernism* (1992), McHale's second book, he provides readings of postmodern fiction and of some of the contemporary writers who go

under the label of cyberpunk. McHale's *What Was Postmodernism*? (2007), follows Raymond Federman's lead in now using the past tense when discussing postmodernism.

Influenced by Thomas Pynchon, postmodern authors fabricate complex plots that demand imaginative leaps. Often they flatten historical depth into one dimension; William Vollmann's novels slide between vastly different times and places as easily as a computer mouse moves between texts.

5.3.1 Creative Nonfiction: Memoir and Autobiography

Many writers hunger for open, less canonical genres as vehicles for their postmodern visions. The rise of global, multiethnic, and women's literature - works in which writers reflect on experiences shaped by culture, color, and gender - has endowed autobiography and memoir with special allure. While the boundaries of the terms are debated, a memoir is typically shorter or more limited in scope, while an autobiography makes some attempt at a comprehensive overview of the writer's life.

Postmodern fragmentation has rendered problematic for many writers the idea of a finished self that can be articulated successfully in one sweep. Many turn to the memoir in their struggles to ground an authentic self. What constitutes authenticity, and to what extent the writer is allowed to embroider upon his or her memories of experience in works of nonfiction, are hotly contested subjects. Noteworthy memoirs include *The Stolen Light* (1989) by Ved Mehta. Born in India, Mehta was blinded at the age of three. His account of flying alone as a young blind person to study in the United States is unforgettable. Irish American Frank McCourt's mesmerizing *Angela's Ashes* (1996) recalls his childhood of poverty, family alcoholism, and intolerance in Ireland with a surprising warmth and humor. Paul Auster's *Hand to Mouth* (1997) tells of poverty that blocked his writing and poisoned his soul.

5.3.2 The Short Story: New Directions

The story genre had to a degree lost its luster by the late l970s. Experimental metafiction stories had been penned by Donald Barthelme, Robert Coover, John Barth, and William Gass and were no longer on the cutting edge. Large-circulation

weekly magazines that had showcased short fiction, such as the Saturday Evening Post, had collapsed.

It took an outsider from the Pacific Northwest - a gritty realist in the tradition of Ernest Hemingway - to revitalize the genre. Raymond Carver (l938-l988) had studied under the late novelist John Gardner, absorbing Gardner's passion for accessible artistry fused with moral vision. Carver rose above alcoholism and harsh poverty to become the most influential story writer in the United States. Carver follows confused working people through dead-end jobs, alcoholic binges, and rented rooms with an understated, minimalist style of writing that carries tremendous impact.

Linked with Carver is novelist and story writer Ann Beattie (1947-), whose middle-class characters often lead aimless lives. Her stories refer to political events and popular songs, and offer distilled glimpses of life decade by decade in the changing United States.

Today, writers with ethnic and global roots are informing the story genre with non-Western and tribal approaches, and storytelling has commanded critical and popular attention. The versatile, primal tale is the basis of several hybridized forms: novels that are constructed of interlinking short stories or vignettes, and creative nonfictions that interweave history and personal history with fiction.

5.3.3 The Short Short Story: Sudden or Flash Fiction

The short short is a very brief story, often only one or two pages long. It is sometimes called 'Flash Fiction' or 'Sudden Fiction' after the l986 anthology *Sudden Fiction*, edited by Robert Shapard and James Thomas.

In short short stories, there is little space to develop a character. Rather, the element of plot is central: A crisis occurs, and a sketched-in character simply has to react. Authors deploy clever narrative or linguistic patterns; in some cases, the short short resembles a prose poem.

Supporters claim that short shorts' 'reduced geographies' mirror postmodern conditions in which borders seem closer together. They find elegant simplicity in these brief fictions. Detractors see short shorts as a symptom of cultural decay, a

general loss of reading ability, and a limited attention span. In any event, short shorts have found a certain niche: They are easy to forward in an e-mail, and they lend themselves to electronic distribution. They make manageable in-class readings and models for writing assignments.

5.3.4 Drama

Tastes change so rapidly in this country that yesterday's avant-garde becomes tomorrow's old hat. Intellectual and political fashions become outmoded, then quaint, finally historical- all within a few years. Inevitably, the fact of American ideational life is reflected in its literature, particularly in its plays- perhaps because the theatre is so public, so social an event. Poets may occasionally be unacknowledged legislators of the world, but even the best of playwrights is more likely to give form and flesh to ideas that are already in the air.

Contemporary drama mingles realism with fantasy in postmodern works that fuse the personal and the political. The exuberant Tony Kushner (l956-) has won acclaim for his prize-winning Angels in America plays, which vividly render the AIDS epidemic and the psychic cost of closeted homosexuality in the 1980s and 1990s.

Women dramatists have attained particular success in recent years. Prominent among them is Beth Henley (1952-), from Mississippi, known for her portraits of southern women. Henley gained national recognition for her *Crimes of the Heart* (l978), a warm play about three eccentric sisters whose affection helps them survive disappointment and despair. Her later plays explore southern forms of socializing - beauty contests, funerals, coming-out parties, and dance halls.

Younger dramatists such as African-American Suzan-Lori Parks (1964-) build on the successes of earlier women. Parks, who grew up on various army bases in the United States and Germany, deals with political issues in experimental works whose timelessness and ritualism recall Irish-born writer Samuel Beckett. Her best-known work, *The America Play* (1991), revolves around the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln by John Wilkes Booth. She returns to this theme in *Topdog / Underdog* (2001), which tells the story of two African-American brothers named Lincoln and Booth and their lifetime of sibling rivalry.

5.4 REGIONALISM

A pervasive regionalist sensibility has gained strength in American literature in the past two decades. Decentralization expresses the postmodern U.S. condition, a trend most evident in fiction writing; no longer does anyone viewpoint or code successfully express the nation. No one city defines artistic movements, as New York City once did. Vital arts communities have arisen in many cities, and electronic technology has de-centered literary life.

As economic shifts and social change redefine America, a yearning for tradition has set in. The most sustaining and distinctively American myths partake of the land, and writers are turning to the Civil War South, the Wild West of the rancher, the rooted life of the Midwestern farmer, the southwestern tribal homeland, and other localized realms where the real and the mythic mingle. Of course, more than one region has inspired many writers; they are included here in regions formative to their vision or characteristic of their mature work.

5.4.1 The Northeast

The scenic Northeast, region of lengthy winters, dense deciduous forests, and low rugged mountain chains, was the first English-speaking colonial area, and it retains the feel of England. Boston, Massachusetts, is the cultural powerhouse, boasting research institutions and scores of universities. Many New England writers depict characters that continue the Puritan legacy, embodying the middle-class Protestant work ethic and progressive commitment to social reform. In the rural areas, small, independent farmers struggle to survive in the world of global marketing.

The bittersweet fictions of Massachusetts-based Sue Miller (1943-), such as *The Good Mother* (1986), examine counterculture lifestyles in Cambridge, a city known for cultural and social diversity, intellectual vitality, and technological innovation. Another writer from Massachusetts, Anita Diamant (1951-), earned popular acclaim with *The Red Tent* (1997), a feminist historical novel based on the biblical story of Dinah.

Russell Banks (1940-), from poor, rural New Hampshire, has turned from

experimental writing to more realistic works, such as *Affliction* (1989), his novel about working-class New Hampshire characters. For Banks, acknowledging one's roots is a fundamental part of one's identity. Banks's recent works include *Cloudsplitter* (1998), a historical novel about the 19th-century abolitionist John Brown.

Three writers who studied at Brown University in Rhode Island around the same time and took classes with British writer Angela Carter are often mentioned as the nucleus of a 'next generation.' Impressive stylists with off-center visions bordering on the absurd, Antrim, Moody, and Eugenides carry further the opposite traditions of John Updike and Thomas Pynchon.

5.4.2 The Mid-Atlantic

The fertile Mid-Atlantic States, dominated by New York City with its great harbor, remain a gateway for waves of immigrants. Today the region's varied economy encompasses finance, commerce, and shipping, as well as advertising and fashion. New York City is the home of the publishing industry, as well as prestigious art galleries and museums.

Don DeLillo (1936-), from New York City, began as an advertising writer, and his novels explore consumerism among their many themes. *Americana* (1971) concludes: "*To consume in America is not to buy, it is to dream*." DeLillo's protagonists seek identities based on images. DeLillo's later novels include politics and historical figures: *Libra* (1988) envisions the assassination of President John F. Kennedy as an explosion of frustrated consumerism; *Underworld* (1997) spins a web of interconnections between a baseball game and a nuclear bomb in Kazakhstan.

In multidimensional, polyglot New York, fictions featuring a shadowy postmodern city abound. An example is the labyrinthine New York trilogy *City of Glass* (1985), *Ghosts* (1986), and *The Locked Room* (1986) by Paul Auster (1947-). In this work, inspired by Samuel Beckett and the detective novel, an isolated writer at work on a detective story addresses Paul Auster, who is writing about Cervantes. The trilogy suggests that reality is but a text constructed via fiction, thus erasing the traditional border between reality and illusion. Auster's trilogy, in effect, self-

deconstructs. Similarly, Kathy Acker (1948-1997) juxtaposed passages from works by Cervantes and Charles Dickens with science fiction in postmodern pastiches such as *Empire of the Senseless* (1988), a quest through time and space for an individual voice.

Younger writers associated with life in the fast lane are Jay McInerney (1955-), whose *Story of My Life* (1988) is set in the drug-driven youth culture of the boom-time 1980s, and satirist Tama Janowitz (1957-). Their portraits of loneliness and addiction in the anonymous hard-driving city recall the works of John Cheever.

African Americans have made distinctive contributions. Feminist essayist and poet Audre Lorde's autobiographical *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (l982) is an earthy account of a black woman's experience in the United States. Bebe Moore Campbell (l950-), from Philadelphia, writes feisty domestic novels including *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine* (l992). Gloria Naylor (l950-), from New York City, explores different women's lives in *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982).

David Bradley (1950-), also from Pennsylvania, set his historical novel *The Chaneysville Incident* (l981) on the underground railroad, a network of citizens who provided opportunity and assistance for southern black slaves to find freedom in the North at the time of the U.S. Civil War.

America's capital city is home to many political novelists. Ward Just (1935-) sets his novels in Washington's swirling military, political, and intellectual circles. Christopher Buckley (1952-) spikes his humorous political satire with local details; his *Little Green Men* (1999) is a spoof about official responses to aliens from outer space. Michael Chabon (1963-), who grew up in the Washington suburbs but later moved to California, depicts youths on the dazzling brink of adulthood in *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* (1988); his novel inspired by a comic book, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* (2000), mixes glamour and craft in the manner of F. Scott Fitzgerald.

5.4.3 The South

The South comprises disparate regions in the southeastern United States,

from the cool Appalachian Mountain chain and the broad Mississippi River valley to the steamy cypress bayous of the Gulf Coast. Cotton and the plantation culture of slavery made the South the richest section in the country before the U.S. Civil War (1860-1865). But after the war, the region sank into poverty and isolation that lasted a century. Today, the South is part of what is called the Sun Belt, the fastest growing part of the United States.

The most traditional of the regions, the South is proud of its distinctive heritage. Enduring themes include family, land, history, religion, and race. Much southern writing has a depth and humanity arising from the devastating losses of the Civil War and soul searching over the region's legacy of slavery.

The South, with its rich oral tradition, has nourished many women storytellers. In the upper South, Bobbie Ann Mason (1940-) from Kentucky, writes of the changes wrought by mass culture. Mason's acclaimed short novel *In Country* (1985) depicts the effects of the Vietnam War by focusing on an innocent young girl whose father died in the conflict.

The novels of Jill McCorkle (1958-) capture her North Carolina background. Southern novelists mining male experience include the acclaimed Cormac McCarthy (l933-), whose early novels such as *Suttree* (1979) are archetypically southern tales of dark emotional depths, ignorance, and poverty, set against the green hills and valleys of eastern Tennessee. In l974, McCarthy moved to El Paso, Texas, and began to plumb western landscapes and traditions. *Blood Meridian: Or the Evening of Redness in the West* (1985) is an unsparing vision of The Kid, a 14-year-old from Tennessee who becomes a cold-hearted killer in Mexico in the 1840s.

A very different Mississippi-born writer is Richard Ford (1944-), who began writing in a Faulknerian vein but is best known for his subtle novel set in New Jersey, *The Sportswriter* (1986), and its sequel, *Independence Day* (l995). The latter is about Frank Bascombe, a dreamy, evasive drifter who loses all the things that give his life meaning - a son, his dream of writing fiction, his marriage, lovers and friends, and his job. Bascombe is sensitive and intelligent - his choices, he says, are made "*to deflect the pain of terrible regret*" - and his emptiness, along with the anonymous malls and

bald new housing developments that he endlessly cruises through, mutely testify to Ford's vision of a national malaise.

Many African-American writers hail from the South, including Ernest Gaines from Louisiana, Alice Walker from Georgia, and Florida-born Zora Neale Hurston, whose 1937 novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, is considered to be the first feminist novel by an African American. Hurston, who died in the 1960s, underwent a critical revival in the 1990s.

Experimental poet and scholar of slave narratives (*Freeing the Soul*, l999), Harryette Mullen (1953-) writes multivocal poetry collections such as *Muse & Drudge* (1995).

Many African-American writers whose families followed patterns of internal migration were born outside the South but return to it for inspiration. Famed science-fiction novelist Octavia Butler (l947-), from California, draws on the theme of bondage and the slave narrative tradition in *Wild Seed* (l980); her *Parable of the Sower* (l993) treats addiction. Sherley Anne Williams (l944-), also from California, writes of interracial friendship between southern women in slave times in her fact-based historical novel *Dessa Rose* (l986).

5.4.4 The Midwest

The vast plains of America's midsection - much of it between the Rocky Mountains and the Mississippi River - scorch in summer and freeze in scouring winter storms. The area was opened up with the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, attracting Northern European settlers eager for land. Early 20th-century writers with roots in the Midwest include Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sinclair Lewis, and Theodore Dreiser.

Midwestern fiction is grounded in realism. The domestic novel has flourished in recent years, portraying webs of relationships between kin, the local community, and the environment. Agribusiness and development threaten family farms in some parts of the region, and some novels sound the death knell of farming as a way of life.

Domestic novelists include Jane Smiley (1949-), whose *A Thousand Acres* (1991) is a contemporary, feminist version of the King Lear story. The lost kingdom

is a large family farm held for four generations, and the forces that undermine it are a concatenation of the personal and the political. Michael Cunningham (1952-), from Ohio, began as a domestic novelist in *A Home at the End of the World* (1990). *The Hours* (1998) brilliantly interweaves Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* with two women's lives in different eras.

Younger urban novelists include Jonathan Franzen (1959-), who was born in Missouri and raised in Illinois. Franzen's best-selling panoramic novel *The Corrections* (2001) - titled for a downturn in the stock market - evokes Midwestern family life over several generations. The novel chronicles the physical and mental deterioration of a patriarch suffering from Parkinson's disease; as in *Smiley's A Thousand Acres*, the entire family is affected. Franzen pits individuals against large conspiracies in *The Twenty-Seventh City* (1988) and *Strong Motion* (1992). Some critics link Franzen with Don DeLillo, Thomas Pynchon, and David Foster Wallace as a writer of conspiracy novels.

The Midwest has produced a wide variety of writing, much of it informed by international influences. Richard Powers (1957-), from Illinois, has lived in Thailand and the Netherlands. His challenging postmodern novels interweave personal lives with technology. *Galatea 2.2* (1995) updates the mad scientist theme; the scientists in this case are computer programmers.

African-American novelist Charles Johnson (1948-) draws on disparate traditions such as Zen and the slave narrative in novels such as *Oxherding Tale* (1982). Johnson's accomplished, picaresque novel *Middle Passage* (1990) blends the international history of slavery with a sea tale echoing *Moby-Dick*. *Dreamer* (1998) re-imagines the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Robert Olen Butler (1945-) writes about Vietnamese refugees in Louisiana in their own voices in *A Good Scent From a Strange Mountain* (1992). His stories in *Tabloid Dreams* (1996) - inspired by zany news headlines - were enlarged into the humorous novel *Mr. Spaceman* (2000), in which a space alien learns English from watching television and abducts a bus full of tourists in order to interview them on his spaceship.

Native-American authors from the region include part-Chippewa Louise Erdrich, who has set a series of novels in her native North Dakota. Gerald Vizenor (1935-) gives a comic, postmodern portrait of contemporary Native-American life in *Darkness at Saint Louis Bearheart* (1978) and *Griever: An American Monkey King in China* (1987).

5.4.5 The Mountain West

The western interior of the United States is a largely wild area that stretches along the majestic Rocky Mountains running slantwise from Montana at the Canadian border to the hills of Texas on the U.S. border with Mexico. Ranching and mining have long provided the region's economic backbone, and the Anglo tradition in the region emphasizes an independent frontier spirit.

Western literature often incorporates conflict. Traditional enemies in the 19th-century West are the cowboy versus the Indian, the farmer/settler versus the outlaw, the rancher versus the cattle rustler. Recent antagonists include the oilman versus the ecologist, the developer versus the archaeologist, and the citizen activist versus the representative of nuclear and military facilities, many of which are housed in the sparsely populated West.

One writer has cast a long shadow over western writing, much as William Faulkner did in the South. Wallace Stegner (1909-1993) records the passing of the western wilderness. In his masterpiece *Angle of Repose* (1971), a historian imagines his educated grandparents' move to the wild West. His last book surveys his life in the *West as a writer: Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs* (1992). Stegner influenced the contemporary Montana school of writers associated with McGuane, Jim Harrison, and some works of Richard Ford, as well as Texas writers like McMurtry.

Novelist Thomas McGuane (1939-) typically depicts one man going alone into a wild area, where he engages in an escalating conflict. McGuane's enthusiasm for hunting and fishing has led critics to compare him with Ernest Hemingway. Michigan-born Jim Harrison (1937-), like McGuane, spent many years living on a ranch. In his first novel, *Wolf: A False Memoir* (1971), a man seeks to view a wolf in the wild in hopes of changing his life.

In Richard Ford's Montana novel *Wildlife* (1990), the desolate landscape counterpoints a family's breakup. Story writer, eco-critic, and nature essayist Rick Bass (1958-) writes of elemental confrontations between outdoorsmen and nature in his story collection In the *Loyal Mountains* (1995) and the novel *Where the Sea Used To Be* (1998).

The West of multiethnic writers is less heroic and often more forward looking. One of the best-known Chicana writers is Sandra Cisneros (1954-). She focuses on the large cultural border between Mexico and the United States as a creative, contradictory zone in which Mexican-American women must reinvent themselves. Her best-selling *The House on Mango Street* (1984), a series of interlocking vignettes told from a young girl's viewpoint, blazed the trail for other Latina writers and introduced readers to the vital Chicago barrio.

Native Americans from the region include the late James Welch, whose *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* (2000) imagines a young Sioux who survives the Battle of Little Bighorn and makes a life in France. Linda Hogan (l947-), from Colorado and of Chickasaw heritage, reflects on Native-American women and nature in novels including *Mean Spirit* (1990), about the oil rush on Indian lands in the 1920s, and *Power* (1998), in which an Indian woman discovers her own inner natural resources.

5.4.6 The Southwest

For centuries, the desert Southwest developed under Spanish rule, and much of the population continues to speak Spanish, while some Native-American tribes reside on ancestral lands. Rainfall is unreliable, and agriculture has always been precarious in the region. Today, massive irrigation projects have boosted agricultural production, and air conditioning attracts more and more people to sprawling cities like Salt Lake City in Utah and Phoenix in Arizona.

In a region where the desert ecology is so fragile, it is not surprising that there are many environmentally oriented writers. The activist Edward Abbey (1927-1989) celebrated the desert wilderness of Utah in *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* (1968).

Barbara Kingsolver (1955-) offers a woman's viewpoint on the Southwest in her popular trilogy set in Arizona: *The Bean Trees* (1988), featuring Taylor Greer, a tomboyish young woman who takes in a Cherokee child; *Animal Dreams* (1990); and *Pigs in Heaven* (1993). *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998) concerns a missionary family in Africa. Kingsolver addresses political themes unapologetically, admitting, "*I want to change the world*."

The Southwest is home to the greatest number of Native-American writers, whose works reveal rich mythical storytelling, a spiritual treatment of nature, and deep respect for the spoken word. The most important fictional theme is healing, understood as restoration of harmony. Other topics include poverty, unemployment, alcoholism, and white crimes against Indians.

Native-American writing is more philosophical than angry, however, and it projects a strong ecological vision. Major authors include the distinguished N. Scott Momaday, who inaugurated the contemporary Native-American novel with *House Made of Dawn*; his recent works include *The Man Made of Words* (1997). Part-Laguna novelist Leslie Marmon Silko, the author of Ceremony, has also published *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999), evoking Indigo, an orphan cared for by a white woman at the turn of the 20th century.

Numerous Mexican-American writers reside in the Southwest, as they have for centuries. Distinctive concerns include the Spanish language, the Catholic tradition, folkloric forms, and, in recent years, race and gender inequality, generational conflict, and political activism. The culture is strongly patriarchal, but new female Chicana voices have arisen.

The poetic nonfiction book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), by Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-), passionately imagines a hybrid feminine consciousness of the borderlands made up of strands from Mexican, Native-American, and Anglo cultures. Also noteworthy is New Mexican writer Denise Chavez (1948-), author of the story collection *The Last of the Menu Girls* (l986). *Her Face of an Angel* (1994), about a waitress who has been working on a manual for waitresses for 30 years, has been called an authentically Latino novel in English.

5.4.7 California Literature

California could be a country all its own with its enormous multiethnic population and huge economy. The state is known for spawning social experiments, youth movements (the Beats, hippies, techies), and new technologies (the "dot-coms" of Silicon Valley) that can have unexpected consequences.

Northern California, centered on San Francisco, enjoys a liberal, even utopian literary tradition seen in Jack London and John Steinbeck. It is home to hundreds of writers, including Native American Gerald Vizenor, Chicana Lorna Dee Cervantes, African Americans Alice Walker and Ishmael Reed, and internationally minded writers like Norman Rush (1933-).

Northern California houses a rich tradition of Asian-American writing, whose characteristic themes include family and gender roles, the conflict between generations, and the search for identity. Maxine Hong Kingston helped kindle the renaissance of Asian-American writing, at the same time popularizing the fictionalized memoir genre.

Southern California literature has a very different tradition associated with the newer city of Los Angeles, built by boosters and land developers despite the obvious problem of lack of water resources. Los Angeles was from the start a commercial enterprise; it is not surprising that Hollywood and Disneyland are some of its best-known legacies to the world. Loneliness and alienation stalk the creations of Gina Berriault (1926-1999), whose characters eke out stunted lives lived in rented rooms in *Women in Their Beds* (1996). Joan Didion (1934-) evokes the free-floating anxiety of California in her brilliant essays *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968). In 2003, Didion penned *Where I Was From*, a narrative account of how her family moved west with the frontier and settled in California. Another Angelino, Dennis Cooper (1953-), writes cool novels about an underworld of numb, alienated men.

Mexican-American writers in Los Angeles sometimes focus on low-grade racial tension. Richard Rodriguez (1944-), author of *Hunger of Memory*: *The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (1982), argues against bilingual education and affirmative action in Days of Obligation: *An Argument With My Mexican Father*

(l992). Luis Rodriguez's (1954-) memoir of macho Chicano gang life in Los Angeles, *Always Running* (1993), testifies to the city's dark underside.

The Latin-American diaspora has influenced Helena Maria Viramontes (1954-), born and raised in the barrio of East Los Angeles. Her works portray that city as a magnet for a vast and growing number of Spanish-speaking immigrants, particularly Mexicans and Central Americans fleeing poverty and warfare. In powerful stories such as *The Cariboo Café* (1984), she interweaves Anglos, refugees from death squads, and illegal immigrants who come to the United States in search of work.

5.4.8 The Northwest

In recent decades, the mountainous, densely forested Northwest, centered around Seattle in the state of Washington, has emerged as a cultural center known for liberal views and a passionate appreciation of nature. Its most influential recent writer was Raymond Carver.

David Guterson (1956-), born in Seattle, gained a wide readership when his novel *Snow Falling on Cedars* (1994) was made into a movie. Set in Washington's remote, misty San Juan Islands after World War II, it concerns a Japanese American accused of a murder. In Guterson's moving novel *East of the Mountains* (1999), a heart surgeon dying of cancer goes back to the land of his youth to commit suicide, but discovers reasons to live. The penetrating novel *Housekeeping* (1980) by Marilynne Robinson (1944-) sees this wild, difficult territory through female eyes. In her luminous, long-awaited second novel, *Gilead* (2004), an upright elderly preacher facing death writes a family history for his young son that looks back as far as the Civil War.

Although she has lived in many regions, Annie Dillard (1945-) has made the Northwest her own in her crystalline works such as the brilliant poetic essay entitled *Holy the Firm* (1994), prompted by the burning of a neighbor child. Her description of the Pacific Northwest evokes both a real and spiritual landscape. Akin to Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, Dillard seeks enlightenment in nature. Her one novel, *The Living* (1992), celebrates early pioneer families beset by disease, drowning, poisonous fumes, gigantic falling trees, and burning wood houses as they

imperceptibly assimilate with indigenous tribes, Chinese immigrants, and newcomers from the East.

Sherman Alexie (1966-) is the youngest Native-American novelist to achieve national fame. Alexie gives unsentimental and humorous accounts of Indian life with an eye for incongruous mixtures of tradition and pop culture. His story cycles include *Reservation Blues* (1995) and *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993), His harrowing novel *Indian Killer* (1996) recalls Richard Wright's Native Son.

5.4.9 Caribbean Islands

Writers from the English-speaking Caribbean islands have been shaped by the British literary curriculum and colonial rule, but in recent years their focus has shifted from London to New York and Toronto. Themes include the beauty of the islands, the innate wisdom of their people, and aspects of immigration and exile - the breakup of family, culture shock, changed gender roles, and assimilation.

Two forerunners merit mention. Paule Marshall (1929-), Jean Rhys (1894-1979) who penned *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), a haunting and poetic refiguring of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Rhys lived most of her life in Europe, but her book was championed by American feminists for whom the madwoman in the attic had become an iconic figure of repressed female selfhood. Rhys's work opened the way for the angrier voice of Jamaica Kincaid (1949-), from Antigua,

Many Latin American writers diverge from the views common among Chicano writers with roots in Mexico, who have tended to be romantic, nativist, and left wing in their politics. In contrast, Cuban-American writing tends to be cosmopolitan, comic, and politically conservative. Gustavo Pérez Firmat's memoir, *Next Year in Cuba: A Chronicle of Coming of Age in America* (1995), celebrates baseball as much as Havana. *The Pérez Family* (1990), by Christine Bell (1951-), warmly portrays confused Cuban families - at least half of them named Pérez - in exile in Miami..

Major Latin American writers who first became prominent in the United States in the 1960s introduced U.S. authors to magical realism, surrealism, a hemispheric sensibility, and an appreciation of indigenous cultures.

5.5 GLOBAL AUTHORS: VOICES FROM ASIA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Many writers from the Indian subcontinent have made their home in the United States in recent years. Bharati Mukherjee (1940-) has written an acclaimed story collection, *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988); her novel *Jasmine* (1989) tells the story of an illegal immigrant woman. Mukherjee was raised in Calcutta; her novel *The Holder of the World* (1993) imagines passionate adventures in 17th-century India for characters in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. *Leave It to Me* (1997) follows the nomadic struggles of a girl abandoned in India who seeks her roots. Mukherjee's haunting story *The Management of Grief* (1988), about the aftermath of a terrorist bombing of a plane, has taken on new resonance since September 11, 2001. Jhumpa Lahiri (1967-) focuses on the younger generation's conflicts and assimilation in *Interpreter of Maladies, Stories of Bengal, Boston, and Beyond* (1999) and her novel *The Namesake* (2003).

Southeast Asian-American authors, especially those from Korea and the Philippines, have found strong voices in the last decade. Among recent Korean-American writers, pre-eminent is Chang-rae Lee (1965-). His moving second novel, *A Gesture Life* (1999), explores the long shadow of a wartime atrocity - the Japanese use of Korean 'comfort women.'

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951-1982), born in Korea, blends photographs, videos, and historical documents in her experimental *Dictee* (l982) to memorialize the suffering of Koreans under Japanese occupying forces.

5.6 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson, we have made a comprehensive critical survey of the most significant writing in the United States at the turn of the twenty first century. We have described and assessed the work of American novelists, playwrights and poets and analyzed the intellectual and critical environment in which they worked. It must have clarified the often baffling complexities and discontinuities of style and content in contemporary writing. We have provided interpretations of individual writers, related

their work to that of their contemporaries, and identified the forces and counter forces in the literature of the past decades. The lesson is critical as well as descriptive in order not only to map the terrain and analyze movements and trends, but also to assess the achievements of the writers discussed.

5.7 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Literary postmodernism was officially inaugurated in the United States with the first issue of:

   (A) boundary 2

   (B) Catch 22

   (C) Literature 22

   (D) Authors 2

2. In which of the following works does the term "literature of silence" occur:

   (A) What Was Postmodernism?

   (B) Constructing Postmodernism

   (C) Postmodernist Fiction

   (D) The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature

3. The Stolen Light by Ved Mehta is a:

   (A) Short short story

   (B) Memoir

   (C) Autobiography

   (D) Novel

4. Which work by John Wilkes Booth revolves around the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln ?

   (A) Topdog /Underdog

   (B) Crimes of the Heart

(C) The America Play

(D) Angels in America

5. Which of the following remain a gateway for waves of immigrants:

(A) The Northeast

(B) The Mid-Atlantic

(C) The South

(D) The Midwest

6. In one of her novels, Bharati Mukherjee imagines passionate adventures in 17th century India for characters in:

(A) Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre

(B) Richard Wright's Native Son

(C) Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway

(D) Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter

7. Which American writer published 'A brave and startling truth' in 1996

(A) Robert Hass

(B) Jessica Hagdorn

(C) Maya Angelou

(D) Micheal Palmer

5.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Comment on the significance of the shift from modernism to postmodernism.

2. Trace the development of 'Short Story' to 'Short Short story' under postmodern conditions.

3. Comment on the mingling of realism and fantasy in Contemporary Postmodern American drama.

4. Write an essay on the pervasive regionalist sensibility in American literature in the past two decades.

5. Show your acquaintance with the literary background of the contemporary American authors from Asia and the Middle East.

5.9 ANSWER KEY: 1. (A); 2. (D); 3. (B); 4. (C); 5. (B); 6. (D); 7. (C)

5.10 SUGGESTED READING

1. Asian American Novelists: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook by Emmanuel S. Nelson (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2000)

2. R. E. Spiller et al., ed., Literary History of the United States (4th ed., rev., 1974)

3. E. Elliott et al., ed., Columbia Literary History of the United States (1988) and The Columbia History of the American Novel (1991)

4. G. Marcus and W. Sollors, ed., A New Literary History of America (2009)

   E. Whitley, American Bards (2010)

5. L. Cassuto et al., ed., The Cambridge History of the American Novel (2011)

6. M. Graham and J. W. Ward, Jr., ed., The Cambridge History of African American Literature (2011)

COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 6**
AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–II**

MOBY DICK

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Objectives

6.3 Melville Biography

6.4 Let Us Sum Up

6.5 Examination Oriented Questions

6.6 Suggested Reading

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Having attained Independence from Great Britain in 1776, America as a young nation, felt a compelling need to possess its own genuine, independent literature which would cater to native needs and situations. The American mind was now moving from the imitative to the optative phase and the Americans found themselves confronted with gigantic problems: the construction of civilization and culture and the production of a literature which would really be called American. The task was enormous but not impossible. Two literary genuises came on the scene to negotiate the problem of quest, for a form. These two great writers were Nanthaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, the master and the disciple. Melville learnt at Hawthorne's feet and the latter's theory of Romance as a form of writing became the bed-rock of the narrative strategy in *Moby Dick.* Melville himself called *Moby Dick* a wicked book and dedicated it to

Hawthorne with these words, "It is the blackness of Hawthorne that fixes and fascinates me".

6.2 OBJECTIVES :

The main objective of the lesson is to familiarize the learners with the author and his major works.

6.3 MELVILLE BIOGRAPHY

Herman Melville, the third of eight children, four brothers and four sisters, was born on the 1st August, 1819 in the city of New York. His father was Allan Melville, a Unitarian, who incurred huge debts and the family had to move from place to place because of the father's instability and losses in business. Allan Melville died when Herman was hardly in his teens and thanks to a family friend Judge Lemule that Melville's mother could support her children. It was at the age of fourteen that Melville was sent as an apprentice aboard a whaling ship the *Acushnet* in 1833 and thus began Melville's great association, intense fascination and love for the sea. For a number of years Melville went on roaming on the high seas and these years of adventure, excitement and romance formed the epicentre of almost all his works. Like Joseph Conrad, the famous British novelist, the sea and the love of the sea becomes the role-playing matrix in Melville's novels. At the age of nineteen, Melville took a job as cabinboy on a trading ship across the Atlantic Ocean, between Liverpool and New York. This was Melville's first major sea voyage and in Melville's own words he had "*a vague prophetic thought*", that he was "fated, one day or another, to be great voyager". For three years Melville went on hunting whales in the Pacific Ocean. At that time, the Whaling Industry was a major industry in America and whaling had already become a passion for people like Melville. Extraction of the precious and commercially viable whale-oil by ship owners, hiring of professionals like expert harpooners, Cabin boys, Captains, Ship-mates etc. would be done on basis of experience and expertise. Even criminals and vagabonds, rapseallions would be aboard the whalers and Melville experienced all this during whaling expeditions across the high seas.

Among his other sea adventures one can talk of his being imprisoned by a tribe of cannibals called the Typees. Ironically, the cannibalistic tribe treated their prisoner well and Melville found the valley of the Typee a veritable paradise on earth. The inhabitants looked beautiful, leading simple, blissful lives, free from the complications of a civilized world. All the same, cannibals will remain cannibals, and that is why at the very first opportunity Melville escaped aboard in Australian Whaler. An account of this adventure can be found in Melville's first book *Typees : A Peep at Polynesian Life* published in 1846.

During one of his numerous voyages, Melville took part in mutiny and was imprisoned and discharged. Melville's second novel, *Omoo***,** tells the story of this episode in his life, from the time he left the island of the Typees through his stay in Tahiti. When Melville left Tahiti, it was aboard his third and last whaler, a New England ship, from Nantucket. Experienced by now, Melville worked as boat-steerer and harpooner during a six-months cruise in Pacific waters, until he left the ship at Hawaii. The intimate knowledge Melville gained on three whaling ships about the sea and its creatures, the ships and their men, and the techniques of whaling, he transmuted into the dramatic voyage that constitutes the framework of his master-piece *Moby Dick.* "A whaling ship was my Yale college and my Harvard", says the narrator Ishmael in that novel.

In Hawaii, Melville worked as a clerk and bookkeeper, then joined the American Navy and sailed as an ordinary seaman on the frigate United States**.** Melville served on this ship for fourteen months, as it made its way across the Pacific, around the tip of South America and upto the east coast of the America to Boston. Two of Melville's novels, *White-Jacket* (1850) and *Billy Budd* written in (1891) are set on Navy-man-of-war. As he left the Navy ship for the final time, in October (1844), just after his twenty fifth birthday, Melville threw his white jacket into the sea, an action symbolic of the end of his years as a working sailor.

After his discharge from the Navy, Melville began writing *Typee* and was launched on his writing career, which he pursued for the next thirteen years. Later, in a letter to Hawthrone, he wrote, "Until I was twenty-five, I had no development

at all." But it is not until his third novel, *Mardi*, that Melville's unfolding becomes apparent.

Melville moved to Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in (1860) with his first wife and first son, and become friends with Hawthorne who lived a few miles away. When Melville wrote the review of Hawthorne's *Mosses from an old Mansc***,** he was working on his novel about a big white whale, later called as *Moby Dick***.**

After the publication of *Moby Dick***,** Melville set to work on *Pierre***,** a strangely personal and morbid book about a youth of nineteen who seems to think like his thirty-five year old author.

Melville's final work of fiction, written in the last year of his life, is strikingly different in style, even as it presents once again, forty years after his escape from The Typee valley and his sojourn in Tahiti. In *Omoo***,** Melville is extremely critical of the exploitation of the Polynesians by the "civilized" nations, especially by Christian missionaries.

*Mardi***,** (1849): A sequel to *Typee* and *Omoo*, Mardi eventually focusses on a search through Pacific waters, which is symbolically a quest for meaning. Melville did not succeed in integrating the elements of adventure and allegory.

Red burn, (1849): Semi-autobiographical novel about a young man's voyage to Liverpool, his experiences aboard ship and amidst the poverty of Europe.

White-Jacket, or *The World in a Man-of-War*, (1850): A novel about life and events aboard a Navy ship, exposing such cruel practices of the officers as disciplinary flogging.

Moby Dick, (1851): *Moby Dick* is at one and the same time an exciting adventure story; an account of the New England whaling industry; a detailed technical description of how experts catch a whale and a saga of the courage required of the harpooners, the boat-steerers, and the other seamen.

*Pierre or The Ambiguities***,** (1852): Novel about a young would be author increasingly torn by the gap between his ideals and life as it unfolds itself to him, and as he holds to his pursuit of truth.

Melville's reputation, originally established through south seas romances, now rests mainly on *Moby Dick***,** *Billy Budd***,** and several of his excellent short stories between 1860 and 1917, few people thought of Melville as a major artist. A handful of British authors-Stevenson, Masefield, Conrad, Ford Maddox mentioned him; but his death in 1891 went virtually unnoticed and it was not until the third decade of the twentieth century that a group of American critics and scholars "discovered" Melville and thus began a wave of interest which has survived more novelty.

The Major Works:

1. *Typee* (1846)
2. *Omoo* (1847)
3. *Mardi* (1849)
4. *Redburn* (1849)
5. *White Jacket* (1850)
6. *Moby Dick* (1851)
7. *Pierre* (1852)
8. *Israel Potter* (1855)
9. *The Piazza Tales* (1856)
10. *The Confidence Man* (1857)
11. *Billy Budd* (Published Posthumously in 1924)
12. *The Apple Tree Table and Other Sketches*

6.4 LET US SUM UP

Melville called himself "*an alien wanderer in the sea of imagination*", and this is what he remained throughout his career as a writer. Herman Melville possessed a rich intellect and a highly fertile imagination. Once he likened himself to a "*Man of War*" and his conscience as a writer could not make any compromises with material requirements like money. What he felt most compelled to write, he found it fairly difficult to do so as it wouldn't sell and he couldn't take it any longer he said "*dollars damn me, I am not able to write what I feel most compelled to write*", and as said earlier, the irresistible urge to write finally overtook his mind

and he remarked: "*dollars be damned, I'll write what I feel*....". Thus, out of this dilemma, a dilemma of a committed writer full of conviction, *Moby Dick* the magnum opus was born, a work encompassing multidimensional connotations of the American mind and psyche.

6.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Briefly discuss Herman Melville as a novelist.

6.6 SUGGESTED READING :

1. Dive Deeper **:** Journey with Mobi Dick by George Cotkin

2. Mobi Dick Centennial Essays by Tyrus Hillmay & Luthers Mansfield

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COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 7**
AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–II**

MOBY DICK

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Objectives

7.3 Melville's Work : *Moby Dick*

7.3.1 Adventure

7.3.2 Existential Element

7.3.3 Whale as Symbol

7.4 Features of an Epic

7.4.1 An Exalted Theme, Fit for an Epic

7.5 Mythic Imagination

7.6 Let Us Sum Up

7.7 Examination Oriented Questions

7.8 Suggested Reading

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Herman Melville was a 19th-century American novelist, short story writer, and poet best known for his complex and adventurous tales of the sea. His most famous work, *Moby-Dick*, is considered a masterpiece of American literature, blending rich symbolism with profound themes of obsession and the human condition. Despite initial mixed receptions, Melville's works have gained enduring acclaim, establishing him as a pivotal figure in literary history.

7.2 OBJECTIVES:

The main aim of the lesson is to familiarize the learners with the novel and its various aspects.

7.3 MELVILLE'S WORK: MOBY DICK

Any story that may be visualised in terms of a frothing sea and bobbling whale boats, dark harpooners shouting in panic, and massive whales sounding with deadly snapping jaws would lead readers to expect a thrilling adventure tale. Combine these elements with a mysterious, one-legged captain lusting for vengeance and all the ingredients seem present for a hair-raising tale of daring on the high seas. *Moby Dick* is one of those rare works of literature that have a capacity for growth through same inner vitality which increases with time. It was on 18th October, 1851 that the book was published in London under the title of *The Whale*. Then, on the 14th November in the same year, the book was published in New York under the title *Moby Dick*. The initial reviews of this work were not very complimentary or enthusiastic. However, since 1919, it has been recognised as a masterpiece- the sort of masterpiece that can serve as a mirror to the changing thoughts and feelings of changing times.

Moby Dick is not just an adventure story of the sea as shown by the rather simple nature of its plot. There are few intense actions or narrative twists in Melville's novels. Therefore, the following summary of the action is intended only to orient the reader to the scope of the novel. The story of *Moby Dick* begins on a day in winter in the city of New York where a young American, who calls himself Ishmael, decides to go on a voyage aboard one of the whaling ships. He takes this decision partly because the sea fascinates him, and partly because he would like to escape from the depression which has been weighing him down. Ishmael sets out for Nantucket, the principal whaling port, but he is temporarily delayed in New Bedford, meets a harpooner named Queequeg. After a weekend in New Bedford they come down to Nantucket and sign on a whaler, the Pequod. There are several apparent omens which seem to suggest that they should not sail on the Pequod, but ignoring these, they sail off into the winter sea. As the ship embarks, it is under

the command of the first mate Starbuck. The Captain, Ahab, keeps below decks, indisposed as he has an alienated temperament. On a previous whaling voyage, he lost a leg bitten off by a white whale which has come to the known by the name of Moby Dick.

The Captain refuses to accept his misfortune as one of the common hazards of his trade, and regards his loss of a leg as a proof of the malice of some supernatural power which has used the white whale as its agent to deprive him of one of his limbs. He directs the crew of his ship to make a search for Moby Dick throughout the Whaling grounds of the Pacific Ocean.

The bulk of the voyage from Nantucket to the cape of Good Hope is described only through implication. It is only when Pequod reaches Africa that bit of action takes place. After many months of search, the white whale is finally sighted and chased. But the monster, which has enormous strength and which is exceptionally fierce not only destroys Fedallah and Ahab, but also sinks the Pequod. All the men on the ship are drowned, with the exception of Ishmael who survives by clinging to a wooden coffin made for the burial of Queequeg, which now serves as a life-buoy for him. Floating on the sea, Ishmael is picked up by another whale-ship by the name of Rachel. It is he who then tells the story; not only he describes Ahab's tragic adventure but details about the Pequod, the Pequod's crew, the different kinds of whales and the various processes which are employed to extract whale-oil from the sperm whales. The novel has, thus, a mixture of elements in which reader finds symbolism, adventure, traits of an epic, Mythic imagination, Supernaturalism exalted themes etc. These elements are important constituents which when discussed in detail make readers aware of *Moby Dick's* real structure.

7.3.1 Adventure : *Moby Dick* is a story of Captain Ahab's pursuit of a white whale, and the disastrous end, which the captain and his ship meet, a story of adventure on the sea, which produces fear in the minds of its readers and white whale becomes a subject of hunt for them as they feel involved too.

7.3.2 Existential Element : The novel is existential in the sense that it dramatizes the world in which, for Ahab, there is no hope. This hopelessness

anticipates the twentieth-century existential novel in which a sense of abandonment produces despair and anguish. The novel depicts a world in which a meaningless action can take place and a useless conflict can occur between a madman and a dumb brute.

7.3.3 Whale as Symbol : To Ishmael, the white whale means many things. Ishmael sees the monster as an immense power and as an astonishing force. He regards the white whale as a phenomenon which defies a rational explanation. Perhaps he believes the white whale to be an impersonal life-force, indifferent to the desires and wishes of human beings. The white whale is a great phallic symbol, a symbol of vitality of the universe and of the life-principle. Like nature it is paradoxically benign and malevolent, nourishing the destructive. The white whale is massive, brutal, monolithic.

7.4 FEATURES OF AN EPIC

The ancient epics are dominated by a sense of fate. In *Moby Dick* we came across many omens which seem to indicate the intervention of fate in human affairs.

In *Moby Dick* we get the feeling that the supernatural powers are playing a role in the affairs of human beings. Omens always give rise to a feeling in our minds that there is some supernatural which gives to human beings an indication of what is in store for them. Thus, at the very outset, Ishmael sees a picture at the Spouter-Inn, which shows a whaling ship wrecked by an enormous whale. The landlord of the Spouter-Inn has the ominous name of Peter Coffin. Then there is the mysterious fellow called Elijah, who makes a vague forecast that the Pequod would meet a sad fate and Captain Ahab is going to his doom. All these omens bode ill for Ahab and his crew; and these omens give us the feeling that a supernatural power is at work to decide the destiny of these men. Ahab himself declares that he is functioning as a lieutenant of the fates.

7.4.1 An Exalted Theme, Fit for an Epic

An epic has an exalted theme, *Moby Dick* can be regarded as being an allegory of the risks involved in trying to subdue and tame Nature to the will

of man. From this point of view, the whale symbolizes all the forces of nature over whom man wishes to establish his supremacy. There is no doubt that man has already conquered many forces of Nature; but it has to be recognized that man cannot become the lord of all Nature.

7.5 MYTHIC IMAGINATION

In *Moby Dick,* the figures of the great white whale and captain Ahab are the result of Melville's most successful effort to create credible figures of mythic proportions and to show at the same time the actual processes by which such figures arise and achieve credibility.

The white colour is at once symbolic of purity and of evil. The white colour represents innocence and joy, but it also represents terror and awe. In both cases, Melville compels us to believe in these great creations of the mythic imagination

Moby Dick is one of the greatest American novels. It tells a gripping story of the pursuit of a whale of an exceptional ferocity; and at the same time it is a novel which takes us into the hidden recesses of the human mind, showing us its complexity and its manifold manifestations.

7.6 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have critically analyzed the novel, Moby Dick. We have discussed different aspects of the novel like existential element, mythic imagination, as an epic etc. to give a deeper knowledge on the story.

7.7 EXAMINATION ORINTED QUESTIONS

a) Critically examine the structure of *Moby-Dick.*

b) Discuss the theme of the novel *Moby-Dick.*

c) Write a critical note on *Moby-Dick* as a psychological novel.

7.8 SUGGESTED READING

1. Dive Deeper**:** Journey with Mobi Dick by George Cotkin

2. Why read Mobi Dick? by Nathaniel Philbrick

COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 8**
AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–II**

MOBY DICK

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Objectives

8.3 Character of Ahab

8.4 Let Us Sum Up

8.5 Examination Oriented Questions

8.6 Multiple Choice Questions

8.7 Suggested Reading

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Moby-Dick features a diverse cast of characters, with Captain Ahab at the forefront, driven by his monomaniacal quest to kill the white whale, Moby Dick, who had previously maimed him. Ishmael, the novel's reflective and observant narrator, provides a detailed account of the voyage on the whaling ship, Pequod. The ship's crew includes the noble and loyal first mate, Starbuck, the amiable second mate, Stubb, and the young and sprightly third mate, Flask, each bringing their distinct personalities and perspectives to the epic tale. Additionally, the harpooners, Queequeg, Tashtego, and Dagoo, add depth and cultural diversity to the narrative, enriching the novel's exploration of human experience and adventure.

8.2 OBJECTIVES

The main aim of this lesson is to familiarize the learners with the character of Ahab in the novel *Moby-Dick.*

8.3 CHARACTER OF AHAB

In *Moby Dick*, Ahab is the American hero preoccupied with certain basic existential issues like the meaning and purpose of life, the problem of good and evil, God and Satan, Heaven and Hell. Ahab is a demi-God type of charmer, a hero who symbolizes within himself the image of American Adam. In other words, an abstract figure totally removed from verisimilitude and has nothing to do with things like Marriage, Wooing, Child-bearing and above all Socialization. The question of to be or not to be is a remarkable trait of the personality of Ahab. Everybody seems to be afraid of him. Nobody is courageous enough to go and talk to him. He is an unusual man, a man in alienation, fearsome looking like a Greek God. Ahab is described as a superhuman being, with a determined mind. His gaze is fixed. The title which can be given to Ahab's character is Revenge.

In the novel, preliminary information about Ahab is provided by Peleg**.** The name Ahab was given to him by his foolish, ignorant mother, which in the Old Testament, is the name of a wicked king. Ahab is at the time described as a good man, "not a pious good man but a swearing good man".

His physical appearance is narrated in the novel by the narrator/Ishmael in the following words:

"There seemed no sign of common bodily illness about him, nor of the recovery from any. He looked like a man cut away from the stake, when the fire has overrunningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them, or taking away one particle from their compacted aged robustness. His whole high, broad form, seemed made of solid bronze, and shaped in an unalterable mould, like Celline's cast Perseus. Threading its way out from among his grey hairs and continuing right down one side of his tawny scorched face and neck, till it disappeared in his clothing, you saw a slender rod-like mark, lividly whitish. Whether that mark was

born with him, or whether it was the scar left by some desperated wound, no one could certainly say".

Ahab was a man, demanding instantaneous obedience. He has a dictatorial nature. The first incident which occurs soon after Ahab appears on the Deck for the first time is that of Stubb receiving a stern rebuke from him. Stubb has gone into his cabin and complained that, when he walks to and fro on the deck with his ivory leg, the sailors below feel disturbed and cannot sleep soundly. Ahab becomes furious with Stubb for having objected to the sound which Ahab's ivory leg makes and, addressing stubb as a dog, orders him to get out of his cabin. Ahab demands implicit and instantaneous obedience from the members of the crew. There is a certain sultanism about his temperament; and it is this sultanism which makes a dictator of him. He always speaks in a peremptory tone. He does not talk much and, even at the dinner-table, he sits like a mute sea-lion surrounded by his brave but respectful cubs (namely the three mates). Indeed, the mates sit before him as if they were little children. Ahab is a man of determination; and we witness an example of this determination when, in a mood of disgust with his habit of smoking, he throws his pipe into the sea, saying : "I'll smoke no more". Later, when Starbuck persists in a suggestion he has made, Ahab threatens to fire at him with his loaded gun, so that Starbuck is compelled to yield.

Ahab was suffering from some tension and it seemed as if this tension was eating his mind. He is full of riddles, a mysterious man, belonging to a palsied universe. The singular obsession to kill the white whale Moby Dick becomes a singular and deep-rooted fixation with Ahab. By killing the whale, Ahab thinks that he can cure the world of the forces of Evil. As a modern Narcissus, Ahab becomes a study in total self absorption leading to isolation, madness and finally suicide. The Melvillean cosmos in Moby Dick in which Ahab operates is stricken, absurd cosmos and the hero operates as a modern–day Sisyphus, fruitlessly engaged in a neverending and meaningless task.

As an existentialist hero Ahab becomes an American Adam gone mad. There is no middle course for him as an extremist bent upon executing monomaniacal

revenge. As a high-class intellectual, he also qualifies to be a transcendentalist. At the same time he strikes the Faustian pact like Marlowe's Dr. Faustus and even rises to the level of myth. There are sudden hidden, secret truths, mysteries and Ahab's mind is full of reflections on God, a God who inflicts punishment in case by mortal defiance. Ahab also becomes an archetype of fabulous innocence and his innocence is his frankness with which he tells that he is going on a journey to kill the huge white whale. His only crime is that he tries to solve things which were not within man's competence. Ahab tries to grapple with the imponderables of human existence, the eternal conflict between God and Satan, Heaven and Hell, Matter and Spirit, Head and Heart. As an ironic Adam, the Melvillean hero tries to create his own Paradise, free from a malevolent, malignant and evil God. In his unequal battle with the heavenly powers, Ahab is bound to lose the fight. How can earthly man defy the gods, defy Fate, Destiny and Chance and yet hope to succeed?

In personal anguish Ahab acknowledges his human deficiency: "Gifted with the high perception, I lack the low, enjoying power: damned, most subtly and most malignantly!" Starbucks thinks him mad but Ahab realizes that his madness is the result not of a disintegrated mind but of a supreme intelligence: "I'm demoniac, I am madness maddened! That wild madness that's only calm to comprehend itself... The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails whereon my soul is grooved to run." The self-knowledge evident throughout this soliloquy ultimately gives way to self-delusion in the long pursuit of *Moby Dick.* His madness has taken the form of a loosening of his imagination so that it has no bounds of reason, he confuses the image with the reality. Again, this metaphoric madness of Ahab is what drives him in the pursuit of the white whale.

In *Moby Dick* the quest is dramatized in terms of Ahab's unrealistic, insane search for vengeance on the white whale, a vengeance which would the properly directed only if the whale were an intentionally malevolent creature. It is true that he appears mad to his crew and that Ishmael refers unheedingly (chapter 52) to the insane old man. He is persistent in his resolve to hunt down *Moby Dick*. On one occasion when, during a furious storm, the crew show signs of revolting

against his persistence in searching for *Moby Dick*, he threatens to kill them with his burning harpoon, if they go back on their promise to chase *Moby Dick* and not to rest till they have killed the monster. He reiterates his resolve: "I'll ten times girdle the unmeasured globe; yea and drive straight through it, but I'll slay him yet".

Ahab's madness is also evident in a scene where Ahab swears his rebellion against God in following words:

"I know thee, than clear spirit [of fire], and I know that thy right worship is defiance. To neither love nor reverence will thou be kind; and e'en for hate thou canst but kill; and all are killed". Drunk with the success of his defiance and the magnitude of his own power, Ahab moves swiftly from one act of dangerous rebellion to another. He wildly envisions himself as the God Apollo: "Ha, ha, my ship! thou mightiest well be taken now for the sea-Chariot of the sun. Ho, ho! all ye nations before my prow! I bring the sun to ye! Yo be on the further billows; hallo! a tandem, I drive the sea!"

Last but not the least in the symbolic role, Ahab can be individually equated with many figures: with Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of all mankind, with the man-child fretting under his inability to compete with his father, or with Satan protesting the rule of God.

8.4 LET US SUM UP

We have discussed the character of Ahab, the protagonist of the novel. He is characterised as an extentialist hero.

8.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) What do you think is the symbolic meaning of Ahab's pursuit of the white whale, *Moby Dick?*

b) Discuss the role of Ahab in *Moby Dick.*

8.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. What is the name of the protagonist in "Moby-Dick"?

   A) Ahab B) Queequeg
   C) Starbuck D) Ishmael

2. What is Captain Ahab's primary goal throughout the novel?

   A) To find the lost city of Atlantis
   B) To capture the rarest fish in the ocean
   C) To seek revenge on the white whale, Moby Dick
   D) To establish a utopian society on a deserted island

3. What is the name of Ahab's ship?

   A) The Pequod B) The Nautilus
   C) The Essex D) The Rachel

4. Which crew member of the Pequod is a harpooner from the South Pacific with distinct tattoos?

   A) Flask B) Starbuck
   C) Queequeg D) Stubb

5. What is the first line of the novel "Moby-Dick"?

   A) "Call me Ishmael."
   B) "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."
   C) "Once upon a time, in a faraway land..."
   D) "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

6. What type of narrative structure is used in "Moby-Dick"?

   A) First-person B) Second-person
   C) Third-person limited D) Epistolary

7. Who is the first mate of the Pequod and one of Ahab's most trusted officers?

   A) Queequeg B) Stubb

C) Flask D) Starbuck

8. What is the name of the young cabin boy on the Pequod who is tragically killed by Moby Dick?

A) Pip B) Tashtego
C) Fedallah D) Bildad

9. Which character serves as the Pequod's carpenter and is known for his deep religiosity?

A) Fedallah B) Bildad
C) Flask D) Queequeg

10. What is the significance of the white whale, Moby Dick, in the novel?

A) It represents the embodiment of evil.
B) It symbolizes the elusiveness of truth.
C) It is a representation of Ahab's ego.
D) All of the above.

Answers: 1. D) Ishmael 2. C) To seek revenge on the white whale, Moby Dick 3. A) The Pequod 4.) C) Queequeg 5.) A) "Call me Ishmael." 6. A) First Person 7. D) Starbuck 8.) A) Pip 9. B) Bildad 10. D) All of the above

8.7 SUGGESTED READING

1. Why read *Mobi Dick*? by Nathaniel Philbrick

COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 9**

AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–II**

MOBY DICK

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Introduction

9.2 Objectives

9.3 Character of Ishmael

9.4 Let Us Sum Up

9.5 Examination Oriented Questions

9.6 Multiple Choice Questions

9.7 Suggested Reading

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Moby-Dick features a diverse cast of characters, with Captain Ahab at the forefront, driven by his monomaniacal quest to kill the white whale, Moby Dick, who had previously maimed him. Ishmael, the novel's reflective and observant narrator, provides a detailed account of the voyage on the whaling ship, Pequod. The ship's crew includes the noble and loyal first mate, Starbuck, the amiable second mate, Stubb, and the young and sprightly third mate, Flask, each bringing their distinct personalities and perspectives to the epic tale. Additionally, the harpooners, Queequeg, Tashtego, and Dagoo, add depth and cultural diversity to the narrative, enriching the novel's exploration of human experience and adventure.

9.2 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the lesson is to familiarize the learners with the character of Ishmael in the novel.

9.3 CHARACTER OF ISHMAEL

Ishmael is the narrator of the story in *Moby Dick*. By profession, he has been a teacher but, in addition to that, he has been a sailor also. He is a resident of New York. The name by which he calls himself is significant. In the Old Testament, Ishmael is an exile, an outcast and a wanderer. Thus, there is a touch of pathos to the name of the narrator of this story. Partly, on account of the fascination which writer has for him, and partly in order to drive away his depression, he decides to go on a voyage. While on previous occasions he has been voyaging as a sailor on merchantships, this time he would like to go as a member of the crew of a whaling ship. He cannot explain why exactly he wishes to go on a whaling voyage; and therefore he attributes his decision to Fate. However, he is conscious of one reason why he wishes to go on a whaling voyage. He finds the idea of whale an overwhelming one. "Such a portentous and mysterious monster roused all curiosity", he says.

Ishmael is a genial, sociable type of man. He becomes quickly intimate with the savage Queequeg. He has a liberal outlook on life too. He is not a narrow minded Christian. He does not mind joining the heathen Queequeg in the latter's pagan worship. Indeed, he becomes an idolator for a little while by offering worship to Queequeg's wooden god, Yojo. However, Ishmael disapproves of such religious practices as fasting, and other forms of penance.

Ishmael is a keen observer of scenes and situations; and he has an excellent memory. He closely watches every process and every operation conducted by the whalemen of the Pequod, retaining in his mind every little detail. That is why he is able afterwards to describe such phenomena as brit and squid, and such matters as the whale-hunts, the behaviour of whales, the baling of the case and the extraction and storage of spermaceti. He finds occasion to measure a whale skeleton; he

examines the interior of a whale's head; he has squeezed the sperm; he has kept a watch on a mast head, and performed various other duties and tasks.

Ishmael is not only a keen observer but also an acute thinker. A critic points out that "Ishmael is all rumination", meaning that this man is generally absorbed in thinking and reflection. The novel contains a large number of reflections and meditations by Ishmael. There are several monologues by him in the course of narration. Indeed, he has same comment to offer on every incident or episode, and on life in general and on human nature. Commenting on Ahab's obsession with the white whale and on Ahab's determination to hunt down the monster, Ishmael says that the man, who is consumed with one unachieved revengeful desire, has to endure many torments. Indeed, says Ishmael, a culture feeds upon the heart of such a man who, therefore suffers the torments of a Prometheus.

Ishmael is perhaps best characterized by thoughtfulness, he attempts to understand whatever he turns his hand to. This facet of his character is used as background for his continual explicit detailing of his new knowledge of whaling. But his considerations are not just academic and scholarly. It is his interest in, observation of, and curiosity about those around him which provides much of the interior action, much of the psychological insight of the novel. Although, as we have noted Melville does not completely maintain the discipline of his first person narrative, he manages to keep his deviations to a minimum and to make them natural by creating the character of Ishmael as both thoughtful and observant.

Further, Ishmael is tolerant, perhaps to a fault: he is tolerant to the point of speaking eloquently in defense of Queequeg's religion, and he speaks early in the book of maintaining a speaking acquaintance with evil, though he himself sides with good. In this sense, regardless of his own commitments, he accepts the world pretty much as he finds it; and in general while he does not have the exuberance of Flask or the joviality of Stubb, Ishmael enjoys what he finds in the world although his enjoyment is quiet and meditative. Ishmael is the thoughtful, intellectual descendant of the Puritans, but unlike Ahab he has become tolerant.

Ishmael has a strong sense of humour. Indeed his sense of humour is inexhaustible. A vein of humour runs through the entire account of the voyage, and through most of the descriptions of character. Leaving aside a few chapters, especially the three concluding ones, the wide narrative is permeated with humour. But the humour is kindly and not bitter or cynical, whether it be the portrayal of Queequeg with his worship of Yojo and his observance of Ramadan, or be it the portrayal of the two owners of the Pequod, or be it the portrayal of the ship's carpenter, or be it the pictures of the town of New Bedford and its inns, or be it even the description of the Pequod or of whales and their behaviour.

Commenting upon the role and the significance of Ishmael, a critic says that Ishmael is not only a character in the book but also the single mind from whom the whole story comes out. It is Ishmael's contemplativeness and his dreaming, which enable him to describe us the marvels of the sea, the terrors of the deep, and the fabulousness of the whale. All that can be mediated and summed up and hinted at, is given to us by Ishmael. Ishmael tries to sum up the whole creation in a single book.

In terms of the religious reading of the novel by some commentators, one might almost say that whereas Ahab reverts to his sin-bedeviled Calivinist forebears, Ishmael represents the Congregationalist and Unitarian moderate descendants of these Calvinistic forebears.

Inspite of his reasoning and meditative qualities, Ishmael, like all men, is capable of being carried away by enthusiasms, and thus, during Ahab's Black Mass at the beginning of the voyage, Ishmael is led by his enthusiasms and his passions to commit himself in a way that the more stable, responsible Starbuck would not.

Ishmael, then, makes an almost perfect narrator for this novel. He is prepared and equipped to stand to the side of the action, not in the centre of it, so that he can observe more of it; for had Stubb, Flask, Starbuck or even Ahab himself been the narrator there are too many things we would not have seen. Yet Ishmael is

equipped with the curiosity. The powers of observation, the academic sense, and the meditative faculties which lead him not only to observe much but to think about, evaluate and comment on what he observes. The character of Ishmael enriches immeasurably our experience of *Moby Dick.*

Ishmael is everything to the story in the first twenty-five chapters, most essentially through his basic identity as an exile, but almost equally in his developing relationship with Queequeg. It is his friendship with the savage harpooner that counteracts his feeling of being an outcast, teaches him to search for character apart from the tattoos and the grotesque behaviour which shock his taste as a civilized man, and in the end provides the means of his survival. Several occasional reappearances of Ishmael in the foreground of action serve to deepen and reinforce the meaning of this relationship, among them are the episodes of mat-making, the monkey-rope, and the squeezing of sperm.

"*And I only am escaped alone to tell thee*" are the last words uttered by Ishmael's narrative which tell us his importance in the story of *Moby Dick*.

9.4 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed the character-sketch of the narrator, Ishmael who is keen observer of scenes and situations.

9.5 EXAMINATION ORINTED QUESTIONS

a) Critically analyse the character of Ishmael in *Moby Dick.*

b) Discuss the theme of the novel *Moby Dick*.

9.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. What does Captain Ahab seek to hunt down and kill throughout the novel?

A) A giant squid B) A giant octopus
C) A great white shark D) A white sperm whale

2. What is the name of the ship's third mate in "Moby-Dick"?

A) Queequeg B) Starbuck
C) Flask D) Stubb

3. Which character in "Moby-Dick" is a Native American harpooner?

A) Starbuck B) Flask
C) Queequeg D) Fedallah

4. What is the name of the inn where Ishmael stays at the beginning of the novel?

A) The Spouter-Inn B) The Anchor Tavern
C) The Sea Captain's Rest D) The Whalebone Lodge

5. What is the narrative style of "Moby-Dick"?

A) Third-person omniscient B) First-person
C) Second-person D) Epistolary

6. Which character in "Moby-Dick" is the Pequod's second mate?

A) Starbuck B) Flask
C) Stubb D) Queequeg

7. What is the name of Ahab's whaleboat, specifically designed for pursuing Moby Dick?

A) Pequod's Revenge B) Ahab's Fury
C) The White Whale Express D) The Pequod Jr.

8. Who is the young sailor who becomes mentally disturbed after being left stranded in the open ocean?

A) Stubb B) Flask
C) Pip D) Queequeg

9. What is the main reason Captain Ahab is obsessed with killing Moby Dick?

A) The whale has destroyed his previous ships
B) The whale has stolen his treasure
C) The whale is the last of its species
D) The whale has taken his leg

10. What is the last line of the novel "Moby-Dick"?

A) "And the whale swam away into the horizon."
B) "Call me Ishmael."
C) "Ahab's revenge was complete."
D) "The sea is a harsh mistress."

Answers: 1. D) A white sperm whale 2. D) Stubb 3. C) Queequeg 4. A) The Spouter-Inn 5. B) First-person 6. A) Starbuck 7. B) Ahab's Fury 8. C) Pip 9. D) The whale has taken his leg 10. B) Call me Ishmael

9.7 SUGGESTED READING

1. Why read Mobi Dick? by Nathaniel Philbrick

2. Dive Deeper**:** Journey with Mobi Dick by George Cotkin

COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 10**
AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–II**

MOBY DICK

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Introduction

10.2 Objectives

10.3 Moby Dick as an Epic-Romance

10.4 Let Us Sum Up

10.5 Examination Oriented Questions

10.6 Multiple Choice Questions

10.7 Suggested Reading

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Moby-Dick employs the epic romance technique, blending grand adventure with profound philosophical and allegorical elements. This approach elevates the whaling voyage to a heroic quest, where Captain Ahab's pursuit of the white whale symbolizes a deeper, existential struggle against an indifferent and often malevolent universe. The narrative weaves together rich symbolism, mythological references, and dramatic confrontations, creating a tapestry that explores themes of obsession, fate, and the human spirit's resilience. Through its epic romance technique, the novel transcends a mere sea story, offering a timeless exploration of the human condition.

10.2 OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the lesson is to acquaint the learners with the Epic-Romance technique used in the novel.

10.3 MOBY DICK AS AN EPIC-ROMANCE

Hawthorne's invention of the theory of Romance as a form of writing became the American writer's answer to the search for a form. Unlike, the traditional novels based on versimilitude, Romance in the American context had nothing to do with real life situations like sex, marriage, wooing, child-bearing etc., and instead the gaze was turned inward.

Melville's incorporation of the Epic-Romance technique in *Moby Dick*, as a form and structure, got based upon the hybridization of technique of the Epic and that of Romance. Traits of the epic like the hunt-motif: hunt of the whale, the elephant, the tiger, the wild boar etc. alongwith the image of a larger-than-life hero had since become the staple ingredients of Epic writing. The hero Ahab's hunt of the gigantic White Whale, Moby Dick, in itself became an ideal stuff for an Epic and in combination with the traits of Romance, Melville made it a highly exciting, volatile narrative in which Ishmael, the narrator, gives to the reader a highly coloured and imaginative adventure.

Melville was greatly influenced by Greek epics, especially Home's *Iliad* and *Odyssey,* and the anger of Ahab against the Whale and obsession to locate it and kill it bears close resemblance to the wrath of Achilles in the *Iliad*. All the traits of the Epic like exaggeration, the hunt-motif, a vast and mind boggling-spectrum of action, and above all the presentation of the White Whale itself, make *Moby Dick* an exciting Epic-Romance.

Ishmael the narrator, who calls himself a water gazer fixed in an ocean reverie in himself qualifies as an Epic hero of American Romance, not to talk of the Whale and Ahab himself.

Melville's imagination was highly coloured and the typical traits of

Romance like alienation, contradiction and disorder followed by irony, profundity and rapidity are extensively used in *Moby Dick* alongwith a fair sprinkling of the bizarre and the grotesque. Ahab's monomania and his relentless hunt of the Whale, become archetypal symbols of the Epic-Romance stuff.

Ahab's voyage across the sea of metaphysics in his ship the Pequod epitomizes man's defiance of the heavenly powers and in this context Ahab becomes, because of Melville's vast imagination, a modern-day Prometheus, a contemporary Sisyphus who wages a lone battle against the impossible and the inscrutable.

In the form of Romance–the action is free, unlimited and events take place at a fast pace. *Moby Dick* as a Romance gets relegated to the world of The Mind and the Spirit in which Ahab, Ishmael as well as the White Whale become abstractionist figures having nothing to do with the world of realism or ordinary, daily life.

The Whale as a chief open-ended symbol has been labelled as a creature which represents the phallic consciousness of man and Ahab's hurling abuses at the Sun, which is a celestial object and represents the inscrutability of God and God in Nature, is sure to bring Ahab to grief. Within the ambit of Epic-Romance, the tripartite existential axis of Ishmael-Whale-Ahab operates as a riddle because as abstractionist personages, Ahab and Ishmael become antithetical in their stance : both look on the whale with totally divergent mind-sets. There is lot of Melville in both Ahab and Ishmael and the author's limitless world of imagination makes it difficult for the reader to keep track of happenings in the narrative.

In Homer's Iliad the gods and goddesses take part whereas in *Moby Dick* it is the Whales which function as the gods with the gargantuan White Whale, *Moby Dick*, becoming as awesome and powerful as the Greek Olympian god, Zeus.

Consequently, Ahab's tragic end when the Pequod is destroyed by *Moby*

Dick and only Ishmael survives, becomes a mystery for which perhaps Melville himself had no answer. Thus, *Moby Dick* as an Epic-Romance not only becomes a hybrid work combining the traits of Epic with those of Romance, but it also uses a cocktail of myth and fact, abstractions and fantasy, biblical symbology and existentially paradoxical situations.

Melville solved the problem of form and structure in *Moby Dick* by giving it the form of Epic-Romance which became ideally suited to the book's narrative and action as well as the role of the chief protagonists: Ahab, Ishmael and the Whale, not to speak of the Sea, which becomes a sea of metaphysics. One could call *Moby Dick* as a gazetteer of whales and whaling, a novel of realistic detail, an Epic or even a fantasy, but none of these structures or narratives would qualify to suit the complexity, the depth and the range of a work like *Moby Dick*.

Melville's own volatile, unpredictable and fathomless imagination made it impossible to apply any other form and structure to *Moby Dick* except than Epic-Romance. Even the climax, when only Ishmael survives and everybody else is dead and gone, approximates to the funeral of Hector in Homer's Iliad with which this great epic ends. Hector's funeral may have served as an epilogue to the Iliad, but Ahab's disastrous end at the hands of the Whale becomes a chilling anti-climax, a steep ironic descent into the depths of awe and mystery, the unanswerable and the enigmatic.

Finally, it can be observed that *Moby Dick* in the form of an Epic-Romance becomes a work of colossal magnitude fraught with unimaginable consequences. Even as an Epic-Romance, *Moby Dick* becomes an imponderable among ponderables, a titanic work, a Leviathan of Melville's own mind and imagination. From the point-of-view of form and structure, Melville could not negotiate the deep chasm within his own soul, except investing *Moby Dick* with the garb of an Epic-Romance. The chasm was so deep that all the waters of the ocean could not fill it. As a corollary to this metaphysical quandary, the Melvillean cosmos in *Moby Dick* could only get represented structurally by applying the

form of Epic-Romance to this monumental work, riddled with limitless speculations and manifold wonders.

10.4 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed Moby Dick as an epic romance as it qualifies all the characterstics of an epic. Epic traits like hunt-motif, exaggeration, action are there in the novel.

10.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Comment on the use of tragic irony in *Moby-Dick.*

b) Bring out epical features of *Moby-Dick.*

c) Discuss *Moby-Dick* as an epic romance.

10.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. What is the narrator's name in "Moby-Dick"?

A) Ishmael B) Ahab
C) Queequeg D) Starbuck

2. What is the name of the ship in "Moby-Dick"?

A) Pequod B) Essex
C) Nautilus D) Rachel

3. What is Captain Ahab's main goal throughout the novel?

A) To catch fish for profit B) To explore new lands
C) To seek revenge on Moby Dick
D) To establish a trading post

4. Who is the tattooed harpooner and close friend of Ishmael in the novel?

A) Flask B) Stubb
C) Starbuck D) Queequeg

5. What does Captain Ahab use as a replacement for his missing leg?

A) A wooden peg
B) An ivory leg
C) A metal prosthesis
D) A leather strap

6. Which member of the crew is known for being superstitious and often warns of the dangers of the white whale?

A) Flask
B) Stubb
C) Starbuck
D) Fedallah

7. What is the name of Ahab's first mate on the Pequod?

A) Flask
B) Stubb
C) Starbuck
D) Queequeg

8. What is the significance of the "Spouter-Inn" in the novel?

A) It is the name of Ahab's ship
B) It is the name of the town where the story is set
C) It is the inn where Ishmael meets Queequeg
D) It is the name of the white whale

9. What is the ultimate fate of Captain Ahab?

A) He is killed by Moby Dick
B) He becomes a successful whaling captain
C) He retires peacefully
D) He is rescued by another ship

10. Who narrates the epilogue of the novel?

A) Ishmael
B) Captain Ahab
C) Starbuck
D) Queequeg

Answers: 1. A) Ishmael 2. A) Pequod 3. C) To seek revenge on Moby-Dick 4.) Queeqeg 5.) An Ivory Leg 6.)Fedallah 7.) Starbuck 8.)It is the inn where Ishmael meets Queequeg 9.) He is killed by Mody Dick 10.) Ishmael

10.7 SUGGESTED READING

1. The romantic architecture of Herman Melville's Moby Dick by Shawn Thomson
2. Mobi Dick Centennial Essays by Tyrus Hillmay & Luthers Mansfield
3. In search of Moby Dick : Quest for the White Whale by Tim Severin

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COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 11**

AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–III**

A FAREWELL TO ARMS

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Introduction

11.2 Objectives

11.3 Hemingway: Life and Work

11.4 Let Us Sum Up

11.5 Examination Oriented Questions

11.6 Multiple Choice Questions

11.7 Suggested Reading

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Ernest Hemingway was a prominent 20th-century American writer known for his distinctive, economical prose and adventurous lifestyle. He crafted novels, short stories, and non-fiction works that often drew from his own experiences, including wartime and outdoor pursuits. Hemingway's influential works, such as "The Old Man and the Sea" and "A Farewell to Arms," are celebrated for their exploration of themes like courage, loss, and human endurance, earning him both critical acclaim and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954.

11.2 OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the lesson is to acquaint the learners with the author, his life and his works.

11.3 HEMINGWAY : LIFE AND WORK

Ernest Hemingway, the second child of his parents, was born on July 21, 1899 at Oak Park, a suburb of Chicago, the second biggest city of America (the first being New York). While his father was a highly successful and unusually skilful doctor, his mother was a singer, with a wonderful voice. She taught singing in Chicago where she had handsome earning from her teaching. His father, truly outdoor man, had a great passion for hunting. The Hemingways were traditional in their views on child-rearing, wanting their wards to acquire the virtues of obedience, hard-work, clean language, decency and moral sense. They wanted them to have higher education and achieve some ambition in life. Like most parents, Hemingways imposed their convictions on their children. The docile ones submitted to the discipline. Ernest by nature, was not given to submitting to outside disciplines, even if it came from his own parents. For instance, his mother would want him to practice playing the cello, which he intensely hated. He took his mother's music room as a torture room. He started using the room for boxing practice, which he immensely liked to do. His mother used to sing in the choir of the Congregational church and brought up all her children, six of them, as staunch believers. With Ernest Hemingway, neither music nor religion could take any hold on him.

Hemingway's father decidedly influenced him so far as his liking for outdoor life was concerned. At very young age, he was able to master the names of all the birds and flowers his father showed him. In fact, he became very much enthusiastic about whatever he saw in outdoor life. Just as in the cases of Rousseau and Wordsworth, nature took profound hold on Hemingway as a source of refreshment and rejuvenation. His father's familiar points of entry into the countryside were walking, hunting, fishing, and camping. The same activities became a great passion with Ernest Hemingway. In fact, he went even beyond pursuing them as physical activities; he studied them more closely than did his father, studying them as arts in their own right, and mastering them as perfectly as his father did the art of surgery. These outdoor activities released his soul and healed whatever wounds the civilized world inflicted on his mind and spirit.

Hemingway began his career as a journalist by covering fires, then was assigned to police and hospital beat. Thus, at this tender age of eighteen, he got an exposure, rather early in his life, to life and death at their most savage. Earlier, Hemingway had experienced, as a small boy, pain and illness while accompanying his physician father on medical calls to the Ojibways during his summers on the Michigan Lake. Now, in Kansas City, he experienced the full range of human misery, from the underworld of criminals to the shattered bodies in the hospital wards. Still greater spectacle of death and suffering Hemingway was to experience soon on the war fronts in Europe. When he had not even completed one year as a journalist, he came to know that the American Red Cross needed ambulance drivers and medical aids for service in the war in Europe. He jumped at the opportunity, left his job with the *Star* in the Spring of 1918, and signed on with the Red Cross. He returned home only to say goodbye to his family, then departed for New York to board the boat for Europe. He was sent to Italian-Austrian front, where he soon found himself behind the lines, distributing Red Cross packages to Italian soldiers in the trenches.

On the sixth of July, close to his nineteenth birthday, in the tiny village of Fosselta di Piave, a few hundred yards away from the dug in Austrian army. Hemingway was hit by an Austrian mortar shell right in the trenches where he was handing out chocolate bars to a group of soldiers. While some died, some got badly wounded, Hemingway got seriously injured in his right leg, and fainted from the shock. He was removed to a field hospital along with the others, and then to the military hospital in Milan. He was given a medal for his valour, and allowed to join the Italian infantry, notwithstanding his foreign nationality. There he fell in love with an American nurse attending on him, whose name was Agnes H. von Kurowsky. She was older than Hemingway by a few years. Before leaving for the front, after recovery from the war wound, Hemingway proposed to her for marriage, which she declined. The war soon ended, and before leaving Italy for America, he proposed to her again, and she again turned down his proposal. He was so much infatuated by her that on reaching Oak Park in 1919, he proposed to her through a letter the third time and she refused to accept this proposal. All this experience

of war and love in Italy he later made into a romantic but tragic novel named *A Farewell to Arms.*

When Hemingway started living in Chicago, Anderson had returned from Europe just about the same time. He impressed upon Hemingway the literary advantage of living in Paris. Hemingway needed no such promptings. He himself was very eager to see and settle in Europe. His experience of war in Italy had created in him a fascination for the life there, as against what was available to him in Oak Park. In the 1920's, Paris had emerged the literary capital of the western world. Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, and several more were already there. Hemingway was anxious to join the select band of the bohemian artists. Anderson promised him letters of introduction, especially to Gertrude Stein who had settled in France before the war and knew the entire circle of literary figures. Besides Anderson, Hemingway also came across, in Chicago, a young pianist from St. Louis named Hadley Richardson. He fell in love with her at first sight. He at once proposed to her, just as he had done to Agnes von Kurowsky. This time, his proposal was readily accepted. Thus, the Spring of 1921 became the happiest time in the life of Hemingway. Full of promise and hope, Hemingway began to entertain the idea of quitting his advertising job, and going back to his reporter's position with some newspaper.

Meanwhile, during the years of 1922 and 1923, Hemingway got an opportunity to roam through Europe on free-lance assignment for the *Toronto Daily Star.* He covered several political conferences in Germany, Italy, and the Near East, and interviewed among others, Mussolini, Clemenceau, and Lloyd George. His visits to Spain were speeded-up by his passion for bullfighting. He was a witness to the treaty of Versailles, which laid the groundwork for the Second World War. He also covered in 1922 the bloody conflict between Greece and Turkey. Incidents from this war provided Hemingway with several transitional sketches in his collection of short-stories called *In Our Time.* During the cold weather, he and his wife would also visit Swiss and Austrian mountains and enjoy skiing there. Amidst these days of fun and joy, Hemingway also experienced one of the shocks of his life on receiving the news from his wife that at the railway

station the trunk containing all his manuscripts, including that of his war novel based on the First World War had lost. *A Farewell to Arms* could be rewritten only after several years of his protracted recovery from the shock.

Hemingway's creative work, both in poetry and prose, now was being accepted for publication. It started appearing in little magazines. Six of his poems were published in the January 1923 issue of Harriet Monroe's magazine *Poetry.* In the summer of the same year came out his first book called *Three Stories and Ten Poems.* Next year followed his greater work, *In Our Time.* The more fame Hemingway achieved as creative writer, the greater strain he felt about doing his journalistic work. Gertrude Stein had warned him of the danger of mixing the two, telling him that one would surely drive out the other. It was a crucial period for Hemingway as a writer. As he said later in his *Death in the Afternoon,* "In waiting for a newspaper you told what happened and, with one trick and another, you communicated the emotion aided by the timeliness which gives a certain emotion to any account of something that has happened on that day; but the real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion and which would be as valid in a year or in ten years or, with luck and if you stated it purely enough, always, was beyond me and I was working very hard to try to get it".

Hemingway was forced to return to Toronto in the Fall of 1923, reason being his wife's pregnancy and poverty, to take up a steady job with the *Star.* As advised by Stein, he saved money, quit journalism, and returned to Europe in 1924, to try to live by creative writing alone. They returned with their first baby, a son named John, but nicknamed Bumby. Owing to their small savings brought from Toronto, the Hemingways were forced to lead an austere life, with short rations and less entertainments. The poverty was, however, counterbalanced by the young couple's happy matrimony and the excitement of being a budding writer in Paris. The mixture of the two– hard life and artistic ambition–gave the whole thing a romantic flavour. As is recalled in his later long short-story, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, it was still the happiest life Hemingway ever lived as a wrier, much happier than his later affluent life as a successful writer.

Perhaps, inspired by his ambition to compete with his peers, Anderson and Fitzgerald, Hemingway aspired now, in 1924, to try to write longer fiction rather than remain a writer of short-stories. His life in Paris and his periodic visits to Pamplona (in Spain) combined to constitute the plot of his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises.* While the novel opens in Paris, depicting the post-war life of the young generation that came to be called the "lost generation," it culminates in the festival of San Fermin in Pamplona, the festival of bullfighting. Hemingway had launched the novel's writing in the summer of 1925, and completed its first draft in just five weeks. However, he spent five long and agonizing months in extensive revisions. As a break from the strenuous exercise of revision, he dashed off in November 1925, just in a week's time, short but blistering satire, *The Torrents of Spring, which* was, as a matter of fact, a parody of Anderson's novels, *Dark Laughter* and *Many Marriages.* When the book appeared in 1926, it led to souring of Hemingway's relations with Anderson, and later with Stein. As the story goes, Hemingway took the unpleasant step only to break contract with Anderson's publishers, Boni and Liveright, signed for the publication of *The Sun Also Rises.*

During the intervening period between marriages; Hemingway lived in Paris, where he continued writing short-stories, resulting in the publication of his second volume called *Men Without Women* in 1927. It included some of his famous stories, namely *The Killers*, *The Undefeated*, *Fifty Grand* and *In Another Country*. The themes of these four pieces - gangsters, prizefighters, soldiers, and bullfighters–handled rather superbly, were typical of Hemingway's choice of material. With these several publications in book form Hemingway was able to earn roughly enough to afford a modest living. But the index of income showed a rising graph, and indicated increasing confidence in the young novelist. Wanting to have a change of scene after his second marriage in 1927, Hemingway left Paris and returned to America; the couple settled in Key West, Florida, which remained their home for the next ten years. Key West being on the Gulf of Mexico, Hemingway liked to go deep-sea fishing, which he found both relaxing and interesting. Here, the people in large measure were Spanish speaking, the place being close to Cuba and other Spanish-

speaking islands in the Caribbean. Being fluent in speaking Spanish and grown fond of the Spaniards, Hemingway enjoyed being there among this non-American population. It gave him a feel of still not living in the interior of America, like his birthplace of Oak Park.

Hemingway went back to Paris in the Spring of 1929, correcting proofs of his new novel, *A Farewell to Arms.* It was a difficult phase of his life which seems to have coloured the ending of this novel. The obsession with death that the hero expresses at the end of the novel seems to have been Hemingway's own mood on the death of his father. After the publication of this novel, achieving instant success, he seemed to have tided over the mood of despondence. He liked to think of *A Farewell to Arms* as his version of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet.* Both the works have Italy as their location. Both pairs of lovers seem "star-crossed." The First World War can be considered the modern counterpart of the family feud in *Romeo and Juliet.* Also, both the pairs withdraw from the conflict, not of their making nor under their control, and sign a separate peace. The parallel between the two works is, in fact, so close that there are equivalents of even minor characters from Shakespeare's play in Hemingway's novel. The tone of the two is also much the same, the peculiar pathos of young love flowering in a hostile universe.

Hemingway's quarrel with the critical credo of the modernists, as well as with their view of life "in out time", was fundamental. While the modernists, headed by Pound and Eliot, based their outlook on the decline-of-the West philosophy, Hemingway remained highly committed to the humanist values of the Renaissance. Similarly, while the modernists adopted the style of indirection, allusion, irony, and paradox, Hemingway maintained his first faith in the power of the simple, straight, and solid narrative. He was not prepared to deflect from the purity of his concentration of what lay at the heart of his writing. There can not be any doubt about his being a highly intelligent and widely read writer. If he had disliked for excessive analysis of experience, of substituting talk for action, it was a matter of technique that he chose to adopt, which was the only possible one for the kind of subjects he wrote about. While the writings of Eliot and Joyce are based on ideas and notions of the modern age, Hemingway's is based on the experience of that very

age. His narratives about them have a ring of authenticity, whereas theirs are mere constructions from their neoclassical type of learning and method. While their's is the mock heroic method of presenting the contemporary world, his is the narratology of experience. There is no meeting ground between the two so far as the technique is concerned. Like Shakespeare's plays, his novels not only make us see the contemporary reality, they also make us feel it. In the case of Elliot and Joyce, the "feeling" aspect is missing, because they have never been there where action is.

Hemingway produced during the thirties two non-fictional books, namely *Death in the Afternoon (1932)* and *Green Hills of Africa (1935)* during the thirties. The first covers both, the history and tradition of bull fighting in Spain as well as the changing style of the art of bullfighting. Much of the book is written in the form of conversation between Hemingway and an elderly American woman who does not know much about most things being talked about in the book. The other about the green hills of Africa brings about the natural beauty of the mountains and forests of the continent of Africa, where the western crusade for the destruction of nature by the monsters of machinery has not yet got entry. For Hemingway, such places, as also the ocean, were the last good places left on earth. They are no less than earthly paradise, or the Garden of Eden, for him. Hemingway also exploited his experience of hunting in Africa for composing two wonderful short stories, which have remained among the best creations of his fictional work. These stories are *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber* and *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*. In the early thirties, Hemingway had also produced another volume of short-stories, his third, entitled *Winner Take Nothing,* which came out in 1933.

The thirties being the decade of depression in the entire western world, even the sales of Hemingway books went down considerably. Like all the other cities of America, Key West, too, was badly hit by the bad days of Western economy. Also, like most leading writers of the decade, Hemingway's attention was also drawn to the plight of the people facing unemployment, finding hard to make both ends meet, in those years of general collapse of Western economies. And influenced, like others, by the mood of the decade, he, too, wrote his version of the left-oriented fiction, although his novels of the period were not to the taste of either the Marxist critics

or the anti-Marxist ones. First came out *To Have and Have Not* in 1937. It is the story of a free-lancing fishing-boat operator named Harry Morgan, who, unable to earn legitimate living owing to depression, is forced to smuggle cargo between Cuba and Florida. The other, and perhaps Hemingway's climactic, novel was about the Spanish Civil War of 1937. This story of the civil war appeared under the title *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in 1940. The background to the work relates to the Spanish elections of February 1936, which brought to power the first liberal democratic regime in the history of Spain. However, just a few months later, in June, a monarchist Fascist coalition led by General Francisco Franco revolted against the government. Hitler and Mussolini, the Fascist Dictators already established in the Germany and Italy, came at once to the aid of France. Britain, France, and the United States did not side with the expected liberal-democratic legitimate government. On the contrary, by imposing an embargo against the legal Spanish government, they lent indirect support to the dictators. For reasons of his own, only Stalin's Russia came to the assistance of liberal-democratic side. The ferocious civil war that followed aroused passionate emotions all over the world, for people began to see the dangers of Fascism. The confrontation finally led to the Second World War (1939-1945).

Besides this great novel, Hemingway embodied the various aspects and episodes of the Spanish Civil War in several other pieces. One such piece was a play, the only one he ever wrote, entitled *The Fifth Column.* It clearly shows that Hemingway did not have great talent for drama. Another piece he wrote was a brilliant short story called *Old Man at the Bridge*. It covers a small incident in the war that somehow manages to embrace the whole tragedy of Spain. With the close of the decade of the 30's also came the end of Hemingway's stay in Key West.

Hemingway's second marriage with Pauline, too, ended with the end of the decade of depression. He shifted his residence a few miles outside Havana, where he bought a hacienda. He lived there for two decades, and left the place only reluctantly after Fiedel Castro came to power. His love for another woman, this time Martha Gelborn, broke his second marriage, just as it had broken his first. This new one was a newspaper woman and a fiction writer. They were married in

1940. He dedicated *For Whom the Bell Tolls* to this very woman, his third wife. They spent parts of 1940 and 1941 in the Far East where Hemingway went on an assignment from a New York newspaper to report on the growing crisis in the pacific, soon to be climaxed by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour.

Even before the end of the war, Hemingway's third marriage ended. The cause was the same old–he had fallen in love with another woman. This time it was Mary Welsh. She too, like his third wife, was a newspaperwoman. After his third divorce, he married her. This fourth marriage proved lasting. Mrs. Mary Hemingway lived for many years after the death of Hemingway in 1961. After the war was over in 1945, Hemingway returned to Cuba. His involvement in war had not given him time for writing, but he had accumulated experience of several. Now, out of that involvement, he set down to working on his fiction. First, he completed *Across, the River and into the Trees,* a sort of quasi-autobiographical novel. Actually, all of Hemingway's works are of the same type; all are based on his own experiences. The latest novel appeared in 1950. As a work of art, it has been considered Hemingway's most poor, second to none. But this was followed by what money considered his best, *The Old Man and the Sea,* which appeared in 1952. It first appeared in September I, 1952 issue of *Life* (a popular magazine), arousing uncommon interest among readers the world over.

On whatever level one considered it, *The Old Man and Sea* turns out a powerfully moving novel. As a straight narrative of a sea adventure, as a struggle of man for survival in a godless world, as a tragedy of overreaching, or even as a Christian parable of sacrifice, the novel does not disappoint the reader. Although the shortest of Hemingway's novels, it came to be considered his richest, which won him Nobel Prize for literature for the year 1952. Never away from his favourite pursuits of hunting, fighting, or fishing, Hemingway got out in 1953 for a big-game hunting in Africa, this time in Kenya. The expedition proved a disaster. The airplane taking him and his wife to Victoria Falls crashed in the jungle. A rescue plane was sent to pick them up, but after they had boarded, that too crashed. The injuries Hemingway received in the two crashes were serious, from which he could never really recover and which ultimately led to his unfortunate death. He returned to

Cuba midway through 1954, still not fully recovered. But no experience of Hemingway went waste. He always turned it into fiction. The hunting experience in Kenya, too, he made into a novel, which has only recently (in 1999) been published under the title *True At First Sight.*

In the last two years or so of his life Hemingway was plagued by all sorts of physical problems. He had grown very heavy with a thick neck, heavy shoulders, massive chest, large belley, all on a pair of spindly legs. He tried hard to reduce his weight, going on severe diets, losing thirty to forty pounds. But he emerged ravaged from this exercise and developed increasing nervousness and tempramentality. All these manifestations swelled into full-blown paranoia, so much so that he started suspecting even his close friends of wanting to eliminate him. He also imagined that the Federal agents were after him. The intense care of his wife and some of his friends were of no avail; his paranoia remained unrestrained. In 1960, he gave up his home in Cuba, owing to anti-Americanism of Castro. His migration, so to say, from Cuba to Idaho was rather painful. He loved the place and was deeply attached to it. Leaving it at such a critical time of his life only worsened his nervous condition. Various ailments came upon him crowding– hypertension, deafness, hepatitis, slackening of sensory perception, failing vision. He was twice prevailed upon for a psychiatric treatment at the Mayo Clinic, but it did not help. Back home, he had to be forcibly restrained from doing violence to himself. Finally, in the early morning of July 2, 1961, he followed the same course his father had adopted; he ended his life with a gun. A pathetic end indeed to a heroic life. But this happens often where one has committed oneself to a life full of continuous excitement. If drabness and immobilization is thrust upon you, you would rather not live as a vegetation. That is what Hemingway would say in his last days. *"A champion is either a Champion, or no more"!*

11.4 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed the life and works of Hemingway in detail. This lesson discussed the childhood, early career, major works and later life of the novelist.

11.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Briefly discuss Ernest Hemingway as a novelist.

11.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. In which war did Ernest Hemingway serve as an ambulance driver?

   A) World War I B) World War II
   C) Korean War D) Vietnam War

2. Which novel by Hemingway is set during the Spanish Civil War and follows the experiences of an American teacher named Robert Jordan?

   A) The Sun Also Rises B) For Whom the Bell Tolls
   C) A Farewell to Arms D) The Old Man and the Sea

3. Which of Hemingway's novels is known for its portrayal of the "Lost Generation" and follows a group of American expatriates in Europe?

   A) The Sun Also Rises B) To Have and Have Not
   C) Islands in the Stream D) Death in the Afternoon

4. For which work did Ernest Hemingway win the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction?

   A) A Farewell to Arms B) The Old Man and the Sea
   C) The Sun Also Rises D) For Whom the Bell Tolls

5. Which African country did Hemingway frequently visit and where he set some of his works?

   A) Egypt B) Kenya
   C) Nigeria D) South Africa

6. What style of writing is Hemingway known for, characterized by short sentences and concise, understated language?

   A) Stream of consciousness B) Gothic fiction
   C) Surrealism D) Minimalism

7. What is the title of Hemingway's autobiographical work that details his time in Paris during the 1920s?

A) The Green Hills of Africa B) Death in the Afternoon
C) A Moveable Feast
D) Across the River and Into the Trees

8. Which Hemingway novel is a love story set against the backdrop of World War I, following the experiences of an American ambulance driver and an English nurse?

A) The Old Man and the Sea B) A Farewell to Arms
C) To Have and Have Not D) Islands in the Stream

9. What activity did Hemingway enjoy that heavily influenced his writing and lifestyle, often portrayed in his works?

A) Sailing B) Mountain climbing
C) Deep-sea diving D) Horseback riding

10. What prestigious literary award did Hemingway win in 1954 for "The Old Man and the Sea"?

A) Pulitzer Prize B) Nobel Prize in Literature
C) Booker Prize
D) Man Booker International Prize

Answers: 1. World War I 2. For Whom the Bells 3. The Sun also Rises 4. The Old Man and the Sea 5. Kenya 6. Minimalism 7. A Movable feast 8. A Farewell to Arms 9. Sailing 10. Nobel Prize in Literature

11.7 SUGGESTED READING

1. Hemingway: The writer as artist by Carlos Barker

COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 12**

AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–III**

A FAREWELL TO ARMS

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Introduction

12.2 Objectives

12.3 Title and Themes

12.4 Let Us Sum Up

12.5 Multiple Choice Questions

12.6 Suggested Reading

12.1 INTRODUCTION

A Farewell to Arms is a poignant novel by Ernest Hemingway, set against the backdrop of World War I. It tells the story of Lieutenant Frederic Henry, an American ambulance driver in the Italian army, and his love affair with Catherine Barkley, a British nurse. The novel explores themes of love, war, and loss with Hemingway's characteristic concise and unadorned prose, creating a powerful narrative that delves into the futility of war and the transient nature of happiness. Through its vivid depiction of the war's chaos and the intimate, tragic romance, the novel remains one of Hemingway's most enduring and acclaimed works.

12.2 OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the lesson is to familiarize the learners with the novel

A Farewell to Arms. It focusses on the significance of the title and the themes of the novel.

12.3 TITLE AND THEMES

Like most other titles of Hemingway's novels, and in the dominant fashion among the leading writers of the time, the title of *A Farewell to Arms* has been derived from a literary source of the past. The titles of Hemingway's *In Our Time* and *The Sun Also Rises,* of Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* and *Tender is the Night,* of Joyce's *Ulysses* and of Eliot's *The Wasteland,* are all derived from the Biblical and literary sources. The title of Hemingway's war novel is said to have been borrowed from a poem of George Peele, a poet and dramatist of the Elizabethan age in England. In his poem called *A Farewell to Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake*, dated 1589, and included in *The Oxford Book of English Verse* edited by Robert Bridges, from which Hemingway is said to have picked up the title for his novel, the sixteenth century poet advocates the cause of war by invoking the popular sentiments of honour and glory. The critics have interpreted the title to mean a farewell to the arms of war, a farewell to female arms, and a farewell to the arms of both war and women, raising the fundamental question about the nature of the novel—whether it is a novel of war, a novel of love, or a novel of both love and war. Before we proceed to examine the theme or themes of the novel it seems imperative to first examine the poem from which Hemingway picked up his title, for a firsthand look at the poem would reveal the context which provoked or suggested to the novelist the title for his work.

If we compare Hemingway's novel with Peele's poem, the antithetical nature of the two works become conspicuous: whereas, Peele's poem powerfully advocates the cause of war, asking the youth to take up arms for wining honour and glory for their country, Hemingway's novel condemns the war in no uncertain terms and advances the attraction of love. The rhetorical poem from the Renaissance period trying to hypnotise the English youth for throwing them into adventures abroad, explains Hemingway hero's disgust, with the empty rhetoric in *A Farewell to Arms.* Note how the hero echoes the key words from Peele's poem as if he were directly

responding to the Elizabethan rhetoric. The poem's repeated use of words like 'sacred, 'honour', 'glory,' 'glorious', etc., marks its emphasis on the abstract values for which it calls upon the British youth to sacrifice their lives. Frederic Henry in Hemingway's novel feels nauseated at the very mention of these words:

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious and sacrifices and the expression in vain. We had heard them.....and had read them.....now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to buy it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity.....Abstract words such as glory, honour, courage, or hallow were obscene besides the concrete names of villages, the number of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.

As against the imperial dream of conquering new and newer lands with the untiring use of arms projected in Peele's poem, Hemingway's novel projects a dream of peace and happiness possible only by bidding farewell to the arms.

Whereas the poem asks for bidding farewell to the beautiful British dames, to homes and theaters, and to all that are loved in times of peace, the novel lays stress on bidding farewell to war and violence and take recourse to the activities of love and sport; whereas, the poem is a war song meant to incite the youth to sacrifice for the imperial dream of enslaving other people, the novel is a love song meant to ensure the liberty of every nation as well as every individual. Thus, the title of Hemingway's novel is straight enough, which indicates the theme of the novel's fable. Though it is another matter, that the dream of love and peace remains in the novel only a dream. Hemingway's ironic view of life would not permit him to settle with anything less than the whole truth.

Even though, *A Farewell to Arms* is about World War I, involving the larger political question of the liberty of individual persons and nations, the American critics of the novel always tend to ignore these questions and concentrate instead on the emotional or psychological problems of the hero, reducing the

novel to an account of an individual's trauma of the wound or his love for the British nurse. Ignoring the general social and political issues informing a work of art and reducing it into either a case study or an aesthetic game remains the dominant trend in American criticism. There seems a deliberate and determined effort at keeping the activity of literary criticism away from the real issues of life, from which great works of art always raise. *A Farewell to Arms* has been, like most other American novels, a victim of this very tendency. The interpretations of the novel that the American critics have made include-that it is the story of a young American who in search of the excitement of war gets wounded and becomes a pathological case of trauma, which he tries to overcome by the medicine of love; that it is the story of love between two young persons with war only an accidental background; that it is a story of an American who having nothing better to do at home stumbles into the war in Europe and finding himself faced with the prospect of death runs away from the war; that it is a symbolic story juxtaposing mountain and plain, home and not-home, love and war. Thus, the novel is reduced into either a story of an individual having nothing to do with the larger questions of society involved in the politics of war, or into a symbolic story involving only the general abstracts of love and war, home and not-home.

No doubt, Hemingway focuses, as always, on the concrete experience of his protagonist both of love as well as war, he does not restrict the experience to the sensations of the protagonist. His hero is a man of education having sharp understanding of the international political situation and of the politics and business of war. Besides, he has strong commitment to the ideas of liberty and equality, which have brought him across the Atlantic to fight for the liberty and equality of nations attacked by the dictators who are enemies of individual liberty. It is these questions which we need to take cognizance of along with our emphasis on the physical experience of the hero in love and war. We must recognize that *A Farewell to Arms* is primarily a war novel, which exposes the politics of war as well as its disastrous consequences for human society.

Here again, the difference between those who rule and make war and those who serve and fight war is clearly made out. Besides, the difference between those who make money out of war and those who lose their lives, and between those who are insensitive to the loss of life involved in war and those who feel the loss on their nerves is sharply brought out in the conversation. It is this exposure to the politics of war, to the deception the rulers play upon the common man, which has caused disgust among the sensitive ones like the hero and the priest, Passini and Manera. The priest is, of course, unaware of the fact, that the hero is more acutely sensitive to the war than is the priest himself; he is also unaware of the fact that the hero is on the side of the common man, not on the side of the exploiters. Thus, the novel also focuses on the general politics of war even as it does on its emotional and psychological impact in the particular case of the protagonist. Of course, Hemingway is not one of those writers who would make the novel a forum for the debate of ideas or a medium for propagating an ideology. His aesthetics requires an objective dramatization of the action, not a subjective intellectuality of that action. But his treatment of the action is not like the mute and dumb picturing; it is a sensitive capturing of the event in all its dimensions-political, social and ethical.

A Farewell to Arms, for certain portrays, not just the experience of war of the American protagonist but the entire situation of the war on the Italian-Austrian front. The war accounts, spread over two years and involving scores of characters from several nationalities, are extensively reported by the narrator, which are either directly observed by him or received from his fellow soldiers. That the war in the novel is meant to be seen in all its implications, and not merely in relation to the individual response of the hero, can be judged from the length of space the narrator devotes to incidents like the retreat of Caporetto.

This shows, the wide canvas of the novel meant to depict the entire complex of the war situation in Italy, in which the hero's story is only an efficient instrument of structure and perspective. The description here shows how the war has disrupted the peace and home-life of innocent common people in Italy. In between the descriptions of war on the Italian front where Henry is participating the narrator

keeps interrupting reports about happenings on the other fronts, such as France. Besides, several times the participation by the British and the American soldiers is stated or discussed extending there by the boundaries of the canvas on which Henry's story occupies only the pivotal place.

Hemingway's treatment of the theme in the novel is most realistic. He uses as narrator, a central character whose perspective on life is starkly rational. Frederic Henry not only experiences the conflict without any external aids of religion or tradition but also narrates those experiences without any kind of falsification. For instance, although his girl, Catherine Barkley, has given him Saint Anthony as a saviour against any danger in war, he does not subscribe to her Catholic superstition.

This reveals how the narrator-hero refuses to seek shelter in any superstition and does not permit anything except his own experience to guide him in his reporting of the war incidents. Be it religion or patriotism, love or friendship, he does not sacrifice truth for the sake of any of these sentiments. He values patriotism and nationalism and attaches great value to love and friendship, but he would not allow any of these sentiments and beliefs to interfere with his commitment to truth. Neither does he allow any of these factors to prevent him from a direct experience of life, including love and war, nor does he permit any belief or sentiment to distort his account of his experience. Thus, his vision of life and his projection of that vision are both conditioned by the common force of truth. The quiet irony in the passage just cited, which places side by side the fact that Henry keeps with him the capsule of Saint Anthony only out of courtesy to his girl and the fact that it is of no use in the war as the hero gets wounded soon after, works very effectively to expose the general superstition to which most people are driven out of despair.

As the narrator refuses reliance on superstition so does he refuse to indulge in any form of self-deception. For instance, when the priest starts giving his make-believe picture of the end of war, the hero immediately distances himself from the account and exposes the naivete of the priest reflecting his inability to see the realities of war.

The hero's response to the war is rational, whereas the response of the Priest is emotional. Even the Bible comes under the rational scrutiny of the hero. His assessment of the war as well as his reading of Bible and human nature are based on his personal experience of men and on his absolute reliance on reason. Obviously, the conversation is meant to expose the naivete of the priest's faith in human goodness as well as to reiterate the hero's total commitment to reason and good sense. Later, confronted in the Caporetto retreat with rumours about the Germans, Frederic Henry again shows a strong reliance on reason by disbelieving the Italian rumours about the enemy: "Last night on the retreat we had heard that there had been many Germans in Italian uniforms mixing with the retreat in the north. I did not believe it. That was one of those things you always heard in the war. It was one of the things the enemy always did to you. You did not know anyone who went over in German uniform to confuse them. Maybe they did but it sounded difficult. I did not believe the Germans did it. I did not believe they had to. There was no need to confuse our retreat". Once again the American hero relies on his reason and good sense; he is not credulous to believe anything without examining it with the touchstone of his reason. His attempt always is to see the situation in its stark reality.

The war theme continues through at least two third of the novel's length. Although in between there are love scenes, the novelist places the love story in the larger context of war. The war is not a background to the love story, which by some critics is considered the main theme of the novel. On the contrary, it is war which constitutes the major theme within which appears the love theme, not so much for providing an alternative to war as for giving relief in the midst of conflict. When the hero, finally, bids farewell to the arms, the weapons of war, he does not do it to choose love in place of war, pleasure in place of purpose; rather, he only escapes a stupid death by the Italian battle police. "You saw emptily, on your stomach, having been present when one army moved back and another came forward. You had lost your cars and your men as a floorwalker loses the stock of his department in a fire. There was, however, no insurance. You were out of it now. You had no more obligation. If they shot floorwalkers after a fire in the

department store because they spoke with an accent they had always had, then certainly the floorwalkers would not be expected to return when the store opened again for business. They might seek other employment; if there was any other employment and the police did not get them". Most critics have considered the hero's desertion as a farewell to arms for an embrace of the arms of Catherine Barkley. However, considered in the novel's context, the hero's love for Catherine has nothing to do with his desertion. He, being a foreigner does certainly have much to do with his escape from Italy, if not from war. His foreign accent becomes responsible for his being suspected as a German in Italian uniform, and his being a foreign volunteer becomes responsible for his quick decision to desert the war. Had he been an Italian, perhaps the situation had not arisen; and yet it must be emphasized that he is quitting the war and Italy only to save his life, for otherwise he would either have been shot dead on the spot, or if spared, would have been made a prisoner. In any case, he would not have remained in the Red Cross service which he had voluntarily joined for serving the suffering humanity in the war.

The war theme continues even through the last portion of the novel dealing with the escape of Henry and Catherine into Switzerland. The lovers are always haunted by the disturbing memories of war, by a guilt feeling of having deserted the war, and by a fear of possible capture by the Italian police. Besides, the experience of war has been for Henry no less than an experience of the absurd. The irrational and imperial order governing the war world was another face of the absurd for the hero. The impersonality of the nameless voices interrogating the officers after the retreat is, an example, of the absurd.

The lieutenant-colonel is shot on the spot. The impersonal order of the military governed by abstract words such as 'sacred,' 'victory,' 'motherland,' 'loyalty,' 'patriotism,' is exposed by the bedrock of personal experience of the particular individuals like Henry and the lieutenant-colonel. Putting in an ironic juxtaposition the impersonality and abstraction of the war order on the one hand and the sincerity and authenticity of the individual experience on the other, the novelist shows how the rational and authentic hero is faced with the irrational and arbitrary powers.

It is this core of the war experience which generates a sense of tiredness, lostness, and meaninglessness among those caught up in the mill of the conflict. Note, for instance, the disgust that Rinaldi expresses at the meaninglessness of his routine in the war: "You're dry and you're empty and there's nothing else. There's nothing else I tell you. Not a damned thing. I know, when I stop working." He keeps working because he cannot face blankness which the war has created in his life. The priest experiences a similar feeling. On Henry's observing that the priest looked tired, the latter replies, "I am tired but I have no right to be." His religion keeps telling him that he must maintain faith and hope. He tries to, but his experience does not support his conviction and hence, results in inner despair. The British major in the Italian war becomes cynical and pessimistic: "They were all cooked. The Germans won the victories. By God they were soldiers. The old Hun was a soldier. But they were cooked too. We were all cooked." The obsession of death generated by his confrontation with the imperial order of the military does not leave the American hero even after he has left the scene of war : "That was what you did. You died. You did not know what it was about. You never had time to learn. They threw you in and told you the rules and the first time they caught you off base they killed you gratuitously like Aymo. Or gave you the syphilis like Rinaldi. But they killed you in the end. You could count on that. Stay around and they would kill you." Henry's outburst at a time when his son has just been born dead and there is a prospect of sure death of his unmarried wife is, understandably, not against the gods or supernatural powers, but against the human war-gods 'they'. The anonymous 'they' have been mentioned all along the narrative as those who make wars and control the affairs of society. Henry is one of the victims of war, so is his would-have been wife, Catherine, and so are Aymo, Rinaldi, the lieutenant-colonel, and all those who get exhausted during the long war and crack under pressure of their consciousness of nothingness, cultivated self-destruction, nourished diseases, and get out of the war in a difficult way. It is these 'they' that the American hero is vehemently registering his complaint against.

This outburst, however, is an inevitable one in the context of the series of

experience, Henry has gone through in the novel, beginning with the threat of sure death after having served the Italian army with utmost dedication, leading to his forced exit from Italy and living as a fugitive in Switzerland, where he finally loses his new-born son, born dead, and his dear love, whom he has not even formally married. Taking an overview, however, we can see that Henry is meant to project a viewpoint of war and life which is rational and balanced, which avoids the irrational faith of the Italian priest, the nihilism of Rinaldi, the criticism of the British major, the romanticism of Catherine Barkley; amidst all these contrary pulls and temptations the hero keeps standing firmly on the ground of reason and good sense, of commitment to the abiding values of love and compassion. It is the hero's position that provides to the title and theme of the novel an axis around which the entire complex of contraries of love and war, personal relations and impersonal order, blind faith and aware cynicism, revolve and are held together in a meaningful balance of opposites.

Thus, Hemingway succeeds in creating a war novel to expose war, a political novel to expose politics, a romantic novel to expose romanticism, and a modern novel to expose modernism. Combining within its fold the strains of the pastoral as well as the anti-pastoral, the scientific as well as the anti-scientific, *A Farewell to Arms* projects through the central consciousness of its protagonist a balanced view of life, which rejects the dogma of religion as well as the amoralism of science, and accepts the secular and moral outlook of liberal humanism. The writer's success lies in dramatizing a contemporary situation in terms of disinterested art, giving not only the both sides of the case but also the abiding fibers of man and society. Narrating through an individual story a tail of our time the novelist is able to convert a topical piece into a universal whole.

12.4 LET US SUM UP

This lesson discussed the aptness of the title of the novel along with the major themes. We have discussed the war theme in detail which makes it a war novel.

12.4 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTION

1. What is the setting of "A Farewell to Arms"?

   A) Paris, France B) Madrid, Spain
   C) Rome, Italy D) Vienna, Austria

2. Who is the protagonist and narrator of "A Farewell to Arms"?

   A) Lieutenant Rinaldi B) Catherine Barkley
   C) Frederic Henry D) Count Greffi

3. What is Frederic Henry's profession at the beginning of the novel?

   A) Soldier B) Journalist
   C) Doctor D) Artist

4. With which army does Frederic serve during World War I?

   A) French Army B) British Army
   C) German Army D) Italian Army

5. What is the name of the nurse with whom Frederic falls in love?

   A) Maria B) Agnes
   C) Helen D) Sylvia

6. Where do Frederic and Catherine plan to escape to at the end of the novel?

   A) Switzerland B) Spain
   C) Portugal D) France

7. Which event prompts Frederic to desert the army and flee with Catherine?

   A) The death of his best friend B) A severe injury
   C) A change in his military assignment
   D) The announcement of a ceasefire

8. What is the relationship between Frederic and Catherine?

A) Siblings B) Cousins
C) Friends D) Lovers

9. What tragedy occurs during childbirth in the novel?

A) The baby is stillborn B) Catherine dies
C) Frederic dies D) Catherine's family disowns her

10. What does Frederic realize as he watches the rain at the end of the novel?

A) He wants to rejoin the army
B) He is in love with another woman
C) He regrets his choices
D) He is at peace with his life

Answers: 1. Rome, Italy 2. Frederick Henry 3. Soldier 4. Italian Army 5. Maria 6. Switzerland 7. Severe Injury 8. Lovers 9. Catherine Dies 10. He regrets his choices

12.6 SUGGESTED READING

1. Hemingway: The writer as artist by Carlos Barker

2. Twentieth century interpretations of A Farewell to Arms by Jay Gellens

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COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 13**

AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–III**

A FAREWELL TO ARMS

UNIT STRUCTURE

13.1 Introduction

13.2 Objectives

13.3 Narrative Technique in *A Farewell to Arms.*

13.4 Let us sum up

13.5 Examination Oriented Questions

13.6 Suggested Reading

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Ernest Hemingway employs a first-person narrative technique, allowing the protagonist, Lieutenant Frederic Henry, to recount his experiences directly. This perspective provides an intimate and immediate connection to Henry's thoughts and emotions, enhancing the authenticity of his wartime and romantic experiences. Hemingway's signature sparse and unembellished prose style further amplifies the rawness and realism of the narrative, effectively conveying the brutality of war and the poignancy of personal loss. This narrative approach immerses readers in the protagonist's journey, making the novel's themes of love, disillusionment, and survival all the more compelling.

13.2 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the lesson is to acquaint the learners with the technique of narration in the novel.

13.3 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE IN A FAREWELL TO ARMS

As is apparent from the very start, *A Farewell to Arms* uses the first person narrative technique, in which the central character himself narrates his own story. It is Frederic Henry, the novel's hero, who tells us about whatever he experienced-saw, felt, thought-during the limited period of the First World War in which he had participated on the Italian-Austrian front as an officer in the Red Cross. All the events he saw during less than two years of his participation, involving quite a few characters, concerning several places in Italy and Switzerland, come to us through the single consciousness of this central character of the novel. There are various advantages as well as disadvantages of using the first-person narrative technique in a novel. Hemingway's merit as a novelist lies in the fact that while making full use of all the advantages he also succeeds in almost eliminating the disadvantages attendant upon the technique he chose to make use of in his *A Farewell to Arms.*

One of the chief advantages of the first-person technique is that the reader responds to the narrative with greater credulousness. He takes the story to be an authentic account because it is being told by someone who saw it all with his own eyes, felt it all with his own heart, thought it all with his own mind. He does not tell us anything he has not seen, anything he has not felt, anything he has not thought himself. In other words, by using this technique the novelist can more easily create the illusion of reality, can more easily arouse the willing suspension of disbelief in the reader's mind. However, the mere adoption of the first-person narrative technique is not enough to make the fiction look real. The novelist also need to create a narrator who is reliable, whose sincerity in telling the whole truth is beyond doubt. In the case of Browning's speakers in his dramatic monologues, the reader cannot rely upon the speaker's version of events. If he did, the purpose of the poem gets defeated. In Browning's case, his success as an artist lies in making clear to the reader, through the very speech of the narrator, all that is being rendered does not reveal the truth, and that the truth has to be gathered by disbelieving the narrator, by following the subtle workings of the writer's irony which exposes the speaker and shows the truth behind the apparent speech. Here, in the case of Hemingway's novel, we are convinced by the narrative that the

author intends to present the narrator as an honest confessor, who tells only what he knows. Of course, since the narrator is also one of the characters, it is always possible that he is prejudiced against a character, or is indulgent in the case of another. In that case, he may not remain equally reliable all along the long narrative of the novel. Hemingway tides it over by making his narrator truly confessional in such moments in the story, so much so that the narrator separates himself as a character and tells us about his limitations in relation to characters he tends to be prejudiced about or those he tends to be indulgent about. The narrator himself puts a question mark to his objectivity. In other words, he himself shows us where and to what extent he is not reliable, and where and to what extent he is reliable. For instance, Frederic Henry's treatment of his fellow-drivers during the retreat, his reporting on them, the narrator makes clear to us, is not all that honest. He makes a confession later that perhaps he was not being fair to them in presenting their case. Also, the novelist never allows us to forget that the narrator is also a character, and that his views of places and people, events and ideas, are his, and not universal truths. The gap between the author and the narrator may not be much, but the fact of the narrator being one of those involved in the novel's situations is never obliterated. And this fact keeps the reader conscious of the fact that the narrator is to be judged taking into account the fact of his being one of the parties in the case before us. In other words, even if the author and the narrator are identified with each other, the narrator and the reader are not. No writer worth the name, would create such a narrative. That, decidedly, is not the intention of art. Piece of propaganda can make such an attempt; it always does. But never an artistic composition. Its attempt is to convince the reader that such a story is possible to happen because here is a person to whom it has happened. And here Hemingway has eminently succeeded. The novel's narrative comes through like an historical account of the war that actually happened. The fact, that it is based on Hemingway's own experience of that war makes it sound all the more authentic, lending the story an additional weight to credibility and reliability.

Hemingway also overcomes the limitations of the narrator's subjectivity by adopting certain measures that restrict his role or power as narrator. For instance,

one of the measures is to make the narrative a recall of events that took place several years ago, making thereby the narrator less involved, giving him an advantage of a grow-up hind-sight, to be able to see his past life from the vantage point of his mature outlook. What Frederic felt at the moment an accident took place and how he looks at it a few years later are kept separate, and we are kept at a distance from the happening, never allowed to be involved in the eye-witness account. It is for this very reason that Hemingway places the narrator as well as the reader look at it from the position of a later-day perspective. Some of the other measures that Hemingway adopts to overcome the limitations of the first-person technique are: minimum reliance on description or reporting; greater space to showing through direct dialogue; permitting other characters to present their views directly; making the narrator almost invisible during the dialogue, even though technically it is his reporting. In *A Farewell to Arms,* as well as in other novels of Hemingway, the dialogues or conversations are so designed that the narrator is either only one of the participants or just unintruding camera-eye, showing only what is happening before it without offering any comment or instruction with regard to anyone including himself. Note, for instance, the following:

"*What's the matter father? You seem very tired".*

"I am tired but I have no right to be".

"It's the heat".

"No, this is only the spring. I feel very low".

"You have the war digust".

"No. But I hate the war".

"I don't enjoy it," I said. He shook his head and looked out of the window.

"You do not mind it. You do not see it. I can tell. I do not see it myself but I feel it a little".

"When I was wounded we were talking about it. Passini was talking".

The priest put down the glass. He was thinking about something else.

"I know them because I am like they are," he said.

"You are different though".

"But really I am like they are".

"The officers don't see anything".

"Some of them do. Some are very delicate and feel worse than any of us".

"They are mostly different".

It goes on for over three pages, as stark as this one, nowhere any intrusion is made in the from of any comment, nor any attempt is made to show any knowledge beyond what the character is saying. Also, even after the conversation is over, the narrator does not say a word about the priest, his views on war, love, and God. All that comes out is only through the dialogue itself, not through direct comment. We are shown, not told, which is dramatic method, and Hemingway follows it to the extent it can be possible in a narrative.

As for the descriptions of places and people in *A Farewell to Arms,* only the accounts of events and places are given space in the narrative. In such passages, the personality of the narrator as character is not so much involved as an observing eye, or imaginative appreciation, or artistic insight, taking the narrator farther away from the character and taking him instead closer to the author himself. Of course, absolute objectivity is neither possible, nor perhaps desirable, in the narrator or the author. As has been observed by Wayne Booth, one of the soundest scholars on the subject of narrative technique:

Even among characters of equal moral, intellectual or aesthetic worth, all authors inevitably take sides. A given work will be "about" a character or set of characters. It cannot possibly give equal emphasis to all, regardless of what its author believes about the desirability of fairness. Hamlet is not fair to Claudius. No matter how hard G. Wilson Knight labours to convince us that we have misjudged Claudius, and no matter how willing we are to admit that Claudius' story is potentially as interesting as Hamlet's, this is Hamlet's story, and it cannot do justice to the King. Othello is not fair to Cassius; King Lear is not just to the

Duke of Cornwall; Madame Bovary is unfair to almost every one but Emma; and A Protrait of the Artist as a Young Man, positively maligns everyone but Stephen. But who cares? The novelist who chooses to tell this story cannot at the same time tell that story; in centering our interests, sympathy, or affection on one character, he inevitably excludes from our interest, sympathy, or affection for some other characters. Art imitates life in this respect as in so many others; just as in real life I am inevitably unfair to everyone but myself or, at best, my immediately loved ones, so in literature complete impartiality is impossible.

Here, Wayne Booth is quite right in his assertion that the author's partiality to the central character, whose story he has chosen to tell, is inevitable. Obviously, a literary work cannot at one and the same time do justice to the "stories" of several characters involved in the plot of that literary work, for it is not possible to place at par all the points of view represented by those several characters. It is not wonder that in Frederic Henry's story of *A Farewell to Arms,* Hemingway's narrator is not fair to all others except himself and his beloved, Catherine Barkley. Since it is the hero's point of view that prevails all over the narrative, all other that do not endorse it or are in conflict with it, have to be treated unfairly. Even we as readers, would not like to have that absolute fairness. We take up to read a literary book precisely because it is the story of one of us, and not because it is an example of the God-like fairness to all. Hence, Frederic is not fair to all those who come in the way of his love for Catherine, including the head nurse, who has large duties to perform than to make things smooth for the lovers; the battle police that are after him because he is a fugitive from war, and those that kill you by one thing or another. We cannot expect him to be fair to others in an absolute sense, nor can we take it as humanly possible. He is fair to them to the extent his kind of person in the given situation in which he is caught up reasonably can be. And that is what literature is all about; it narrates, whatever be the technique it adopts to do that, a human story, involving human thoughts and emotions in all their imperfections, not excluding dreams and aspirations.

At the same time, it is not fair to say that the author or the narrator is unfair to so, and so far all characters in a literary work exist only within

the world of the work, and they exist only as they are in that work; they have no existence outside the work, and as such there cannot be any question of the author's being fair or unfair to them. They are what they are within the pages of the book, and they cannot be otherwise. Hence, the question is irrelevant; unless, of course, the characters are historically verifiable with definitive history available about them. In fact, even in that case, we cannot consider the fictional characters as historical, because the fiction writer never claims his commitment to historical reality. The characters of Shakespeare in historial plays are never judged on the basis of their existence in history; they are judged solely on the basis of what they are within the pages of Shakespeare's plays. Also, even if we agree with the assertion that no writer can be fair to all characters in the comparative sense that he is more so to the central, we cannot overlook the fact that while some works are more dramatic and less potential or partisan in their presentation, others are less dramatic and more polemical or partisan in narration. Booth himself makes out a distinction between telling and showing; while in telling the teller's point of view dominates to the extent that certain characters are bound to get much less exposure than the others, in showing there being dramatic presentation all characters are equally exposed or shown to the reader to form his own opinion of them each. In the latter case, the point of view of the narrator is not overbearing.

In terms of Booth's distinction, it can be said with certainty that in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms,* there is much greater showing than telling, and hence, much less dominance of the narrator's point of view than in the third-person omniscient author or the purely first-person biographical narrator. As has already been demonstrated, in Hemingway's novel, just as in dramatic compositions, there is heavy reliance on dialogue as the vehicle of narration than on direct telling. Besides, whatever telling is there, it is largely in the form of factual reporting without intensive or overbearing comments. There are no analyses of characters and situations, no theorizations or philosophisations, no polemics or contentions. It is simple, solid story-telling, and deliberately nothing more. At the same time, in the absence of authorial intrusions, Hemingway's novel does not suffer from the

kind of ambiguity that Booth talks about in the case of certain modern novels such as Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* or *Ulysses,* where the reader is not always sure whether, the scene is serious or comic. As Booth has rightly observed, "There is this much truth to the demand for objectivity in the author : signs of the real author's untransformed loves and hates are almost fatal. But clear recognition of this truth cannot lead us to doctrines about techniques, and it should lead us to demand of the author that he eliminate love and hate, and the judgements of the implied author are....the very stuff out of which great fiction is made."

One of the serious disadvantages of the first person narrative technique is that it limits the scope of social scale to a narrow range of characters as well as incidents. Since the action gets limited to the life of the narrator himself, only those characters and incidents will get included in the plot that are related to his life. Unless a long life span is made the scope of the novel, the number of people entering his life as well as the number of happenings would remain rather small. Novelists like Defoe or Fielding overcame it by making almost the whole life of the narrator as the scope of the novel. Moll Flanders is born at the beginning and is nearing her end at the end of the narrative. *A Farewell to Arms* designed as tragedy, and not an autobiography, cannot avail of that advantage. For achieving the tragic intensity, the events must remain limited to a small space of time and involve only a small number of characters. What comedy achieves in variety and width, tragedy accomplishes in intensity and depth. Hemingway's novel does achieve tragic intensity with the rain and snow suggesting a sense of doom right from the beginning. The inevitable and imminent sense of tragic end looms large in the novel's action all along; it hangs over the events like a dark cloud, which bursts into rain at the end, carrying with it Catherine and the child she gives birth to. Nowhere in the novel this sense of doom is allowed to relent, much less to absent from the reader's mind. Hence, the limitation of limited scale is no disadvantage to the novel; in fact, it is an advantage for achieving its tragic end.

Even within the tragic structure of *A Farewell to Arms,* Hemingway is able to include a large number of characters by locating the novel's incidents in the public places, rather than the private space of the hero's life. The theme of

war itself ensures the involvement of a large number of soldiers and officers. Also, even when it is not war time. Hemingway keeps the action outdoor—in cafes and hospitals, officer's mess and sports complex. Since, Hemingway always preferred to focus on action rather than thought, event rather than emotion, his narratives never had to face the problem of missing the social dimension. In fact, his strength lies in showing the tremendous scope there is within the framework of the first-person narrative for social variety as well as tragic intensity. Hence, Hemingway's choice of the technique for his novel proved appropriate for his vision of life he wished to communicate through the ware experience of a single character.

13.4 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed the narrative technique of the novel. It is a first person narration which takes the story of the novel to an authentic account.

13.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Discuss the narrative technique used by Hemingway in the novel *A Farewell to Arms.*

13.6 SUGGESTED R4EADING

1. Hemingway : The writer as artist by Carlos Barker

2. Twentieth century interpretations of A Farewell to Arms by Jay Gellens

COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 14**

AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–III**

A FAREWELL TO ARMS

UNIT STRUCTURE

14.1 Introduction

14.2 Objectives

14.3 A Farewell to Arms as Tragedy of Star-Crossed Lovers.

14.4 Let Us Sum Up

14.5 Examination Oriented Questions

14.6 Multiple Choice Questions

14.7 Suggested Reading

14.1 INTRODUCTION

A Farewell to Arms is a profound tragedy that delves into the devastation wrought by war and the impermanence of love. The novel follows Lieutenant Frederic Henry and his romance with Catherine Barkley amidst the chaos of World War I, only to see their happiness shattered by loss and death. Hemingway's stark and unadorned prose accentuates the novel's tragic elements, emphasizing the futility and unpredictability of life. Through its exploration of suffering, disillusionment, and the inevitable consequences of conflict, the novel stands as a powerful testament to the tragic human condition.

14.2 OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the lesson is to familiarize the learners with the Novel's tragic aspect.

14.3 A FAREWELL TO ARMS AS TRAGEDY OF STAR-CROSSED LOVERS

Shakespeare calls Romeo and Juliet as star-crossed lovers. Hemingway, we are told, is said to have called *A Farewell to Arms* his *Romeo and Juliet.* Edmund Wilson was the first to have quoted Hemingway's remark. It was then taken up by Carlos Baker, and elaborated into a case of great similarity between the two tragedies :

The most obvious parallel is that Henry and Catherine, like their Elizabethan prototypes, might be seen as star-crossed lovers. Hemingway might also have been thinking of how rapidly Romeo and Juliet, whose affair has begun as a mere flirtation, pass over into the status of relatively mature lovers. In the third place, he may have meant to imply that his own lovers, caught in the tragic pattern of the war on the Austrian-Italian front, are not far different from the young victims of the Montagne-Capulet family feud.

Thus, speculating on the possible reasons for Hemingway's remark on his novel being a sort of modern love tragedy like Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Baker examines the case seriously and finds several valid grounds which can justify the comparison. Seeking further threads of similarity between the fabrics of the two tragedies separated by a space of over four centuries, the critic makes the following comment.

Neither in Romeo and Juliet nor in A Farewell to Arms is the catastrophe a direct and logical result of the immoral social situation. Catherine's bodily structure, which precludes a normal delivery for her baby, is an unfortunate biological accident. The death of Shakespeare's lovers is also precipitated by an accident—the detention of the message-bearing friar. The student of aesthetics, recognizing another kind of logic in art than that of mathematical cause-and-effect, may however see that Catherine's death, like that of Juliet, shows a kind of artistic inevitability. Except by a large indirect, the war does not kill Catherine any more than the Veronese feud that kills Juliet. But in the emotional experience of the novel, Catherine's dying is directly associated and interwoven with the whole tragic pattern of fatigue

and suffering, loneliness, defeat and doom, of which the war is itself the broad social manifestation. And one might make a similar argument about Romeo and Juliet.

Thus, making out quite a plausible case between the two tragedies focused on the love between two young lovers, Baker traces close similarities between the two works in terms of the lover's age, their affair progressing from a mere flirtation to serious commitment, their being caught between two warring forces around them of which their love becomes a casualty, the actual accident, rather than the feud, being the real cause of the tragedy, etc. The parallel between the two works goes well down to even minor details of individual characters and incidents. After reading, Baker one begins to see the significance of Hemingway's seemingly casual remark. One begins to feel convinced that Hemingway might have deliberately designed his novel on a conscious imitation of the tragic pattern in Shakespeare's early tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Making further exploration in the parallelism between *A Farewell to Arms* and Shakespeare's tragedy, Baker goes on to add.

In application of Frederic and Catherine, the phrase "star-crossed lovers" needs some qualification. It does not mean that they are the victims of an actual malevolent metaphysical power. All their crisis are caused by forces which human beings have set in motion. During Frederic's understandably bitter ruminations while Catherine lies dying in the Lausanne hospital fatalistic thoughts do, quite naturally, cross his mind. But he does not, in the end, blame anything called "Fate" for Catherine's death. The pain of her labor reminds him that her pregnancy has been comfortable and apparently normal; the present biological struggle is perhaps a way of evening thins up. "So now they got her in the end. You never got away with anything". But he immediately rejects his own inference: that is, that her sufferings in labor are a punishment of sinful pleasure... The anonymous "they" is nothing but a name for the way things are.

Continuing further into the deeper regions of the tragic pattern, Baker then examines the various statements that the hero makes in the last section of the novel

while Catherine is dying in the hospital at Lausanne. It is these statement, finally, which would reveal the specific meaning that Hemingway might have associated with their love being star-crossed. Baker is quite right in not considering Hemingway as a believer in any metaphysical system of governance operating in the natural world where human species live. Rejecting the metaphysical, Baker examines its implication in terms of the natural. His analysis of Henry's ruminations or responses in the crucial last scene is quite convincing:

A little later Frederick Henry bitterly compares the human predicament first to a game and then to a swarm of ants on a log in a campfire. Both are homely and unbookish metaphors such as would naturally occur to any young American male at a comparable time. Living now seems to be a war-like game played for keeps, where to be tagged out is to die. Here, again, there is a moral implication in the idea of being caught off base-trying to steal third, say, when the infield situation and the number of outs make it wiser to stay on second. "They threw you in and told you the rules and the first time they caught you off base they killed you". One trouble, of course, is that the player rarely has the time enough to learn by long experience; his fatal error may come in the second half of the first inning, which is about as far as Catherine seems likely to go. Even those who survive long enough to learn the rules may be killed through the operation of chance or the accidents of the game. Death may, in short, come gratuitously without the slightest reference to the rules.

It is plainly a gratuitous death which comes to the ants on the burning log in Frederick's remembered campfire. Some immediately die in flame, as Catherine is now dying. Others, like Lieutenant Henry, who has survived a trench mortar explosion, will manage to get away, their bodies permanently scarred, their future course uncertain – except that they will die in the end. Still others, unharmed, will swarm on the still cool end of the log until the fire at last reaches them. If a Hardyean President of the Immortals takes any notice of them, he does little enough for their relief. He is like Frederick Henry pouring water on the burning campfire log–not to save the ants, only to empty a cup.

Catherine's suffering and death prove nothing except that she could not have become pregnant. But she had to become pregnant in order to find out that becoming pregnant was unwise. Death is a penalty for ignorance of "the rules": it is also a fact which has nothing to do with rule or reason. Death is the fire which, in conclusion, burns us all, and it may singe us along the way. Frederick Henry's ruminations simply go to show that if he had Catherine seem star–crossed, it is only because Catherine is biologically double-crossed, Europe is war-crossed, and life is death–crossed.

This reproduction of Baker's analysis of the hero's ruminations on life and death in order to illucidate the meaning of the term "star-crossed", which is too long for a quotation, became necessary because the analysis could not be cut short without losing the very point that is being made in the argument. Baker's contention here is that the meaning of star–crossed in Hemingway's tragedy is very different from the one is Shakespeare's. Here it is the star–crossing of a natural world, there it is the star-crossing of a metaphysical world; the two tragic visions are very different, the difference being the vast gap between the Elizabethan England of the Renaissance and the Modern world of the post Darwinian outfit.

Once we start looking into the differences between *A Farewell to Arms* and *Romeo and Juliet,* several other aspects come to the fore. One of these is the difference of focus in the two works: while Shakespeare's work is centred on the love theme, the feud is an impediment that comes up in the path of love; in Hemingway's work love crops up in the heart of war. In Hemingway, love is accidental, not the main theme. It remains peripheral in the international arena of war; it gets burnt like every thing else does in the vast violence, the engulfing fire, that makes the Hemingway hero not a bit prejudiced about the existence on earth. His special state of mind entirely affected by the war, a cynical and senseless war, has to do with the course of love that, even though it runs under the shadow of war, in essence, is not determined by the war. His prejudiced view of life is forced on him by the sudden end to his love that comes in the very prime of its birth. He had understood all that was involved in the war, although the understanding came the hard way. But he could not comprehend the greater senselessness of the death

of love. It came too, suddenly compared to war; he had no time to learn it. Hence, the total upsetting of his mind. He feels knocked out in the very first round. Hence, it is a greater shock than that of war. In Shakepeare's *Romeo and Juliet,* no such bitterness about life and world is generated by the end of love. There the lovers find fulfillment even in death. Lovers always carry that sense in Shakespeare. If one dies, for whatever reason, the other follows. *Othello or Antony and Cleopatra, or Romeo and Juliet,* at that level the story, is the same. In Hemingway, no such consumation is sought in love. Death does not fulfil anything; it empties everything. Obviously, the metaphysical world of the Renaissance is replaced here by the naturalistic world. There is no god here, nor any soul that craves for the abode elsewhere. It is only here and now that alone constitutes reality. Nothing beyond.

Also, while Shakespeare's lovers remain in a state of innocence, Hemingway's lovers have already matured before they fall in love. The various comments that Catherine makes on man and life during their conversations, making love amidst the pressures of war, clearly mark the difference from the rather adolescent minds of the lovers in Shakespeare. When Henry quotes Shakespeare's Caesar saying "cowards die many times before their death", or Marvell's lover in *To His Coy Mistress* always hearing on his back the Time's winged chariot, Catherine's comments are critical of both. Her utterances are a witness to her maturity. So are Henry's observations on war whenever his fellow soldiers talk pure patriotism or eerie idealism. One can recall here his remark that men turn Christian in defeat, or how those tasting victory behave with your women, etc. There seems a vast difference in the levels of consciousness that Hemingway's lovers demonstrate and that shown by the innocent lovers of Shakespeare. When an overview is taken of the two works, one feels that while the similarities between them are rather superficial, the differences are decidedly deep. Hemingway's remark here seems as ironic as is his vision of life in his novel.

The Priest as Code Hero

One of the banes of Hemingway criticism has been the concept of "code hero" that Philip young, misusing Freud's theory of trauma, devised in his early book on Hemingway. Describing the hero in Hemingway as autobiographical, making the

author's war wound at Forselta in the First World War as the basis of trauma, he concluded that both Hemingway and his hero received in that physical wound also the psychological wound of trauma, and became both and permanetly pathological cases, always needing someone to show them the way to control and compose their shattered nerves. This gave rise to the concept of the 'Code Hero'. Since the disease diagnosed was psychological, a matter of nerves only, the remedy was the model health of the sportsman–prize fighter, bullfighter, fisherman, or even the priest whose faith permits no disruption of his nervous system. The concept suited so well the critical credo of the modernists who had a life-long quarrel with Hemingway because of his antimodernist humanism, that they found an easy ground to dub him as a dumb ox, capable, as a writer, of describing only the mindless objects of nature or purely physical activities of the human animals.

The concept of the 'Code Hero' was not only misconceived, it was also consciously and deliberately mischievous. It did the damage to reputation of the writer, who was made to suffer on that count in comparison with his contemporaries like William Faulkner, even Scott Fitzgerald. However, the mischief could not have lasted for ever. It finally got exposed, and thereafter discarded and buried for good. We know now, and for sure, that Hemingway was more modern than the self-styled high modernists. The latter got exposed by the time of the Second World War. Their fascist sympathies, their antisemitism, their irrational opposition to science, democracy and humanism– three pillars of modernism-was thoroughly exposed, paving way for the emergence of the genuine modernist, Ernest Hemingway. In the light to his true colour, the code hero in Hemingway came to be recognized for what in truth the character is-a primitive human not having had the benefit of developed consciousness. The bullfighter Pedro Romero in *The Sun Also Rises* or the Priest in *A Farewell to Arms* are simple primitive characters, who have remained protected by their blind faith in the tradition that has been handed down to them by their ancestory. They have never been exposed to the challenges of the post-Reformation, post-Renaissance, and the post-Darwinian consciousness which is characteristic of the modern man in the twentieth century. Hemingway created a hero, who represented the modern world, represented the

modern consciousness, and heroically confronted a godless world of an absurd existence, making Titanic attempt to stand on his own strength in the face of an indifferent world that kills the virtuous and the villainous alike: "you stay around, and you can be sure they will kill you". In his battle of consciousness there is no place for these regressive characters who, when faced with the challenges of modern consciousness, can only withdraw into the simpler world of primitive religion or physical sport. Pedro Romero has no answer to the challenge of Brett Ashley. She spares him only out of pity, finding him so pathetic a case for her modern outlook on love, marriage, and life in general. The priest has no answer to the international war. When confronted by the hero with the realities of war, he feels baffled and decides to return to his village of Abruzzi where there is hunting and people do not make fun of religion. The priest comes out equally pathetically in his encounter with Modern love. He cannot comprehend the intricacies of the love between Frederic and Catherine. When asked by Henry if he had ever loved anyone living (as against the non-existent God), he only fumbles to say that he must have loved his mother. Thus, both in love and war, the two challenge the characters face in the novel, the so-called "code hero" is an utter failure, a butt of ridicule, a specimen of the medieval man. Hemingway deliberately, with a design, creates invariably two foils to his hero, his central character. While on the left side is the primitive figure, already outdated for the modern world of Hemingway's fiction, on the right is the pseudo-modernist who has acquired knowledge of the modern world but has lost all strength to withstand its pressure. Thus, while one represents the unaware faith, the other represents faithless awareness. The hero alone in Hemingway is so shaped that he carries a modern consciousness but without having lost his capacity to make commitment to lasting values that act as substitute-faith. Hence, he combines the strength of both and remains free from their weakness. Thus, it is the hero himself who embodies a set of values, who represents a code. It is absurd, therefore, to speak of any code outside of the hero's person, embodied in a minor character, which the hero is supposed to pick up as a sort of *tyro* learning from the *tutor*, that too, from a distance in a studied silence. Nothing can be more pathological than this concept of the 'code hero'; it is good that it stands discarded and buried.

Hemingway's merit as an artist lies, not in his rejection of the modern world in favour of the primitive or natural or pastoral; rather, it lies in his honest encounter of life in the modern world, a facing of the challenges without any crutches of any blind faith or mindless tradition. His strength lies in shaping a hero who stands out among his colleagues and contemporaries as a genuine explorer of life and an honest report of what he discovers in his pursuit of truth. He hates to wear any eyeglasses to escape the sun or to get a colourful view of things colourless or dark. He is prepared to burn his finger, or affect his sight, but he would see the world with his naked eye and with empty hands. No opium would be acceptable in the face of pain or suffering, opium of religion or tradition. One can recall here the hero's rejection of his wife's soothing opiumes when he is undergoing the pain of gangerence in the green hills of Africa and is facing an imminent death in *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*. His strength is his secular, scientific, democratic outlook on life and the values embodied in that outlook. These values constitute a substitute faith to replace the old blind faith of the catholic religion to which Hemingway and his hero are born, and which remains, if at all, as a technical tag attached to them meaning nothing. What matters is the value that has been derived from an honest exposure to life for coping with the challenge that one faces while making such an honest attempt to face life without irrational beliefs and conventional attitudes. It is for this very strength that Hemingway's fiction still carries an appeal with the readers, whereas his contemporaries like Faulkner and Fitzgerald have started sounded rather dated. This strength of honest facing up to the challenges also gets reflected in Hemingway's prose style. There again, it is the same virtues of simplicity, honesty, and authenticity that shape his prose, which again has not become date with time; it still sounds as fresh as it did in the 1920's. And, it is this very quality of his fiction, of both his matter and manner, subject and style, his honesty to say precisely what he perceives, that makes his stories parables of life. For the individual stories assume the general character of man's struggle in a world not made to suit his desires and purposes, a world with which he finds himself at odds. Such parables never become dated, for such a struggle is what has marked the history of human civilization on earth. It is this very quality of his fiction which has made him immortal like Shakespeare and Homer.

14.4 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed the novel as tragedy of star-crossed lovers. Hemingway compared his novel to Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet.

14.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Discuss the theme of love in *A Farewell to Arms.*

b) Discuss *A Farewell to Arms* as a tragedy.

14.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Which of the following themes is prominent in "A Farewell to Arms"?

   A) Quest for vengeance
   B) Exploration of space travel
   C) Examination of political corruption
   D) Effects of war on individuals

2. What is one of the main consequences of the war on the characters in the novel?

   A) Increased prosperity
   B) Improved mental health
   C) Loss of innocence
   D) Strengthened family bonds

3. How does the theme of love impact the characters in the story?

   A) It leads to a blissful ending for all characters
   B) It provides a source of hope and connection amid the chaos of war
   C) It is a distraction from the realities of the war
   D) It leads to betrayal and disappointment for all characters

4. What does the novel suggest about the futility of war?

   A) War is always justified and brings positive outcomes
   B) War can be justified if it protects a nation's interests
   C) War is ultimately futile and brings suffering and destruction
   D) War is necessary for progress and growth

5. How does the setting of the novel contribute to its themes?

A) The setting has no significant impact on the themes
B) The setting emphasizes the characters' luxurious lifestyles
C) The setting serves as a backdrop for the characters' romantic relationships
D) The setting reflects the harsh realities of war and its impact on society

6. In what ways does the novel explore the concept of escape?

A) Characters physically escape from the war-torn regions
B) Characters escape into a fantasy world
C) Characters escape from their own emotions and traumas
D) Characters escape from their duties as soldier.

7. What role does fate play in the lives of the characters?

A) Fate has no impact on the characters' lives
B) Characters are entirely in control of their own destinies
C) Characters struggle against fate but are ultimately powerless
D) Fate is a minor theme and doesn't affect the characters

8. How does the novel address the concept of disillusionment?

A) Characters are constantly optimistic and hopeful
B) Disillusionment is not a significant theme in the novel
C) Characters experience disillusionment as they confront the realities of war
D) Characters are immune to disillusionment due to their strong beliefs

9. Which of the following best describes the overall tone of the novel regarding war and its consequences?

A) Celebration of war's heroic aspects
B) Complete condemnation of war
C) Neutral presentation of war's outcomes
D) Ambivalent portrayal of war's effects

10. What is the impact of the theme of death on the characters?

A) Characters are indifferent to death
B) Characters find solace in the inevitability of death
C) Characters are deeply affected by death and often struggle to cope
D) Death is celebrated as a natural part of life

Answers: 1. Effects of war on individuals 2. Loss of innocence 3. It provides a source of hope and connection amid the chaos of war 4. War is ultimately futile and brings suffering and destruction 5. The setting reflects the harsh realities of war and its impact on society 6. Characters escape from their own emotions and traumas 7. Characters struggle against fate but are ultimately powerless 8. Characters experience disillusionment as they confront the realities of war 9. Complete condemnation of war 10. Characters are deeply affected by death and often struggle to cope

14.6 SUGGESTED READING

1. Hemingway : The writer as artist by Carlos Barker
2. Twentieth century interpretations of A Farewell to Arms by Jay Gellens

COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 15**
AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–III**

A FAREWELL TO ARMS

UNIT STRUCTURE

15.1 Introduction

15.2 Objectives

15.3 Prose Style in *A Farewell to Arms*

15.4 Let Us Sum Up

15.5 Examination Oriented Questions

15.6 Suggested Reading

15.1 INTRODUCTION

Ernest Hemingway's prose style is renowned for its simplicity, clarity, and precision. Hemingway employs short, straightforward sentences and a minimalistic approach, stripping away unnecessary details to focus on the essence of the narrative. This economical use of language enhances the emotional impact and stark realism of the story, effectively conveying the brutality of war and the intensity of the protagonist's experiences. The understated and unembellished prose invites readers to infer deeper meanings and emotions, making Hemingway's style both accessible and profoundly evocative.

15.2 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the lesson is to acquaint the learners with the prose sytle of the novelist.

15.3 PROSE STYLE IN *A FAREWELL TO ARMS*

Hemingway received his reputation as a pioneer of modern English prose style soon after the publication of his first book of short stories entitled *In Our Time* in 1925. While to begin with critics spoke of the Hemingway style, for until then only the early novels and short stories had appeared. But after the publication of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in 1940, critics started speaking of his early and later styles. Whatever the difference of early and later, or one and another kind of style, the critics have always related the Hemingway style to Hemingway the man; Psychobiographical approach to Hemingway's fiction, including all the aspects of its art, has been a bane of Hemingway criticism. While several aspects have been misunderstood, several others remain ignored. Biography is a useful source for the interpretation of a writer's work, but it has to remain as background material, not as a key to open the treasures of his art. We need to make use of our biographical knowledge about him, but only to the extent it is able to illuminate an aspect or an item of his art within the artistic frame itself, not in violation of the artistic frame. With these preliminaries we can now examine the prose style of Hemingway, so to how it was shaped in its early stage and under what influences, and how the author forged it to serve the ends of his art.

The view that 'style is the man' has been quite popular even outside of Hemingway. Although there is an element of truth in the statement, it is not adequate enough to cover the entire range of styles that have been there in the history of English literature. Clearly, the man behind the artist is only one of the many factors that go into the style of an artist. We can see how the style of an artist or artwork is determined by the genre (drama, epic, or novel), by the narrative (tragic, comic, or farcical), by the narrator or speaker (whether peasant, professor, or priest). It is, therefore, comparatively more appropriate to speak of style in relation to individual work, rather than individual writer. It is also important to remember that the style of an artwork must be studied in relation to the various aspects that determines and necessitates it.

In the life of every writer there is always a formative period, when various

influences work to shape the writer's distinctive style, having certain peculiarities of its own. As for the style of individual work, that is decided by its subject and form, but the writer's peculiarities will always creep in whatever be the individual case. About his formative period, Hemingway is said to have remarked: "that's how I learned to write-by reading the Bible". The element of simplicity both in diction and syntax-chief characteristic of the *Old Testament* narratives-is the main quality of Hemingway's prose also in all his works. Of Course, not all Hemingway characters would speak simple language or use simple syntax; also, not all situations would called for the quality of simplicity. But, by and large, the Hemingway narrators, who are close proximations of the author himself, would prefer to use the simple language and sentence structure. Note, for instance, the following:

In the late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains. In the bed of the river there were pebbles and boulders, dry and white in the sun, and the water was clear and swiftly moving and blue in the channels. Troops went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees. The trunks of the trees, too, were dusty and the leaves fell early that year and we saw the troops marching along the road and the dust rising and leaves, stirred by the breeze, falling and the soldiers marching and afterward, the road bare and white except for the leaves.

Here is the opening paragraph of the novel, stating the theme of war as it comes through the individual consciousness of the narrator. Nothing could be simpler than this piece. This simplest of words in the straightest of syntax, absolutely without any qualifying or subordinate clause, without any ornamental or explanatory epithets. The whole piece runs like the stream, taking no devious route; it just flows unhindered on the wheels of ands, making a smooth movement of slides showing the house, the village, the river, the mountains, the troops, the military vehicles, but also he pebbles and boulders, trees with dust on the leaves, etc. all these objects stand just as they do in the landscape, captured as if by the camera eye. There is unique freshness about the words and sentences, very much like the pebbles and boulders, rivers and mountains.

We cannot fail to notice that the narrative here is not only stark but also impersonal. Even though the narrator is first person, we find him dropping not a single word which could detract our attention from the objects to the person showing them. Whatever emotion the scene arouses in the reader's mind is done through the objective correlative of the objects, not even once through direct expression of that emotion. The narrator remains almost invisible; only a voice comes out narrating the events of the plot. The bare and bony prose here shows the strength of simplicity; a simple accumulation of details creates a complete picture in the reader's mind. Hemingway also acknowledged his debt to Ring Lardener, whose regular column in the Chicago *Tribune* was one of the municipal glories, from whom he learned some of the technicalities of idiomatic prose as well as of humour, burlesque, and satire. Although *A Farewell to Arms* is a tragic novel, the humour of the trenches, that heightens rather than relieve the tragic tension, is quite pronounced in the novel. A little instance of irony would do here: "At the start of the winter came the permanent rain and with the rain came, the cholera. But it was checked and in the end only seven thousand died of it in the army". And the dark humour of the comedy is what those caught in the war live by: "Their rifles were wet and under their capes the two leather cartridge-boxes on the front of the belts, gray leather boxes heavy with the packs of clips of thin, long 6.5 mm. cartridges, bulged forward under the capes so that the men, passing on the road, marched as though they were six months gone with child".

One of the most powerful influences on Hemingway's writing was that of Kansas City *Star,* which had been for almost twenty years the natural target of talented, ambitious Midwesterners. During his less-than-one year association before joining the war in 1918, Hemingway received valuable training in writing neat and solid prose. The *Star* required its reporters to master its famous style-sheet before they went into the profession. The very first paragraph of the style-sheet insisted: "*Use short sentences. Use short first paragraphs. Use vigorous English. Be positive, not negative*". Hemingway, more than anyone else, mastered these rules so well that they became a matter of habit with him. Note, for instance, the following:

I went on to the hospital. There were some letters, an official one, and some others, I was to have three weeks convalescent leave and then return to the front. I read it over carefully. Well, that was that. The convalescent leave started October fourth when my course was finished. Three weeks was twenty-one days. That made October twenty-fifth. I told them I would not be in and went to the restaurant a little away up in the street from the hospital for supper and read my letters and the Corriere Della Sera at the table. There was a letter from my grandfather, containing family news, patriotic encouragement, a draft for two hundred dollars, and a few clippings; a dull letter from the priest at our mess, a letter from a man I knew who was flying with the French and had gotten in with a wild gang and was telling about it, and a note from Rinaldi asking me how long I was going to skulk in Milano and what was all the news?

Nothing could be better. No other prose would be so solid. It does not think. It does not feel. It only acts, and acts slowly or swiftly as the matter deserves causal or careful attention. And it keeps moving without any wet emotions or dry thoughts. It just keeps us fixed with the camera eye that moves on uninterrupted. The stream flows, and flows in a rhythmic fashion. This vigorous prose makes a sharp contrast to the intellectual prose of James which lacks motion, which only weaves circles, creating a web, keeping the reader involved in the thoughts and emotions generated by any little action. Hemingway's short, direct positive sentences are in marked contrast to James's long, indirect, and round-about sentences.

Another instruction of the *Star's* style-sheet (Rule no.3) insisted: "Never use slang. Such words as stunt, cut out, get his goat, come across, sit up and take notice, put one over, have no place after their use become common. Slang to be enjoyable must be fresh". Hemingway, we know, does not use any slang whatever, stale or fresh. He knew that while slang was topical, standard English was universal. He uses slang only where he must, such as in a character's speech who must not lose his local colour. Rinaldi is one such characters in a *A Farewell to Arms.* Another important instruction of the style-sheet (Rule No. 21) was: "Avoid the use of adjectives, especially such extravagant ones as splendid, gorgeous, grand,

magnificent, etc.". Hemingway followed it equally faithfully, never ignoring the precious advice. It is for this reason that his prose is free from the heavy and turgid writing which was so common around the time Hemingway took up the career of creative writing. Of course, it is neither possible nor necessary to avoid the use of epithets (adjectives and adverbs). At times, their fundamental use makes it necessary for the writer to rely upon them. However, merely ornamental or decorative use, serving no purpose except that of embelishment, is what Hemingway always stayed away from. But he makes effective and functional use of epithets wherever required. Note, for instance, the following :

Now in the fall the trees were bare and roads were muddy.....The mulberry trees were bare and the fields were brown. There were wet dead leaves on the road from the rows of bare trees and men were working on the road, tamping stone in the ruts from piles crushed stone.....On a narrow street we passed a British Red Cross ambulance. The driver wore a cap and his face was thin and tanned.

It is only this kind of adjectives and adverbs that Hemingway uses; apparently they are highly functional, being as necessary as the nouns themselves. Also, they do not distract from the action that the narrative is after. The epithets appear in a matter-of-fact manner, never creating any sides to the stream of moving action. Since, the narrator is himself involved in the war effort which is the subject of narration, the prose remains only as much concerned with the non-essential objects of nature or society as it is possible for a soldier in action. Hence, attention to the beauties and luxuries in natural or human world would seldom appear on the screen used by the novelist.

Hemingway's prose in *A Farewell to Arms,* as well as elsewhere, heavily relies on the conjunctives, such as 'and', for furthering the narrative. They act like wheels on which the train of narrative moves, never causing any halt or hinderance. No other writer has perhaps ever made such a wonderful use of 'and' and such other conjunctives. We may pick up any page of the novel, any novel, the abundant use of 'and' will at once strike the eye. Note how effectively it work in the following passage:

The wind rose in the night and at three o' clock in the morning with the rain coming in sheets there was a bombardment and the Croatians came over across the mountain meadows and through the patches of woods and into the front line. They fought in the dark in the rain and a counter-attack of scared men from the second line drove them back. There was much shelling and many rockets in the rain and machine gun and rifle fire all along the line. They did not come again and it was quieter and between the gusts of wind and rain we could hear the sound of a great bombardment far to the north.

Here, the conjunctive 'and' does the trick. It is a magic device with Hemingway that does wonders with words, phrases, clauses, putting them all together, connecting them like the boggies of a train, keeping it always on the rails, always in simple linear movement, always straight in reaching its next destination. Hemingway's conjunctives, such as 'and' act like glue that connects the different slides of pictures to make a whole scene. The technique works wonderfully well. There is no other writer in English who has been able to make such a powerful use of 'and'.

Using more the technique of showing, rather than of telling, Hemingway relies a good deal on dialogue, which is one way of keeping the narrator invisible, and keeping the narrative impersonal. Hemingway is a master of this technique as well. Like his prose in general, his dialogue is pruned of all the unnecessary reporting of manners and gestures and is allowed to appear only in functional form. See, for instance, the following:

"Who else did you see"? Catherine asked.

"Mr. and Mrs. Meyers".

"They are a strong lot".

"He is supposed to have been in the penitentiary at home. They let him out to die".

"And he lived happily in Milan forever after".

"I don't know how happily".

"Happily enough after jail I should think".

"She is bringing some things here".

"She brings splendid things. Were you her dear boy"?

"One of them."

"You are all her dear boys", Catherine said. "She prefers the dear boys. Listen to it rain".

"It's raining hard".

"And you'll always love me, won't you"?

Nothing can achieve greater objectivity than is there in the present piece. Even drama is not objective as the dialogue in Hemingway, for in drama there are instructions indicating exits and entries of characters as also about the manner in which they go out or come in, singing a song or banging a door, etc. It is absolutely stark, with nothing to cover the bare bones. Characters seem to speak as mere voices. They are not aided by the narrator in any manner.

Thus, a good deal of what Hemingway was to acquire as a writer had been handed over to him by the Kansas City *Star* style-sheet. As Hemingway himself is said to have recalled, "those were the best rules I learned for the business of writing.... I've never forgotten them. No man with any talent, who feels and writes truly about the thing he is trying to say, can fail to write well if he abides by them." Of course, like any other great writer, Hemingway only absorbed those influences to suit his own temperament as well as his artistic needs. A Moise is said to have aptly remarked, "Like all real writers, Hemingway owes his well-deserved eminence not to any influence, but to his ability to select from a host of influences-part of that little thing called genius". Another influence that Hemingway absorbed even after his apprenticeship was over, was that of his senior fellow expatriate in Paris, the famous Gertrude Stein. One of the characteristics of Gertrude Stein's prose was the device of repetition used for emphasis and clarification. In his Paris days, we know how

Hemingway was close to her and sought her advice. This device of repeating the key words Hemingway decidedly borrowed from her and put it to remarkable use. Here is one such instance:

He said the offensive in Flanders was going to be bad. If they killed men as they did this fall the Allies would be cooked in another year. He said we were all cooked but we were all right as long as we did not know it. We were all cooked. The thing was not to recognize it. The last country to realize they were cooked would win the war. We had another drink. Was I on somebody's staff? No. He was. It was all balls. We were alone in the club sitting back in one of the big leather sofas. His boots were smoothly polished dull leather, they were beautiful boots. He said it was all balls. They thought only in divisions and man-power. They all squabbled about divisions and only killed them when they got them. They were all cooked. The Germans won the victories. By God they were soldiers. The old Hun was a soldier. But they were cooked too. We were all cooked. I asked about Russia. He said they were cooked already. I'd soon see they were cooked. Then the Austrians were cooked too.

The repetition of the key words like 'crooked,' 'killed,' 'balls,' etc., clarifies the hopelessness of the war-situation with both parties facing a no-war situation. The repetition reveals more about the speaker whose remarks are being reported by the hero-narrator. The obsessive repetition in Hemingway is always the style of a drunk in. Whatever subject or word he gets hooked on, the drunk will keep on repeating it-also becoming a source of great humour. This device is also used by Hemingway in the service of satire and parody, and used quite effectively. Here is one such example:

I did not say anything. I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometime standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and had read them, on proclamations that were slapped up by billposters over other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards

at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honour, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.

Here, the satire on the rhetoric of war used by the political and religious leaders is quite harsh. The emptiness of the rhetorical cant and the solidity of the simple objects of life-road, river, village, etc.-are so juxtaposed as to ironically and satirically hit the deceptive idiom of the phony characters. Thus, the language reveals the character. The effectiveness of the style is enhanced by the simplicity and naturalness of the narrator, who only puts before us, very simply and naturally, what he had heard with his own ears and what he has seen with his own eyes, putting the two together only to show the ironic gap between the things heard and the things seen.

In his tragic novels, including *A Farewell to Arms,* irony is not merely a device used for humour and satire, for local and dramatic effect, it ultimately becomes a structural device, which puts the entire plot into tragic perspective, relating the beginning, middle and end, juxtaposing the themes of love and war, contrasting with each other the tragic characters and those that are either funny or phony. Irony goes further in weaving the fabric of the entire texture of the novel, arranging in the ironic pattern the scenes and situations, metaphors and symbols. We can recall here, for instance, how, in a joke, the soldiers carrying cartridge boxes on their bellies are compared to women carrying babies in pregnancy. When we reach the end of the novel, we see how Catherine, carrying a baby in large part of the later narrative, finally dies in child birth. The irony in the structure connects the two scenes, as well as the two themes of love and war to show that the product of a destructive war could not have been a live baby, for war and violence can only produce death, not life.

The furthest penetration of the structural irony in the novel, just as in other tragic novels of Hemingway, and, in fact, in all the great tragedies, is to underline the gap between what man aspires or dreams and what life grants him, and how when the individual tragedy takes place the world moves on as indifferently as ever, highlighting through this powerful device the horror that lies at the centre of man's existence, the cold indifference of the world surrounding him. Note, when Catherine is in suffering in the hospital, facing a sure death (emotionally sensed by Frederic), how the surrounding world stands in relation to it:

Outside along the street were the refuse cans from the houses waiting for the collector. A dog was nosing at one of the cans.

"What do you want"? I asked and looked in the can to see if there was anything I could pull out for him; there were nothing on top but coffee-grounds, dust and some dead flowers.

"There is not anything, dog", I said. The dog crossed the street. I went up the stairs in the hospital to the floor Catherine was on and down the hall to her room. I opened the door; the room was empty, except for the Catherine's bag on a chair and her dressing-gown hanging on a hook on the wall.

Hemingway puts together here, in a significant sequence, the refuse cans being searched by the dog followed by Frederic's looking for Catherine, leading to horror of these being nothing but emptiness in the refuse cans as well as Catherine's room. Both the searches end in finding only coffee-grounds, dust and some dead flowers in one case, and only Catherine's bag on a chair and her dressing gown hanging on a hook. These are death images after the living material is emptied-dust and dead flowers or dressing-gown hanging on a hook. These objective-correlatives evoke horror.

It was hot in the cafe and the air was bad. Many of the people at the tables knew one another. There were several card games going on. The waiters were busy bringing drinks from the bar to the tables. Two men came in and could find on place to sit. They stood opposite the table where I was. I

ordered another beer. I was not ready to leave yet. It was too soon to go back to the hospital. I tried not to think and to be perfectly calm. The men stood around but no one was leaving. So they went out. I drank another beer. There was quite a pile of saucers now on the table in front of me. The man opposite me had taken off his spectacles, put them away in a case, folded his paper and put it in his pocket and now sat holding his liquor glass and looking out at the room.

Here is the world out there, very hot, just as it is very cold inside the hospital room where Catherine is dying, where the mercury is sinking in the mouth of the dying. In the indifferent world in which Catherine (or any individual) has her death in a corner, they eat and drink and remain individuals, each to himself or herself, instinctively holding the newspaper if another seems to be reading it, instinctively ordering another drink if another seems to be wanting it, knowing a few and yet watching them as others. Here is the ironic view of life showing the horror that always surrounds an individual tragedy. One cannot resist here quoting in full that beautiful little poem of W. H. Auden, *Muse' des Beau Arts*. which paints it all through yet another painting of the same life:

About suffering they were never wrong,
The old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window just walking dully long;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood :
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course

Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot

Where the dogs go on with their dogy life and torturer's horse

Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Brueghel's Icarus, for instance : how everything turns away

Quiet leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may

Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,

But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone

As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green

Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen

Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,

Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

Here is the tragic vision, the ironic view of the world, which Brueghel's Icarus, Auden's poem, and Hemingway's novel so beautifully put across, each through an individual case, anyone's case-Icarus's, or Christ's, or Catherine's. At the centre of the picture is the irony, which reveals it so coldly, so unconcernedly.

15.4 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed the prose style of the novel. His prose is free from the heavy and turgid writing which was so common around the time Hemingway took up the career of creative writing.

15.4 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Write a note on Hemingway's prose style.
2. Discuss Hemingway's narrative technique in *A Farewell to Arms.*
3. What is heroic in the Hemingway's hero? Discuss with special reference to *A Farewell to Arms.*
4. Examine *A Farewell to Arms* as a modern tragedy.

5. Discuss *A Farewell to Arms* as a war novel.

6. Write a note on the character of Catherine Barkley.

7. Examine the role of minor characters in the plot of *A Farewell to Arms.*

8. Are there comic reliefs in the tragedy of *A Farewell to Arms?* Discuss.

15.6 SUGGESTED READING

1. Carlos Barker, *Hemingway : The Writer as Artist.* Princeton University Press, 1952.

2. Sheridan Baker. *Ernest Hemingway : An Introduction and Interpretation.* Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967.

3. Jay Gellens (ed.). *Twentieth Century Interpretations of A Farewell to Arms.* Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970.

4. Richard Hovey. *Hemingway : The Inward Terrain.* University of Washington Press, 1968.

5. Frank Seafella. *Hemingway : Essays of Reassessment.* Oxford University Press, 1991.

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MARK TWAIN : LIFE AND WORK

UNIT STRUCTURE

16.1 Introduction

16.2 Objectives

16.3 Life of Mark Twain

- 16.3.1 A glimpse of his early life
- 16.3.2 An account of his travels
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16.5 Short Answer Type Questions

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16.8 Let Us Sum Up

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16.9.1 Answers to SAQ's

16.9.2 Answers to MCQ's

16.10 Suggested Reading

16.10.1 Chronological list of the writings of Mark Twain

16.10.2 Bibliography

16.1 INTRODUCTION

This lesson based on Mark Twain has been written with an aim to provide to the scholars, the knowledge of certain aspects of the writings of the author who was a leading exponent of his time. The scholars of English Literature rejoice in knowing about the author and his age because there is a lot of intellectual, religious, political and social significance attached to the author and his age. An attempt has been made to analyze *Mark Twain* as a writer and a comparison with his contemporaries has been incorporated to ascertain the actual position of the writer during his own time.

The historical and analytical aspect of this work has been attempted to draw the attention of the reader to certain facts and factors, hitherto unknown and unrecognized. Copious critical notes have been provided for the sake of reference to enable the scholars to comprehend the background to this work, its historical significance and its current impact on the contemporary readers as well as those of the after-times. Questions have been framed for the students to review their comprehension of the subject matter and a consolidated relevant bibliography along with the reference books has been provided. A suitable glossary has been provided to make the work easy for students of distance education learning system. The model test paper will help the scholars to sit at home and work out the pattern of examination and judge their own performance on the basis of the questions they attempt from the exercise.

16.2 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this lesson are:

- That the learner should have read, with care and understanding, this representative work of one of the major American authors.
- That the learner should be able to give an account of the history of English novels, especially with reference to Mark Twain**.**
- That the learner should be able to identify and explain major events of English history and major literary and social issues relevant to the development of prose writing in the days of Mark Twain.
- That the learner should be able to demonstrate familiarity with the bibliographic tools and resources appropriate to the study of American novels and of the author cited above, and to apply these tools and resources to literary research.
- That the learner should be able to demonstrate capacity to develop critical analyses of novels of the nineteenth century in the context of established critical approaches.
- That the learner should be able to recognize, identify, and use accurately literary terms and concepts applicable to the American novels and novelists and to understand and apply appropriate literary conventions.
- That the learner should be able to express insights which relate his readings of the novelist to fundamental questions of human behavior and value, and to contemporary thought.
- In this lesson we will familiarize you with the life and works of the famous writer Mark Twain who was a famous American novelist of the nineteenth Century.
- We will discuss important points related to the author and facilitate your efforts of comprehending and learning by:

  a) giving you detailed information about the life and works of Mark Twain

  b) giving you glossary of difficult words and phrases

c) giving you practice to have your own assessment by trying to make you answer questions in your own language.

d) giving you multiple choice questions to make concepts more clear and avoid confusions between similar options.

e) giving you the correct answers so that you may verify your own answers.

f) discussing the summary of the lesson.

g) giving a concise list of the important sources suggested for reading.

16.3 LIFE OF MARK TWAIN

Samuel Langhorne Clemens (November 30, 1835-April 21, 1910) is most popularly known by his pen name Mark Twain. He was an American author and humorist. He is noted for his novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* which was published in 1884. This work of his is called "the Great American Novel". The second famous work of his is *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. It was published in 1876. This work preceded Finn. Twain was a friend to presidents, artists, industrialists, and European royalty. His friend circle was remarkable. Twain was admired during his lifetime for many rare qualities. His wit and satire earned admiration from critics and contemporary writers. Upon his death he was lauded as the "greatest American humorist of his age". It is noteworthy that William Faulkner called Twain "the father of American literature".

16.3.1 A glimpse of his early life

Samuel Langhorne Clemens was born in Florida, Missouri, on November 30, 1835, to a Tennessee country merchant, John Marshall Clemens (August 11, 1798 – March 24, 1847), and Jane Lampton Clemens (June 18, 1803 – October 27, 1890). The couple had seven children. Twain was the sixth of seven children. Only three of his brothers and sisters survived childhood: his brother Orion (July 17, 1825 – December 11, 1897); Henry, who died in a riverboat explosion (July 13, 1838 – June 21, 1858); and Pamela (September 19, 1827 – August 31, 1904). His sister Margaret (May 31, 1830 – August 17, 1839) died when Twain was three, and his brother Benjamin (June 8, 1832 – May 12, 1842) died three years later. Another brother, Pleasant (1828–1829), died at six months. Twain was born two weeks after the closest

approach to Earth of Halley's Comet. On December 4, 1985, the United States Postal Service issued a stamped envelope for "Mark Twain and Halley's Comet".

When Twain was four years of age, his family shifted to Hannibal, Missouri, a harbor town on the Mississippi River that motivated the imaginary town of St. Petersburg in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. This famous place, Missouri, was a slave state and young Twain became well-known with the tradition of slavery, a theme he would later explore in his writing. It was since childhood that it had been taking impressions and the writer inside him was being stirred.

Twain's father was a legal representative and a local judge. The Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad was organized in his office in 1846. The railroad connected the second and third largest cities in the state and was the westernmost United States railroad until the Transcontinental Railroad. It delivered mail to and from the Pony Express.

Twain was 11years of age, when his father died of pneumonia in March 1847. The next year he started working. He became a printer's trainee. A couple of years later, in 1851, he began working as a typesetter and contributor of articles and humorous sketches for the Hannibal Journal. This newspaper was owned by his brother Orion. With the passage of time he progressed further. When he was 18, he left Hannibal and worked as a printer in New York City, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Cincinnati. He joined the union and well-informed himself in public libraries in the evenings, finding wider information than at a conventional school. This attempt of self-instruction made him stronger and self-dependent. At the age of 22, Twain came back to Missouri and started working there.

Once he was on a voyage to New Orleans down the Mississippi. There the steamboat pilot, Horace E. Bixby, encouraged Twain to be a steamboat pilot. As Twain observed in Life on the Mississippi, the pilot surpassed a steamboat's captain in prestige and authority; it was a rewarding occupation with wages set at $250 per month, roughly equivalent to $73,089 a year today. A steamboat pilot needed to know the ever-changing river to be able to stop at the hundreds of ports and wood-lots. Twain studied 2,000 miles (3,200 km) of the Mississippi for more than two

years before he received his steamboat pilot license in 1859. The adventurous spirit was perhaps nurtured during these experiences.

In the course of his training, Samuel persuaded his younger brother Henry to work with him. Unfortunately, Henry was killed on June 21, 1858, when the steamboat on which he was working, the Pennsylvania, exploded. It was a co-incidence that Twain had foreseen this death in a dream a month earlier. This episode of the dream followed by reality inspired his interest in parapsychology. He was an early member of the Society for Psychical Research. Twain was guilt-stricken and held himself responsible for the rest of his life for the death of his brother. He continued to work on the river and was a river pilot until the American Civil War broke out in 1861 and traffic along the Mississippi was truncated. Missouri was considered by many to be part of the South, and was represented in both the Confederate and Federal governments during the Civil War. Twain wrote a sketch, "*The Private History of a Campaign That Failed*". In this sketch he claimed that he and his friends had been Confederate volunteers for two weeks before terminating their company. These disturbances and irregular experiences had a lot to do with his writings.

16.3.2 An account of his travels

Travelling was an indispensible part of Twain's life. He joined Orion, who in 1861 became secretary to James W. Nye, the governor of Nevada Territory, and moved towards west. Twain and his brother traveled more than two weeks on a stagecoach across the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains. They visited the Mormon community in Salt Lake City. These experiences left a deep mark on the writer's mind. They inspired Roughing It and provided material for The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County. Finally, Twain's journey ended in the silver-mining town of Virginia City, Nevada, where he became a miner. He did not fare well in this field. Twain failed as a miner and worked at a Virginia City newspaper, the Territorial Enterprise. Here he first used his pen name. On February 3, 1863, he signed a humorous travel account "*Letter From Carson – re: Joe Goodman; party at Gov. Johnson's; music*" with "Mark Twain" this was the birth of the author with the pen name MARK TWAIN. Twain moved to San Francisco, California in 1864, still as a journalist. He met writers such as Bret Harte, Artemus Ward, and Dan DeQuille. The young poet

Ina Coolbrith may have romanced him.

He did not get outright success. His first success as an author came when his entertaining tall tale, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*, was published in a New York weekly, The Saturday Press, on November 18, 1865. It brought him national consideration. After about a year, he traveled to the Sandwich Islands which is the present-day Hawaii, as a reporter for the Sacramento Union. He not only traveled but also wrote about his experiences. His travelogues were admired and became the basis for his first lectures. Thus came up one more interesting aspects of this great writer.

Fortunately, in 1867, a neighborhood newspaper funded his trip to the Mediterranean. During his tour of Europe and the Middle East, he wrote an admirable anthology of travel letters, which were later compiled as The Innocents Abroad in 1869. It was on this trip that he met his future brother-in-law. Thus his life took one more step ahead, not only in the writing field but also on the domestic front.

16.3.3 Marriage and children

Twain met Charles Langdon in 1867. In course of one of their friendly interactions, Charles showed a picture of his sister, Olivia, to Twain. This incident was to create a lot of difference in his life. Twain claimed to have fallen in love with Olivia at first sight. The two met in 1868. After a year, they were engaged and married in February 1870 in Elmira, New York. Olivia belonged to a "wealthy but liberal family". With the help of his wife's associations, he met abolitionists, "socialists, principled atheists and activists for women's rights and social equality". Some famous and mentionable among these were Harriet Beecher Stowe who was his next door neighbor in Hartford, Connecticut, Frederick Douglass, and the writer and utopian socialist William Dean Howells who became a longtime friend. In this manner a very good company of dynamic friends culminated.

Twain along with his wife lived in Buffalo, New York from 1869 to 1871. Twain owned a stake in the Buffalo Express newspaper, and worked as an editor and writer. Their son Langdon died of diphtheria at 19 months. This hurt the couple badly. In 1871 Twain moved his family to Hartford, Connecticut, where starting in 1873, he arranged the building of a home. During the demolition in 1927 his local

admirers saved his dream home and eventually turned it into a museum focused on him. While living there Olivia gave birth to three daughters: Susy (1872–1896), Clara (1874–1962) and Jean (1880–1909). The couple's marriage lasted 34 years, until Olivia's death in 1904. Thus the married life of the writer was one of perfect harmony and peace.

During his seventeen years in Hartford (1874–1891), Twain wrote many of his best-known works: *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *The Prince and the Pauper* (1881), *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). Twain made a second tour of Europe, described in the 1880 book *A Tramp Abroad*. His tour included a stay in Heidelberg from May 6 until July 23, 1878, and a visit to London. Thus we find him as a widely travelled man.

16.3.4 Ardent lover of science and technology

Twain was fascinated with science and scientific investigation. He developed a close and permanent friendship with Nikola Tesla, and the two spent much time together in Tesla's laboratory. Twain patented three inventions, including an Improvement in Adjustable and Detachable Straps for Garments This was used to replace suspenders. Second was a history trivia game. Third and most commercially successful was a self-pasting scrapbook; a dried adhesive on the pages only needed to be moistened before use.

The love of science and technology shows clearly in his works as well. His book A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court features a time traveler from contemporary America, using his knowledge of science to introduce modern technology to Arthurian England. This type of storyline would later become a common characteristic of the science fiction sub-genre, Alternate history. In 1909, Thomas Edison visited Twain at his home in Redding, Connecticut and filmed him. Part of the footage was used in *The Prince and the Pauper* (1909), a two-reel short film.

16.3.5 Monetary predicament

Twain made a considerable amount of money in the course of his writing, but he lost a great deal through investments, mostly in new inventions and technology,

particularly the Page typesetting machine. It was a beautifully engineered mechanical marvel that astounded viewers when it worked, but was prone to breakdowns. Twain spent $300,000 (equal to $7,590,000 today) on it between 1880 and 1894, but before it could be perfected, it was made outdated by the Linotype. He lost not only the bulk of his book profits but also a substantial portion of his wife's inheritance.

He suffered yet another setback when he also lost money through his publishing house, which enjoyed initial success selling the memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant. After this initial success it went broke, losing money on a biography of Pope Leo XIII. Surprisingly, fewer than two hundred copies were sold. This resulted in an utter loss of money.

Twain's writings and lectures, combined with the help of a new friend, enabled him to pull through financially. In 1893, he began a 15-year-long companionship with financier Henry Huttleston Rogers, a principal of Standard Oil. He helped the writer a great deal. Rogers first made Twain file for bankruptcy. Then Rogers had Twain transfer the copyrights on his written works to his wife, Olivia, to put a stop to creditors from gaining ownership of them. Finally, Rogers took absolute charge of Twain's money until all the creditors were paid. Thus it was with the help of a good friend that he was able to come out of this huge trouble.

Twain embarked on an around-the-world lecture tour in 1894 to pay off his creditors in full, although he was no longer under any legal obligation to do so. In mid-1900, he was the guest of newspaper proprietor Hugh Gilzean-Reid at Dollis Hill House. Twain was deeply fascinated with the beauty and tranquility of this place. He wrote of Dollis Hill that he had "never seen any place that was so satisfactorily situated, with its noble trees and stretch of country, and everything that went to make life delightful, and all within a biscuit's throw of the metropolis of the world" He then returned to America in 1900, having earned an adequate amount of money to pay off his debts, without settling for less, which would have been cheaper and easier, for him. Now he was in a sound financial position.

16.3.6 Lecture assignments

Twain was in demand as a featured speaker, and appeared before many men's clubs. He became famous for his lectures in the Authors' Club, Beefsteak Club,

Vagabonds, White Friars, and Monday Evening Club of Hartford. He was made an honorary member of the Bohemian Club in San Francisco. In the late 1890s, he spoke to the Savage Club in London and was nominated amateur member. His humour was of good taste. When told that only three men had been so honored, including the Prince of Wales, he replied "Well, it must make the Prince feel mighty fine." Twain spoke to the Concordia Press Club in Vienna as a special guest in 1897, following diplomat Charlemagne Tower. In German, to the great amusement of the assemblage, Twain delivered the speech *Die Schrecken der deutschen Sprache* which meant *The Horrors of the German Language*. Thus we see that he was a good entertainer. This is why he was so popular during his lifetime and even afterwards.

16.3.7 A glimpse of his later life and death

Twain's daughter Susy died of meningitis. He passed through a period of deep depression, which began in 1896. Olivia's death in 1904 and Jean's on December 24, 1909, deepened his gloom. On May 20, 1909, his close friend Henry Rogers died unexpectedly. One after the other, there was a volley of jolts for him which made his later years desperate and challenging.

In 1906, Twain began writing his autobiography in the North American Review. In April, Twain heard that his friend Ina Coolbrith had lost nearly all she owned in the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. To help his friend, he volunteered a few autographed portrait photographs to be sold for her benefit. To further aid Coolbrith, George Wharton James visited Twain in New York and arranged for a new portrait session. Initially he was opposed to the idea but Coolbrith had to be helped. Twain admitted that four of the resulting images were the finest ones ever taken of him. Misery surrounded him from all sides as he was broken on the domestic front as well as in case of the well being of his close friends.

Twain formed a club in 1906 for girls he viewed as surrogate granddaughters. It was called the Angel Fish and Aquarium Club. The dozen or so members ranged in age from 10 to 16. Twain exchanged letters with his Angel Fish girls and invited them to concerts and the theatre and to play games. Twain confessed in 1908 that the club was his life's chief delight. Thus, his emotional vacuum was filled up to a certain extent due the presence of these grand daughters.

A feather that was attached in his cap in his later life was that Oxford University awarded Twain an honorary doctorate in letters (D.Litt.) in 1907.

In 1909, Twain is quoted as saying:

I came in with Halley's Comet in 1835. It is coming again next year, and I expect to go out with it. It will be the greatest disappointment of my life if I don't go out with Halley's Comet. The Almighty has said, no doubt: 'Now here are these two unaccountable freaks; they came in together, they must go out together.'

His prophecy was perfect-Twain died of a heart attack on April 21, 1910, in Redding, Connecticut, one day after the comet's closest approach to Earth. When President William Howard Taft came to know about the death of this great author he was deeply grieved. He said:

"Mark Twain gave pleasure – real intellectual enjoyment – to millions, and his works will continue to give such pleasure to millions yet to come... His humor was American, but he was nearly as much appreciated by Englishmen and people of other countries as by his own countrymen He has made an enduring part of American literature."

Twain's funeral was performed at the Old Brick Presbyterian Church in New York. He is buried in his wife's family plot at Woodlawn Cemetery in Elmira, New York. His grave is marked by a 12-foot i.e., two fathoms, or mark twain monument, placed there by his surviving daughter, Clara. There is also a smaller headstone.

16.4 WORKS OF MARK TWAIN

The works of Mark Twain as we see them today are very famous and largely popular with readers of English fiction as well as non-fiction. The great contribution that he made to the world of literature took him decades to build the empire of wholesome writing. There were different stages of his progress in which he gradually maintained a regular flow of literary output.

16.4.1 Early journalism and travelogues

The very first work of significance was, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*. It was first published in the New York Saturday Press on November 18, 1865. The only reason it was published there was that his story arrived too late to

be included in a book Artemus Ward was compiling featuring sketches of the wild American West. He invited Twain to contribute his writing there but he could not keep up with the time.

It made him very famous right from the beginning. After this burst of popularity, Twain was commissioned by the Sacramento Union to write letters about his travel experiences for publication in the newspaper. This was the first of such assignments based on his experiences of riding the steamer Ajax in its maiden voyage to Hawaii, referred to at the time as the Sandwich Islands. These were humorous letters. They proved the genesis to his work with the San Francisco Alta California newspaper, which designated him a traveling correspondent for a trip from San Francisco to New York City via the Panama isthmus. Throughout his journey, Twain was writing letters meant for publishing back and forth, recording his experiences with his burlesque humor. On June 8, 1867 began another journey. Twain set sail on the pleasure cruiser Quaker City for about a time span of five months. This trip resulted in the writing of one more popular work named *The Innocents Abroad* or *The New Pilgrims' Progress*.

This book is a record of a pleasure trip. If it were a record of a serious scientific expedition it would have about it the intensity and gravity, that insightfulness, and that impressive mysteriousness which are so appropriate to works of that kind, and withal so attractive. Contrary to this mood, it is only a documentation of a picnic. It has an objective, which is, to recommend to the reader how he would be likely to see Europe and the East if he looked at them with his own eyes. The original perception has been given weightage, instead of the eyes of those who traveled in those countries before him.

Twain published a second piece of travel literature in 1872. This came up as the famous *Roughing It*. It is considered as a semi-sequel to *Innocents*. *Roughing It* is a semi-autobiographical account of Twain's journey to Nevada and his subsequent life in the American West. This book became famous for its notable theme. It lampoons American and Western society in the same way that *Innocents* critiqued the various countries of Europe and the Middle East. Twain's next work kept *Roughing It* focus on American society but focused more on the events of the day. The next work was entitled *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today*. It was not a travel piece, as his preceding

two books had been, and it was his first attempt at writing a novel. The book is also distinguished because it is Twain's only partnership. This work was written with his neighbor Charles Dudley Warner.

Twain's next two works were based on his experiences on the Mississippi River. The first one, *Old Times on the Mississippi*, was a series of sketches published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1875, featured Twain's disillusionment with Romanticism. *Old Times* eventually became the starting point for the next work which was *Life on the Mississippi.*

16.4.2 The pride of American literature

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

Twain's next major publication was *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, which was based on his youth in Hannibal. Tom Sawyer was modeled on Twain as a child. It had traces of two schoolmates, John Briggs and Will Bowen. The book also introduced in a supporting role the character Huckleberry Finn. He was modeled on Twain's boyhood friend Tom Blankenship.

Thereafter he wrote another novel named *The Prince and the Pauper*. It had a proper storyline. But despite a storyline that is all-pervading in film and literature today, it was not as well received. Telling the narrative of two boys born on the same day who are physically indistinguishable, the book acts as a social commentary as the prince and pauper switch places. Pauper was Twain's first attempt at fiction. The blame for its shortcomings is usually put on Twain for having not been experienced enough in the ways of the English society, and also on the fact that it was produced after an enormous hit. In between the writing of Pauper, Twain had started *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. It is said that he over and over again had problems completing Finn. He started and completed another travel book, *A Tramp Abroad*, which follows Twain as he traveled through central and southern Europe.

Mark Twain's subsequent major published work, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, solidified him as a remarkable American writer. Critics have called it the first Great American Novel. The book has become essential reading in many schools throughout the United States. *Huckleberry Finn* was an offshoot from *Tom Sawyer*

and had a more serious tone than its forerunner. The main principle behind *Huckleberry Finn* is the young boy's conviction in the right thing to do though most believed that it was wrong.

Four hundred manuscript pages of *Huckleberry Finn* were written in mid-1876, right after the publication of *Tom Sawyer.* Some accounts have Twain taking seven years off after his first burst of creativity, eventually finishing the book in 1883. Other details say that Twain was working on *Huckleberry Finn* in tandem with *The Prince and the Pauper* and other works in 1880 and other years.

The last part of *Huckleberry Finn* is subject to much controversy. Some say that Twain experienced some sort of mental irregularity in the last days of writing the novel. Critic Leo Marx calls it a failure of nerve. Ernest Hemingway once said of *Huckleberry Finn*: "If you read it, you must stop where the Nigger Jim is stolen from the boys. That is the real end. The rest is just cheating". Hemingway also wrote in the same essay: "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn".

Just as he was winding up *Huckleberry Finn,* Twain wrote *Life on the Mississippi,* which is said to have heavily influenced the former book. The work recounts Twain's memories and new experiences after a 22-year absence from the Mississippi. In it, he also states that Mark Twain was the call made when the boat was in safe water – two fathoms.

16.4.3 Later writing

When he had finished the above mentioned great work, Twain began turning to his business accomplishments to keep them afloat and to ward off the mounting challenges he had been having from his writing projects. Twain paid attention on President Ulysses S. Grant's *Memoirs* for his fledgling publishing company, finding time in between to write The Private History of a Campaign That Failed for *The Century Magazine*. This piece detailed his two-week stint in a Confederate militia during the Civil War. The name of his publishing company was Charles L. Webster & Company, which he owned with Charles L. Webster, his nephew by marriage.

Twain thereafter shifted his attention on *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's*

Court. In this work, he made his first big announcement of discontent with politics. It was written with the same "historical fiction" technique of *The Prince and the Pauper*. *A Connecticut Yankee* showed the absurdities of political and social patterns by setting them in the court of King Arthur. The book was started in December 1885. It remained undone for a few months later until the summer of 1887, and ultimately was completed in the spring of 1889.

As he was passing through a rough time, Twain had begun to write articles and commentary at a large scale with reduced returns to pay the bills and keep his business projects afloat, but it was not enough. He filed for bankruptcy in 1894 with the help of one of his friends.

His next large-scale work, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, was written in haste, as Twain was dreadfully trying to stave off the bankruptcy. From November 12 to December 14, 1893, Twain wrote 60,000 words for the novel. Critics have pointed to this hasty completion as the cause of the novel's rough organization and constant disruption of continuous plot. There were parallels between this work and Twain's financial failings, notably his desire to escape his current constraints and become a different person. His mental dilemma got reflected in his work.

Like *The Prince and the Pauper*, this novel also is based on the story of two boys born on the same day who exchange positions in life. Considering the circumstances of Twain's birth and Halley's Comet, and his strong belief in the paranormal, it is not astonishing that these "mystic" associations appear again and again throughout his works. The actual title is not clearly recognized. It was first published serially in *Century Magazine*, and when it was finally published in book form, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* appeared as the main title; however, the disputed subtitles make the entire title read like this: *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson: And the Comedy of Those Extraordinary Twins*. Thus the work was full of twists and turns in making its final appearance before the readers.

Twain's next undertaking was a work of straight fiction that he called *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*. This work was dedicated to his wife Olivia. This work was criticized a lot but Twain had long said that this was the work of which he was most proud. The book had been a dream of his since his boyhood days. He asserted

that he had landed upon a manuscript detailing the life of Joan of Arc when he was a teenager. This was another piece which Twain was sure would save his publishing company. His financial adviser, Henry Huttleston Rogers, packed in that idea and got Twain out of that business altogether. The author got the book published for the love of it.

During this time of appalling financial troubles, Twain published several literary reviews in newspapers to help make ends meet. He notably derided James Fenimore Cooper in his article. He gave the details of Cooper's "Literary Offenses" to make it known that his opinion of the man's work was justified. He became a terrifically frank critic not only of other authors, but also of other critics so much so that he suggested that before praising Cooper's work, his admirers Professors Loundsbury, Brander Matthes, and Wilkie Collins ought to have read some of it and not blindly appreciated it.

This critical approach began somewhere in 1890 and continued till his death. Other authors to fall under Twain's assault during this time period were the famous ones like George Eliot, Jane Austen, and Robert Louis Stevenson. In addition to providing a source for the tooth and claw style of literary criticism, Twain outlines in several letters and essays what he considers to be quality writing. He lays stress on concision, utility of word choice, and realism. Paradoxically, several of his works were later criticized for lack of continuity. Main among these are *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and for lack of organization is *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. There are certain irregularities that cannot be avoided even by the greatest and most skilful writers.

Twain published some works that his wife, a *de facto* editor and censor throughout his life, had looked down upon. His wife died in 1904 and he got these works published after her death. Of these works, the most mentionable was *The Mysterious Stranger* which described various visits of Satan to the Earth. This is perhaps the best known. This particular work was not published in Twain's lifetime. There were three versions found in his manuscripts. These were made between 1897 and 1905: the Hannibal, Eseldorf, and Print Shop versions. Confusion between the versions led to a wide-ranging publication of a disorderly version. It was only recently

that the original versions as Twain wrote them become available to the readers of literature.

Twain's last work was his autobiography. Not being in a position to write it on his own, he dictated it. He thought it would be most entertaining. He went off on whims and tangents in non-chronological order. Some archivists and compilers have rearranged the biography into more conventional forms, in so doing, discarding some of Twain's humor and the flow of the book. The first volume of autobiography was published by the University of California in November 2010. This was 100 years after his death as Twain wished. It soon became an unexpected bestselling book. It made Twain one of very few authors publishing new best-selling volumes in all 3 of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. Thus he remained famous for an unbelievably long time and continues to be so today.

16.4.4 Pen names

Twain used out of the ordinary pen names before finally settling down on Mark Twain. He signed humorous and imaginative sketches Josh till about the year 1863. Apart from this, he used the pen name 'Thomas Jefferson Snodgrass' for a series of humorous letters.

He maintained that his most important pen name came from his years working on Mississippi riverboats, where two fathoms, a depth indicating safe water for passage of boat, was measured on the sounding line. A fathom is a maritime unit of depth which is equal to two yards (1.8 m); *twain* is an archaic term for two. The river boatman's call was *mark twain* or, more fully, *by the mark twain*, meaning according to the mark on the line, the depth is two fathoms. This implied that, the water is 12 feet (3.7 m) deep and it is safe to pass".

Twain made an open declaration of the fact that his celebrated pen name was not entirely his own innovation. In *Life on the Mississippi*, he confessed about the source of the name thus:

Captain Isaiah Sellers was not of literary turn or capacity, but he used to jot down brief paragraphs of plain practical information about the river, and sign them "MARK TWAIN", and give them to the New Orleans Picayune. They related to the

stage and condition of the river, and were accurate and valuable; ... At the time that the telegraph brought the news of his death, I was on the Pacific coast. I was a fresh new journalist, and needed a nom de guerre; so I confiscated the ancient mariner's discarded one, and have done my best to make it remain what it was in his hands – a sign and symbol and warrant that whatever is found in its company may be gambled on as being the petrified truth; how I have succeeded, it would not be modest in me to say.

16.5 SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. When was Mark Twain born? Who were his parents?
2. Give a brief account of his brothers and sisters.
3. What is the relation between his birth and the Halley's Comet?
4. What is the role of Hannibal town in the novels of Mark Twain?
5. Where did he work at the age of 18?
6. How did Twain become a steamboat pilot? What was his experience?
7. What inspired Twain's interest in parapsychology ?
8. Why was Twain grief-stricken ?
9. Give an account of Twain's first success as an author.
10. How did Twain meet his wife Olivia?
11. How did Olivia expand his friend circle?
12. Which three inventions had Twain patented?
13. How does the love of Science and technology appear in his literary works?
14. How did Twain lose his money?
15. How did he come out of the financially troubled situation?
16. What did he write about Dollis Hill?
17. Which lectures did Twain become famous for?
18. What was the result of the success of "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County"?

19. Write a note on Twain's second piece of travel literature.
20. What are the main features of "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer?"
21. How popular was "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn?"
22. Under what circumstances was "Pudd'nhead Wilson" written?
23. Which work was dedicated to Olivia?
24. How did Twain manage to write his autobiography?
25. What does Twain say about his most important pen name?

16.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. The original name of Mark Twain was.…

   a) Samuel Langhorne Clemens b) William
   c) Vincent d) George

2. Twain was born in (name of the place).…

   a) France b) Italy
   c) Japan d) Florida, Missouri

3. Mark Twain was born on (date)….

   a) November 30,1435 b) November 30,1535
   c) November 30, 1635 d) November 30,1835

4. His father's name was.…

   a) Smith b) John Marshall Clemens
   c) Henry d) Billboard

5. His mother's name was.…

   a) Jane Lampton Clemens b) Susan
   c) Margaret d) Catharine

6. Twain was born two weeks after the closest approach to Earth of ….

   a) Sun b) Moon

c) Stars d) Halley's Comet

7. After his father's death he became a….

a) Printer's trainee b) Lab Assistant
c) Advocate d) Cloth merchant

8. Who encouraged Twain to become a steamboat pilot….

a) Barbara b) Fanny
c) Thomas d) Horace E. Bixby

9. Twain's brother who was killed in a steamboat explosion was….

a) Tom Sawyer b) Huckleberry Finn
c) Briggs d) Henry

10. The name of Twain's brother-in-law was….

a) Lipton b) Bond
c) Herrick d) Charles Langdon

11. The name of Mark Twain's wife was….

a) Olivia b) Victoria
c) Elizabeth d) Lucy

12. Twain spent a lot of time in Tesla's laboratory with….

a) Edison b) Nikola Tesla
c) Einstein d) Wright Brothers

13. Which work of Twain's was called "The Great American Novel"?

a) The Adventures of Tom Sawyer
b) Innocents Abroad
c) Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
d) Pudd'nhead Wilson

14. Which character was modeled on Twain as a child….

a) Tom Sawyer b) Huckleberry Finn
c) Pudding d) Femina

15. Twain left for his heavenly abode in…

a) 21st April 1510 b) 21st April 1610
c) 21st April 1710 d) 21st April 1910

16.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Give a brief account of the life of Mark Twain.
2. Twain wrote on a large scale. Discuss his works and the circumstances that gave birth to these great works.
3. Write a note on Twain's marriage and children. How did his wife stand by him in the days of hardship?
4. Give an account of the travels of Twain.
5. How did Twain earn and lose his money? How did he manage to come out of his financial difficulties?
6. Briefly discuss the lecture assignments of Mark Twain.
7. Twain's life was closely connected with the Halley's Comet. Discuss this with reference to the birth and death of the author.
8. Write a note on the death of Twain with special reference to President William Howard Taft's statement.
9. What was Twain's contribution to the enrichment of American literature?
10. Twain changed his pen name more than once. Write a note on his love for pen names.

16.8 LET US SUM UP

Twain, the famous American writer and humorist, began his career writing light, humorous verse, but developed into a reporter of the vanities, hypocrisies and vicious acts of mankind. When he was at the height of his career, with Huckleberry

Finn, he pooled rich humor, sturdy narrative and social criticism. Twain was a master at representative colloquial speech and helped to create and popularize a distinctive American literature built on American themes and language. There were many challenges that he had to face. Many of Twain's works have been censored at times for different reasons. Adventures of Huckleberry Finn has been over and over again restricted in American high schools, not least for its frequent use of the word "nigger", which was in widespread usage in the pre-Civil War period in which the novel was set. Such circumstances however, did not deter him from his writing passion.

Critics are of the opinion that a complete bibliography of his works is nearly unfeasible to compile because of the enormous number of pieces written by Twain. He often wrote in obscure newspapers which went unrecorded. Moreover, he used several different pen names. Added to this, a huge part of his speeches and lectures have been lost or were not written down. For these reasons, the compilation of Twain's works is a continuing course of action. Researchers rediscovered published material by Twain as recently as 1995. There is every possibility that we may find yet more writings of his to add to our libraries.

16.9 ANSWER KEY

After reading the content of the lesson the concepts must be clear to you. If you have been able to find out the answers to the exercise questions, you deserve praise. If you have not been able to find any one of the answers, here is a list of the answers. Refer to these for your convenience.

16.9.1 ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Samuel Langhorne Clemens was born in Florida, Missouri, on November 30, 1835, to a Tennessee country merchant, John Marshall Clemens (August 11, 1798 – March 24, 1847), and Jane Lampton Clemens (June 18, 1803 – October 27, 1890).
2. The couple had seven children. Twain was the sixth of seven children. Only three of his brothers and sisters survived childhood: his brother Orion (July 17, 1825 – December 11, 1897); Henry, who died in a riverboat explosion (July 13, 1838 – June 21, 1858); and Pamela (September 19, 1827 – August

31, 1904). His sister Margaret (May 31, 1830 – August 17, 1839) died when Twain was three, and his brother Benjamin (June 8, 1832 – May 12, 1842) died three years later. Another brother, Pleasant (1828–1829), died at six months.

3. Twain was born two weeks after the closest approach to Earth of Halley's Comet. On December 4, 1985, the United States Postal Service issued a stamped envelope for "Mark Twain and Halley's Comet."
4. When Twain was four years of age, his family shifted to Hannibal, Missouri, a harbor town on the Mississippi River that motivated the imaginary town of St. Petersburg in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. This famous place, Missouri, was a slave state and young Twain became well-known with the tradition of slavery, a theme he would later explore in his writing. It was since childhood that he had been taking impressions and the writer inside him was being stirred.
5. When he was 18, he left Hannibal and worked as a printer in New York City, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Cincinnati. He joined the union and well-informed himself in public libraries in the evenings, finding wider information than at a conventional school. This attempt of self-instruction made him stronger and self-dependent. At the age of 22, Twain came back to Missouri and started working there.
6. Once he was on a voyage to New Orleans down the Mississippi. There the steamboat pilot, Horace E. Bixby, encouraged Twain to be a steamboat pilot. As Twain observed in Life on the Mississippi, the pilot surpassed a steamboat's captain in prestige and authority; it was a rewarding occupation with wages set at $250 per month, roughly equivalent to $73,089 a year today. A steamboat pilot needed to know the ever-changing river to be able to stop at the hundreds of ports and wood-lots. Twain studied 2,000 miles (3,200 km) of the Mississippi for more than two years before he received his steamboat pilot license in 1859. The adventurous spirit was perhaps nurtured during these experiences.

7. In the course of his training, Samuel persuaded his younger brother Henry to work with him. Unfortunately, Henry was killed on June 21, 1858, when the steamboat on which he was working, the Pennsylvania, exploded. It was a co-incidence that Twain had foreseen this death in a dream a month earlier. This episode of the dream followed by reality inspired his interest in parapsychology.
8. Twain was guilt-stricken as held himself responsible for the rest of his life for the death of his brother. It was because of his motivation that Henry had joined him on the steamboat and finally got killed.
9. His first success as an author came when his entertaining tall tale, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*, was published in a New York weekly, The Saturday Press, on November 18, 1865. It brought him national consideration. After about a year, he traveled to the Sandwich Islands which is the present-day Hawaii, as a reporter for the Sacramento Union. He not only traveled but also wrote about his experiences. His travelogues were admired and became the basis for his first lectures. Thus came up one more interesting aspects of this great writer.
10. Twain met Charles Langdon in 1867. In course of one of their friendly interactions, Charles showed a picture of his sister, Olivia, to Twain. This incident was to create a lot of difference in his life. Twain claimed to have fallen in love with Olivia at first sight. The two met in 1868. After a year, they were engaged and married in February 1870 in Elmira, New York.
11. Olivia belonged to a wealthy but liberal family. With the help of his wife's associations, he met abolitionists, socialists, principled atheists and activists for women's rights and social equality. Some famous and mentionable among these were Harriet Beecher Stowe who was his next door neighbor in Hartford, Connecticut, Frederick Douglass, and the writer and utopian socialist William Dean Howells who became a longtime friend. In this manner a very good company of dynamic friends culminated.
12. Twain was fascinated with science and scientific investigation. He developed

a close and permanent friendship with Nikola Tesla, and the two spent much time together in Tesla's laboratory. Twain patented three inventions; including an Improvement in Adjustable and Detachable Straps for Garments this was used to replace suspenders. Second was a history trivia game. Third and most commercially successful was a self-pasting scrapbook; a dried adhesive on the pages only needed to be moistened before use.

13. The love of science and technology shows clearly in his works as well. His book A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court features a time traveler from contemporary America, using his knowledge of science to introduce modern technology to Arthurian England. This type of storyline would later become a common characteristic of the science fiction sub-genre, Alternate history. In 1909, Thomas Edison visited Twain at his home in Redding, Connecticut and filmed him. Part of the footage was used in The Prince and the Pauper (1909), a two-reel short film.
14. Twain made a considerable amount of money in the course of his writing, but he lost a great deal through investments, mostly in new inventions and technology, particularly the Paige typesetting machine. It was a beautifully engineered mechanical marvel that astounded viewers when it worked, but was prone to breakdowns. Twain spent $300,000 (equal to $7,590,000 today) on it between 1880 and 1894, but before it could be perfected, it was made outdated by the Linotype. He lost not only the bulk of his book profits but also a substantial portion of his wife's inheritance. He suffered yet another setback when he also lost money through his publishing house, which enjoyed initial success selling the memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant. After this initial success it went broke, losing money on a biography of Pope Leo XIII. Surprisingly, fewer than two hundred copies were sold. This resulted in an utter loss of money.
15. Twain's writings and lectures, combined with the help of a new friend, enabled him to pull through financially. In 1893, he began a 15-year-long companionship with financier Henry Huttleston Rogers, a principal of Standard Oil. He helped the writer a great deal. Rogers first made Twain file for

bankruptcy. Then Rogers had Twain transfer the copyrights on his written works to his wife, Olivia, to put a stop to creditors from gaining ownership of them. Finally, Rogers took absolute charge of Twain's money until all the creditors were paid. Thus it was with the help of a good friend that he was able to come out of this huge trouble.

16. He wrote of Dollis Hill that he had never seen any place that was so satisfactorily situated, with its noble trees and stretch of country, and everything that went to make life delightful, and all within a biscuit's throw of the metropolis of the world

17. He became famous for his lectures in the Authors' Club, Beefsteak Club, Vagabonds, White Friars, and Monday Evening Club of Hartford. He was made an honorary member of the Bohemian Club in San Francisco. In the late 1890s, he spoke to the Savage Club in London and was nominated amateur member.

18. It made him very famous right from the beginning. After this burst of popularity, Twain was commissioned by the *Sacramento Union* to write letters about his travel experiences for publication in the newspaper. This was the first of such assignments based on his experiences of riding the steamer *Ajax* in its maiden voyage to Hawaii, referred to at the time as the Sandwich Islands. These were humorous letters. They proved the genesis to his work with the San Francisco *Alta California* newspaper, which designated him as traveling correspondent for a trip from San Francisco to New York City via the Panama Isthmus.

19. Twain published a second piece of travel literature in 1872. This came up as the famous *Roughing It*. It is considered as a semi-sequel to *Innocents*. *Roughing It* is a semi-autobiographical account of Twain's journey to Nevada and his subsequent life in the American West. This book became famous for its notable theme. It lampoons American and Western society in the same way that *Innocents* critiqued the various countries of Europe and the Middle East.

20. Twain's next major publication was *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, which was based on his youth in Hannibal. Tom Sawyer was modeled on Twain as a child. It had traces of two schoolmates, John Briggs and Will Bowen. The book also introduced in a supporting role the character Huckleberry Finn. He was modeled on Twain's boyhood friend Tom Blankenship.
21. Mark Twain's subsequent major published work, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, solidified him as a remarkable American writer. Critics have called it the first Great American Novel. The book has become essential reading in many schools throughout the United States. *Huckleberry Finn* was an offshoot from *Tom Sawyer* and had a more serious tone than its forerunner. The main principle behind *Huckleberry Finn* is the young boy's conviction in the right thing to do though most believed that it was wrong.
22. His next large-scale work, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, was written in haste, as Twain was dreadfully trying to stave off the bankruptcy. From November 12 to December 14, 1893, Twain wrote 60,000 words for the novel. Critics have pointed to this hasty completion as the cause of the novel's rough organization and constant disruption of continuous plot. There were parallels between this work and Twain's financial failings, notably his desire to escape his current constraints and become a different person. His mental dilemma got reflected in his work.
23. Twain's next undertaking was a work of straight fiction that he called *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*. This work was dedicated to his wife Olivia.
24. Twain's last work was his autobiography. Not being in a position to write it on his own, he dictated it. He thought it would be most entertaining. He went off on whims and tangents in non-chronological order. Some archivists and compilers have rearranged the biography into more conventional forms, in so doing, discarding some of Twain's humor and the flow of the book.
25. He said that his most important pen name came from his years working on Mississippi riverboats, where two fathoms, a depth indicating safe water for passage of boat, was measured on the sounding line. A fathom is a maritime

unit of depth which is equal to two yards (1.8 m); *twain* is an archaic term for two. The river boatman's call was *mark twain* or, more fully, *by the mark twain*, meaning according to the mark on the line, the depth is two fathoms. This implied that, The water is 12 feet (3.7 m) deep and it is safe to pass.

16.9.2 ANSWERS TO MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Samuel Langhorne Clemens
2. Florida, Missouri
3. November 30, 1835
4. John Marshall Clemens
5. Jane Lampton Clemens
6. Halley's Comet
7. Printer's trainee
8. Horace E. Bixby
9. Henry
10. Charles Langdon
11. Olivia
12. Nikola Tesla
13. Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
14. Tom Sawyer
15. 21st April 1910

16.10 SUGGESTED READING

Scholars all over the world have appreciated the works of Mark Twain on the basis of whatever they could lay their hands on. Many of them would have been interested in reading more about the great author. For the benefit of the scholars, a list of the writings of Twain is given here. A bibliography is being appended for further reference.

16.10.1 CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF THE WRITINGS OF MARK TWAIN

- (1867) *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County* (fiction)
- (1868) *General Washington's Negro Body-Servant* (fiction)
- (1868) *My Late Senatorial Secretaryship* (fiction)
- (1869) *The Innocents Abroad* (non-fiction travel)
- (1870–71) *Memoranda* (monthly column for The Galaxy Magazine (1866))
- (1871) *Mark Twain's (Burlesque) Autobiography and First Romance* (fiction)
- (1872) *Roughing It* (non-fiction)
- (1873) *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today* (fiction, made into a play)
- (1875) *Sketches New and Old* (fictional stories)
- (1875) *Some Learned Fables for Good Old Boys and Girls* (fiction, short story)
- (1876) *Old Times on the Mississippi* (non-fiction)
- (1876) *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (fiction)
- (1876) *A Murder, a Mystery, and a Marriage* (fiction); (1945, private edition), (2001, Atlantic Monthly).
- (1877) *A True Story and the Recent Carnival of Crime* (stories)
- (1877) *The Invalid's Story* (fiction)
- (1878) *Punch, Brothers, Punch! and other Sketches* (fiction)
- (1879) *The Great Revolution in Pitcairn* (fiction)
- (1880) *A Tramp Abroad* (travel)
- (1880) *1601: Conversation, as it was by the Social Fireside, in the Time of the Tudors* (fiction)
- (1882) *The Prince and the Pauper* (fiction)
- (1883) *Life on the Mississippi* (non-fiction (mainly))
- (1884) *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (fiction)

- (1889) *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (fiction)
- (1892) *The American Claimant* (fiction)
- (1892) *Merry Tales* (fiction)
- (1892) *Those Extraordinary Twins* (fiction)
- (1893) *The £1,000,000 Bank Note and Other New Stories* (fictional stories)
- (1894) *Tom Sawyer Abroad* (fiction)
- (1894) *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* (fiction)
- (1896) *Tom Sawyer, Detective* (fiction)
- (1896) *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (fiction)
- (1897) *How to Tell a Story and other Essays* (non-fictional essays)
- (1897) *Following the Equator* (non-fiction travel)
- (1898) *Concerning the Jews* (non-fiction)[2]
- (1898) *Is He Dead?* (play)
- (1900) *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg* (fiction)
- (1900) *A Salutation Speech From the Nineteenth Century to the Twentieth* (essay)
- (1901) *The Battle Hymn of the Republic, Updated (satire)*
- (1901) *Edmund Burke on Croker and Tammany* (political satire)
- (1901) *To the Person Sitting in Darkness* (essay)
- (1901) *To My Missionary Critics* (essay) The North Atlantic Review 172 (April 1901) [3]
- (1902) *A Double Barrelled Detective Story* (fiction)
- (1904) *A Dog's Tale* (fiction)
- (1904) *Extracts from Adam's Diary* (fiction)
- (1905) *King Leopold's Soliloquy* (political satire)
- (1905) *The War Prayer* (fiction)

- (1906) *The $30,000 Bequest and Other Stories* (fiction)
- (1906) *What Is Man?* (essay)
- (1906) *Eve's Diary* (fiction)
- (1907) *Christian Science* (non-fiction)
- (1907) *A Horse's Tale* (fiction)
- (1909) *Is Shakespeare Dead?* (non-fiction)
- (1909) *Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven* (fiction)
- (1909) *Letters from the Earth* (fiction, published posthumously)
- (1910) *Queen Victoria's Jubilee* (non-fiction)
- (1912) *My Platonic Sweetheart* (dream journal, possibly non-fiction)
- (1916) *The Mysterious Stranger* (fiction, possibly not by Twain, published posthumously)
- (1922) *The Writings of Mark Twain*, 37 vols., Albert Bigelow Paine editor, Gabriel Wells, New York, 1922–1925, out-of-print definitive edition first edition.
- (1923) *The United States of Lyncherdom* (essay, published posthumously)
- (1924) *Mark Twain's Autobiography* (non-fiction, published posthumously)
- (1935) *Mark Twain's Notebook* (published posthumously)
- (1946) *The Portable Mark Twain*, Bernard DeVoto editor, Penguin Classics (2004), ISBN 0142437759
- (1962) *Letters from the Earth* (posthumous, edited by Bernard DeVoto)
- (1969) *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* (fiction, published posthumously)
- (1992) *Mark Twain's Weapons of Satire: Anti-Imperialist Writings on the Philippine-American War*. Jim Zwick, ed. (Syracuse University Press) ISBN 0-8156-0268-5 (previously uncollected, published posthumously)
- (1995) *The Bible According to Mark Twain: Writings on Heaven, Eden, and the Flood* (published posthumously)

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ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN : THE GREAT AMERICAN NOVEL

UNIT STRUCTURE

17.1 Introduction

17.2 Objectives

17.3 Major Focal Points of the Novel

17.3.1 Important facts about the Novel

17.3.2 Publication History

17.3.3 Plot Construction of the Novel

17.3.4 Major theme of the Novel

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17.3.6 Use of Symbols

17.4 Facts related to social aspects

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17.5 Let Us Sum Up

17.6 Short Answer Type Questions

17.7 Multiple Choice Questions

17.8 Examination Oriented Questions

17.9 Answers to SAQ's & MCQ's

17.9.1 Answers to SAQ's

17.9.2 Answers to MCQ's

17.10 Suggested Reading

17.1 INTRODUCTION

This novel is measured as the Great American Novel. The work is among the first in major American literature to be written in the colloquial speech. It has a remarkable use by local color regionalism. It is told in the first person by Huckleberry "Huck" Finn. Finn is a friend of Tom Sawyer and narrator of two other Twain novels *Tom Sawyer Abroad* and *Tom Sawyer, Detective*.

The book is distinguished for its vibrant sketch of people and places along the Mississippi River. It is famous for satirizing a Southern antebellum society that had ceased to be present about twenty years before the work was published *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is an often contemptuous look at ingrained attitudes, predominantly racism. The work has been popular with readers since its publication in 1884 and is considered as a follow-up to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. It has also been the persistent object of study by serious literary critics. It was criticized upon release because of its foul-mouthed language and became even more notorious in the 20th century because of its apparent use of racial stereotypes and because of its frequent use of the racial disgrace "nigger"

17.2 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this unit are:

- That the learners should have read, with care and understanding, this representative work of one of the major American authors.
- That the learner should be able to give an account of the history of English novels, especially with reference to *Mark Twain.*

- That the learner should be able to identify and explain major events of English history and major literary and social issues relevant to the development of prose writing in the days of *Mark Twain*.
- That the learner should be able to demonstrate familiarity with the bibliographic tools and resources appropriate to the study of American novels and of the author cited above, and to apply these tools and resources to literary research.
- That the learner should be able to demonstrate capacity to develop critical analyses of novels of the nineteenth century in the context of established critical approaches.
- That the learner should be able to recognize, identify, and use accurately literary terms and concepts applicable to the American novels and novelists and to understand and apply appropriate literary conventions.
- That the learner should be able to express insights which relate his readings of the novelist to fundamental questions of human behavior and value, and to contemporary thought.
- In this unit we will familiarize you with the globally famous work of the famous writer Mark Twain who was a famous American novelist of the nineteenth Century.
- We will discuss important points related to the author and facilitate your efforts of comprehending and learning by:

  a). giving you detailed information about the novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

  b). giving you glossary of difficult words and phrases

  c). giving you practice to have your own assessment by trying to make you answer questions in your own language.

  d). giving you multiple choice questions to make concepts more clear and avoid confusions between similar options.

e). giving you the correct answers so that you may verify your own answers.

f). discussing the summary of the lesson.

g). giving a concise list of the important sources suggested for reading.

17.3 MAJOR FOCAL POINTS OF THE NOVEL

The novel received world-wide acclaim immediately after its publication in 1884. Readers round the globe cherished the story which was meticulously woven and beautifully presented to the world of literature. The scholars need to have some very important technical information. This information is scattered at different places. We have put together all relevant focal points from various sources for the use of distance learning students.

17.3.1 Important facts about the novel

This novel was called The Great American Novel. It gained global acclaim and made Twain one of the most famous authors and humorists of the age. There are certain facts about the novel which the scholars should know. These are….

- **FULL TITLE** - *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*
- **AUTHOR** - Samuel Langhorne Clemens
- **PEN NAME** - Mark Twain
- **TYPE OF WORK** – Fiction (Novel).
- **GENRE** - Picaresque novel (episodic, colorful story often in the form of a quest or journey); satire of popular adventure and romance novels; bil-dungs-ro-man (Noun- used in North America) novel of education or moral development, a novel about the early years of somebody's life, exploring the development of his or her character and personality.
- **LANGUAGE** - English. The author frequently makes use of Southern and black dialects of the time. The use of local dialect made the work more effective.
- **TIME AND PLACE IN WHICH THE NOVEL WAS WRITTEN** - 1876–1883; Hartford, Connecticut, and Elmira, New York.

- **YEAR OF FIRST PUBLICATION** - 1884
- **PUBLISHER** - Charles L. Webster & Co.
- **CHRONICLER** - Huckleberry Finn
- **POINT OF VIEW** - Huck's point of view, although Twain occasionally deviates from the main theme in which he brings forth his own satirical sense of humor.
- **NATURE** - Repeatedly ironic or mocking, for the most part concerning adventure novels and romances; also contemplative, as Huck seeks to interpret the world around him; sometimes boyish and high-spirited.
- **SETTING (TIME)** - Before the Civil War; approximately 1835-1845; Twain said the novel was set forty to fifty years before the time of its publication.
- **LOCATION** - The Mississippi River town of St. Petersburg, Missouri; various locations along the river through Arkansas.
- **CENTRAL CHARACTER** - Huck Finn
- **MOST IMPORTANT CONFLICT** - At the beginning of the novel, Huck struggles against society and its attempts to refine him. This is represented by the Widow Douglas, Miss Watson, and other adults. Later, this inconsistency gains greater focus in Huck's dealings with Jim, as Huck must decide whether to turn Jim in, as society demands, or to protect and help his friend instead.
- **RISING ACTION** - Miss Watson and the Widow Douglas endeavor to develop Huck until Pap reappears in town. He demands Huck's money, and kidnaps Huck. Huck escapes society by making a false show of his own death and moving back to Jackson's Island. Here he meets Jim and sets out on the river with him. Huck slowly but surely begins to inquire about the system society has taught him. In order to protect Jim, he lies and makes up a story to scare off some men searching for escaped slaves. Even though Huck and Jim live a serene life on the raft, at the end of the day they are unable to escape the ills and

hypocrisies of the outside world. The most extraordinary representatives of these outside evils are the defraud men the duke and the dauphin, who engage in a series of increasingly serious scams that culminate in their sale of Jim, who ends up at the Phelps farm.

- **CLIMAX** - Huck thinks of sharing this information but then decides against writing Miss Watson to tell her the Phelps family is holding Jim. He decides to move by his conscience rather than the established morality of the day. Instead, Tom and Huck try to free Jim, and Tom is shot in the leg during the attempt. This episode is the climax of the story.
- **FALLING ACTION** - When Aunt Polly arrives at the Phelps farm and appropriately identifies Tom and Huck, Tom reveals that Miss Watson died two months earlier and freed Jim in her will. Subsequently, Tom recovers from his gash, while Huck decides he is done with sophisticated society and makes plans to travel to the West.
- **THEMES** - Racism and slavery; intellectual and moral education; the hypocrisy of "civilized" society.
- **MOTIFS** - Childhood; lies and cons; superstitions and folk beliefs; parodies of popular romance novels.
- **SYMBOLS** - The Mississippi River; floods; shipwrecks; the natural world.
- **PREMONITION** - Twain uses parallels and juxtapositions more so than explicit foreshadowing, especially in his frequent comparisons between Huck's plight and eventual escape and Jim's plight and eventual escape.

17.3.2 Publication History

Twain in the beginning conceived of the work as a sequel to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* that would follow Huck Finn through adulthood. He started with a few pages he had detached from the earlier novel. Twain began working on a document he initially titled *Huckleberry Finn's Autobiography.* Twain worked on the manuscript off and on for the next several years, in due course abandoning his original plan of following Huck's maturity into adulthood. It seems he lost interest in the manuscript

while it was in evolution, and set it aside for quite a few years. After making a trip down the Mississippi, Twain returned to his work on the novel. He finally completed it. The novel's name strongly paralleled its predecessor's: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Tom Sawyer's Comrade)*.

There was a basic difference in the titles. Contrasting to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,* Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* does not have the definite article "the" as a part of its proper title. Essayist and critic Spencer Neve has interpreted this missing article very logically. He states that this nonexistence of the definite article represents the never fulfilled anticipations of Huck's adventures—while Tom's adventures were fulfilled at least at the time, by the end of his novel. Huck's narrative ends with his stated objective to head west.

Mark Twain wrote the story in pen on paper between 1876 and 1883. Paul Needham, who supervised the verification of the manuscript for Sotheby's books and manuscripts department in New York in 1991, acknowledged, "What you see is Clemens' attempt to move away from pure literary writing to dialect writing". An illustration of this can be seen in the very first line of the novel. Twain revised the very first line of Huck Finn three times. He in the beginning wrote, "You will not know about me", which he changed to, "You do not know about me," before settling on the final version, "You don't know about me, without you have read a book by the name of 'The Adventures of Tom Sawyer'; but that ain't no matter". The revisions also show how Twain reworked his material to strengthen the characters of Huck and Jim, as well as his understanding of the then-current debate over literacy and ballot vote.

Huck Finn was ultimately published on December 10, 1884, in Canada and England, and on February 18, 1885, in the United States. It must be noted here that the American publication was delayed because someone defaced an illustration on one of the plates, creating an obscene joke. Thirty-thousand copies of the book had been printed before the obscenity was exposed. A new plate was made to amend the illustration and renovate the accessible copies.

In 1885, the Buffalo Public Library's curator, James Fraser Gluck, approached Twain to donate the manuscript to the Library. Twain sent half of the pages to the

library. He thought that the other half had been lost by the printer. Co-incidentally, in 1991, the missing half turned up in a steamer trunk owned by descendants of Gluck. The Library effectively proved possession and, in 1994, opened the Mark Twain Room in its Central Library to display the literary fortune.

17.3.3 Plot construction of the novel

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

As the novel *Huckleberry Finn* opens, we find that Huck is not at all excited with his new life of hygiene, etiquette, church, and school. However, he accepts it out at the request of Tom Sawyer. Tom tells him that in order to take part in his new "robbers' gang", Huck must give an impression of being "respectable". All goes smooth until Huck's violent, drunken father, Pap, reappears in town and demands Huck's money. The local judge, Judge Thatcher, and the Widow try to get officially authorized custody of Huck, but another well-intentioned new judge in town believes in the rights of Huck's natural father. He thinks he should pay the good Samaritan. He takes the old drunk into his own home in an attempt to reform him. This effort fails miserably, and Pap soon proceeds to his old undignified ways. He hangs around town for quite a few months. The sole target in his mind is to harass his son, who in course of time has learned to read and to tolerate the Widow's attempts to improve him. The Widow Douglas warns him to stay away from her house. He is infuriated by this behavior of hers. One day, Pap kidnaps Huck and holds him in a cabin across the river from St. Petersburg.

Whenever Pap moves out on some errand, he locks Huck in the cabin, and when he returns home drunk, he thrashes the boy. Huck was tired of his confinement. He feared that the violence being inflicted on him will worsen. So he escapes from Pap by faking his own death. He killed a pig and spread its blood all over the cabin. He hid on Jackson's Island in the middle of the Mississippi River. From there Huck watches the townspeople rummage around the river for his body. After a few days on the island, he comes to meet Jim who is one of Miss Watson's slaves. Jim has run away from Miss Watson after hearing her talk about selling him to a plantation down the river, where he would be treated dreadfully and estranged from his wife and children.

Huck is uncertain about the legitimacy or goodness of helping an escape slave**.** He however teams up with Jim. They camp out on the island. At this time, a great storm causes the Mississippi to overflow. Huck and Jim spy a log raft and a house floating past the island. They capture the raft and loot the house, finding in it the body of a man who has been shot. Jim refuses to let Huck see the dead man's face. The island is a pleasurable place. Huck and Jim are strained to leave after Huck comes to know from a woman onshore that her husband has seen smoke coming from the island and believes that Jim is hiding out there. Huck also learns that a prize has been offered for Jim's capture. Huck and Jim move downriver on the raft, intending to leave it at the mouth of the Ohio River and proceed up that river by steamboat to the free states, where slavery is forbidden. After many days of travel they reach past St. Louis, and they come across a gang of robbers on a broken down steamboat. They manage to run away with the robbers' booty.

During a night of thick fog, Huck and Jim miss the mouth of the Ohio and encounter a group of men looking for escaped slaves. Huck has a short-lived moral predicament about concealing stolen "property". Jim, after all, belongs to Miss Watson. He thinks for some time then lies to the men and tells them that his father is on the raft afflicted from smallpox. The men are terrified of the ailment. They give Huck money and hurriedly run away. Unable to go to the reverse towards the mouth of the Ohio, Huck and Jim continue downriver.

The next night, a steamboat slams into their raft, and Huck and Jim are estranged. After being separated, Huck ends up in the home of the kindhearted Grangerfords, a family of Southern aristocrats engaged in a stringent and silly dispute with a neighboring kinfolk, the Shepherdsons. The elopement of a Grangerford daughter with a Shepherdson son leads to a gun battle in which many in the families are killed. While Huck is caught up in the feud, Jim shows up with the repaired raft. Huck hurries to Jim's hiding place, and they take off down the river.

A few days later, Huck and Jim liberate a pair of men who are being chased by armed bandits. The men are undoubtedly swindling artists. They declare to be a displaced English duke (the duke) and the long-lost successor to the French throne (the dauphin). Incapable to tell two white adults to leave, Huck and Jim carry on down the river with the twosome of "aristocrats." The duke and the dauphin pull several dishonest schemes in the little towns along the river. Coming into one town, they hear the story of a man, Peter Wilks, who has just died and left much of his legacy to his two brothers. They also tell them that the two brothers should be arriving from England any day. The duke and the dauphin enter the town pretending to be Wilks's brothers. Wilks's three nieces greet the fraud men and quickly set about liquidating the property.

A number of townspeople become doubtful. Huck grows to have a high regard for the Wilks sisters. He makes up his mind to frustrate the cheats. He steals the dead Peter Wilks's gold from the duke and the dauphin but is forced to hide it in Wilks's coffin. Huck then confides about it all to the eldest Wilks sister, Mary Jane. Huck's plan for revealing the duke and the dauphin's scam is about to open out when Wilks's real brothers turn up from England. The fuming townspeople hold both sets of Wilks claimants, and the duke and the dauphin just hardly run away in the resultant disorder. Auspiciously for the sisters, the gold is found. Unfortunately for Huck and Jim, the duke and the dauphin make it back to the raft just as Huck and Jim are pushing off.

After a few more small scams, the duke and dauphin commit their most horrible offense: they sell Jim to a local farmer, telling him Jim is a runaway for whom a large

reward is being offered. Huck finds out where Jim is being detained and decides to free him. At the house where Jim is a hostage, a woman greets Huck eagerly and calls him "Tom". Huck comes to know that the people who have kept Jim as a captive are none other than Tom Sawyer's aunt and uncle, Silas and Sally Phelps. The Phelpses mistake Huck for Tom, who is due to arrive for a visit, and Huck goes along with their blunder. He intercepts Tom between the Phelps house and the steamboat dock, and Tom behaves as if he is his own younger brother, Sid.

Tom thinks of a plan to free Jim. He adds all sorts of superfluous obstacles even though Jim is only lightly secured. Huck is sure Tom's plan will get them all killed, but he obeys. After a very long time of meaningless groundwork, during which the boys rummage through the Phelps's house and make Aunt Sally unhappy, they put the plan into accomplishment. Jim is freed, but a follower shoots Tom in the leg. Huck is forced to get a doctor, and Jim sacrifices his freedom to nurse Tom. All go back to the Phelps's house, where Jim ends up back in chains.

The next morning Tom discloses that Jim has actually been a free man all along, as Miss Watson, who made a condition in her will to free Jim, died two months earlier. Tom had planned the entire escape idea all as a game and had intended to pay Jim for his troubles. Tom's Aunt Polly then appears and identifies "Tom" and "Sid" as Huck and Tom. Huck fears for his future. He thinks that his father might reappear. Jim tells him that the body they found on the floating house off Jackson's Island had been Pap's. Aunt Sally then enters the scene and offers to adopt Huck. Huck is fed up of the previous experiences of "sivilizing". He announces his plan to set out for the West.

17.3.4 Major themes of the novel:

The major themes explored in the novel are :

Civilization v/s natural life

The most important theme of the novel is the conflict between civilization and "natural life." Huck represents natural life. His inclination for a thoroughly natural life is shown through his freedom of spirit, uncivilized ways, and desire to escape

from civilization. He was brought up without any rules or discipline and has a strong repulsion for anything that might "civilize" him. This inconsistency is introduced in the first chapter. The efforts of the Widow Douglas show how she tries to force Huck to wear new clothes, give up smoking, and learn the Bible. All the way through the novel, Twain seems to suggest that the uncivilized way of life is more advantageous and ethically advanced. Drawing on the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Twain suggests that civilization corrupts, rather than improves, human beings. He strongly rejects refinement in the ways of living.

Honor

The topic of honor is introduced in the novel in the second chapter. Tom Sawyer expresses his conviction that there is a great deal of honor linked with the dishonest business of thieving. Robbery appears as a persistent factor all through the novel, particularly when Huck and Jim stumble upon robbers on the stranded boat and are forced to put up with the Duke and Dauphin. These both rob all and sundry they meet. Tom's original robber band is paralleled later in the novel when Tom and Huck become true thieves, but principled and praiseworthy ones, at the end of the novel. They make up their mind to steal Jim. In this act they actually free him from the bonds of slavery. This is an honorable act. As a consequence, the concept of honor and taking deliberate pains to earn it becomes a central theme in Huck's adventures.

Hunger and Food

Hunger and food play an important role in the novel. During his childhood, Huck often fights pigs for food. He is also seen eating out of a barrel of odds and ends. In this manner, making an allowance of food for Huck becomes a sign of people caring for and protecting him. Many illustrations to this effect can be found in the novel. In the first chapter, the Widow Douglas provides foodstuff for Huck. Later on in the story, Jim becomes his symbolic caretaker. Jim is found feeding and watching over him on Jackson's Island. Food is again discussed fairly significantly when Huck lives with the Grangerford's and the Wilks's.

Contempt of religious conviction

Twain focuses very intently on the the theme of mockery of religion. All through his life, Twain was well-known for his attacks on structured religion. Huck Finn's mocking character absolutely situates him to ridicule religion. The views and reactions of Huck represent Twain's individual views. In the first chapter, Huck indicates that hell sounds far more fun than heaven. Afterwards, in a very important scene, the King who is a liar and cheat of the first order, convinces a religious community to give him money. He tells them that he wants the money so that he can convert his pirate friends. The religious people are easily misguided. This incident mocks their beliefs and devotion to God.

Superstitious beliefs

Superstitious beliefs appear all the way through the novel. Under normal circumstances, both Huck and Jim are very balanced characters. However, when they come across anything which is to some extent superstitious, irrationality takes over. The power superstition holds over the two demonstrates that Huck and Jim are child-like regardless of their visible maturity. Along with this, superstition indicates that something unpleasant is going to follow. This appears in the plot at several important places in the story. For illustration, we find when Huck spills salt, his rascal father Pap comes back, and when Huck touches a snakeskin with his uncovered hands, a rattlesnake bites Jim. So, the theme of superstitious beliefs occupies an important place in the storyline.

Slavery and racism

The theme of slavery is perhaps the most well acknowledged characteristic of this novel. Ever since it's first publication, Twain's viewpoint on slavery and thoughts surrounding racism have been vehemently debated. In his private and community life, Twain was fervently against slavery. Taking into account this information, it is easy to see that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* provides a parable to make clear how and why slavery is erroneous. Jim is one of the main characters in the story. He is a slave. Mark Twain uses him to display the various aspects of slavery. Jim is

full of humanity. He expresses the complex human emotions and struggles with the path of his life. Jim is under the threat that he can be sold anytime. To put a stop to the threat of being sold and forced to separate from his family, Jim runs away from his owner, Miss Watson. He works hard to obtain freedom. He desperately wants to buy his family's freedom.

All along their voyage downriver, Jim cares for and protects of Huck. He treats Huck, not as a servant, but as a friend. As a consequence, Twain encourages the reader to feel sympathy and empathy for Jim. The reader has a strong feeling of annoyance for the society that has enslaved him and threatened his life. Twain attacks slavery through is portrayal of Jim. He uses only a suggestive manner. He never straightforwardly addresses the issue. Huck and Jim never debate slavery, and all the other slaves in the novel are very minor characters. Only in the concluding segment of the novel does Twain develop the central conflict pertaining to slavery: should Huck free Jim and then be condemned to hell? This judgment is life-altering for Huck, as it forces him to discard everything "civilization" has trained him in. Huck chooses to liberate Jim. This decision is based on his personal experiences rather than social norms. Huck chooses the principles of the "natural life" over that of civilization or socially evolved life.

Money

The theory of affluence or paucity of money thereof, is woven all the way through the novel, and highlights the inequality between the rich and poor. Twain intentionally begins the novel by pointing out that Huck has over six thousand dollars to his name; a sum of money that dwarfs all the other sums mentioned, making them seem inconsequential in contrast. Huck shows a comfortable approach towards wealth. He has so much of it that he does not analyze money as a necessity, but to a certain extent as an extravagance. Huck's views regarding material goods are clearly dissimilar to Jim's. For Jim, who is on a quest to buy his family out of slavery, money is equal to independence. In addition, wealth would allow him to raise his standing in society. Thus, Jim is on an invariable pursuit for prosperity, whereas Huck remains unconcerned about it.

Mississippi River

Most part of the plot takes place on the river or its banks. For Huck and Jim, the river is symbolical of freedom. When they are on the raft, they are entirely free and determine their own courses of action. Jim looks forward to reaching the free states, and Huck is impatient to break away from his offensive, drunkard father and the civilization of Miss Watson. However, the towns along the river bank begin to exercise pressure upon them, and in due course of time, Huck and Jim meet criminals, shipwrecks, untruthfulness, and great danger. Finally, a fog forces them to miss the town of Cairo, at which point there were planning to head up the Ohio River, towards the free states, in a steamboat. In the beginning, the river is a protected place for the two travelers. With the passage of time, it becomes more and more precarious as the realities of their escapee lives set in on Huck and Jim. The river which was representative of absolute freedom, soon becomes only a short-term escape. The novel concludes on the safety of dry land, where, ironically, Huck and Jim find their true independence.

17.3.5 Use of Motifs

Motifs are persistent structures which appear again and again. They can also be located in the form of contrasts and literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes. They help to enhance the efficacy of the work making it more attractive for the reader. Here are some of the prominent motifs used in the novel:

Infancy and immaturity

Huck's period of infancy is an important factor in his moral education over the course of the novel. We know that only a child is unprejudiced enough to undergo the kind of development that Huck does. Both Huck and Tom are young. Their age allows them to enjoy a sense of play to their actions, which excuses them in certain ways and also deepens the novel's observations on slavery and society. Paradoxically, Huck often knows certain things better than the grown-ups around him. This is inspite the fact that he has lacked the supervision that a proper family and community should have presented him. Twain also recurrently draws associations between Huck's youth

and Jim's status as a black man: both are in danger, yet Huck, because he is white, has power over Jim. The infantile behavior, pure joy, and innocence of childhood give Huckleberry Finn a complete experience of fun and humor. Though its themes are quite substantial, the novel itself feels light in tone and is an enjoyable read because of this unruly childhood enthusiasm that enlivens the narrative.

Falsehood and fraud

The novel is full of wicked lies and scams. Many of these can be seen in the behavior of the duke and the dauphin. It is obvious that these con men's lies are bad, for they hurt a number of blameless people. Huck himself tells a number of lies and even cons a few people, most notably the slave-hunters. He makes up a story about a smallpox outbreak in order to protect Jim. As Huck realizes, it seems that telling a lie can actually be a good thing, depending on its principle. This insight is part of Huck's learning process. He learns through his practical experiences that some of the rules he has been taught disagree with what seems to be right. At other points, the lines of demarcation between a con, legitimate entertainment, and approved social structures like religion are fine indeed. In this light, lies and cons provide an effective way for Twain to highlight the moral uncertainty that runs through the work of fiction.

Superstitions and Folk Beliefs

When Huck comes in contact with Jim on Jackson's Island, Jim talks at great length about a wide range of superstitions and folktales. While Jim at the outset appears stupid to believe so steadfastly in these kinds of signs and omens, it turns out, strangely, that many of his beliefs do indeed have some basis in reality or foreshadow proceedings to come. Huck at first rejects most of Jim's superstitions as silly, but eventually he comes to be thankful for Jim's deep knowledge of the world. In this sense, Jim's superstition serves as a substitute to accepted social teachings and assumptions and provides a reminder that mainstream conventions are not always right. Many a times, traditional beliefs prove to be untrue.

Amusing imitations of famous Romance Novels

The novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is full of people who support

their lives on romantic literary models and stereotypes of various kinds. Tom Sawyer, the most noticeable example, bases his life and actions on adventure novels. The deceased Emmeline Grangerford painted tearful maidens and composed verse about lifeless children in the romantic style. The Shepherdson and Grangerford families kill one another out of a strange, frenzied notion of family honor. The natural inclination of these characters toward the romantic allows Twain a few favorable conditions to indulge in some fun. There is no doubt about it that the episodes that deal with this subject are among the most comical ones in the novel. On the other hand, there is a more essential and practically important message hidden beneath: that popular literature is highly stylized and artistic. For that reason, it hardly reflects the reality of a society. Twain shows how a stringent faithfulness to these romantic ideals is in due course hazardous: Tom is shot, Emmeline dies, and the Shepherdsons and Grangerfords end up in a deadly clash. The characters would have lived more comfortably had they not been brain-washed by traditional romantic literature.

17.3.6 Use of Symbols

Symbols are something visible that by association or convention represents something else that is invisible. They express indirectly by an image, form, or model; they are things, characters, figures, and colors used to stand for abstract ideas or concepts.

The Mississippi River and other symbols

Huck and Jim, through their experience find that the Mississippi River is the final symbol of freedom. When they are alone on their raft, they do not have to answer to anyone. The river carries them toward freedom. Jim is carried toward the free states. Huck has a strong feeling that the river is carrying it away from his offensive father and the limiting "sivilizing" of St. Petersburg.

Much in semblance with the river itself, Huck and Jim are in a state of fluctuation. They are willing to change their attitudes about each other with little stimulation. Regardless of their freedom, however, they soon discover that they are not entirely free from the troubles and influences of the towns on the river's banks.

The real world, full of harshness, comes unwelcome on the paradise of the raft. The river floods, bring Huck and Jim into contact with criminals, wrecks, and stolen goods. Then, a thick fog causes them to miss the mouth of the Ohio River, which was to be their route to freedom.

As the narrative proceeds, the river becomes something other than the essentially compassionate place Huck initially thought it was. As Huck and Jim move further south, the duke and the dauphin assault the raft. Huck and Jim are compelled to spend more time ashore. Though the river continues to offer a protection from trouble, it often merely affects the exchange of one bad situation for another. Each escape exists in the larger context of a repeated drift southward, toward the Deep South and unshakable slavery.

In this changeover from pleasant retreat to source of danger, the river mirrors the complicated state of the South. As Huck and Jim's journey progresses, the river, which once seemed a paradise and a source of freedom, becomes merely a short-term means of escape that on the other hand pushes Huck and Jim ever further toward danger and destruction. Their challenges go on increasing. The more they sort out the situation, the more it heads towards some new development.

17.4 FACTS RELATED TO SOCIAL ASPECTS

There are certain facts about the novel which should be brought to the notice of the scholars for their keen observation. These facts have lost their existence as they are embedded in the records which nobody bothers to go through now-a-days.

17.4.1 Social reaction to the novel

The publication of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* resulted in pleasant reviews. The novel was controversial from the beginning. When the American edition was published in 1885 a number of libraries prohibited it from their collection. The early criticism paid attention on what was apparent as the book's coarseness.

The Concord library has damned Huck as trash and only suitable for the slums. Soon after, in 1905, New York's Brooklyn Public Library also banned the book due to bad word choice and Huck having not only itched but scratched within

the novel, which was considered obscene. Many subsequent critics have condemned the final chapters. Ernest Hemingway claimed that the book devolves into little more than minstrel-show satire and broad comedy after Jim is detained. He declared, All modern American literature comes from *Huck Finn*, and hailed it as the best book we've had. He warned, however, "If you must read it you must stop where the Nigger Jim is stolen from the boys. That is the real end. The rest is just cheating." Writer Louisa May Alcott criticized the book's publication as well, saying that if Twain "could not think of something better to tell our pure-minded lads and lasses he had best stop writing for them." Pulitzer Prize winner Ron Powers states in his Twain biography *Mark Twain: A Life* that "Huckleberry Finn endures as a consensus masterpiece despite these final chapters," in which Tom Sawyer leads Huck through elaborate plotting to liberate Jim.

Much modern scholarship of *Huckleberry Finn* has focused on its treatment of race. Scholars studying Twain have emphasized that the book, by civilizing Jim and revealing the fallacies of the racist assumptions of slavery, is an attack on racism. Many say that the book falls short on this score, especially in its portrayal of Jim. Professor Stephen Railton of the University of Virginia says that Twain was unable to fully rise above the stereotypes of black people that white readers of his era estimated and therefore resorted to minstrel show-style comedy to provide humor at Jim's expense, and ended up confirming rather than challenging late-19th century racist stereotypes. Because of this hullabaloo over whether *Huckleberry Finn* is racist or anti-racist, and because the word "nigger" is frequently used in the novel, many have questioned the correctness of teaching the book in the U.S. public school system. According to the American Library Association, *Huckleberry Finn* was the fifth most repeatedly challenged book in the United States during the 1990s. controversy always haunted this book for one reason or the other.

Many students and their guardians have protested the book being prescribed in the school syllabus. Mostly the African-American students were uneasy with the work. A Washington state high school teacher called for the exclusion of the novel from a school curriculum as well. The teacher, John Foley, called for replacing *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* with a more modern novel. He states that teaching

the novel is not only pointless, but complicated due to the unpleasant language within the novel with many students becoming uncomfortable at just hearing the N-word. He views this change as "common sense", with Obama's election into office as a sign that Americans are ready for a change, and that by removing these books from the reading lists, they would be following along with this change. The book has not only been a source of trouble in relation to in schools, but in the media as well. One such incident within the media occurred in 1955 and concerned CBS. In this incident, CBS had been trying to avoid notorious material while making a televised version of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In doing so, they decided to edit all the material within the novel involving slavery, essentially cutting the material out entirely, and changing Jim's character by not hiring an African American actor for his role. So, there were different reactions from all fronts.

17.4.2 Popularity of the novel: Adaption of the novel in other genres

Inspite of the controversy surrounding the novel, the work was undoubtedly considered as a great achievement in the field of literature. The appeal it made to critics could not be ignored. It was made into a silent film first of all in 1924. Later on it was made into a talkie film in 1931. Many versions followed after that. In 1968 it was filmed as an animated television series for children. In 1972 it was made as a soviet film. In 1976, it was made as a Japanese anime with 26 episodes a parody of Huckleberry Finn was created by Big Idea Productions with Larry the Cucumber as the titular character in 2008. *Tom and Huck*, a 1995 Disney live action film was made for the recreation of children. The novel was also converted into stage performances twice. There were many follow ups in literature. Greg Matthews wrote *The Further Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in 1983. This is a novel which continues Huck's adventures after he lights out for the Territory at the end of Twain's novel. A novel about Huck's father, Pap Finn, was written by Jon Clinch. Its name was *Finn.* Nancy Rawles wrote *My Jim* in 2005. This is a novel narrated largely by Sadie, Jim's enslaved wife. Many musical performances were also organized by famous musical groups based on the theme of the novel.

17.5 LET US SUM UP

We see that the novel Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is undoubtedly one of the most famous novels in the world of literature. It became controversial right since the first day of its publication. The American publication was delayed by a couple of months because of some undesirable circumstances which were rectified later on. The themes in the novel were much to the liking of the readers although it was criticized for the reference to slavery and racism. It was technically rich because of the skilful use of motifs and symbols. It was adapted in many other genres. This proves its popularity.

17.6 SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. What is the genre of the novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*?
2. What is the nature of the novel?
3. What is the most important conflict in the story?
4. Write about the rising action of the novel.
5. Describe the climax of the story.
6. Comment on the difference in the titles of Tom Sawyer and Finn. How can you justify this difference?
7. How did Twain finally write the first line of the novel?
8. Why was the American publication of the novel delayed by some months?
9. How did the manuscript of the novel reach Buffalo Public Library?
10. Which is the most important theme in the novel?
11. How does Twain introduce the theme of honor in his story?
12. What role does hunger play in the novel?
13. Twain mocks the role of religion through Huck. How?

14. How are superstitious beliefs woven in the story?

15. Describe the depiction of slavery and racism in the story.

16. The theme of financial inequality is carefully woven in the novel. Discuss.

17. What are motifs? What role do they play in a work of literature?

18. How does the unruly childhood enthusiasm enliven the narrative?

19. Falsehood and fraud play an important role in the occurrence of events in the novel. Elucidate.

20. Belief in popular romantic folk tales is sometimes hazardous. How does Twain prove it in the novel?

21. What type of reception did the novel get from the libraries?

22. Discuss the views of Ernest Hemingway regarding the novel.

23. What did other critics say about the quality of the work?

24. Why did scholars call it an attack on racism?

25. Write a note on the popularity of the novel.

17.7 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. The time during which the novel was written is….

   a) 1300-1340 b) 1450-1460
   c) 1580-1590 d) 1876-1883

2. The year of first publication of the novel was….

   a) 2001 b) 2002
   c) 2003 d) 1884

3. The publisher of the novel was….

   a) Rupa & Co b) Smart publishers
   c) Charles L. Webster & Co. d) London Publishing House

4. The Central character of the novel is….

a) Aunt Polly b) Susan Henry
c) Sister Linda d) Huck Finn

5. Twain revised the very first line of the novel….

a) Once b) Twice
c) Three times d) Six times

6. The manuscript of the novel is in the custody of….

a) Buffalo Public Library b) District Library
c) City Library d) Town Library

7. The most favorite theme in the novel is Huck's inclination towards….

a) Natural life b) Club life
c) Rustic life d) Desert life

8. The topic of honor is introduced in the ….chapter.

a) Second b) Fourth
c) Sixth d) eighth

9. Huck often fights for food with….

a) Birds b) Pigs
c) Cows d) Squirrels

10. Jim talks at great length about….

a) Superstitions and folk tales b) Family matters
c) Friends d) Forefathers

11. This is the final symbol of freedom for Huck and Jim….

a) The Mississippi river b) The Ganges
c) The Sparta river d) The Congo river

12. Who said, "All modern American Literature comes from Huck Finn"….

a) Tony Morrison b) Ernest Hemingway
c) Alexander d) Columbus

13. The most controversial word in the novel is….

a) Nigger b) Fool
c) Stupid d) Idiot

14. Adaptation of the novel in different genres proves it's….

a) Popularity b) Cheapness
c) Vulgarity d) Stupidity

15. A parody of the novel was made by Big Idea Productions in…..

a) 2002 b) 2004
c) 2006 d) 2008

17.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Throw light on *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as the Great American novel.
2. There are certain important facts about the novel which should be kept in mind before reading the original story. What are these?
3. What is the publication history of the novel?
4. Write a note on the plot construction of the novel.
5. How far do you agree that slavery and racism are the most sensitive points in the novel?
6. Comment on the friendly relationship between Huck and Jim.
7. The novel is one of the most controversial ones. How far do you agree?
8. Discuss the symbols used in the novel.
9. Which theme do you think is the most entertaining in the novel?

10. The novel was adapted into different genres. Comment on its popularity.

17.9 ANSWERS TO SAQ's & MCQ's

After reading the content of the lesson the concepts must be clear to you. If you have been able to find out the answers to the exercise questions, you deserve praise. If you have not been able to find any one of the answers, here is a list of the answers. Refer to these for your convenience.

17.9.1 ANSWERS TO SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. The genre of the novel is-Picaresque novel (episodic, colorful story often in the form of a quest or journey); satire of popular adventure and romance novels; bil-dungs-ro-man (Noun- used in North America) novel of education or moral development, a novel about the early years of somebody's life, exploring the development of his or her character and personality.

2. The nature of the novel is repeatedly ironic or mocking, for the most part concerning adventure novels and romances; also contemplative, as Huck seeks to interpret the world around him; sometimes boyish and high-spirited.

3. The most important conflict at the beginning of the novel is that Huck struggles against society and its attempts to refine him. This is represented by the Widow Douglas, Miss Watson, and other adults. Later, this inconsistency gains greater focus in Huck's dealings with Jim, as Huck must decide whether to turn Jim in, as society demands, or to protect and help his friend instead.

4. Miss Watson and the Widow Douglas endeavor to develop Huck until Pap reappears in town. He demands Huck's money, and kidnaps Huck. Huck escapes society by making a false show of his own death and moving back to Jackson's Island. Here he meets Jim and sets out on the river with him. Huck slowly but surely begins to inquire about the system society has taught him. In order to protect Jim, he lies and makes up a story to scare off some men searching for escaped slaves. Even though Huck and Jim live a serene life on the raft, at the end of the day they are unable to escape the ills and hypocrisies of the outside world. The most extraordinary representatives of these outside

evils are the defraud men the duke and the dauphin, who engage in a series of increasingly serious scams that culminate in their sale of Jim, who ends up at the Phelps farm.

5. Huck thinks of sharing this information but then decides against writing Miss Watson to tell her the Phelps family is holding Jim. He decides to move by his conscience rather than the established morality of the day. Instead, Tom and Huck try to free Jim, and Tom is shot in the leg during the attempt. This episode is the climax of the story.

6. There was a basic difference in the titles. Contrasting to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,* Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* does not have the definite article "the" as a part of its proper title. Essayist and critic Spencer Neve has interpreted this missing article very logically. He states that this nonexistence of the definite article represents the never fulfilled anticipations of Huck's adventures—while Tom's adventures were fulfilled at least at the time, by the end of his novel. Huck's narrative ends with his stated objective to head west.

7. Twain revised the very first line of *Huck Finn* three times. He in the beginning wrote, "*You will not know about me*", which he changed to, "*You do not know about me*", before settling on the final version, "*You don't know about me, without you have read a book by the name of 'The Adventures of Tom Sawyer'; but that ain't no matter*". The revisions also show how Twain reworked his material to strengthen the characters of Huck and Jim, as well as his understanding of the then-current debate over literacy and ballot vote.

8. *Huck Finn* was ultimately published on December 10, 1884, in Canada and England, and on February 18, 1885, in the United States. It must be noted here that the American publication was delayed because someone defaced an illustration on one of the plates, creating an obscene joke. Thirty-thousand copies of the book had been printed before the obscenity was exposed. A new plate was made to amend the illustration and renovate the accessible copies.

9. In 1885, the Buffalo Public Library's curator, James Fraser Gluck, approached Twain to donate the manuscript to the Library. Twain sent half of the pages to the library. He thought that the other half had been lost by the printer. Co-incidentally, in 1991, the missing half turned up in a steamer trunk owned by descendants of Gluck. The Library effectively proved possession and, in 1994, opened the Mark Twain Room in its Central Library to display the literary fortune.

10. The most important theme of the novel is the conflict between civilization and "natural life." Huck represents natural life. His inclination for a thoroughly natural life is shown through his freedom of spirit, uncivilized ways, and desire to escape from civilization. He was brought up without any rules or discipline and has a strong repulsion for anything that might "sivilize" him. This inconsistency is introduced in the first chapter. The efforts of the Widow Douglas show how she tries to force Huck to wear new clothes, give up smoking, and learn the Bible. All the way through the novel, Twain seems to suggest that the uncivilized way of life is more advantageous and ethically advanced. Drawing on the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Twain suggests that civilization corrupts, rather than improves, human beings. He strongly rejects refinement in the ways of living.

11. The topic of honor is introduced in the novel in the second chapter. Tom Sawyer expresses his conviction that there is a great deal of honor linked with the dishonest business of thieving. Robbery appears as a persistent factor all through the novel, particularly when Huck and Jim stumble upon robbers on the stranded boat and are forced to put up with the Duke and Dauphin. These both rob all and sundry they meet. Tom's original robber band is paralleled later in the novel when Tom and Huck become true thieves, but principled and praiseworthy ones, at the end of the novel. They make up their mind to steal Jim. In this act they actually free him from the bonds of slavery. This is an honorable act. As a consequence, the concept of honor and taking deliberate pains to earn it becomes a central theme in Huck's adventures.

12. Hunger and food play an important role in the novel. During his childhood, Huck often fights pigs for food. He is also seen eating out of a barrel of odds and ends. In this manner, making an allowance of food for Huck becomes a sign of people caring for and protecting him. Many illustrations to this effect can be found in the novel. In the first chapter, the Widow Douglas provides foodstuff for Huck. Later on in the story, Jim becomes his symbolic caretaker. Jim is found feeding and watching over him on Jackson's Island. Food is again discussed fairly significantly when Huck lives with the Grangerford's and the Wilks's.

13. Twain focuses very intently on the the theme of mockery of religion. All through his life, Twain was well-known for his attacks on structured religion. Huck Finn's mocking character absolutely situates him to ridicule religion. The views and reactions of Huck represent Twain's individual views. In the first chapter, Huck indicates that hell sounds far more fun than heaven. Afterwards, in a very important scene, the "King" who is a liar and cheat of the first order, convinces a religious community to give him money. He tells them that he wants the money so that he can "convert" his pirate friends. The religious people are easily misguided. This incident mocks their beliefs and devotion to God.

14. Superstitious beliefs appear all the way through the novel. Under normal circumstances, both Huck and Jim are very balanced characters. However, when they come across anything which is to some extent superstitious, irrationality takes over. The power superstition holds over the two demonstrates that Huck and Jim are child-like regardless of their visible maturity. Along with this, superstition indicates that something unpleasant is going to follow. This appears in the plot at several important places in the story. For illustration, we find when Huck spills salt, his rascal father Pap comes back, and when Huck touches a snakeskin with his uncovered hands, a rattlesnake bites Jim. So, the theme of superstitious beliefs occupies an important place in the storyline.

15. The theme of slavery is perhaps the most well acknowledged characteristic of this novel. Ever since it's first publication, Twain's viewpoint on slavery and thoughts surrounding racism have been vehemently debated. In his private and community life, Twain was fervently against slavery. Taking into account this information, it is easy to see that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* provides a parable to make clear how and why slavery is erroneous. Jim is one of the main characters in the story. He is a slave. Mark Twain uses him to display the various aspects of slavery. Jim is full of humanity. He expresses the complex human emotions and struggles with the path of his life. Jim is under the threat that he can be sold anytime. To put a stop to the threat of being sold and forced to separate from his family, Jim runs away from his owner, Miss Watson. He works hard to obtain freedom. He desperately wants to buy his family's freedom.

16. The theory of affluence or paucity of money thereof, is woven all the way through the novel, and highlights the inequality between the rich and poor. Twain intentionally begins the novel by pointing out that Huck has over six thousand dollars to his name; a sum of money that dwarfs all the other sums mentioned, making them seem inconsequential in contrast. Huck shows a comfortable approach towards wealth. He has so much of it that he does not analyze money as a necessity, but to a certain extent as an extravagance. Huck's views regarding material goods are clearly dissimilar to Jim's. For Jim, who is on a quest to buy his family out of slavery, money is equal to independence. In addition, wealth would allow him to raise his standing in society. Thus Jim is on an invariable pursuit for prosperity, whereas Huck remains unconcerned about it.

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18. Huck often knows certain things better than the grown-ups around him. This is inspite the fact that he has lacked the supervision that a proper family and

community should have presented him. Twain also recurrently draws associations between Huck's youth and Jim's status as a black man: both are in danger, yet Huck, because he is white, has power over Jim. The infantile behavior, pure joy, and innocence of childhood give Huckleberry Finn a complete experience of fun and humor. Though its themes are quite substantial, the novel itself feels light in tone and is an enjoyable read because of this unruly childhood enthusiasm that enlivens the narrative.

19. The novel is full of falsehood and fraud. Many of these can be seen in the behavior of the duke and the dauphin. It is obvious that these con men's lies are bad, for they hurt a number of blameless people. Huck himself tells a number of lies and even cons a few people, most notably the slave-hunters. He makes up a story about a smallpox outbreak in order to protect Jim. As Huck realizes, it seems that telling a lie can actually be a good thing, depending on its principle. This insight is part of Huck's learning process. He learns through his practical experiences that some of the rules he has been taught disagree with what seems to be "right." At other points, the lines of demarcation between a con, legitimate entertainment, and approved social structures like religion are fine indeed. In this light, lies and cons provide an effective way for Twain to highlight the moral uncertainty that runs through the work of fiction.

20. The natural inclination of the characters toward the romantic allows Twain a few favorable conditions to indulge in some fun. There is no doubt about it that the episodes that deal with this subject are among the most comical ones in the novel. On the other hand, there is a more essential and practically important message hidden beneath: that popular literature is highly stylized and artistic. For that reason, it hardly reflects the reality of a society. Twain shows how a stringent faithfulness to these romantic ideals is in due course hazardous: Tom is shot, Emmeline dies, and the Shepherdsons and Grangerfords end up in a deadly clash. The characters would have lived more comfortably had they not been brain-washed by traditional romantic literature.

21. The Concord library has damned Huck as 'trash and only suitable for the

slums.' Soon after, in 1905, New York's Brooklyn Public Library also banned the book due to bad word choice and Huck having "not only itched but scratched" within the novel, which was considered obscene.

22. Many subsequent critics have condemned the final chapters. Ernest Hemingway claimed that the book devolves into little more than minstrel-show satire and broad comedy after Jim is detained. He declared, "All modern American literature comes from" *Huck Finn*, and hailed it as "the best book we've had". He warned, however, "If you must read it you must stop where the Nigger Jim is stolen from the boys. That is the real end. The rest is just cheating".

23. Writer Louisa May Alcott criticized the book's publication as well, saying that if Twain "could not think of something better to tell our pure-minded lads and lasses he had best stop writing for them. Pulitzer Prize winner Ron Powers states in his Twain biography (*Mark Twain: A Life*) that Huckleberry Finn endures as a consensus masterpiece despite these final chapters, in which Tom Sawyer leads Huck through elaborate plotting to liberate Jim.

24. Much modern scholarship of *Huckleberry Finn* has focused on its treatment of race. Scholars studying Twain have emphasized that the book, by civilizing Jim and revealing the fallacies of the racist assumptions of slavery, is an attack on racism. Many say that the book falls short on this score, especially in its portrayal of Jim. Professor Stephen Railton of the University of Virginia says that Twain was unable to fully rise above the stereotypes of black people that white readers of his era estimated and therefore resorted to minstrel show-style comedy to provide humor at Jim's expense, and ended up confirming rather than challenging late-19th century racist stereotypes. Because of this hullabaloo over whether *Huckleberry Finn* is racist or anti-racist, and because the word "nigger" is frequently used in the novel, many have questioned the correctness of teaching the book in the U.S. public school system.

25. Inspite of the controversy surrounding the novel, the work was undoubtedly considered as a great achievement in the field of literature. The appeal it

made to critics could not be ignored. It was made into a silent film first of all in 1924. Later on it was made into a talkie film in 1931. Many versions followed after that. In 1968 it was filmed as an animated television series for children. In 1972 it was made as a soviet film. In 1976, it was made as a Japanese anime with 26 episodes a parody of Huckleberry Finn was created by Big Idea Productions with Larry the Cucumber as the titular character in 2008. *Tom and Huck*, a 1995 Disney live action film was made for the recreation of children. The novel was also converted into stage performances twice. There were many follow ups in literature.

17.9.2 ANSWERS TO MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1.	1876-1883	2.	1884
3.	Charles L. Webster & Co.	4.	Huck Finn
5.	Three times	6.	Buffalo Public Library
7.	Natural life	8.	Second
9.	Pigs	10.	Superstitions and folk tales
11.	The Mississippi river	12.	Ernest Hemingway
13.	Nigger	14.	Popularity
15.	2008		

17.10 SUGGESTED READING

1. Budd, Louis J., ed. *New Essays on* The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

2. Chadwick-Joshua, Jocelyn. *The Jim Dilemma: Reading Race in* Huckleberry Finn. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1998.

3. De Koster, Katie, ed. *Readings on* The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1998.

4. Doyno, Victor A. *Writing* Huck Finn: *Mark Twain's Creative Process*.

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992.

5. Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. *Was Huck Black?: Mark Twain and African-American Voices.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

6. Hoffman, Andrew Jay. *Twain's Heroes, Twain's Worlds.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988.

7. Pizer, Donald, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism: Howells to London.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

8. Powers, Ron. *Mark Twain: A Life.* New York: Free Press, 2005.

9. Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.* New York: Penguin Classics, 1986.

10. ———. *Life on the Mississippi.* New York: Penguin Classics, 1986.

11. Wieck, Carl F. *Refiguring* Huckleberry Finn. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2000.

CHAPTER-WISE SUMMARY OF THE STORY (CHAPTER 1-20)

UNIT STRUCTURE

18.1 Introduction

18.2 Objectives

18.3 Chapter-wise story of the Novel

18.4 Let Us Sum Up

18.5 Short Answer Questions

18.6 Multiple Choice Questions

18.7 Examination Oriented Questions

18.8 Answer to SAQ's and MCQ's

18.8.1 Answer to SAQ's

18.8.2 Answer to MCQ's

18.9 Suggested Reading

18.1. INTRODUCTION

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn has become well-known not only as one of Twain's greatest achievements, but also as a highly contentious piece of literature. In certain Southern states, the novel was disqualified due to its wide-ranging criticism of the double standards of slavery. Critics have debated that the novel is racist due to the over-use of the word "nigger." It is ridiculous that the

connotations of this word tend to take priority over the novel's deeper antislavery themes, and prevent readers from understanding Twain's true point of view. In Twain's time, this word was used over and over again and did not carry as prevailing a racist connotation as it does at present. Hence, in using the word, Twain was merely projecting a realistic portrayal of Southern society. Without a doubt, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is highly significant due to its deep examination of issues surrounding racism and ethics. It continues to provide controversy and debate to this day. This proves the unrelenting relevance of these concepts.

18.2 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this lesson are:

- That the learner should have read, with care and understanding, this representative work of one of the major American authors.
- That the learner should be able to give an account of the history of English novels, especially with reference to *Mark Twain.*
- That the learner should be able to identify and explain major events of English history and major literary and social issues relevant to the development of prose writing in the days of *Mark Twain*.
- That the learner should be able to demonstrate familiarity with the bibliographic tools and resources appropriate to the study of American novels and of the author cited above, and to apply these tools and resources to literary research.
- That the learner should be able to demonstrate capacity to develop critical analyses of novels of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the context of established critical approaches.
- That the learner should be able to recognize, identify, and use accurately literary terms and concepts applicable to the American novels and novelists and to understand and apply appropriate literary conventions.

- That the learner should be able to express insights which relate his readings of the novelist to fundamental questions of human behavior and value, and to contemporary thought.
- In this lesson we will familiarize you with the globally famous work of the famous writer Mark Twain who was a famous American novelist of the nineteenth Century.
- We will discuss important points related to the author and facilitate your efforts of comprehending and learning by:

  a) giving you detailed information about the novel *Adventures of Huckleberry finn.*

  b) giving you glossary of difficult words and phrases.

  c) giving you practice to have your own assessment by trying to make you answer questions in your own language.

  d) giving you multiple choice questions to make concepts more clear and avoid confusions between similar options.

  e) giving you the correct answers so that you may verify your own answers.

  f) discussing the summary of the lesson.

  g) giving a concise list of the important sources suggested for reading.

18.3 CHAPTER-WISE STORY OF THE NOVEL

Chapter 1

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn begins where *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer"*ends. At the end of "Tom Sawyer", Huck and Tom find a treasure of twelve thousand dollars, which they divide equally. Judge Thatcher invests it in the bank for them at six percent interest. In this way, each boy earns a dollar a day on their investment. Widow Douglas agrees to take care of Huck Finn.

Huckleberry Finn is the storyteller in the novel and he starts off by describing his life to the reader. He accompanies Widow Douglas. She buys him new clothes and begins educating him about the Bible. Huck is sore with all of these "restrictions"

on his life. Out of dislike, he runs away to avoid being "civilized". Tom Sawyer goes after Huck. He goads him to return to the Widow's house. He promises that they will start a band of robbers together. Huck agrees to return, but still complains about having to wear new clothes and eat only when the dinner bell rings. He did not have such problems when he lived with his father.

Widow Douglas forbids him from smoking. Her special treatment towards him is complemented by her sister, Miss Watson, who also lives in the house. Miss Watson is a spinster who decides that Huck must get an education. She tries to teach him spelling and lectures him on how to behave well so that he will be welcomed into heaven. Miss Watson warns Huck that if he does not behave well, he will go to hell. Huck finds the description of hell far more appealing and exciting than the description of heaven, and decides he would rather go to hell, but doesn't tell Miss Watson of his choice. Huck goes into his bedroom at night. He lights a candle before going to bed. He starts to feel very forlorn. Every night sound, including an owl, dog and whippowill, is like the sound of death. At one point, Huck flicks a spider away, and accidentally burns it up in the candle flame, which he thinks is a very bad omen. Huck lies awake until midnight, at which time he hears a soft meow from below his window. The meow is an indication from Tom Sawyer, and Huck replies with an analogous meow. He climbs out of the bedroom window and drops to the ground to meet his friend.

Chapter 2

The boys decide to go away quietly. As they move away, Huck stumbles over a root and makes a noise. Miss Watson's slave Jim comes outside to look around. Huck and Tom hunker down to hide. Jim ends up sitting down right between them to wait to hear the sound again. Huck thinks they will never get away, but Jim soon gets tired and falls asleep against a tree. While Jim sleeps, Tom wants to play a trick on him. He and Huck climb into the house and steal three candles, for which they leave a nickel as "pay". Then Tom quietly makes his way to Jim, takes off Jim's hat, and places it on a tree branch above Jim's head. He soon returns and tells Huck what he did. Jim wakes up. He believes he has been bewitched, and keeps the nickel as a token around his neck for the rest of his life. Jim tells all the other slaves that he had

been ridden around the world by some witches, and that the nickel was given to him by the mischievous sprite which means devil.

Tom and Huck sneak down to the river. They meet some of the other boys who are believed to be members of Tom's robber band. Together, they steal a skiff and glide down the river. They reach an area where Tom has discovered a cave. Tom shows the boys a hidden room in the cave which they make their robber head office. Tom then reads them a pledge that he has written. This was taken mostly from robber books and pirate stories. The boys quarrel over what Huck Finn's role in the gang will be. The problem is that Huck does not have a family for them to kill in case he reveals any of the gang's secrets. Huck finally offers them Miss Watson in place of his real parents. The boys then sign an oath in blood to join the band. Tom is elected captain.

Tom explains that they will only attack carriages and take the things inside. The men will be killed and the women will be brought back to the cave. He also mentions that they will ransom some of the people, because that is what they do in books. Tom does not know what "ransom" means. The boys return home dog-tired. Huck climbs into bed having muddied up his new clothes, and feeling weary.

Chapter 3

Next morning Huck gets a lecture from Miss Watson for dirtying his clothes. She takes him into a secret place to pray, motivating him to pray every day so he will get what he wants. Huck tries to pray daily, but becomes disappointed when all he gets is a fish-line with no hooks, when he prayed extra hard for hooks. When he asks Miss Watson about it, she tells him praying brings spiritual gifts. He concludes that praying is wastage of time. A drowned man is found in the river. The people believe he is Huck's Pap. Huck is disbelieving after he hears the man was found floating on his back. He comments that everyone knows dead men float face down, so this must have been a woman in man's clothing that looked like his Pap.

Tom Sawyer's robber band disintegrates soon. The boys get bored of pretending they are robbing people. The only real adventure is when they destroy a Sunday School picnic and chase some of elementary school children away. Tom

pretends that during this 'battle' there were Arabs and elephants. The boys were invading a large army. Huck is too practical to follow Tom's fantastical imaginations. When Huck asks why they could not see all the elephants, Tom explains that some magicians must have turned the whole army into a Sunday School picnic. Tom then tells Huck all about genies in bottles, and how the genies must obey whoever rubs the bottle. Huck gets an old lamp and tries to find a genie, but when it fails he decides that the genies were just another of Tom's lies.

Chapter 4

Huck spends the next three months with the widow. He gets adjusted to his new life. He starts to attend school and remarks, "*I liked the old ways best, but I was getting so I liked the new ones, too*." Everything goes fine for some time.

One day Huck by chance overturns a salt-shaker at the breakfast table. Miss Watson does not let him throw any salt over his left shoulder. According to Huck's belief it was a way of avoiding the bad luck. Huck gets bothered that something bad will happen. As soon as Huck leaves the house, he notices boot prints in the fresh snow. Upon closer scrutiny he realizes that there is a cross on the left boot-heel, which he has only ever seen in his Pap's. Huck's Pap has returned.

Huck knows it fairly well that Pap is after his money (the $6,000 that he got from sharing the treasure with Tom). He is uncomfortable and goes to Judge Thatcher and begs the Judge to take all his money as a gift. The Judge is quite astonished by the request When Huck refuses to disclose why he wants to give away his money; Judge Thatcher agrees to buy it for one dollar, saying he will take the money for a consideration. Huck is worried over what is going to happen now that Pap has returned. He goes to Jim for advice. Jim takes out a hair-ball in order to do some magic with it for Huck. When the hair-ball refuses to work properly, Jim suggests that Huck give it some money. Huck offers a counterfeit quarter, which Jim takes and places under the ball. Jim tells Huck that Pap is torn between two angels, a good white angel and a bad black angel. He also explains that Huck will have substantial pain in his life and at the same time considerable joy. When Huck returns to his room that night, he finds his Pap sitting there.

Chapter 5

Huck introduces Pap to the readers as a dirty, poor man who used to shock him a great deal. Now, Huck is no longer frightened of Pap. He observes how old his father has grown. Pap repeatedly bothers Huck for wearing good clothes and going to school. He blames Huck for putting on airs and acting better than his own father. Pap comments that no one in his family could ever read, and that he certainly does not want his son to be smarter than he is. He asks Huck to read out something. He becomes quite infuriated when he realizes that Huck is in fact able to read. Pap threatens to thrash Huck if he ever catches him near the school again. He makes Huck hand over the dollar that Judge Thatcher paid him. He then climbs out the window to go drinking in the town.

Then Pap goes to Judge Thatcher and tries to make the Judge give him Huck's money. The Judge refuses. He and the widow take a case to court in an effort to get Huck lawfully placed with one of them. The custody judge is unfortunately new to the town and refuses to separate Huck from his father. Judge Thatcher, realizing he cannot win, gives Huck some money, which Huck straight away turns over to Pap. Pap gets tremendously drunk and is placed in jail for a week.

The new judge then compassionately takes Pap into his home. He dresses him well, and tries to improve him. After thinking that he has reformed Pap, the Judge goes to bed. Pap sneaks out of the new judge's house and buys some alcohol. By morning he is so much under the influence of intoxication that he breaks his arm in two places and nearly freezes to death on the porch. The new judge is enraged at this unfaithfulness. He says that the only way to reform Pap is with a shotgun.

Chapter 6

Pap begins hanging out around the town and demands Huck give him money every few days. The widow tells Pap to get away from her property. Pap retaliates by kidnapping Huck. He takes him three miles upriver to a log cabin. Pap carefully locks the door and makes sure that Huck cannot escape. Huck enjoys being free from school but soon gets upset because of the corporal punishment that his father inflicts on him. He searches for a way to get away. Huck discovers part of a saw that is missing its handle and starts to cut a log in the rear corner of the cabin. He is forced

to stop when Pap returns. Pap is intoxicated and makes Huck go outside and bring in all the supplies he has brought from town. Pap drunkenly curses everyone he has ever met and spends a significant part of his outburst criticizing the government.

Huck plans to escape after Pap falls asleep. On the other hand, Pap has a restless night. Huck is afraid he might wake up and catch him trying to get out of the cabin. At one point Pap jumps up thinking he is covered with snakes. Later, he dreams that the angel of death is after him and he starts to chase Huck around the cabin with a knife. Huck runs for his life and manages to stay alive after Pap falls asleep again. Huck then takes down the gun and holds it for defense.

Chapter 7

Pap and Huck go out into the woods to hunt. There Huck sees a discarded small boat on the river and jumps in to get it. He realizes that Pap did not see him catch the canoe. He hides it in a little stream for future use and returns to Pap. Next, Huck brings a wooden raft from the river with timber that is worth about ten dollars. Pap locks Huck into the cabin and takes the raft to town in order to put it up for sale.

Taking benefit of Pap's absence, Huck quickly finishes his sawing and climbs out of the cabin, taking everything worth any money to his canoe. He axes down the front door and goes hunting. Huck shoots a wild pig and butchers it inside the cabin. He scatters the blood on his shirt and the floor. He also carefully lays some of his hairs on the now bloody axe. This he does to make it appear as if he has been killed. Huck cuts open a bag of flour and marks a path indicating that the killer left via a lake that does not connect to the river. In this manner he prevents anyone from searching along the river for anything more than his dead body. As Huck is finishing, a man appears nearby in a skiff. Huck recognizes that it is Pap returning early and that he is clear-headed. Without delay, Huck jumps into the canoe and pushes off. He floats downstream until he reaches Jackson's Island, a deserted stretch of land in the middle of the river. Huck ties up the canoe and satisfied with his work, settles down to get some sleep.

Chapter 8

Huck wakes up on Jackson's Island late the next day and hears a big gun

being fired. A boat filled with his friends comes down the river. The search parties have also set loaves of bread filled with mercury afloat; believing the mercury and bread will be attracted to his body. Knowing the loaves will be floating around the area, Huck searches for one and enjoys eating it for lunch.

Sometime later, Huck begins exploring the island. He follows a large snake. In this process, he unintentionally stumbles into a clearing with a still smoking campfire. He is frightened. He retreats to his campsite and paddles over to the Illinois side of the river. He soon returns for the night. Sleep comes to him poorly. He is weighed down with fear for who else might be inhabiting the deserted island.

The subsequent morning Huck decides to explore who else is on the island with him. He paddles his canoe down to the other campsite and hides in the brush. Soon he sees Jim. Out of joy for discovering a friend on the island, Huck rushes out and greets him. Jim nearly dies of fright when he sees Huck, whom he believes to be dead. Huck tells him the story about how he faked his murder. Jim tells him that he overheard Miss Watson telling the widow that she was going to sell him down the river for a good sum of money. Jim ran away. He did not want to be sold. Thus he has been hiding out on Jackson's island.

Huck and Jim are together now. Jim tells him about various superstitious signs which the slaves watch out for. When some birds go hopping along the ground, stopping every few feet, Jim comments that means it will rain soon. He also tells Huck a story about how he lost a large sum of money. First, Jim purchased a cow that died. Next, he invested with another slave who was setting up a bank. Unluckily, the bank lost all its money and poor Jim was left with nothing.

Chapter 9

Jim and Huck travel around the island together. They find out a cave atop a hill in the middle of the island. They paddle their canoe to the base of the hill and then haul their equipment into the cave in order to keep it dry. Jim foretold that a storm will arrive. It arrives that night, and the river rises for more than twelve days at a stretch.

The two friends, Huck and Jim go out on the river at night. They pick up

wandering firewood and other bits and pieces that happen to float downstream. One night, they capture a large raft. This will be used to find the way through the river after they leave the island. Later on, they see a whole house floating downstream and climb into it to pick up some of the goods. Jim finds Huck's Pap lying dead on the floor of the house. He refuses to let Huck see the man's face. He does not make it known that it is Pap. Jim also notes that Pap was shot in the back while apparently attempting to rob the house.

Chapter 10

Huck is overjoyed with all the things they managed to get from the house. He is also still inquisitive about the man in the house but Jim refuses to talk about him. Huck mentions that he thought they would have bad luck after he brought a snakeskin into the cave, not great luck like what they were having. Always superstitious, Jim warns Huck that the bad luck is still coming.

After three days, Huck tries to play a trick on Jim by leaving a curled up dead rattlesnake under Jim's blanket. Unfortunately, when Jim gets into the bed he gets bitten in the ankle by the snake's mate. Huck kills the mate and sheepishly carries both snakes far away from the cave. He is embarrassed by the results of his behavior. Jim takes the jug of Pap's whiskey and drinks himself into a drunken state of unconsciousness to avoid feeling the pain of his inflamed leg. It takes Jim four complete days to get better from the bite. Huck takes an oath to never touch a snakeskin with his hands. To know what is happening in the town, Huck dresses up as a girl and goes to the village. He stops at a house where he sees a woman knitting. Since she is new to the town, Huck figures he can talk to her without being recognized.

Chapter 11

Huck knocks on the door of the house. The woman lets him in, believing him to be a young girl. Huck inquires about the area, and the woman talks for over an hour about her problems. She lastly tells him that there is a three hundred dollar bounty for capturing Jim. Rumor has it that some of the townspeople believe that Jim killed Huck and ran away, while other people believe that Pap killed Huck. She tells Huck that she herself believes Jim is hiding out on Jackson's Island.

Huck becomes nervous. He picks up a needle and thread and does such a poor job of threading the needle that the woman gets doubtful. The woman makes him throw a piece of lead at a rat in order to judge his aim. Afterwards, she reveals where Huck went wrong with his "girl" behavior and asks him what his real name is, and to be candid. Huck cunningly pretends to be a runaway trainee hiding in women's clothes to avoid recognition. Huck is finally able to get out from the house and straight away returns to the island. He tells Jim to take hold of everything and put it in the canoe. They propel off, after piling their belongings onto the raft.

Chapter 12

Jim and Huck travel down the river for a few days. They improve the raft by building a wigwam, which will keep them dry and warm. Huck goes into a close by town and buys more rations for the next day. They only travel at night to avoid being seen and questioned.

One night, during a strong storm, they see a broken down steamboat ahead of them. Huck convinces Jim to tie the raft to the boat and climb on board. They are surprised that there are three robbers on board, two of whom have tied up the third man. It seems that the bound man had threatened to turn them all in to the state. One of the robbers wants to kill him immediately, but the other man stops him. The two men as a final point decide to kill their partner by leaving him on the boat and waiting until it sinks. At this news, Huck scrambles back to rejoin Jim. Together they discover that their raft has come untied and floated away.

Chapter 13

Huck and Jim hunt for the worn-out ferryboat for the robbers' skiff. Just as they find it, the two robbers appear and place the goods they have looted into the skiff. The robbers then remember that their partner still has his share of the money. They return to steal it from him. Huck and Jim jump into this skiff, cut the rope, and speed away downstream. They find their raft again and recapture it.

Huck then goes ashore and finds a ferry night-watchman. He wants to save the robbers. He feels guilty leaving them for dead. He tells the man that his family ran into the ruin while traveling downriver and that they are stuck there. The man without

delay gets his commuter boat moving to endeavor and save them. Soon, the wreck floats by. It is sunk even further. Huck realizes that all three men aboard the wreck have surely drowned. He is disappointed, but proud of his effort. Huck paddles downriver until he meets Jim. Together they sink the skiff and tie up to wait for daylight.

Chapter 14

Huck and Jim discuss a range of things. Huck tells Jim all about kings and other upper-class personages. Jim is very overwhelmed and fascinated. When Huck talks about King Solomon, Jim tells him that Solomon was one of the most thoughtless men who ever lived. Jim comments that any man who had as many wives as Solomon would go foolish. He says that the concept of chopping a child in half in order to figure out which woman is the lawful mother is unintelligent. Jim explains that the matter was about a whole child, not a half a child, and Solomon would have shown more respect for children if he had not had so many. Huck tries to explain the ethical message Solomon was trying to teach, but Jim hears none of it.

Then, Huck tries to make clear to Jim that Frenchmen speak a dissimilar language. Jim is astonished by this and cannot comprehend why all men would not speak the same language. Huck tries to make the likeness that a cat and a cow do not speak the same language, so neither should an American and a Frenchman. Jim then argues that a cat and a cow are not the same species, but Frenchmen and Americans are. He concludes that Frenchmen should therefore speak the same language he does. Huck gets frustrated and gives up trying to disagree with Jim. It seems impossible for him to explain it to Jim.

Chapter 15

Jim is eager to reach Cairo which is at the base of Illinois where the Ohio river merges with the Mississippi. From there, both he and Huck will be able to take a steamboat upriver and into the free states where Jim will finally be a liberated man. Just at this juncture, a thick fog arrives and covers everything in a gloomy white. They land on the shore. Huck tries to tie up the raft which pulls loose and starts floating downstream with Jim on board. Huck jumps into the canoe and follows it,

but soon loses sight of it in the fog. He and Jim spend a number of hours tracking each other by calling out. A large island finally separates them and Huck is left all alone.

Huck awakens and coincidentally manages to catch up with the raft the following morning. He finds Jim asleep and wakes him up. Jim is glad to see him, but Huck tries to play a trick on Jim by telling him that the events of the night before were just a nightmare. After some convincing, Jim starts to read between the lines. He wants to find the meaning of the dream. Huck as a final point indicates the leaves and debris left from the night before. Jim gets mad at Huck for playing such a mean trick on him. Huck feels terrible about what he did and apologizes to Jim.

Chapter 16

Jim impatiently searches the riverbank for the town of Cairo. Huck feels increasingly guilty when Jim talks of becoming free. Huck knows that helping Jim get away is breaking the law, but Jim is also his friend. Therefore, Huck is trapped in a difficult moral predicament. Huck thinks hard and realizes he will feel possibly even worse if he turned Jim into the authorities. He is finally convinced that it would be best to let him break away from bondage.

On his way to shore, Huck meets two white men searching for escapee slaves. The men inquire him who else is on his raft. Huck shrewdly tells them his Pa, mother, and sister is aboard. Huck pretends to be enthusiastic for their help and tells them no one else has been willing to pull the raft to shore. At this news, the men become suspicious and finally conclude that Huck's family must have smallpox. Each man then puts a twenty dollar coin on a log and floats it over to Huck to avoid any communication with him. They make him promise not to stop anywhere near their town. Huck's clever lie fools the men and saves Jim from being taken into custody.

Huck and Jim are delighted to have received so much additional money. They knew this amount is enough for several trips up the river. They continue inspecting for Cairo, but are not capable to establish it. Huck and Jim now begin to guess that they passed Cairo in the fog several nights earlier. The next night, Huck and Jim start to plan to use the canoe to paddle upriver. On the other hand, the canoe disappears.

This event forces them to go on downriver in hopes of buying a new canoe. While drifting downstream, they encounter an oncoming steamboat. Instead of getting out of their way as the steamboats usually do, the boat ploughs directly over the raft. Both Huck and Jim are forced to jump overboard. Huck emerges and grabs a piece of wood with which he paddles to the shore. Jim cannot be located. Huck is soon encircled by dogs and stands soaked to the skin, wet and powerless.

Chapter 17

Huck stands immobile. He knows that when one is surrounded by dogs, one should not run and stands stock still. Within a few moments, a man calls out to him from the dwelling telling him to be at a standstill. After several of the men in the house prepare their rifles, Huck is allowed to approach. He vigilantly enters the house. When the family sees him, they straight away become welcoming. Huck has reached the Grangerford household. This family is in a drawn out and brutal dispute with the nearby Shepherdson family. When the Grangerford's are familiar with the fact that Huck is no relation to the Shepherdson's, they greet him with open arms.

Huck tells the family that he is an orphan. His name is George Jackson from down south. He has lost everything, and arrived at their home after falling off of a steamboat. The Grangerford's propose him a place in their home and he agrees to stay. The youngest son, Buck, is near to Huck's age and they soon become good associates.

Huck becomes familiar to his new home. He comes to know that the family had a younger daughter named Emmeline who passed away several years earlier. She was a talented poet and painter, and concentrated her work on eulogies for the dead. Huck is fascinated by the idea of Emmeline's poetry. He wishes that he could write some lines dedicated to Emmeline. Unfortunately he is not capable to come up with anything. The family is quite well-to-do considering their location. They own a fairly large house with nice furnishings and even have scholarly books in the parlor. Huck is happy to stay there for many reasons. Their high quality of food and wonderful cooking attracts him a lot.

Chapter 18

Huck introduces the reader to most of the Grangerford family. The father of the house is Colonel Grangerford. He is a authoritative, well-respected and honored man. The family owns a substantial amount of land. It also has one hundred slaves, including a slave for each member of the household. Tom and Bob are the two eldest sons. The youngest son is Buck, with whom Huck becomes friends. There are two daughters in the family. They are Miss Charlotte, who bears herself like her father, and Miss Sophia, who is shy and compassionate.

Huck and Buck go out hunting one day. They hear a horse approaching behind them. They run behind a bush and wait to see who arrives. Harvey Shepherdson passes by and Buck takes a shot at him, knocking off his hat. Harvey then chases the two boys into the woods but is not able to catch them. Huck is confused about this behavior on both sides. Buck explains the family dispute to Huck. For over thirty years, the men in each family have been unswerving to killing off the men in the rival family. No one remembers why the feud started, but quite a lot of men have been killed each year.

As a practice, the Grangerford's go to church. All the men take guns with them, and ironically listen to preaching about brotherly love. After the service and once they have all returned home, Miss Sophia pulls Huck aside and without delay asks him to return to the church and fetch her Testament, which she by mistake left there. Huck does as he is asked. He finds the book. He finds a note that has been slipped into it which reads, "half past two". Huck gives the Testament to Sophia. He assures her that he did not read the communication made through the note.

When Huck goes outside, he realizes that his personal slave is following him very intimately. This behavior is abnormal. The slave offers to show him some water moccasins. He had made a similar offer the day before as well. Huck realizes that the slave is talking to him in some kind of code language. He apprehends that something else is going on. Huck agrees to follow him. He goes to the swamp. He is surprised to find Jim asleep on the ground. Jim has the raft, which he entirely repaired, and is waiting for Huck to rejoin him so they can continue their expedition downriver.

The next day something unexpected happens. Miss Sophia elopes with Harvey Shepherdson. The feud is rekindled in full force. Buck's father and both his brothers are killed in a surprise attack. Huck arrives at the port in time to see Buck and his cousin shooting at five grown men. In due course the men manage to tiptoe around Buck and kill both the boys. Huck watches all these happenings from a tree that he climbed in an endeavor to find protection. Once the Shepherdson's have left, Huck pulls Buck and the other boy out of the river and onto dry land where he weeps and covers their faces.

Huck rushes back to the house. He finds that it is rather hushed in the wake of the family tragedy. He goes to the swamp, finds Jim, who is glad to see that Huck lived through the massacre, and together they push the raft into the river and start floating downstream.

Chapter 19

Huck and Jim are happy to be together again. They continue down the river for a few days, enjoying the fresh air and warm breeze. Huck finds a canoe. He uses it to paddle up a stream about a mile in search of berries. Two men come running through the woods. They request him for help. Huck makes them cover their tracks and then all three paddle back to the river.

The two men are not honest people. They are humbugs and frauds who were running away from townspeople who meant to tar and feather them. One man is about seventy and hairless, and the other is in his thirties. The younger man specializes in printing and theater while the older man often "works" camp revivals. They try to impress Huck and Jim.

The younger man then tells them that he is actually the direct descendent of the Duke of Bridgewater and therefore is a Duke. Both Huck and Jim start to treat him as royalty and cater to his every need. This makes the older man jealous and so he then tells them that he is the Dauphin, or Louis the XVII. Huck and Jim treat both men as aristocracy, even though Huck comments that it is pretty noticeable neither is truly a member of the royal family.

Chapter 20

Huck makes pretence before these men. He explains to the King and Duke that he is a farmer's son. He has recently lost his father and brother. He tells them that Jim is the last slave the family owns and that he is traveling south to Orleans to live with his Uncle Ben. Huck also says that he and Jim travel at night because they keep getting stressed by people who think Jim is a runaway slave. The Duke tells him that he will find out a way for them to travel during the hours of daylight.

That night the whole system is rearranged. The Duke and King take over Huck and Jim's beds. A large storm causes the river to become irregular, and Huck watches for danger. Soon Jim takes over and Huck falls asleep. He is washed overboard by a large wave. Jim bursts out laughing at the sight of Huck flailing about in the water. The scene entertains him a lot.

The King and Duke come up with brilliant money making schemes. The Duke proposes that they should put on a play where they perform short scenes from Shakespeare and the King agrees. After dinner, they go into a nearby town to see what luck will bring them. The men find the town deserted, as everyone has gone to a revitalization meeting. The Duke breaks into a printer's shop and takes orders from some farmers. He collects cash and promises to print advertisements in the paper. In his final project, he makes a handbill showing a runaway slave and describing Jim. He tells the others that this handbill will make it seem as if they are taking Jim back to collect the reward.

The King goes to the revival meeting with Huck. He chances upon a crowd listening to the preacher. The people get sore with the spirit of penitence. In the middle of all their crying and yelling, the King jumps up onto the stage. He tells the spectators that he was once a pirate in the Indian Ocean and that their meeting made him be disappointed for the actions of his former life. The King says that he would return to the Indian Ocean to change his former colleagues, if only he had the money to do so. Instantaneously, a collection is taken up. The King leaves with over eighty-seven dollars. In this manner he cheats them readily.

18.4 LET US SUM UP

After going through the first half of the novel we are almost lost in the world of these three adolescent boys. All three come from three different backgrounds but they are very deeply attached to each other. This emotional attachment makes the novel more interesting. The reader in a way becomes a part of each and every suffering of the boys and wishes them success. One cannot resist the temptation to read the following half of the novel.

18.5 SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. How does Mark Twain connect the story of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to the previous story of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*?
2. Who is Miss Watson? What efforts does she make to improve Huck?
3. When do Huck and Tom see Jim for the first time? What tricks does Tom play on Jim?
4. How does Huck meet Tom's robber band? How do they plan their strategy?
5. Why does Tom's robber band disintegrate? What real adventure do they have?
6. What does Huck do with his money when he comes to know that Pap is back?
7. What is Pap's reaction to Huck's education?
8. How does the custody judge react to Pap's case?
9. Why does Pap kidnap Huck?
10. How does Huck escape from the clutches of Pap? How does he fake his death?
11. Whom does Huck find on Jackson's island? Why had Jim run away from Miss Watson's house? Why was he hiding on Jackson's Island?
12. What does Jim tell about various superstitious signs to Huck?
13. Discuss how Jim finds dead Pap.
14. Narrate Jim's encounter with the rattle snake in his bed.

15. What is Huck's experience after disguising himself as a girl?
16. What were the three robbers doing on the boat? Why do two robbers want to kill their third partner?
17. Why do the robbers go back to their third partner?
18. Why does Jim think that Solomon was one of the most thoughtless men that ever lived?
19. Why is Jim astonished that Frenchmen do not speak the same language as others do? Is Huck able to explain it to him?
20. How is Huck separated from Jim due to the thick fog when they are on their way to Cairo?
21. What is Huck's moral predicament?
22. How do Huck and Jim get extra money?
23. How does Huck introduce himself to the Grangerford's family?
24. Why does Huck's personal slave follow him?
25. How does the king cheat the audience in the revival meeting?

18.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. The lady who agrees to take care of Huck is….

   a) Nancy b) Pricey
   c) Mickey d) Widow Douglas

2. Mrs. Douglas' sister who lives with her is….

   a) Miss Wilson b) Miss Watson
   c) Miss Nelson d) Miss Harrison

3. Miss. Watson's personal slave is….

   a) Jack b) John
   c) Jimmy d) Jim

4. Huck does not have a family to give as security to the robbers. So he gives….

   a) Pap b) Miss Watson

c) Widow Douglas d) Finn

5. Huck offers all his money as gift to….

a) Judge Thatcher b) Judge Iyer
c) Judge Robin d) Judge Henry

6. Pap is an alcoholic person and throughout the novel he is seen….

a) Singing b) Dancing
c) Twisting d) Drinking

7. Huck is kidnapped in the story by….

a) Joe b) Peter
c) Fish d) Pap

8. Huck scatters the blood of a ….to make Pap believe that he is dead.

a) Frog b) Wild pig
c) Goat d) Cow

9. In the floating house Jim finds the dead body of….

a) Larry b) Harry
c) Ferry d) Pap

10. Huck places a dead …. in Jim's blanket.

a) Frog b) Bird
c) Rattle snake d) Fish

11. To know what's happening in town, Huck dresses up as a….

a) Clown b) Joker
c) Ruffian d) Girl

12. The bounty declared for capturing Jim is….

a) 900 dollars b) 800 dollars
c) 700 dollars d) 300 dollars

13. According to Jim, the most thoughtless man who ever lived was….

a) Hitler b) Mussolini

c) Lenin d) Solomon

14. Jim is impatient to reach ….where he will be a liberated man.

a) Russia b) Holland
c) Finland d) Cairo

15. The girl who elopes with Harvey Shepherdson is….

a) Sophia b) Celia
c) Sylvia d) Lydia

18.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Evaluate *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as a sequel to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.*
2. How do Widow Douglas and Miss Watson work hard on civilizing Huck?
3. Why do you think that Tom is a great help to Huck?
4. Miss Watson tries her level best for Huck's spiritual upliftment but he secretly decides to go to hell. Discuss with reference to Huck's immaturity.
5. Discuss the humor in the first meeting of Huck and Tom with Jim when he comes to search out for the noise outside.
6. Huck's decision to give all his money as gift to Judge Thatcher shows how pure and innocent he is. Discuss.
7. What impression of Pap do you get from Huck's experience with him?
8. Narrate how Huck plans his escape from the clutches of his father when he is kidnapped?
9. Huck's experiences on Jackson's Island with Jim are very interesting. How do you evaluate them?
10. Narrate Huck's introduction and stay at the Grangerford's. What happened in the end?

18.8 ANSWERS TO SAQ's & MCQ's

After reading the content of the lesson the concepts must be clear to you. If

you have been able to find out the answers to the exercise questions, you deserve praise. If you have not been able to find any one of the answers, here is a list of the answers. Refer to these for your convenience.

18.8.1 ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* begins where "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" ends. At the end of "Tom Sawyer", Huck and Tom find a treasure of twelve thousand dollars, which they divide equally. Judge Thatcher invests it in the bank for them at six percent interest. In this way, each boy earns a dollar a day on their investment. Widow Douglas agrees to take care of Huck Finn. Huckleberry Finn is the storyteller in the novel and he starts off by describing his life to the reader.

2. Miss Watson is the sister of Widow Douglas. Both live in the same house. Miss Watson is a spinster who decides that Huck must get an education. She tries to teach him spelling and lectures him on how to behave well so that he will be welcomed into heaven. Miss Watson warns Huck that if he does not behave well, he will go to hell. Huck finds the description of hell far more appealing and exciting than the description of heaven, and decides he would rather go to hell, but doesn't tell Miss Watson of his choice.

3. Huck and Tom decide to go away quietly. As they move away, Huck stumbles over a root and makes a noise. Miss Watson's slave Jim comes outside to look around. Huck and Tom hunker down to hide. Jim ends up sitting down right between them to wait to hear the sound again. Huck thinks they will never get away, but Jim soon gets tired and falls asleep against a tree. While Jim sleeps, Tom wants to play a trick on him. He and Huck climb into the house and steal three candles, for which they leave a nickel as "pay". Then Tom quietly makes his way to Jim, takes off Jim's hat, and places it on a tree branch above Jim's head. He soon returns and tells Huck what he did.

4. Tom and Huck sneak down to the river. They meet some of the other boys who are believed to be members of Tom's robber band. Together, they steal a skiff and glide down the river. They reach an area where Tom has discovered

a cave. Tom shows the boys a hidden room in the cave which they make their robber head office. Tom then reads them a pledge that he has written. This was taken mostly from robber books and pirate stories. The boys quarrel over what Huck Finn's role in the gang will be. The problem is that Huck does not have a family for them to kill in case he reveals any of the gang's secrets. Huck finally offers them Miss Watson in place of his real parents. The boys then sign an oath in blood to join the band. Tom is elected captain. Tom explains that they will only attack carriages and take the things inside. The men will be killed and the women will be brought back to the cave. He also mentions that they will ransom some of the people, because that is what they do in books. Tom does not know what "ransom" means.

5. Tom Sawyer's robber band disintegrates soon. The boys get bored of pretending they are robbing people. The only real adventure is when they destroy a Sunday School picnic and chase some of elementary school children away. Tom pretends that during this 'battle' there were Arabs and elephants. The boys were invading a large army. Huck is too practical to follow Tom's fantastical imaginations. When Huck asks why they could not see all the elephants, Tom explains that some magicians must have turned the whole army into a Sunday School picnic. Tom then tells Huck all about genies in bottles, and how the genies must obey whoever rubs the bottle. Huck gets an old lamp and tries to find a genie, but when it fails he decides that the genies were just another of Tom's lies.

6. Huck knows it fairly well that Pap is after his money (the $6,000 that he got from sharing the treasure with Tom). He is uncomfortable and goes to Judge Thatcher and begs the Judge to take all his money as a gift. The Judge is quite astonished by the request When Huck refuses to disclose why he wants to give away his money; Judge Thatcher agrees to "buy" it for one dollar, saying he will take the money "for a consideration." Huck is worried over what is going to happen now that Pap has returned.

7. Pap repeatedly bothers Huck for wearing good clothes and going to school. He blames Huck for putting on airs and acting better than his own father. Pap comments that no one in his family could ever read, and that he certainly does not want his son to be smarter than he is. He asks Huck to read out something. He becomes quite infuriated when he realizes that Huck is in fact able to read. Pap threatens to thrash Huck if he ever catches him near the school again.

8. Pap goes to Judge Thatcher and tries to make the Judge give him Huck's money. The Judge refuses. He and the widow take a case to court in an effort to get Huck lawfully placed with one of them. The custody judge is unfortunately new to the town and refuses to separate Huck from his father. Judge Thatcher, realizing he cannot win, gives Huck some money, which Huck straight away turns over to Pap. Pap gets tremendously drunk and is placed in jail for a week. The new judge then compassionately takes Pap into his home. He dresses him well, and tries to improve him. After thinking that he has reformed Pap, the Judge goes to bed. Pap sneaks out of the new judge's house and buys some alcohol. By morning he is so much under the influence of intoxication that he breaks his arm in two places and nearly freezes to death on the porch. The new judge is enraged at this unfaithfulness. He says that the only way to reform Pap is with a shotgun.

9. Pap begins hanging out around the town and demands Huck give him money every few days. The widow tells Pap to get away from her property. Pap retaliates by kidnapping Huck. He takes him three miles upriver to a log cabin. Pap carefully locks the door and makes sure that Huck cannot escape. Huck enjoys being free from school but soon gets upset because of the corporal punishment that his father inflicts on him.

10. Taking benefit of Pap's absence, Huck quickly finishes his sawing and climbs out of the cabin, taking everything worth any money to his canoe. He axes down the front door and goes hunting. Huck shoots a wild pig and butchers it inside the cabin. He scatters the blood on his shirt and the floor. He also carefully lays some of his hairs on the now bloody axe. This he does to make

it appear as if he has been killed. Huck cuts open a bag of flour and marks a path indicating that the killer left via a lake that does not connect to the river. In this manner he prevents anyone from searching along the river for anything more than his dead body. As Huck is finishing, a man appears nearby in a skiff. Huck recognizes that it is Pap returning early and that he is clear-headed. Without delay, Huck jumps into the canoe and pushes off. He floats downstream until he reaches Jackson's Island, a deserted stretch of land in the middle of the river.

11. The subsequent morning Huck decides to explore who else is on the island with him. He paddles his canoe down to the other campsite and hides in the brush. Soon he sees Jim. Out of joy for discovering a friend on the island, Huck rushes out and greets him. Jim nearly dies of fright when he sees Huck, whom he believes to be dead. Huck tells him the story about how he faked his murder. Jim tells him that he overheard Miss Watson telling the widow that she was going to sell him down the river for a good sum of money. Jim ran away. He did not want to be sold. Thus he has been hiding out on Jackson's island.

12. Huck and Jim are together now. Jim tells him about various superstitious signs which the slaves watch out for. When some birds go hopping along the ground, stopping every few feet, Jim comments that means it will rain soon. He also tells Huck a story about how he lost a large sum of money. First, Jim purchased a cow that died. Next, he invested with another slave who was setting up a "bank". Unluckily, the bank lost all its money and poor Jim was left with nothing.

13. The two friends, Huck and Jim go out on the river at night. They pick up wandering firewood and other bits and pieces that happen to float downstream. One night, they capture a large raft. This will be used to find the way through the river after they leave the island. Later on, they see a whole house floating downstream and climb into it to pick up some of the goods. Jim finds Huck's Pap lying dead on the floor of the house. He refuses to let Huck see the man's

face. He does not make it known that it is Pap. Jim also notes that Pap was shot in the back while apparently attempting to rob the house.

14. Huck tries to play a trick on Jim by leaving a curled up dead rattlesnake under Jim's blanket. Unfortunately, when Jim gets into the bed he gets bitten in the ankle by the snake's mate. Huck kills the mate and sheepishly carries both snakes far away from the cave. He is embarrassed by the results of his behavior. Jim takes the jug of Pap's whiskey and drinks himself into a drunken state of unconsciousness to avoid feeling the pain of his inflamed leg. It takes Jim four complete days to get better from the bite.

15. Dressed as a girl, Huck goes to the house of a woman who is new in town. She tells Huck that she herself believes Jim is hiding out on Jackson's Island. Huck becomes nervous. He picks up a needle and thread and does such a poor job of threading the needle that the woman gets doubtful. The woman makes him throw a piece of lead at a rat in order to judge his aim. Afterwards, she reveals where Huck went wrong with his "girl" behavior and asks him what his real name is, and to be candid. Huck cunningly pretends to be a runaway trainee hiding in women's clothes to avoid recognition. Huck is finally able to get out from the house and straight away returns to the island.

16. One night, during a strong storm, they see a broken down steamboat ahead of them. Huck convinces Jim to tie the raft to the boat and climb on board. They are surprised that there are three robbers on board, two of whom have tied up the third man. It seems that the bound man had threatened to turn them all in to the state. One of the robbers wants to kill him immediately, but the other man stops him. The two men as a final point decide to kill their partner by leaving him on the boat and waiting until it sinks.

17. Huck and Jim hunt for the worn-out ferryboat for the robbers' skiff. Just as they find it, the two robbers appear and place the goods they have looted into the skiff. The robbers then remember that their partner still has his share of the money. They return to steal it from him.

18. Huck and Jim discuss a range of things. Huck tells Jim all about kings and other upper-class personages. Jim is very overwhelmed and fascinated. When Huck talks about King Solomon, Jim tells him that Solomon was one of the most thoughtless men who ever lived. Jim comments that any man who had as many wives as Solomon would go foolish. He says that the concept of chopping a child in half in order to figure out which woman is the lawful mother is unintelligent. Jim explains that the matter was about a whole child, not a half a child, and Solomon would have shown more respect for children if he had not had so many. Huck tries to explain the ethical message Solomon was trying to teach, but Jim hears none of it.

19. Huck tries to make clear to Jim that Frenchmen speak a dissimilar language. Jim is astonished by this and cannot comprehend why all men would not speak the same language. Huck tries to make the likeness that a cat and a cow do not speak the same language, so neither should an American and a Frenchman. Jim then argues that a cat and a cow are not the same species, but Frenchmen and Americans are. He concludes that Frenchmen should therefore speak the same language he does. Huck gets frustrated and gives up trying to disagree with Jim. It seems impossible for him to explain it to Jim.

20. Jim is eager to reach Cairo which is at the base of Illinois where the Ohio river merges with the Mississippi. From there, both he and Huck will be able to take a steamboat upriver and into the free states where Jim will finally be a liberated man. Just at this juncture, a thick fog arrives and covers everything in a gloomy white. They land on the shore. Huck tries to tie up the raft which pulls loose and starts floating downstream with Jim on board. Huck jumps into the canoe and follows it, but soon loses sight of it in the fog. He and Jim spend a number of hours tracking each other by calling out. A large island finally separates them and Huck is left all alone.

21. Jim impatiently searches the riverbank for the town of Cairo. Huck feels increasingly guilty when Jim talks of becoming free. Huck knows that helping Jim get away is breaking the law, but Jim is also his friend. Therefore, Huck is

trapped in a difficult moral predicament. Huck thinks hard and realizes he will feel possibly even worse if he turned Jim into the authorities. He is finally convinced that it would be best to let him break away from bondage.

22. On his way to shore, Huck meets two white men searching for escapee slaves. The men inquire him who else is on his raft. Huck shrewdly tells them his Pa, mother, and sister is aboard. Huck pretends to be enthusiastic for their help and tells them no one else has been willing to pull the raft to shore. At this news, the men become suspicious and finally conclude that Huck's family must have smallpox. Each man then puts a twenty dollar coin on a log and floats it over to Huck to avoid any communication with him. They make him promise not to stop anywhere near their town. Huck's clever lie fools the men and saves Jim from being taken into custody. Huck and Jim are delighted to have received so much additional money. They knew this amount is enough for several trips up the river.

23. Huck tells the family that he is an orphan. His name is George Jackson from down south. He has lost everything, and arrived at their home after falling off of a steamboat. The Grangerford's propose him a place in their home and he agrees to stay. The youngest son, Buck, is near to Huck's age and they soon become good associates.

24. When Huck goes outside, he realizes that his personal slave is following him very intimately. This behavior is abnormal. The slave offers to show him some water moccasins. He had made a similar offer the day before as well. Huck realizes that the slave is talking to him in some kind of code language. He apprehends that something else is going on. Huck agrees to follow him. He goes to the swamp. He is surprised to find Jim asleep on the ground. Jim has the raft, which he entirely repaired, and is waiting for Huck to rejoin him so they can continue their expedition downriver.

25. The King goes to the revival meeting with Huck. He chances upon a crowd listening to the preacher. The people get sore with the spirit of penitence. In

the middle of all their crying and yelling, the King jumps up onto the stage. He tells the spectators that he was once a pirate in the Indian Ocean and that their meeting made him be disappointed for the actions of his former life. The King says that he would return to the Indian Ocean to change his former colleagues, if only he had the money to do so. Instantaneously, a collection is taken up. The King leaves with over eighty-seven dollars. In this manner he cheats them readily.

18.8.2 ANSWERS TO MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1.	Widow Douglas	2.	Miss Watson
3.	Jim	4.	Miss Watson
5.	Judge Thatcher	6.	Drinking
7.	Pap	8.	Wild pig
9.	Pap	10.	Rattle snake
11.	Girl	12.	300 dollars
13.	Solomon	14.	Cairo
15.	Sophia		

18.9 SUGGESTED READING

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2. Chadwick-Joshua, Jocelyn. *The Jim Dilemma: Reading Race in* Huckleberry Finn. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1998.

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8. Powers, Ron. *Mark Twain: A Life.* New York: Free Press, 2005.

9. Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.* New York: Penguin Classics, 1986.

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CHAPTER-WISE SUMMARY OF THE STORY (CHAPTER 21-43)

UNIT STRUCTURE

19.1 Introduction

19.2 Objectives

19.3 Chapter-wise story of the Novel

19.4 Let Us Sum Up

19.5 Short Answer Type Questions

19.6 Multiple Choice Questions

19.7 Examination Oriented Questions

19.8 Answers to SAQ's to MCQ's

19.8.1 Answers to SAQ's

19.8.2 Answers to MCQ's

19.9 Suggested Reading

19.1 INTRODUCTION

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn has become well-known not only as one of Twain's greatest achievements, but also as a highly contentious piece of literature. In certain Southern states, the novel was disqualified due to its wide-ranging criticism of the double standards of slavery. Critics have debated that the novel is racist due to the over-use of the word "nigger". It is ridiculous that the connotations of this word tend to take priority over the novel's deeper antislavery

themes, and prevent readers from understanding Twain's true point of view. In Twain's time, this word was used over and over again and did not carry as prevailing a racist connotation as it does at present. Hence, in using the word, Twain was merely projecting a realistic portrayal of Southern society. Without a doubt, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is highly significant due to its deep examination of issues surrounding racism and ethics. It continues to provide controversy and debate to this day. This proves the unrelenting relevance of these concepts.

19.2 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this lesson are:

- That the learner should have read, with care and understanding, this representative work of one of the major American authors.
- That the learner should be able to give an account of the history of English novels, especially with reference to Mark Twain.
- That the learner should be able to identify and explain major events of English history and major literary and social issues relevant to the development of prose writing in the days of Mark Twain.
- That the learner should be able to demonstrate familiarity with the bibliographic tools and resources appropriate to the study of American novels and of the author cited above, and to apply these tools and resources to literary research.
- That the learner should be able to demonstrate capacity to develop critical analyses of novels of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the context of established critical approaches.
- That the learner should be able to recognize, identify, and use accurately literary terms and concepts applicable to the American novels and novelists and to understand and apply appropriate literary conventions.
- That the learner should be able to express insights which relate his readings of the novelist to fundamental questions of human behavior and value, and to contemporary thought.

- In this lesson we will familiarize you with the globally famous work of the famous writer Mark Twain who was a famous American novelist of the nineteenth Century.
- We will discuss important points related to the author and facilitate your efforts of comprehending and learning by:

  a). giving you detailed information about the novel *Adventures of Huckleberry finn*

  b). giving you glossary of difficult words and phrases

  c). giving you practice to have your own assessment by trying to make you answer questions in your own language.

  d). giving you multiple choice questions to make concepts more clear and avoid confusions between similar options.

  e). giving you the correct answers so that you may verify your own answers.

  f). discussing the summary of the lesson.

  g). giving a concise list of the important sources suggested for reading.

19.3 CHAPTER-WISE STORY OF THE NOVEL

Chapter 21

The King and Duke change their interest to enacting scenes from Shakespeare. The King learns the lines for Juliet. He also practices sword-fighting with the Duke to perform part of Richard III. The Duke decides that a great encore would be for the King to perform Hamlet's soliloquy without the text. The Duke has to piece the famous lines together from memory. The end result is quite different from the true soliloquy, but still contains some basics of drama.

The men stop in a close by town and decide to place up their show. They hire the courthouse for a night. They also print up bills proclaiming how fantastic the performance will be. At this time a circus is also in town. It is a challenge for them to attract the audience but they hope people will still attend their dramatic performances.

A man Boggs rides into town on the day of the show. He is a drunk. He comes in each month and threatens to kill a man, but in reality never troubles anyone. This time, he is after a Colonel Sherburn, the wealthiest man in town and a storeowner. Boggs stands outside the store and shouts insults at the Colonel. The Colonel comes out of his store and tells Boggs that he will put up with the insults until one o'clock and after that he will kill him if Boggs utters even one word. Boggs continues persistently. At accurately 1pm, the Colonel appears. He kills Boggs on the spot. Precisely at that moment, Boggs's daughter comes. She comes to save her father, but she is too late. After Boggs is laid to rest, the crowd turns into a mass and concludes that Sherburn should be lynched for killing Boggs.

Chapter 22

The crowd is very angry. It travels to Sherburn's store and rips down the front fence. They stop the progress of their movements when Sherburn comes out with a shotgun and peacefully stands in front of them. He lectures the crowd on how wretched they are. He also tells them that they are being led by half of a man, Buck Harkness, and calls them all cowards. After his speech, he cocks his gun. The crowd runs off in every direction because it is scared.

Huck goes to the circus which is in town until late that night. The Duke and King plan to perform their show after it.. He stealthily goes in and watches all the fun activities. He sees the clown and showgirls. Huck says that it is the best circus he has ever witnessed in his life.

The Shakespearean show is a failure. Only twelve people turn up. None of them stays until the end. In response, the Duke prints up some new handbills touting a show titled the Royal Nonesuch. At the end of the handbill, he cleverly adds the line, "*Ladies and Children Not Admitted*". He claims that if such a line does not bring an audience, then he does not know Arkansas.

Chapter 23

The Royal Nonesuch opens to a house jam-packed with men. The Duke welcomes them and publicizes the spectators for the King. The King comes out. He

is completely naked and covered in paint. He crawls on all fours. The audience laughs their heads off, and he is called back to do it twice more. Then the Duke thanks them all and wishes them a good night.

The men are enraged that the show is so undersized. They feel cheated. They want to take revenge on the Duke and King. Before they can rush the stage in protest, one man stands up and tells them that they will be the objects of ridicule in the town if it ever is discovered how badly they were cheated. They all agree to leave and advertize the show for being wonderful so the rest of the town can be cheated as well. So, the next night's concert is also full, and the audience leaves just as angry. The third night, all the men show up, carrying rotten eggs, dead cats, and other foul items with them. The Duke pays a man to mind the door and he and Huck rush away to the raft. They immediately push out onto the river and the King emerges from the wigwam where he and Jim have been hiding all along. Together, the two con-artists made four hundred sixty-five dollars.

Jim is sorrowful over no longer being able to see his wife and children. Huck comments that Jim cares as much about his family as a white person would. Jim then tells Huck a story. It is about when he was with his daughter, Elizabeth, one day. Jim told her to shut the door and she just stood there smiling at him. Jim got nuts that she did not comply with his orders. He yelled at her. He finally shattered her on the side of the head for not listening to him. Ten minutes later Jim returned and his daughter still had not closed the door. She was standing in the same place, crying. At that moment, a strong wind slammed the door behind her, causing Jim to jump. However, his daughter never moved an inch. Jim realized his poor daughter had lost her audible range. Jim tells Huck that he burst out crying upon making this realization and grabbed his daughter to give her a hug. Ever since, he has felt terrible about how he treated her. He becomes emotional at the memory of his daughter.

Chapter 24

The Duke does not want to tie up Jim in a rope. He figures out a better resolution. He paints Jim in blue and makes him wear a different set of clothes. He

writes a sign that reads, "Sick Arab - but harmless when not out of his head". Jim is in high spirits that he can now move about.

The King and Huck cross the river and meet a young fool waiting for the ferry to Orleans. He tells them all about how a Peter Wilks has died. This man had left his whole estate to his daughters and brothers. The two brothers have not yet arrived from England. This greatly disappointed the man before he died. The King takes a wholehearted curiosity in the story and gathers every point he can.

After collecting all the details, the King approaches the Duke and tells him the whole story. The two men agree to pretend to be Peter Wilks's brothers from Sheffield, England. Huck acts as a servant. They get a steamboat to take them to the town and drop them off. Their strategy works perfectly and when they hear that Peter is dead, both men put up a huge cry and lament. Huck remarks that, *"It was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race"*. In this way they become a part of the Wilks' household.

Chapter 25

The two swindle artists are taken by the crowd that greeted them upon arrival to visit the family. In the Wilks family there are three orphaned girls: Mary Jane, Susan, and Joanna. Everyone exchanges hugs and cries. The King and Duke go to examine the coffin. The two men burst out crying again. The King makes a speech about how heartbreaking the whole situation is. They finish off by kissing all the women on the forehead and acting heartbroken. Huck comments that the whole scene is "disgusting".

The King and Duke ascertain they have received the bigger part of the estate property as well as three thousand dollars cash. The three girls have also received three thousand dollars and the house they live in. Wilks's will discloses where in the cellar to find the cash. The two men go downstairs and find it. The King and Duke count the money and find four hundred and fifteen dollars short. To ease any mistrust, they add the money they made from the Royal Nonesuch to the quantity. In order to win the town over to their side permanently, they courteously give their share of the

money to the three girls. They know it very well that they can steal it back at anytime. So it was not a risk for them.

The King gives a speech. He idiotically moves off the central topic. A Doctor Robinson enters the crowd, hears the King and laughs vigorously. He calls the King a deceptive person because his British pronunciation is such a bad reproduction of the original way a Britisher speaks. The townspeople rally around the King, who has been so charitable, and defend him. The Doctor warns Mary Jane directly, but in response, she hands the bag of money to the King and tells him to invest it for her. The doctor advises them one final time of the mistakes they are making, and then goes away.

Chapter 26

Joanna and Huck are the youngest two people present. They eat together. She asks him all about England. Huck tells her lies. He wants to sound well-informed. She catches him in several of the lies. Huck keeps pretending to choke on a chicken bone in order to think of a way out. Mary Jane overhears Joanna telling Huck that she does not believe him. She makes Joanna ask for forgiveness to Huck for being so bad-mannered. Huck decides he cannot let the King and Duke steal the money from these exceptionally benevolent girls.

Huck goes to the King's room. He hears the Duke and King approaching. The conmen debate whether they should leave now that suspicion has been raised or wait until the rest of the property is sold off. They decide to stay and hide their money in the straw tick mattress. Huck steals the money without delay. He waits until it is secure to slip downstairs to put out of sight of the others.

Chapter 27

Hiding the money is a big problem. Huck is afraid he will be trapped with the stolen money. As a result he hides it inside Peter Wilks's coffin. That day, the funeral service is held. It is interrupted by loud barking from a dog locked in the underground room. The undertaker goes to silence the dog. He returns and tells the audience the

dog caught a rat. Huck remarks that the service was long and tiresome. He is relieved when Peter Wilks and the money are at last buried.

The King and Duke instantaneously begin selling the whole lot of things they can. They also sell the slave family owned by the household. To sell the slaves faster, they break up the slave-family and sell each one separately. The girls are tremendously displeased by this thoughtlessness. Many of the townspeople also expressed displeasure, but the men are not persuaded.

On the day of the public sale, the King realizes the money is gone. He questions Huck. He smartly blames the slaves who were sold. Both the Duke and King feel extremely foolish for selling the slaves at such low prices. They are sorry that all their money is now lost and they have to suffer a loss.

Chapter 28

Later that morning, Huck sees Mary Jane sitting on her floor. She is crying while packing to go to England with her uncle's. Mary Jane is upset about the slaves being so badly treated. Huck blurts out that they will be together again in two weeks at the most, knowing the Duke and King will discard the town. He realizes he has slipped. He tells her everything. She becomes enraged as he relates the story, and when Huck finishes, she calls the King a "*brute*".

Huck helps Mary Jane leave the house and reside with a friend across the river. Before she leaves, he writes down where the money is located so she will be able to find it later on. Huck is afraid that if Mary Jane stays at the house, her face will give away Huck's lack of caution. Huck tells her sisters that she is across the river trying to stir up interest in buying the house. Huck remarks that he has never forgotten Mary Jane. He thinks she is one of the most beautiful girls he has ever met. This is how he narrates the course of events.

The auction is held that afternoon. The King works hard to sell every last thing. In the middle of the auction, a steamboat lands, and two men claiming to be the real heirs to the Wilks's fortune come ashore. As they approach the crowd, Huck

notices that the elder man is speaking, and that the younger man's right arm is in a sling. Here is a turn of events.

Chapter 29

The men who have newly arrived tell that they have lost their baggage and are therefore unable to prove their identity. The King and Duke continue pretending to be the real heirs. Both groups are taken to the pub where Levi Bell and Dr. Robinson interrogate them for information.

The King and the Duke are unhappy by the first information exposed to them that the Wilks money has been stolen. They blame it on the slaves and continue pretending. The lawyer, Levi Bell, manages to get all three men to write a line for him. He pulls out some old letters and examines the handwriting, only to discover that none of three men had written the letters to Peter Wilks. The authentic Harvey Wilks explains that his brother had copied all his letters because his handwriting is so poor. He is sorry to say, since his brother has a broken arm, he cannot write and therefore they cannot provide evidence of their case.

All of a sudden it strikes Harvey Wilks that his departed brother had his initials tattooed on his chest. He challenges the King to tell him what was on Peter's chest. He is thinking that the men who had laid his brother out would have seen the mark and will be able to determine who is lying. The King continues pretending. He does not want to be caught. He tells them Peter had a blue arrow tattooed on his chest. The men who laid out Peter Wilks cannot remember seeing anything. As a consequence they are forced to dig up the body.

The whole town travels to the place of burial. They finally dig out and open the casket. They find out the gold Huck has hidden there. The men holding the King and Duke let go to get a look at the money. Taking advantage of this occasion, the three men-Huck, the King, and the Duke run to the river as fast as they can. Huck gets to the raft and takes off down the river. He wants to escape the two men. When the Duke and King catch up to him in a little skiff, he almost starts to shed tears.

Chapter 30

The King seizes Huck, shakes and rattles him, and yells at him for trying to get away. He blames him for escaping without waiting. The Duke at last intervenes and calls the King an "*old idiot*". He asks the King, "*Did you enquire for him when you got loose?*" because he feels for Huck.

After that, the King and Duke get into a disagreement about the money and start accusing each other of stealing the cash and hiding it. They are irritated particularly in view of the fact that they had added the proceeds of the Royal Nonesuch to the pot. The Duke lastly physically attacks the King and forces him say that he took the money. After this quarrel, both men get drunk, but Huck notices the King never again admits to taking the money and to a certain extent refuses it at every occasion.

Chapter 31

The Duke and King start scheming how to recuperate their fortunes. They reach a village named Pikesville. The King leaves. He tells the Duke and Huck to follow him if he does not come back by noontime. He does not come back. So, they go to find him, leaving Jim with the raft. Huck and the Duke search for quite some time, and finally find the King in a drinking hole. Soon, both the Duke and King are drunk.

Huck thinks this is a golden opportunity to slip away. He runs straight back to the raft. When he arrives Jim is gone. A young man on the road tells him Jim was just seized and sold to the Phelps family, down the road. Everything becomes clear before Huck. He realizes that in an attempt to make some money, the King had snuck back to the raft while he and the Duke had been searching for him. He hurriedly took Jim, sold him for forty dollars, and came back to the town to drink.

Huck thinks about his next course of action. He is split between two thoughts. On one hand there is his friendship for Jim and on the other, his principle that helping a runaway slave is a sin. Huck finally writes a letter to Miss Watson explaining where Jim is. Not quite contented, he thinks about it some more, and forcibly tears apart the letter saying, "*All right, then, I'll go to hell!*"

Huck starts walking to the Phelps's farm, but encounters the Duke along the way. The Duke is posting advertisements for the Royal Nonesuch, which the two men are scheduling to carry out again. When he sees Huck, the Duke gets extremely malicious. He is afraid Huck will caution the townspeople. He lies to Huck and tells him Jim was sold to a farm several days away and threatens Huck in order to keep him silent. Huck promises not to say a word, and hopes he will never have to deal with men such as the Duke and King ever again.

Chapter 32

Huck decides to rely on his luck. He goes directly up to the front door of the Phelps's farm. He is quickly encircled by about fifteen hound dogs. They take flight when a large black woman chases them away. Aunt Sally emerges and hugs Huck, saying "*It's you, at last! - ain't it?*" Utterly surprised, Huck merely mutters "*yes'm*". Aunt Sally pulls Huck into the house and starts to ask him why he is so late. Not sure how to respond, Huck says the steamboat blew a cylinder. The woman asks if anyone was hurt, to which Huck replies, "*No'm, killed a nigger*". Before he has a chance to answer any more questions, Silas Phelps returns home after picking up his nephew at the landing stage.

Aunt Sally hides Huck, pretends he is not there. Suddenly she drags him out and surprises Silas. Silas does not identify Huck until Aunt Sally announces, "*It's Tom Sawyer!*" Huck nearly faints from joy when he hears his friend's name and realizes Aunt Sally is Tom's aunt. Over the next two hours, Huck tells the family all about the Sawyer's and entertains them with stories. Soon he hears a steamboat coming down the river, and realizes Tom is probably on the boat, since the family was expecting him. Eager to meet his friend and keep himself safe, Huck tells Aunt Sally and Silas that he must return to town to fetch his baggage, quickly explaining they need not go along with him.

Chapter 33

Huck meets Tom Sawyer on the road and stops his stagecoach. Tom is alarmed. He thinks Huck is a ghost. Huck reassures him and they settle down to catch up.

Huck tells Tom what has happened at the Phelps's, and Tom thinks about how they should carry on. He tells Huck to return to the farm with his suitcase. Tom returns to town and begins his trip to the Phelps's again.

Huck arrives back at the Phelps house, and soon after that, Tom arrives. The family is excited. They do not get very lots of visitors, so they make Tom welcome. Tom makes up a story about his hometown and then boldly kisses Aunt Sally right on the mouth. Shocked at his behavior, she hits him over the head with her spinning stick. Tom discloses that he is Sid Sawyer, Tom's brother.

Silas tells the family that their new slave Jim warned him about the Royal Nonesuch. He took it upon himself to inform the rest of the town. Silas figures the two cheats Jim spoke of will be ridden out of town that night. Huck and Tom climb out of their windows in order to inform the Duke and the King, but they are too late. They see the two men being paraded through the street covered in tar and feathers. Huck remarks that human beings can be awfully cruel to one another.

Chapter 34

Tom and Huck come up with ways to break Jim out of his detention center. Huck plans to get the raft, steal the key to the padlock, unlock the door and then float down the river some more. Tom claims that plan is too simple and would work too well. Tom's plan is much more elaborate and stylish, and takes a great deal longer to put into process.

The boys go to the shelter where Jim is being kept and search around. Tom decides that the best way, or at least the way that will take the longest, is to dig a hole for Jim to climb out of. The next day, he and Huck go behind the black man who is delivering Jim's food. Jim recognizes Huck and Tom and calls them by name. Both boys pretend not to hear. When he has an opportunity, Tom tells Jim that they are going to dig him out. Jim is in high spirits. He grabs Tom's hand and shakes it.

Chapter 35

To generate a fantastical story and game, Tom tries to find out how to make Jim into a real prisoner before his courageous escape. He decides that he and Huck

will have to cut off the leg of Jim's bed in order to free the chain. They will have to send him a knotted ladder made of sheets and give him a shirt to keep a diary on. They will also have to get him some tin plates to write messages on and throw out of the window. Tom tells Huck that they will use case-knives to dig Jim out, rather than the much quicker and more suitable picks and shovels. In this way they plan out Jim's release.

Chapter 36

The subsequent night, Tom and Huck creep out and start digging with their case knives. They wear out soon and their hands rapidly develop blisters. It seems they haven't accomplished anything. Tom sighs and agrees to use a pick and shovel, but only as long as they pretend to be using case knives. Huck agrees and tells Tom he is getting even-headed all the time.

The next day, they pilfer some tin plates and a brass candlestick for Jim to write with. They also finish digging the hole and make it possible for Jim to move at a snail's pace out. Jim wants to escape straight away, but Tom tells Jim all about the little things he needs to do first. He has to write in blood, throwing the tin plates out of the hut, etc. Jim thinks all of these thoughts are a little foolish, but agrees to do it. He tries to honor the help his friends are creating for him. Tom then makes the man who brings Jim his food, believe that Jim is enchanted. He says he will heal him by baking a pie. He plans to hide the sheet ladder. In this manner he wants to help his friend.

Chapter 37

At this point in the story, Aunt Sally notices that she has lost a sheet, a shirt, six candles, a spoon and a brass candlestick. Very bewildered by the strange disappearances, she becomes absolutely furious. Aunt Sally shouts at poor Silas, who in due course discovers the missing spoon in his pocket, where Tom had placed it. He looks humiliated and promises her he has no idea how the spoon got into his pocket. Aunt Sally then yells at everyone to get away from her and let her get some peace and settle down.

Tom decides that the only way to steal back the spoon is to perplex his poor Aunt Sally even further. Tom has Huck hide one of spoons while Aunt Sally counts them, and then Huck puts it back when Aunt Sally counts again. By the time she has finished counting, Aunt Sally has no idea exactly how many spoons she has, and Tom is able to take one without any more trouble. Tom then does the same thing with the sheet, by stealing one out of her closet and putting it on the clothesline, only to remove it the subsequent day. The boys bake Jim a witch's pie, in which they conceal the rope. It takes them several hours to get it right because the pie is so large, but they to end with succeed. The man who normally takes Jim his food takes the pie in to him, and Jim happily removes the rope.

Chapter 38

Tom designs an emblem for Jim to etch on the walls so as to permanently leave his mark on the prison cell. After that, Tom works out three grief-stricken inscriptions and tells Jim he must carve them into a rock. Huck and Tom go to bring back an old grindstone for Jim to use as his rock. The stone is too heavy for them to carry. They are forced to take help from Jim. He has to leave his prison and help them. Jim rolls the rock into the hut and begins to work on the inscriptions.

After this, Tom decides that Jim should have some cell companions, such as snakes and spiders. He tells Jim that he and Huck will discover some for him. Jim is violently against the idea. Tom then tries to convince Jim to get a flower so he can water it with his tears. Jim replies that the flower would not last very long. Tom finally gets annoyed, and quits for the night. He is in a bad mood.

Chapter 39

Both the loyal friends, Huck and Tom spend the next day catching creatures to live with Jim in his cell. They first assemble about fifteen rats. Aunt Sally's son releases them by accident and both Tom and Huck get beatings for bringing rats into her house. The boys are adamant to pursue their plan. They catch another fifteen rats, along with some spiders, caterpillars, frogs, and bugs. At the end of the day they gather some garter snakes and put them in a bag. Miserably enough, after dinner they find out all the snakes runaway in the house as well. Huck remarks that there was no

shortage of snakes in the house for quite a while after that. This caused a lot of disturbance.

Uncle Silas decides to start advertising Jim as a runaway slave in some of the local newspapers because he has failed to receive a reply to his earlier letters. The agricultural estate to which he wrote never existed, so, he never received a reply. Tom thinks of a plan about how to stop Silas. He sends anonymous letters that warn him off this plan of action. Tom and Huck first plant a letter reading, "*Beware. Trouble is brewing. Keep a sharp lookout*". The next night the boys nail up a letter containing a skull and crossbones. They follow it up with a picture of a coffin. This they do to scare Uncle Silas.

Tom plans a final overthrow by drafting a longer letter. Pretending to be a member of a gang of robbers who are planning to steal Jim from the family, he warns them that the gang will be coming late at night from the north to get Jim. The family is terribly frightened and does not know what to do. To a certain extent Tom has succeeded in frightening the whole family.

Chapter 40

The letter has a strong effect. Over fifteen farmers carrying weapons are sitting in the house waiting for the robbers to come during the night of the escape. Huck is terrified for their safety. He slips out the window and tells Tom they must leave without delay or they will be shot. Tom gets very thrilled when he hears about how many people came to seize them.

When Tom, Huck and Jim start to move away from the hut, Tom gets trapped on the fence and his britches rip quite loudly. All three start to run. The farmers shoot after them. When they get to a dark area, Huck, Jim, and Tom hide behind a bush and let the whole pack of farmers and dogs run past them.

When they are out of the reach of the farmers, they advance to where the raft is concealed. Tom tells Jim he is a free man again, and that he will always be a free man from now on. Jim feels grateful. He thanks him and tells him it was a great

escape plan. Tom then shows them where he was hit by a bullet in the leg. Jim is concerned for Tom's health. Jim rips up one of the Duke's old shirts and ties up the leg with it. He wants to care for Tom in his hurt state. Jim tells Tom that he is not going to budge until they get a doctor there and make sure he is safe. Tom gets mad at both of them and shouts. Huck ignores him and gets the canoe ready to go to town. Tom makes him guarantee to blindfold the doctor before bringing him back to their hiding place so that the doctor does not leak out the secret of their hiding there.

Chapter 41

To find a doctor, Huck goes to town. The doctor does not allow Huck to come along. He makes Huck tell him where the raft is and takes the canoe out alone to find Tom and Jim. Huck falls takes a nap on a woodpile while waiting for him to come back. When he wakes up, he is told the doctor has not yet returned. Huck soon sees Silas, who is very delighted Huck is not hurt. Collectively, they go to the post office, and Silas asks where Sid is. Huck makes up a story about Sid taking off to gather news about the events of the night. When they return home, Aunt Sally makes a fuss over Huck, but is glad he has returned.

A large congregation is held at the house. The women discuss how they suppose Jim must have been fanatical due to Jim's grindstone inscriptions and the tools found in his hut, all of which Huck and Tom actually crafted. Aunt Sally is apprehensive about Sid's location. Huck tells her the same tale he told Uncle Silas, but it does not set her mind at ease. During the night, Huck sneaks out several times. Each time sees her sitting with a lit candle on the front porch. She is waiting for Sid's return. Huck feels very regretful for her and wishes he could tell her the whole thing.

Chapter 42

The next day, the doctor comes. He brings Tom on a stretcher and Jim in chains. Tom is exhausted due to a fever from the bullet wound, but is still alive. Aunt Sally takes him inside and straight away starts to care for him. Tom improves speedily and is almost completely better by the next day. Huck goes into the bedroom to sit with Tom and see how he is doing. Aunt Sally walks in as well and while both of them

are sitting there, Tom wakes up. He, without more ado, starts to tell Aunt Sally about everything the two of them did and how they managed to help Jim escape. Aunt Sally cannot believe they were creating all such nuisance around her house.

When Tom hears that Jim has been recaptured he shouts at them that they cannot chain Jim up anymore. He tells them that Jim has been free ever since Miss Watson died and freed him in her will. They say that Miss Watson was so embarrassed about planning to sell Jim that she felt it best to liberate him.

Suddenly, Aunt Polly who is Aunt Sally's sister, comes. Aunt Sally is so astonished that she rushes over to her sister to give her a hug. Aunt Polly tells Aunt Sally that the boys veiled as Tom and Sid are actually Huck and Tom. Self-conscious, the boys look quite shamefaced. Aunt Polly only gets annoyed when she discovers that Tom has been stealing and hiding her letters. She also explains to Aunt Sally that in regards to Jim, Tom is correct. Miss Watson freed Jim in her will.

Chapter 43

Tom tells Huck he had planned for them to run all the way to the mouth of the Mississippi if they had managed to escape safe and sound. Jim gets a positive welcome in the house because of how well he cared for Tom when he was sick. Tom, feeling slightly guilty, gives Jim forty dollars for putting up with them the entire time and for being such a good prisoner. Jim turns to Huck and tells him he was right about being a rich man one day. This all is happening in a light vein.

Huck asks about his six thousand dollars. He thinks Pap managed to take it all. However, Tom explains that Pap was never seen again after Huck disappeared. Finally, Jim reveals that the man he and Huck found dead in the floating house was in fact Pap, but Jim had not wanted Huck to see him. Huck ends the novel by announcing that Aunt Sally wants to adopt him now, so he needs to start planning on heading west since he tried to be civilized once before, and did not like it. Now he wants to consider things in a fresh vein.

19.4 LET US SUM UP

We see in the second half of the story of the novel, the same thrill and fervor

continues as was existent in the first half. The three adventurous boys are time and again separated from one another but their loyalty is unfailing. They are closely bound and committed to each other. Through a long chain of events they are re-united. Each one individually gets justice from society as well as destiny. They undergo all sorts of troubles and take a lot of risk to save each other. This tendency is appreciated in the end by all the family members who finally give the threesome their dues.

19.5 SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. What does Boggs do? Why is he killed?
2. How does the crowd react to Bogg's death?
3. How does the Shakespearean show fare?
4. Why are the men enraged? How much money did the con-artists make out of the show?
5. Does Jim remember his family? What does he tell about his daughter?
6. How do the King and the Duke become a part of the Wilks's family?
7. What do the King and the Duke do to win the trust of the townspeople?
8. What does Dr. Robinson feel about the two men?
9. When does Huck decide he cannot let the King and the Duke steal the money from the benevolent girls?
10. Is it easy for Huck to steal the money and hide it?
11. How and why does Huck help Mary Jane?
12. Why was Peter Wilks's body dug out?
13. How do the King, the Duke and Huck manage to run away from the burial place?
14. What is the conflict in Huck's mind regarding Jim's release?

15. What happens when Huck goes to the door of Phelps farm?

16. What happens when Huck meets Tom Sawyer on the road?

17. Why does Huck remark that human beings can be awfully cruel to one another?

18. How do Huck and Tom reach Jim at the Phelps'?

19. What does Tom suggest to generate a fantastical story and game?

20. What plan does Tom make to prove that Jim is enchanted?

21. How do Huck and Tom perplex Aunt Sally about the missing things?

22. Why does Tom get annoyed and quit for the night?

23. What creatures do the boys gather to put into Jim's cell?

24. Discuss the encounter between the farmers and the three boys?

25. What treatment does Jim get in the end?

19.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. The man who kills Boggs is….

   a) Colonel Sherburn b) Columbus
   c) Vasco da Gama d) Hitler

2. The King and the Duke tout a show titled….

   a) Nursery rhymes b) Jingle bells
   c) The Royal Nonesuch d) Tra la la

3. From the first few days of the show the King and the Duke earned….

   a) 15 dollars b) 75 dollars
   c) 200 dollars d) 465 dollars

4. The person who lost her hearing in Jim's family is his….

   a) Wife b) Daughter
   c) Mother d) Aunt

5. Mary Jane, Susan, Joanna are daughters of the….family.

   a) Royal b) Wilks's

c) Village d) Town

6. The man who warns the three girls against the deceptive King is….

a) Dr. Robinson b) Dr. Thomson
c) Dr. Wilson d) Dr. Watson

7. The youngest daughter in the Wilks's family is….

a) Lorreta b) Henretta
c) Margretta d) Joanna

8. Huck hides the money stolen from the King and the Duke in….

a) Cupboard b) Cellar
c) Corridor d) Peter Wilks's coffin

9. The most beautiful girl that Huck has ever met in his life is….

a) Violet b) Pancy
c) Mary Jane d) Lily

10. Peter Wilks had his initials tattooed on his….

a) Chest b) Right arm
c) Left arm d) Shoulder

11. After escaping from the Wilk's burial, the escapees reach a village named….

a) Troy b) Venice
c) France d) Pikesville

12. Towards the end of the story, Jim is sold to the….family.

a) Raymond b) Bata
c) Woodland d) Phelps

13. Who tears the letter and says, "All right, then, I'll go to hell"

a) Sam b) Sunny
c) Shakira d) Huck

14. Aunt Sally is the aunt of….

a) Polly b) Tom

c) Huck d) Jim

15. Aunt Polly is Aunt Sally's….

a) Mother b) Sister

c) Grandmother d) Great grandmother

19.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. How do the king and the Duke plan to enact scenes from Shakespeare to earn money?
2. What response does The Royal Nonesuch get from the audience?
3. Why do the con-artists paint Jim in blue and write, "Sick Arab – but harmless when not out of his head"?
4. How does the King come to know of the prospect of becoming Wilks's brother?
5. Huck is initially with the King and the Duke in their plans. Why does he want to save the three sisters from being cheated in the later part of the story?
6. How does Huck steal the money and hide it in Peter Wilks's coffin?
7. Why do the con-artists break up the slave family and sell them?
8. Describe the confusion which arises when Peter Wilks's real brothers reach home.
9. Describe the meeting between Aunt Sally and Aunt Polly.
10. Discuss the loyalty in relationship between the three friends. How are all of them suitably rewarded in the end?

19.8 ANSWERS TO SAQ's & MCQ's

After reading the content of the lesson the concepts must be clear to you. If you have been able to find out the answers to the exercise questions, you deserve praise. If you have not been able to find any one of the answers, here is a list of the answers. Refer to these for your convenience.

19.8.1 ANSWERS TO SAQ's

1. A man Boggs rides into town on the day of the show. He is a drunk. He comes in each month and threatens to kill a man, but in reality never troubles anyone. This time, he is after a Colonel Sherburn, the wealthiest man in town and a storeowner. Boggs stands outside the store and shouts insults at the Colonel. The Colonel comes out of his store and tells Boggs that he will put up with the insults until one o'clock and after that he will kill him if Boggs utters even one word. Boggs continues persistently. At accurately 1pm, the Colonel appears. He kills Boggs on the spot. Precisely at that moment, Boggs's daughter comes. She comes to save her father, but she is too late in coming.

2. The crowd is very angry. It travels to Sherburn's store and rips down the front fence. They stop the progress of their movements when Sherburn comes out with a shotgun and peacefully stands in front of them. He lectures the crowd on how wretched they are. He also tells them that they are being led by half of a man, Buck Harkness, and calls them all cowards. After his speech, he cocks his gun. The crowd runs off in every direction because it is scared.

3. The Shakespearean show is a failure. Only twelve people turn up. None of them stays until the end. In response, the Duke prints up some new handbills touting a show titled the Royal Nonesuch. At the end of the handbill, he cleverly adds the line, "Ladies and Children Not Admitted". He claims that if such a line does not bring an audience, then he does not know Arkansas.

4. The men are enraged that the show is so undersized. They feel cheated. They want to take revenge on the Duke and King. Before they can rush the stage in protest, one man stands up and tells them that they will be the objects of ridicule in the town if it ever is discovered how badly they were cheated. They all agree to leave and advertize the show for being wonderful so the rest of the town can be cheated as well. So, the next night's concert is also full, and the audience leaves just as angry. The third night, all the men show up, carrying rotten eggs, dead cats, and other foul items with them. The Duke pays a man to mind the door and he and Huck rush away to the raft. They

immediately push out onto the river and the King emerges from the wigwam where he and Jim have been hiding all along. Together, the two con-artists made four hundred sixty-five dollars.

5. Jim is sorrowful over no longer being able to see his wife and children. Huck comments that Jim cares as much about his family as a white person would. Jim then tells Huck a story. It is about when he was with his daughter, Elizabeth, one day. Jim told her to shut the door and she just stood there smiling at him. Jim got nuts that she did not comply with his orders. He yelled at her. He finally shattered her on the side of the head for not listening to him. Ten minutes later Jim returned and his daughter still had not closed the door. She was standing in the same place, crying. At that moment, a strong wind slammed the door behind her, causing Jim to jump. However, his daughter never moved an inch. Jim realized his poor daughter had lost her audible range. Jim tells Huck that he burst out crying upon making this realization and grabbed his daughter to give her a hug. Ever since, he has felt terrible about how he treated her. He becomes emotional at the memory of his daughter.

6. The King and Huck cross the river and meet a young fool waiting for the ferry to Orleans. He tells them all about how a Peter Wilks has died. This man had left his whole estate to his daughters and brothers. The two brothers have not yet arrived from England. This greatly disappointed the man before he died. The King takes a wholehearted curiosity in the story and gathers every point he can. After collecting all the details, the King approaches the Duke and tells him the whole story. The two men agree to pretend to be Peter Wilks's brothers from Sheffield, England. Huck acts as a servant. They get a steamboat to take them to the town and drop them off. Their strategy works perfectly and when they hear that Peter is dead, both men put up a huge cry and lament. Huck remarks that, "It was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race." In this way they become a part of the Wilks' household.

7. The King and Duke ascertain they have received the bigger part of the estate property as well as three thousand dollars cash. The three girls have also

received three thousand dollars and the house they live in. Wilks's will discloses where in the cellar to find the cash. The two men go downstairs and find it. The King and Duke count the money and find four hundred and fifteen dollars short. To ease any mistrust, they add the money they made from the Royal Nonesuch to the quantity. In order to win the town over to their side permanently, they courteously give their share of the money to the three girls.

8. The King gives a speech. He idiotically moves off the central topic. A Doctor Robinson enters the crowd, hears the King and laughs vigorously. He calls the King a deceptive person because his British pronunciation is such a bad reproduction of the original way a Britisher speaks. The townspeople rally around the King, who has been so charitable, and defend him. The Doctor warns Mary Jane directly, but in response, she hands the bag of money to the King and tells him to invest it for her. The doctor advises them one final time of the mistakes they are making, and then goes away.

9. Joanna and Huck are the youngest two people present. They eat together. She asks him all about England. Huck tells her lies. He wants to sound well-informed. She catches him in several of the lies. Huck keeps pretending to choke on a chicken bone in order to think of a way out. Mary Jane overhears Joanna telling Huck that she does not believe him. She makes Joanna ask for forgiveness to Huck for being so bad-mannered. Huck decides he cannot let the King and Duke steal the money from these exceptionally benevolent girls. Huck goes to the King's room. He hears the Duke and King approaching. The conmen debate whether they should leave now that suspicion has been raised or wait until the rest of the property is sold off. They decide to stay and hide their money in the straw tick mattress. Huck steals the money without delay. He waits until it is secure to slip downstairs to put out of sight of the others.

10. Hiding the money is a big problem. Huck is afraid he will be trapped with the stolen money. As a result he hides it inside Peter Wilks's coffin. That day, the funeral service is held. It is interrupted by loud barking from a dog locked in the underground room. The undertaker goes to silence the dog. He returns

and tells the audience the dog caught a rat. Huck remarks that the service was long and tiresome. He is relieved when Peter Wilks and the money are at last buried.

11. Huck helps Mary Jane leave the house and reside with a friend across the river. Before she leaves, he writes down where the money is located so she will be able to find it later on. Huck is afraid that if Mary Jane stays at the house, her face will give away Huck's lack of caution. Huck tells her sisters that she is across the river trying to stir up interest in buying the house. Huck remarks that he has never forgotten Mary Jane. He thinks she is one of the most beautiful girls he has ever met.

12. It strikes Harvey Wilks that his departed brother had his initials tattooed on his chest. He challenges the King to tell him what was on Peter's chest. He is thinking that the men who had laid his brother out would have seen the mark and will be able to determine who is lying. The King continues pretending. He does not want to be caught. He tells them Peter had a blue arrow tattooed on his chest. The men who laid out Peter Wilks cannot remember seeing anything. As a consequence they are forced to dig up the body.

13. The whole town travels to the place of burial. They finally dig out and open the casket. They find out the gold Huck has hidden there. The men holding the King and Duke let go to get a look at the money. Taking advantage of this occasion, the three men-Huck, the King, and the Duke run to the river as fast as they can. Huck gets to the raft and takes off down the river. He wants to escape the two men. When the Duke and King catch up to him in a little skiff, he almost starts to shed tears.

14. Huck thinks about his next course of action. He is split between two thoughts. On one hand there is his friendship for Jim and on the other, his principle that helping a runaway slave is a sin. Huck finally writes a letter to Miss Watson explaining where Jim is. Not quite contented, he thinks about it some more, and forcibly tears apart the letter saying, "*All right, then, I'll go to hell!*"

15. Huck decides to rely on his luck. He goes directly up to the front door of the

Phelps's farm. He is quickly encircled by about fifteen hound dogs. They take flight when a large black woman chases them away. Aunt Sally emerges and hugs Huck, saying "*It's you, at last! - ain't it?*" Utterly surprised, Huck merely mutters "*yes'm*." Aunt Sally pulls Huck into the house and starts to ask him why he is so late. Not sure how to respond, Huck says the steamboat blew a cylinder. The woman asks if anyone was hurt, to which Huck replies, "*No'm, killed a nigger*". Before he has a chance to answer any more questions, Silas Phelps returns home after picking up his nephew at the landing stage.

16. Huck meets Tom Sawyer on the road and stops his stagecoach. Tom is alarmed. He thinks Huck is a ghost. Huck reassures him and they settle down to catch up. Huck tells Tom what has happened at the Phelps's, and Tom thinks about how they should carry on. He tells Huck to return to the farm with his suitcase. Tom returns to town and begins his trip to the Phelps's again.

17. Silas tells the family that their new slave Jim warned him about the Royal Nonesuch. He took it upon himself to inform the rest of the town. Silas figures the two cheats Jim spoke of will be ridden out of town that night. Huck and Tom climb out of their windows in order to inform the Duke and the King, but they are too late. They see the two men being paraded through the street covered in tar and feathers. Huck remarks that human beings can be awfully cruel to one another.

18. The boys go to the shelter where Jim is being kept and search around. Tom decides that the best way, or at least the way that will take the longest, is to dig a hole for Jim to climb out of. The next day, he and Huck go behind the black man who is delivering Jim's food. Jim recognizes Huck and Tom and calls them by name. Both boys pretend not to hear. When he has an opportunity, Tom tells Jim that they are going to dig him out. Jim is in high spirits. He grabs Tom's hand and shakes it.

19. To generate a fantastical story and game, Tom tries to find out how to make Jim into a real prisoner before his courageous escape. He decides that he and

Huck will have to cut off the leg of Jim's bed in order to free the chain. They will have to send him a knotted ladder made of sheets and give him a shirt to keep a diary on. They will also have to get him some tin plates to write messages on and throw out of the window. Tom tells Huck that they will use case-knives to dig Jim out, rather than the much quicker and more suitable picks and shovels. In this way they plan out Jim's release.

20. They pilfer some tin plates and a brass candlestick for Jim to write with. They also finish digging the hole and make it possible for Jim to move at a snail's pace out. Jim wants to escape straight away, but Tom tells Jim all about the little things he needs to do first. He has to write in blood, throwing the tin plates out of the hut, etc. Jim thinks all of these thoughts are a little foolish, but agrees to do it. He tries to honor the help his friends are creating for him. Tom then makes the man who brings Jim his food, believe that Jim is enchanted. He says he will heal him by baking a pie. He plans to hide the sheet ladder. In this manner he wants to help his friend.

21. Tom decides that the only way to steal back the spoon is to perplex his poor Aunt Sally even further. Tom has Huck hide one of spoons while Aunt Sally counts them, and then Huck puts it back when Aunt Sally counts again. By the time she has finished counting, Aunt Sally has no idea exactly how many spoons she has, and Tom is able to take one without any more trouble. Tom then does the same thing with the sheet, by stealing one out of her closet and putting it on the clothesline, only to remove it the subsequent day. The boys bake Jim a witch's pie, in which they conceal the rope. It takes them several hours to get it right because the pie is so large, but they to end with succeed. The man who normally takes Jim his food takes the pie in to him, and Jim happily removes the rope.

22. Tom decides that Jim should have some cell companions, such as snakes and spiders. He tells Jim that he and Huck will discover some for him. Jim is violently against the idea. Tom then tries to convince Jim to get a flower so he can water it with his tears. Jim replies that the flower would not last very long. Tom finally gets annoyed, and quits for the night.

23. Both the loyal friends, Huck and Tom spend the next day catching creatures to live with Jim in his cell. They first assemble about fifteen rats. Aunt Sally's son releases them by accident and both Tom and Huck get beatings for bringing rats into her house. The boys are adamant to pursue their plan. They catch another fifteen rats, along with some spiders, caterpillars, frogs, and bugs. At the end of the day they gather some garter snakes and put them in a bag. Miserably enough, after dinner they find out all the snakes runaway in the house as well. Huck remarks that there was no shortage of snakes in the house for quite a while after that.

24. Over fifteen farmers carrying weapons are sitting in the house waiting for the robbers to come during the night of the escape. Huck is terrified for their safety. He slips out the window and tells Tom they must leave without delay or they will be shot. Tom gets very thrilled when he hears about how many people came to seize them. When Tom, Huck and Jim start to move away from the hut, Tom gets trapped on the fence and his britches rip quite loudly. All three start to run. The farmers shoot after them. When they get to a dark area, Huck, Jim, and Tom hide behind a bush and let the whole pack of farmers and dogs run past them.

25. Jim gets a positive welcome in the house because of how well he cared for Tom when he was sick. Tom, feeling slightly guilty, gives Jim forty dollars for putting up with them the entire time and for being such a good prisoner. Jim turns to Huck and tells him he was right about being a rich man one day.

19.8.2 ANSWERS TO MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1.	Colonel Sherburn	2.	The Royal Nonesuch
3.	465 dollars	4.	Daughter
5.	Wilks's family	6.	Dr. Robinson
7.	Joanna	8.	Peter Wilks's coffin
9.	Mary Jane	10.	Chest
11.	Pikesville	12.	Phelps
13.	Huck	14.	Tom

15. Sister

19.9 SUGGESTED READING

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5. Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. *Was Huck Black?: Mark Twain and African-American Voices*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
6. Hoffman, Andrew Jay. *Twain's Heroes, Twain's Worlds*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988.
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11. Wieck, Carl F. *Refiguring* Huckleberry Finn. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2000.

ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL "ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY"

UNIT STRUCTURE

20.1 Introduction

20.2 Objectives

20.3 Analysis of the Story

20.4 Characters in the Novel

20.5 Analysis of The Adventurous Threesome

20.6 Let Us Sum Up

20.7 Short Answer Type questions

20.8 Multiple Choice Questions

20.9 Examintion Oriented Question

20.10 Answers to SAQ's & MCQ's

20.10.1 Answers to SAQ's

20.10.2 Answers to MCQ's

20.11 Suggested Reading

20.1 INTRODUCTION

In all the preceding lessons you have seen the various aspects about the most famous American author and humorist Mark Twain and his novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Now we will analyze the key points related to the author as well as his globally famous work. The learners will have to travel the whole length of the novel because it is replete with numerous critical factors which should be taken note

of. The long time taken to write the novel and the concept of the story with a number of themes woven into one complete whole is indeed a wonderful enterprise that the man of letters undertook. A critical analysis of the story and its characters is essential for scholarly approach to this work. The technicalities of the novel should be meticulously considered for literary evaluation. This lesson will help the scholars in this regard.

20.2 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this unit are:

- That the learner should have read, with care and understanding, this representative work of one of the major American authors.
- That the learner should be able to give an account of the history of English novels, especially with reference to *Mark Twain.*
- That the learner should be able to identify and explain major events of English history and major literary and social issues relevant to the development of prose writing in the days of *Mark Twain*.
- That the learner should be able to demonstrate familiarity with the bibliographic tools and resources appropriate to the study of American novels and of the author cited above, and to apply these tools and resources to literary research.
- That the learner should be able to demonstrate capacity to develop critical analyses of novels of the nineteenth century in the context of established critical approaches.
- That the learner should be able to recognize, identify, and use accurately literary terms and concepts applicable to the American novels and novelists and to understand and apply appropriate literary conventions.
- That the learner should be able to express insights which relate his readings of the novelist to fundamental questions of human behavior and value, and to contemporary thought.

- In this lesson we will familiarize you with the globally famous work of the famous writer Mark Twain who was a famous American novelist of the nineteenth century.
- We will discuss important points related to the author and facilitate your efforts of comprehending and learning by:

  a) giving you detailed information about the novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*

  b) giving you glossary of difficult words and phrases.

  c) giving you practice to have your own assessment by trying to make you answer questions in your own language.

  d) giving you multiple choice questions to make concepts more clear and avoid confusions between similar options.

  e) giving you the correct answers so that you may verify your own answers.

  f) discussing the summary of the lesson.

  g) giving a concise list of the important sources suggested for reading.

20.3 ANALYSIS OF THE STORY

Chapters 1-5

The opening sentence introduces Huck in slang, friendly manner: "You don't know about me". From the very opening words of the novel, Twain makes it obvious that Huck is the storyteller. He communicates that the person who reads will hear the story of his adventures straight from him. Along with this, to make it apparent to readers unknown with The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, he tells that this novel exists independently; Huck explains that if they haven't read Twain's earlier work, it "ain't no matter". This way, the reader is confident enough to continue reading the present work without suffering from any sense of loss about not having read the earlier novel.

The first important character introduced to us is Widow Douglas. She is a

principled woman who hopes to take care of Huck and transform him into a civilized child. The reader without more ado understands that the most important theme of the novel is the inconsistency between civilization and freedom. In harmony with Rousseau, Twain wants to suggest that civilization corrupts rather than improves human beings. In the first chapter, Huck is forced to change his ordinary character into the mold the Widow Douglas demands from him. He feels restricted in new clothes. He hates being restricted to eating dinner only when the dinner bell rings. Twain skillfully contrasts this new standard of living with Huck's old way of life. We find an interesting illustration to this effect when Huck compares eating dinner off a plate to eating from a "barrel of odds and ends", which suggests a pig's slop bucket. Here, Twain explains that in his earlier life, Huck competed for food with pigs. He does not forget to highlight the fact that Huck enjoyed eating from the slop bucket more than eating from the plate. Huck's relationship with food is a well-known theme throughout the novel, and during his time on Jackson's Island and working his way down river, Huck revels in and enjoys his ad hoc meals.

In the first chapter, we detect that Huck is paradoxically trapped in a "civilized" world. His preference is to live freely in nature. Irony can be found in other areas of the novel too. For instance, Huck explains that the Widow Douglas wouldn't let him smoke, even though, ironically, she behind closed doors uses snuff herself. Irony appears yet for a second time when Miss Watson tries to warn Huck about hell. This warning is juxtaposed by her excruciating educational lessons. Huck finds spelling very difficult to learn and hates the lessons so much, that he comments hell sounds more agreeable. In this ironic reference, Twain reminds the reader of Huck's childhood virtuousness. Only a child would judiciously choose hell over heaven.

Superstition enters and spreads throughout the story, so that every part or aspect is affected in the novel. The first chapter provides quite a few examples of Huck's superstitious side, specifically in his interpretation of the night sounds as death, and in how he believes the spider burning to death in the flame of his candle is a serious omen of bad luck. After killing the spider, Huck immediately attempts a counter-charm, even though he knows there is no way of undoing bad luck.

Characteristically, Huck is a very levelheaded person, making his devotion to superstition slightly ironic. Huck is very consistent and sensible. For instance, in determining that he would have a preference for heaven over hell after Miss Watson describes the two to him. Huck uses very logical way of thinking that the reader can understand. Superstition, on the other hand, is absolutely irrational. Thus, when confronted by superstition Huck behaves contrary to his usual manner, perhaps a reminder that he is just a child, or an allusion to typical sensibilities of the time. Likewise, superstition symbolizes Huck's fear of the unknown; Huck is most superstitious whenever he is extremely worried about his future, such as in this opening chapter and afterwards while on Jackson's Island. Superstition also serves to foretell proceedings throughout the novel, as Huck knows the bad luck will return to trouble him. For example, after Huck by coincidence brushes the spider into his candle flame, Pap returns to town and creates a whole lot of problems for him.

This chapter introduces the other boys in Huck's town. It is important to become aware of the fact that although Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer are best friends, the other boys are more than willing to cut Huck out of Tom's gang. Accepting that Huck is not very popular helps explain his feelings of loneliness in the town; the adults keep trying to "*sivilize*" him, and the other boys tend to ignore him.

Mark Twain attractively juxtaposes theft and honor. These contradictory ideas are conveniently combined by Tom Sawyer, who understandably explains to the other boys that robbery is honorable. Tom's definition appears to be absolute nonsense. However, as the reader will see by the end of the book, this scene actually parallels the novel's ending, where Huck and Tom steal Jim out of slavery. As a consequence, Twain truly demonstrates how honor and robbery can exist side by side.

Tom Sawyer's gang can be viewed as a juvenile representation of society as a whole, an example of a synecdoche. Tom creates a set of rules, ideas, and morals that he expects the boys to hold fast to, all of which he gets from books. Thus, books form a foundation for civilization; using books, Tom creates a society for his gang of friends. Ironically, Twain mocks the adult world in this chapter by showing that although the adult world relies on books such as the Bible to define civilization, pirate and robber books might also be adequate.

Slavery is introduced in this chapter through Tom and Huck's communications with Miss Watson's slave, Jim. As the story of the novel progresses, slavery slowly but surely becomes a larger issue. It is important to note Huck's views towards slavery at this point so that they may be compared to his views later on. In this chapter, Huck comments that Jim, "*was most ruined, for a servant*", thus indicating he supports the idea of slavery. Only later in the novel does Huck start to question whether Jim should be a servant at all. This way Twain shows his dislike for slavery.

Huck's level-headedness and literalness come into sight here. Twain goes to great lengths to show that Huck is a logical thinker who only believes what he can see with his own eyes. Thus, Tom's band becomes lackluster when all they do is do violence to turnip wagons and Sunday School picnics. Unlike Tom Sawyer, Huck is not capable to make-believe that the picnic is really an Arab army. The same thing happens with respect to Huck's Pap; Huck decides that Pap cannot be dead because the dead person was floating on its back rather than its face, meaning that it must have been a woman. We see Huck is very simple in his approach.

This focus on judiciousness and literalness is used by Twain to further assault religion. Huck is told to pray for what he wants, but when he prays and does not get anything, he decides that praying is meaningless. Huck also thinks about the Christian perception of always helping other people. When he realizes that Christianity seems to offer him no personal benefit in life, he quickly discards it as quite meaningless.

Superstition figures again when Huck asks Jim to help him decide what to do about Pap. Jim uses a large hairball he believes to have magical abilities to be of assistance to Huck. This is the first time that Twain foreshadows the happenings of the rest of the novel. Jim mentions "*two gals flyin*" around Huck's life, a light one and a dark one, a rich one and a poor one. This is of course a reference to Huck and to Jim, since Huck is rich and Jim is poor. Jim's comment that Huck should keep away from the water will go unheeded when both of them end up running away downriver. They cannot keep away from the river.

Huck strongly focuses about a split between what can be termed "*natural learning*" versus "*book learning*". He has been brought up with only "*natural*

learning," such as how to continue to exist in the wild. This can be contrasted with Tom Sawyer's "*book learning*", which has little authentic application in Huck's life. Twain makes fun of it by portraying the absurdity of Tom's robber band. The effectiveness of Huck's type of learning is persistently experienced. We can see this when he spots Pap's boot marks in the snow. This split between natural and book learning will be brought to a head when Huck encounters Pap directly. Twain makes his views very impressive in this manner.

Chapters 6-10

These five chapters are very important as they expose a great deal about the protagonist Huck as a person. Huck appears before us as an energetic personality who fights forcefully for his life. Huck is imprisoned by his alcoholic father Pap. His break away from Pap demonstrates his intelligence for innovation, as does his aptitude to live alone on Jackson's Island. Huck does not need anyone's help to stay alive, and the only sign that he is not absolutely in high spirits is his comment that he sometimes feels friendless.

Huck's persona is quite outstandingly recognized throughout these chapters. He exhibits an unassuming nature in that he continuously underplays his bright ideas. Therefore, when he fakes his death, he says in a self-congratulatory vein that even Tom Sawyer would have been proud of the make-believe attempt that he is making. This indicates that Tom would have been able to fake it better but that it was good enough to earn some admiration. The innocent nature of Huck is also discovered in his encounter with Jim. Jim makes him take an oath not to expose his secrecy. He then tells him that he has run away from Miss Watson. Huck is at once faced with the accountability of protecting Jim or telling the town the reality. He chooses to stay with Jim. It is noticeable here that as a young boy who has lived outside of main stream society for quite some time, he is still away from the prejudices of the older folks in his town. This youthfulness is reinforced by the image of Huck dressing up as a girl at the end of Chapter 10. This idea of Huck dressing up as a girl also makes the story humorous.

Huck shows exceptional strength of character. It leads Huck to refuse to disclose Jim. His fortitude at this stage of the novel is tested many times during the course of their travels. In a sense, it is Huck's anxious need to not be alone anymore that overcomes his fear of damnation for not turning in an escapee slave. While Tom Sawyer was his best friend as a playmate, Huck seeks someone who will be concerned about him as a person rather than as a simple play friend. While it is not at all clear that Jim will be able to assume this role, early indications lean towards the development of this relationship as Jim works to get Huck safely inside the cave and out of the rain.

The reader is unable to understand Mark Twain's intentions at times. Jim's intention for keeping Pap's death from Huck is vague. Jim could simply be trying to protect Huck's feelings, but there is also very likely a selfish motive. Jim has just revealed to Huck that he ran away from the widow. Were he to tell Huck that Pap died, there would be no reason for Huck to remain with Jim on the island. His fear would all be over and he would once again like to go and live freely. It is only the fear of being caught and tortured by Pap that forces Huck to stay on Jackson's island. Jim fears that Huck might at some point return to town and tell people where he is hiding. Thus, for Jim, it is a life and death decision whether or not to inform Huck of Pap's death. This is how the reader interprets this situation. Twain does not make it very evident why he kept Jim from disclosing the recovery of Pap's dead body.

Chapters 11-15

These chapters are basically focused on slavery. They provide insight into Jim's character. Jim is sincere and dependable, but also obstinate and mature. The chapters are very interesting because they test Jim's loyalty to Huck, and vice-versa. For the first time the novel is dealing with the issue of loyalty, which will later have a strong impact on each character's decisions. With the development of the plot, various traits of the prominent characters come up which were hitherto unknown.

Jim's honesty is recognized in several ways. The most effective example is his delight at seeing Huck alive again after they are separated by the fog. Jim gets

disappointed with Huck for tricking him into believing it was all a dream precisely because he had invested a great deal of emotional pain into the adventure. In this part of the novel, it becomes noticeable that Jim would be willing to sacrifice a great deal to guarantee Huck's safety. Thus he is loved by the reader for his loyalty.

The predicament at this stage of the novel is that Huck does not yet reciprocate Jim's sincere stance. Huck is not yet willing to sacrifice even a part of his life to guarantee Jim's wellbeing, and thus leads Jim from one adventure to another. Main of these is on the broken down steamboat or for the duration of the fog. This is significant because it is Huck's loyalty to Jim that will be tested later.

The obstinate and mature side of Jim is evidenced by his arguments with Huck and his attitude towards adventures. Huck comments that once Jim gets an idea into his head it is impossible to change it. He proves this to the reader by discussing Jim's opinions of Solomon and Frenchmen. Jim's stubbornness can to some extent be traced to his maturity. He to a great extent wishes to avoid any adventures because adventures bring complications. Jim would be happiest if he were able to get to Cairo and take the steamboat upriver with no interruptions. His sole dream is to reach Cairo and be free forever.

Mark Twain as a writer was very popular for his sense of irony. This section contains quite a lot of examples. His best use of irony concerns the three robbers on the broken down steamboat. When Huck and Jim lose their raft, they need to steal the robbers' skiff. However, the robbers return before they can steal it. The robbers are unscrupulously greedy. They decide that they want all of their money, including their partner's share. To grab the money from the third partner, they head back into the steamboat. Huck and Jim immediately steal the skiff. The irony is two-fold: not only are the robbers "robbed", they are also damned to die on the steamboat as a result of their self-indulgence. Huck attempts to have them rescued, but the river acts faster than he can, by dragging the wreck further and causing it to sink too far for anyone to survive. Thus, the robbers meet the fate they condemned their partner to, namely drowning.

Chapters 16-20

These chapters focus on social observations of the people and places along the Southern Mississippi. Each chapter introduces new characters and adventures that highlight particular prejudices or follies. Huck is also forced to play different roles as he tries to incorporate himself into each new circumstance. Through each of Huck's roles, the reader receives new insight into his personality and character. He has to be viewed with these many aspects in mind.

It is very interesting to note here that Twain offers social commentary in three separate escapades in the novel. First, two slave-hunters approach Huck's raft. Huck is afraid for Jim's security. He makes them believe his smallpox ridden family is on the raft. Anxious to avoid the plague, each man forks over $20 just to keep the raft away from town. While disease is a suitable concern, Twain demonstrates the fear with which people treat other sick people who need help and support. Instead of offering to help, the two men try to buy off the family and send them elsewhere. They panic them so much so that they want to keep them away at any cost.

Second, the Grangerford and Shepherdson families indulge in a violent, tragic dispute. The events reflect a modern day Romeo and Juliet theme. A Grangerford daughter and Shepherdson son run off. This causes a familial slaughter. Ironically, the two lovers are the only ones that survive. Huck explains how civilized, wealthy and respected the Grangerford family is, but then shatters this image by detailing the feud's excessive and tragic killings. Here, Twain demonstrates the utter stupidity of even the most educated and respected families, who can destroy themselves through nonsensical behavior and excessive pride. Their belief in the old traditional romantic literature is of no relevance but they adhere to it and ruin the whole of their families.

The last incident occurs when the King cheats an entire congregation out of money. His story about being a pirate and wishing to convert his brethren is preposterous and ridiculous. At the revival meeting, everyone is so overcome by the love of God and their fellow man that they believe him and make a generous contribution to his cause. With this anecdote, Twain is commenting on the trustfulness of religious zealots, which is in accordance with his attack on religion in the very

opening pages of the novel, when Huck decides that praying and heaven as described by Miss Watson as lousy alternatives to having fun. Twain's view of religion is clearly set forth in this and other novels, and he tends to express that devotion to religion is simply a waste of time. In fact religion does not require a man to indulge in so many activities. Faith needs no show.

All the way through these chapters, Huck over and over again assumes different characters and roles in order to survive and to protect Jim. At the Grangerford's, he pretends to be an orphan, to the slave-hunters he pretends to be an innocent boy living with a sick family, and to the Duke and Dauphin, he pretends to be an orphan traveling with his only slave. Each of these roles provides great insight into Huck's personality. When Buck is killed, Huck is profoundly affected by the whole tragedy and even admits to crying upon pulling his friend's dead body out of the river. He wishes that he had not played a role in causing the death of so many people, and, at the same time, realizes how foolish the disagreement is. He thinks that these people could have solved the whole situation amicably.

It is amazing that Huck persistently pretends to be less intelligent or less capable than he really is. It is easy to forget that he is only a boy of fourteen when he and Jim are floating down the river together. When they meet other people, Huck's communications are always at a lower, less mature level. For example, he tells the slave-hunters he is too feeble to drag the raft ashore by himself. In contrast to this, in reality he has handled the raft alone many times. When he and Buck are together, he shows far more maturity than Buck. This is clearly seen in his control in matters with reference to the dispute. Tom Sawyer also comes across as a young child in comparison to Huck's common sense approach to life.

Here we also find another noteworthy fact. Huck's interaction with the Duke and the King is at first confusing and later irritating. He and Jim both are quite conscious that the two men are cheat artists. This compels the reader to inquire why they put up with them. In reality, Huck is frightened of the consequences of crossing either man. He compares the men to Pap and remarks, "I learnt that the best way to get along with his kind of people is to let them have their own way". As a consequence, Huck

and Jim realize that rather then rouse up trouble with either of the men, it is best to play along and pretend they have been duped. Jim is unhappy with the situation. He observes at the end of Chapter 20 that he would prefer it if no more kings arrived during the trip. Huck seems to be considering a way out of the situation. Unfortunately, he is unable to come up with a good arrangement. To some extent, Huck enjoys watching the two men at work, since their actions produce more of an exciting activity for him.

Chapters 21-25

In these chapters, Twain again provides interpretation of human nature and presents a biting portrayal of society. Twain's 'version' of Shakespeare, Boggs's death, Jim's feelings about his family, and the Royal Nonesuch all seek to provoke the reader into analyzing the idiotic ways of society. These aspects of social life show how we are wasting our life by choosing the wrong and inferior things. Huck assists in this encouragement by adding commentary that brings Twain's critiques into sharper focus. He works as Twain's mouthpiece.

Twain mocks the ways of society very well. The use of Shakespeare is at once funny and tragic. In unfolding the butchered Hamlet's soliloquy, it is immediately noticeable that the Duke has messed up the lines. Furthermore, the vision of the King, with his white hair and whiskers, playing fair Juliet makes even more of a mockery of the plays. This also brings out Twain's humor.

Boggs's death attracts the reader's attention on a much more serious aspect of the society. Boggs is shot to death in front of a crowd of people, including his daughter. The disrespect Boggs showed to Colonel Sherburn barely justifies murder. Twain further derides the society for its gutless actions, as the mob ready to lynch Sherburn is easily manipulated and succumbs to cowardice. The murder of Boggs in broad daylight passes away very easily.

Twain also makes several piercing comments about the general mind-set towards blacks when Jim discusses his family. Huck comments that he is surprised to find that Jim is almost as concerned about his family as a white person. This prevailing

attitude, often invoked to justify breaking up slave families, is something Huck is beginning to overcome. Jim's touching story about his daughter Elizabeth, in which he hits her for not obeying him, is a powerful indication to Huck that Jim is in fact more concerned about his children than Huck's father ever was about him. Blacks are just as human as whites are. The social order failed to acknowledge this truth.

One concept of Twain is very original and innovative. The Royal Nonesuch is perhaps Twain's most brilliant philosophical creation, a show in which the audience sees exactly what it pays for: nothing. Not only does the title truthfully describe the show, but Twain cleverly has the Duke and King add the line, "Ladies and Children Not Admitted". Thus the show comments on human nature, namely that we cannot imagine a show being about nothing, even when the very title states it. The men are further fooled into thinking the Nonesuch must be some great, sexual thing, since their wives are excluded. Moreover, to avoid humiliation, the duped men then talk up the show to their friends. Again, Twain gives a mocking analysis of his fellow citizens by demonstrating how easily broken human egos are. The final showing, which truly is non-existent since the Duke and King run off before it starts, is a coup for the two conmen, who once again give the citizens exactly what they pay for. One wonders whether it is possible to hold them guilty of a crime, considering that in reality, they were honest about the substance of the show.

The conmen's next exciting activity proves them highly disgraceful individuals. The Duke and King sink even lower in their misuse of human acceptance and nature by pretending to be the uncles of three orphaned girls in order to steal their legacy. Huck's views on this design are clear. He calls the King and Duke "disgusting" and remarks that he is "ashamed of the human race". Their behavior and intentions both are much below the dignity of society.

These chapters offer us a great deal of new outlook into Huck Finn. He is apparently maturing in his views. This is clear by his belief that black and white people are not so different. He is also changing from a boy who lacks firm morals to a man with a commitment to values. Thus, his commentary is no longer merely descriptive, but increasingly evaluative. It is becoming obvious that Huck will soon

not be content to stand aside and let things slide past, as the metaphor of gliding down the river suggests. Instead, Huck will take a stand and assert himself as an individual. Huck's attitudes will eventually bear fruit in his actions, marking the final step in his journey towards maturity.

Chapters 26-30

As the story develops, we discover new events and happenings. These chapters mark Huck's first moments of maturity. Before this stage of development, he followed the authority of the elderly people around him, such as Pap, the Widow, Miss Watson, Judge Thatcher, and the King and Duke. The moment Huck decides to steal the money, he breaks free of this authority. For the first time, Huck acts on his convictions and morals to help other people, rather than simply acting on his personal desires. He shows signs of growth and a capacity of taking independent decisions.

Huck's relation with Mary Jane also highlights a budding aspect of his growth. For the first time in the novel we find that he shows an interest in women. In The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Huck viewed girls as nothing more than an annoyance and did not believe they were to be taken seriously. The protagonist is absolutely different here. Huck calls Mary Jane beautiful, and comments that when he saw her light a candle in the window, his "heart swelled up sudden, like to burst". The feelings for the young woman are very raw, sincere and natural here.

In addition, it is remarkable that Huck is anxious to get out of the clutches of the King and the Duke by the end of the Wilks ordeal. Huck is not simply terrified of them. In fact, when he first meets them he compares them to his Pap, but is truly attempting to break free from the authority and control that they hold over him. He wants to have his own identity.

It is important to note here that Jim is not a part of these scenes. Nevertheless, we do meet a slave family torn apart by the King and Duke. Twain places this scene directly after Jim's emotionally charged story of his daughter's hearing loss and their subsequent separation, a very purposeful choice. Twain was fervently opposed to slavery, and hated this aspect of the institution. Thus, Twain is trying to subconsciously

influence his reader every step of the way by directing their emotions towards compassion for the slaves. In observing the fate of this slave family, the reader begins to more powerfully take hold of Jim's reasons for running away. His struggle for freedom becomes more than clear to the reader.

Chapters 31-35

This section of the novel spectacularly forces Huck to finally decide what he believes about slavery, and, as such, solidify his own principles. The most powerful and touching scene occurs when Huck writes a letter to Miss Watson explaining where Jim is, only to tear it up, accept his fate no matter what the consequence of following his conscience, and set out to free Jim. Huck is willing to sacrifice his soul for Jim's freedom, showing a tremendous amount of personal growth. This scene indicates how his relationship with Jim has changed over the course of the journey downriver, from companion, to respected friend, to the only family Huck will acknowledge. Huck decides to free Jim after remembering all the times Jim protected and cared for him, something which no one else has ever done for Huck. In this manner Twain successfully establishes the relationship between man and man irrespective of the color of his skin.

There is bitter irony in Huck's story about the steamship cylinder exploding. Huck concocts the tale as an excuse for arriving in town so much later than expected, and when aunt Sally asks him if anyone was hurt, he replies "*No'm, killed a nigger*". Aunt Sally is pleased to hear that no white people were hurt or killed. She does not care that a black person died. In the beginning of the book, the reader could easily attribute racist attitudes to the culture and time, forgiving the speaker for his or her ignorance, but after being introduced to Jim, the reader is unable to maintain that distance. Thus, it is surprising to hear Huck make such a racist and hypocritical off handed comment, but perhaps he is simply speaking in a way he thinks Aunt Sally would relate. Through this statement Twain wants to convey how the worth of life of a white man and a black man are rated differently.

In this section, Twain's writing style also returns to that of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer. Tom's return signifies that reasonable thinking will fade away, and a

disproportionate sense of adventure and fantasy will take over. Huck quickly takes a backseat when Tom's unlimited creativity is released upon the Phelps home. This way the spirit of adventure once again takes the upper hand.

Tom's enthusiasm to steal a slave is surprising to Huck. It is somewhat of a surprise to the reader too, considering the long moral journey Huck experience to decide he would risk hell for his friend. Thus, Huck questions Tom's motive, and finally concludes it is simply Tom's juvenile love for adventure that is spurring him on. The reader must recognize this as a bogus hypothesis. Tom has never committed a true crime with serious moral repercussions, and is thus unlikely to do so now. As the reader discovers in later chapters, Tom knows that Jim is already free, although Jim is unaware. Therefore, Tom knows he and Huck aren't breaking the law, but keeps this information from Huck so he will continue to play the prisoner game. Tom is in fact a fun loving kind of a person and will always choose the path in which there is some thrill and fervor.

Chapters 36-40

Most of the actions in these chapters represent Tom's humorous adventures in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer. There is a grim anti-slavery undercurrent, as Jim and Huck are concerned only with breaking Jim out of slavery, and don't understand that for Tom, this is all just a game. Huck is serious and ethical in the whole decision.

These chapters provide a conclusion to Huck and Jim's journey downriver. Huck is reunited with Tom, and it is becoming clear that there will be happy ending for all. We have now moved away from Huck's story and reentered the story of Tom and Huck, which is where the novel began. Once again, Tom is making the major decisions. Huck simply plays along, and Jim plainly accepts. Fascinatingly, Tom is still the same boy he was when the reader last saw him in the earliest chapters of the novel. On the other hand, Huck has developed into a more mature, morally sound human being. Huck always thought that Tom's make believe adventures were not worth the time or effort Tom put into them. He is overjoyed to believe that they are truly setting Jim free, and releasing him from the bonds of slavery. For Huck, this is one of the most serious and dangerous actions he has ever undertaken, but for Tom,

it is all just a game. In any case Huck wants to see Jim free from the bondage of slavery and his happiness in the whole enterprise is beyond all limits.

Chapters 41-43

There are a number of key facts revealed in the final chapters that affect how the reader views each character. Tom announces that Jim is free. This declaration reveals why Tom was willing to help Huck in what Huck thought was a true offense. Since Jim was already a free man, Tom was not breaking any laws and therefore thought the entire tribulation was a great adventure. His boyhood temperament is a source of fun for the readers.

The second most important disclosure is that Pap is dead. Jim has known this for most of the journey, in fact since leaving Jackson's Island. However, Jim's impulse for hiding this secret from Huck is uncertain. One reason can be that Jim felt unhappy for Huck and wanted to care for him since he was now an orphan. The second hypothesis can be that Jim knew that if Huck found out Pap was dead, he would simply have returned to town and ended his runaway journey. His company was very crucial for Jim. Without Huck, Jim would have had a far more difficult journey downriver as a lone black man and runaway slave. Huck gave him a cover of safety. Having developed a strong understanding of Jim's character, it seems most likely that Jim was motivated by kindness, but a selfish desire for Huck's companionship might also have played a role. In any case, the reader can't deny the fact that the union did well to both of them.

The conclusion appears to leave Huck almost exactly where he started. However, Huck has transformed appreciably during the course of his travels. Huck's observation that he needs to head west before they try to civilize is significant. We know that Huck can act civilized when he needs to, as he survived well in his many extended stays at Southern family estates. There is a radical change in the character developed by Twain. In the beginning of the novel, Huck is a deprived, simple, uneducated boy. Conversely, by the conclusion of novel, Huck is a shrewd, intelligent, prosperous young man who simply does not care to be a part of a boring middle-class

lifestyle. Huck changes overwhelmingly in the course of this novel. He struggles with powerful moral issues, risks his life for those he cares about, and thrives in the process.

Along with this, the representation of black slaves changes noticeably in the course of the novel. At first, slaves are just background characters, carrying out household tasks while white characters dominate the plot. Nevertheless, this changes with the introduction of Jim. The turn of events continues to develop even when Jim leaves the plot for short periods. As a consequence, the King's forced break-up of the Wilks's slave family strongly impacts the reader, whereas before getting to know Jim, it might not have been supposed as so noteworthy. In addition to being a story about Huck's growth and maturation, and resulting freedom from his Pap, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is also a story about Jim's expedition towards freedom. By ending the novel with Jim becoming a free man, with money to his name, Twain provides a clear social commentary about the immorality of slavery. Jim symbolizes the whole of the slave community.

20.4 CHARACTERS IN THE NOVEL

The novel is undisputedly famous for the various themes and technical angles that it provides to the reader. Apart from this fact, the reader also feels closely connected to the various characters in the story. An introduction of the major characters is given here:

Huck

Huckleberry Finn is the protagonist or the main character and narrator of the story. Without a mother and with an often absent alcoholic father, he is basically an orphan who is adopted by Miss Watson and the Widow Douglas. He feels suffocated in the traditional control of the home, so, Huck chooses to flee society and enter the natural world, where he feels most at home. When he and Jim cross paths in the wilderness, the two decide to travel together, and both use a raft to escape the bondage of the land. Huck is a simple unintelligent, poor boy in the beginning of the novel but becomes a smart, shrewd, educated, moneyed man in the end.

Tom

Tom is introduced in the opening and end of the novel. In the middle of the story he is not presented. Resembling Huck, he enjoys in the open air, but, contrasting Huck, however, he comes from a respectable, sophisticated family. Just because of the monotony of such a rigid living arrangement he feels suffocated. To come out of this he wants a bit of thrill in his life. For this, he must devise adventures to keep his mind busy. Tom is just as intelligent as Huck, and the two are best friends. The story is as much dependent on Tom as it is on Huck.

Jim

Jim is one of the threesome who carry the story of the novel in a much synchronized manner. He is the slave of Ms. Watson. He runs away from her house when he comes to know that she is planning to sell him off. He encounters Huck on the Jacksons island and agrees to travel with him down the Mississippi. Though Jim is often uninformed and child-like, the weighty feelings he expresses for his family and his overall persona prove to Huck and the reader that he is just as entitled to liberty as any white person. Jim, however, is trained by society, and though he believes he deserves freedom, also considers himself inferior to whites. He gets justice in the end of the novel.

Ms. Watson/Widow Douglas

These two sisters are Huck's caretakers. The widow Douglas has agreed to take charge of Huck's upbringing. Miss Watson takes the whole charge of educating and civilizing him. They largely come to represent the romantic attitudes of the nineteenth century American South. Their hypocritical religious values are also exposed, particularly in the beginning of the story, when they interact most with Huck. They also become a source of light humor because Huck is fed up of their elaborate attempts at reforming him.

Judge Thatcher

Judge Thatcher is the legitimately fair and impartial local judge. Huck gives him his six thousand dollars because he is afraid that his drunkard father Pap will snatch

them away. He plays a minor role in the story but he is generally regarded as the emblematic good-guy who wants to do well to one and all.

Pap

Pap is Huck's father. He is the merciless, corrupt and often drunk figure who darts in and out of his son's life. He is opposed to Huck's educational pursuits and is basically the orthodox Southern racist. He almost kills Huck on at least one occasion. The boy is so tormented by the violence of his father that he is compelled to flee into the wilderness. Shortly thereafter, Jim finds the man's dead body on an abandoned houseboat. His negative image proves to be a blessing in disguise because it becomes the reason of Huck's redemption.

Shepherdsons and Grangerfords

These two families have been in a state of mutual disagreement for the past few generations. Huck enters them midway through the book. Twain uses them in his general reflection of American society, particularly in regards to the hypocrisy of religion. It is ironical that the families attend church together but have no doubts about shedding each other's blood afterwards. They show how people are uncivilized inspite of their education and wealth.

King and Duke

These are humorous, though indisputably coldblooded villains. They force Huck and Jim to go together with them on their own travels down the Mississippi. Throughout their journey they dupe the local townspeople into some scheme or the other. They are constantly involved in shady moneymaking activities. In the end, nevertheless, these two characters meet justice when they are tarred and feathered for their scheming. The boys try to save them from disgrace but they are so badly trapped that they have to suffer their fate.

Wilks family

This ill-fated family nearly becomes the victim of one of the king and duke's most malicious schemes. Expecting the arrival of Peter Wilks' two English brothers,

the family is easily convinced that the king and the duke really are these long-lost kinsfolk. Luckily Huck helps Mary Jane and the others realize their mistake, and the two con men don't manage to escape with the money. All that happens in this family helps the reader to understand the true nature of many important characters in the family. Huck finally manages to save the whole family from the evil designs of the king and duke.

Aunt Sally and Silas Phelps

The Phelps family appears near the end of the novel. Jim is sold to them by the king. They are Tom's relatives, and interact with Huck, Tom and Jim in the grand finale of the novel. Comically, Aunt Sally is the definite head of the household, with Silas meekly carrying out her orders. The behavior between aunt Sally and Silas Phelps is a source of great entertainment because aunt Sally keeps Silas Phelps on his toes all the time.

20.5 ANALYSIS OF THE ADVENTUROUS THREESOME

Huck Finn

Twain makes it obvious at the very outset of the novel that Huck is a boy who hails from the lowest levels of white society. His father is an alcoholic and a hooligan. Huck himself is unclean and frequently on the streets. The Widow Douglas attempts to "reform" Huck. He finds it disgusting and maintains his self-governing ways. The neighborhood has failed to protect him from his father. Though the Widow gives Huck some of the schooling and religious training that he had missed, he has not been indoctrinated with social values just as Tom Sawyer has been. Huck's detachment from conventional society makes him disbelieving of the world around him.

Huck's disbelief and his experiences as he travels down the river force him to question the things society has taught him. Jim is legally Miss Watson's property, but Huck's sense of logic makes him feel that it is right to help Jim. Huck's natural intelligence and his willingness to think through a situation on its own intrinsic worth lead him to some conclusions that are correct in their context. It is true that this

would shock white society. For example, Huck discovers, when he and Jim meet a group of slave-hunters, that telling a lie is sometimes the right course of action.

Huck is a child of fourteen years, so, the world seems new to him. Because of his background, he believes less in imitation. He creates his own rules. He must still struggle with some of the preconceptions about blacks that society has embedded in him. At the end of the novel, he shows himself all too willing to follow Tom Sawyer's leadership. His failures make Huck appealing and sympathetic. He is only a boy, after all, and therefore imperfect. Unsatisfactory as he is, Huck represents what anyone is capable of becoming: a thinking, feeling human being rather than a mere cog in the machine of society. Hence his role as the protagonist is suitable.

Jim

Jim is a man of outstanding cleverness and compassion. On surface, Jim seems to be superstitious to the point of stupidity, but a careful reading of the time that Huck and Jim spend on Jackson's Island reveals that Jim's superstitions cover up a deep knowledge of the natural world and represent an alternate form of truth or intelligence. What is more, Jim has one of the few healthy, running families in the novel. He has been estranged from his wife and children, yet, he misses them dreadfully. It is only the thought of an everlasting separation from them that motivates his illegal act of running away from Miss Watson. On the river, Jim becomes a surrogate father, as well as a friend, to Huck, taking care of him without being interfering or smothering. He cooks for Huck and shelters him from some of the worst horrors that they face. He protects him from the sight of Pap's corpse and the news of his father's death.

Critics consider Jim as too passive, but it cannot be ignored that he remains at the mercy of every other character in this novel, including even the poor, thirteen-year-old Huck. Like Huck, Jim is down-to-earth about his situation. He has to find ways of accomplishing his goals without incurring the anger of those who could turn him in. So, he is hardly ever able to act fearlessly or speak his mind. Despite these limitations and constant fear, Jim over and over again acts as a noble human being and a loyal friend. In fact, Jim could be described as the only real adult in the novel,

and the only one who provides a positive, respectable example for Huck to follow. He is the proper guardian to Huck.

Tom Sawyer

Tom is Huck's best friend. Both are of the same age. Huck's birth and background have left him in paucity and on the margins of society, Tom has been brought up in relative comfort. So his way of life is an ill-timed combination of what he has learned from the adults around him and the imaginary notions he has acquired from reading romance and adventure novels. Tom believes in sticking strictly to rules, most of which have more to do with style than with principles or anyone's welfare. Tom is thus the perfect foil for Huck. His unbending devotion to rules and precepts contrasts with Huck's inclination to question authority and think for himself. Huck thinks more in terms of natural course of things.

Tom's escapades are often humorous. T hey also show just how frighteningly and carelessly cruel society can be. Tom knows that Miss Watson has died and that Jim is now a free man, yet he is willing to allow Jim to remain a captive while he entertains himself with unbelievable escape plans. Tom's plotting tortures not only Jim, but Aunt Sally and Uncle Silas as well. In the end, although he is just a boy like Huck and is appealing in his enthusiasm for adventure and his insensible wittiness, Tom embodies what a young, well-to-do white man is raised to become in the society of his time: self-centered with dominion over all. Thus he represents this section of the white society.

20.6 LET US SUM UP

After analyzing the novel there is no doubt that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is Twain's literary masterpiece. To construct this novel he first overcame the complicatedness of writing in the first person from a young boy's point of view. The novel is also a testimony to the various dialects and characteristics of the southern regions. The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is a story about freedom. It deals with physical freedom for the slaves and spiritual freedom for both Jim and Huck. Few novels have approached the success of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn in combining such serious issues with Twain's characteristically enchanting humor.

20.7 SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. How does Twain make it obvious that Huck is the narrator? How does he establish the independent status of the present novel?
2. How is the most important theme introduced in the first chapter of the novel?
3. Which instances of irony do we find in the beginning of the story where Huck settles down with Widow Douglas and Miss Watson?
4. How is superstition introduced in the first chapter?
5. How does superstition symbolize Huck's fear of the unknown?
6. How does Twain juxtapose theft and honor?
7. How is Tom's gang a juvenile representation of society?
8. How is slavery introduced in the first chapter?
9. Some concepts are merely literal. How does Twain assault religion through Huck's experiences?
10. Why did Twain keep Jim from disclosing the recovery of Pap's dead body?
11. Twain offers social commentary in three escapades. Which is the first escapade?
12. Write a note on the second escapade.
13. Discuss the third escapade.
14. Which different roles does Huck assume in the novel?
15. Why do Huck and Jim put up with the king and the duke even when they know that they are cheats?
16. Huck plays the role of Twain's mouthpiece. Explain.
17. What is the general mindset of the whites towards blacks?
18. The maturing of Huck is clearly visible in the middle chapters of the novel. Narrate how.

19. How does Mark Twain successfully establish the relationship between man and man?

20. What is the irony in Huck's story about the steamship cylinder exploding?

21. Discuss how Twain's writing style changes in the end of the novel?

22. Show how Tom is a fun-loving and adventurous character.

23. What are the key facts in the last chapters of the novel?

24. Compare Huck's persona in the beginning and the end of the novel.

25. How are slaves important in the novel?

20.8 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Twain says in harmony with ….that civilization corrupts.

   a) Rousseau b) Joe
   c) Jack d) Jill

2. Widow Douglas checks Huck from smoking but she herself uses ….behind closed doors.

   a) Wine b) Perfume
   c) Snuff d) Songs

3. When Huck says that his family has small-pox, the robbers on the other boat give him….to go away.

   a) Help b) Advice
   c) Money d) Care

4. Huck compares the conmen to….

   a) Women b) Girls
   c) Pap d) Dancers

5. Jim hit his daughter Elizabeth for not….

a) Eating b) Singing
c) Dancing d) Obeying him

6. Huck's interest in women is noticed for the first time when we see his inclination for….

a) Aunt Polly b) Aunt Sally
c) Miss Watson d) Mary Jane

7. Huck finally decides to set….free at any cost.

a) Buck b) King
c) Jim d) Duke

8. Towards the end, Twain's style focuses more on the spirit of ….

a) Adventure b) Justice
c) Harmony d) Equality

9. The main character selected by Twain as hero is….

a) Aunt Polly b) Boggs
c) Huck d) Buck

10. Huck is uncivilized but….is comparatively more civilized.

a) Tom b) Headley
c) Winston d) Briggs

11. The representative character of the slaves is….

a) Colonel b) Hawker
c) Jim d) Finley

12. The most villainous character that terrifies Huck at the beginning of the novel is….

a) Magi b) Pap
c) Lily d) Lucy

13. The only "true adult" character in the story is….

a) Shopkeeper b) Jim
c) Grocer d) Shoemaker

14. Huck's age as shown in the novel is….years.

a) Six b) Seven
c) Fourteen d) Sixty

15. The novel has a ….ending.

a) Happy b) Funny
c) Ridiculous d) Notorious

20.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Comment on the significance of the use of colloquial language in the beginning of the novel.
2. How far do you agree that the attempts of Widow Douglas and Miss Watson to civilize Huck prove them to be good guardians?
3. Discuss Pap's failure in playing the role of an ideal guardian to Huck.
4. Twain's use of irony and superstition make the novel very interesting. Discuss.
5. Write a note on Huck's development from an uncivilized destitute to a sophisticated boy.
6. Evaluate Jim as a slave, friend and guardian to different characters in the novel.
7. How does Tom prove to be a fun-loving adventurous boy from the beginning to the end of the story?
8. Which character in the novel appeals the most to you? Justify giving suitable reasons.
9. Write a note on the female characters in the novel.

10. Evaluate the novel as an adventure story with a social commentary.

20.10 ANSWERS TO SAQ's & MCQ's

After reading the content of the lesson the concepts must be clear to you. If you have been able to find out the answers to the exercise questions, you deserve praise. If you have not been able to find any one of the answers, here is a list of the answers. Refer to these for your convenience.

20.10.1 Answers to short answer Questions

1. The opening sentence introduces Huck in slang, friendly manner: "You don't know about me". From the very opening words of the novel, Twain makes it obvious that Huck is the storyteller. He communicates that the person who reads will hear the story of his adventures straight from him. Along with this, to make it apparent to readers unknown with The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, he tells that this novel exists independently; Huck explains that if they haven't read Twain's earlier work, it "ain't no matter". This way, the reader is confident enough to continue reading the present work without suffering from any sense of loss about not having read the earlier novel.

2. The reader without more ado understands that the most important theme of the novel is the inconsistency between civilization and freedom. In harmony with Rousseau, Twain wants to suggest that civilization corrupts rather than improves human beings.

3. We detect that Huck is paradoxically trapped in a civilized world. His preference is to live freely in nature. Irony can be found in other areas of the novel too. For instance, Huck explains that the Widow Douglas wouldn't let him smoke; even though, ironically, she behind closed doors uses snuff herself. Irony appears yet for a second time when Miss Watson tries to warn Huck about hell. This warning is juxtaposed by her excruciating educational lessons. Huck finds spelling very difficult to learn and hates the lessons so much, that he comments hell sounds more agreeable. In this ironic reference, Twain reminds the reader of Huck's childhood virtuousness. Only a child would judiciously choose hell over heaven.

4. Superstition enters and spreads throughout the story, so that every part or aspect is affected in the novel. The first chapter provides quite a few examples of Huck's superstitious side, specifically in his interpretation of the night sounds as death, and in how he believes the spider burning to death in the flame of his candle is a serious omen of bad luck. After killing the spider, Huck immediately attempts a counter-charm, even though he knows there is no way of undoing bad luck.

5. Superstition symbolizes Huck's fear of the unknown; Huck is most superstitious whenever he is extremely worried about his future, such as in this opening chapter and afterwards while on Jackson's Island. Superstition also serves to foretell proceedings throughout the novel, as Huck knows the bad luck will return to trouble him. For example, after Huck by coincidence brushes the spider into his candle flame, Pap returns to town and creates a whole lot of problems for him.

6. Mark Twain attractively juxtaposes theft and honor. These contradictory ideas are conveniently combined by Tom Sawyer, who understandably explains to the other boys that robbery is honorable. Tom's definition appears to be absolute nonsense. However, as the reader will see by the end of the book, this scene actually parallels the novel's ending, where Huck and Tom steal Jim out of slavery. As a consequence, Twain truly demonstrates how honor and robbery can exist side by side.

7. Tom Sawyer's gang can be viewed as a juvenile representation of society as a whole, an example of a synecdoche. Tom creates a set of rules, ideas, and morals that he expects the boys to hold fast to, all of which he gets from books. Thus, books form a foundation for civilization; using books, Tom creates a society for his gang of friends. Ironically, Twain mocks the adult world in this chapter by showing that although the adult world relies on books such as the Bible to define civilization; pirate and robber books might also be adequate.

8. Slavery is introduced in this chapter through Tom and Huck's communications

with Miss Watson's slave, Jim. As the story of the novel progresses, slavery slowly but surely becomes a larger issue. It is important to note Huck's views towards slavery at this point so that they may be compared to his views later on. In this chapter, Huck comments that Jim, "*was most ruined, for a servant*". thus indicating he supports the idea of slavery. Only later in the novel does Huck start to question whether Jim should be a servant at all. This way Twain shows his dislike for slavery.

9. Huck's level-headedness and literalness come into sight here. Twain goes to great lengths to show that Huck is a logical thinker who only believes what he can see with his own eyes. This focus on judiciousness and literalness is used by Twain to further assault religion. Huck is told to pray for what he wants, but when he prays and does not get anything, he decides that praying is meaningless. Huck also thinks about the Christian perception of always helping other people. When he realizes that Christianity seems to offer him no personal benefit in life, he quickly discards it as quite meaningless.

10. Jim's intention for keeping Pap's death from Huck is vague. Jim could simply be trying to protect Huck's feelings, but there is also very likely a selfish motive. Jim has just revealed to Huck that he ran away from the widow. Were he to tell Huck that Pap died, there would be no reason for Huck to remain with Jim on the island. His fear would all be over and he would once again like to go and live freely. It is only the fear of being caught and tortured by Pap that forces Huck to stay on Jackson's island. Jim fears that Huck might at some point return to town and tell people where he is hiding. Thus, for Jim, it is a life and death decision whether or not to inform Huck of Pap's death. This is how the reader interprets this situation. Twain does not make it very evident why he kept Jim from disclosing the recovery of Pap's dead body.

11. It is very interesting to note here that Twain offers social commentary in three separate escapades in the novel. First, two slave-hunters approach Huck's raft. Huck is afraid for Jim's security. He makes them believe his smallpox ridden family is on the raft. Anxious to avoid the plague, each man forks over $20 just

to keep the raft away from town. While disease is a suitable concern, Twain demonstrates the fear with which people treat other sick people who need help and support. Instead of offering to help, the two men try to buy off the family and send them elsewhere. They panic them so much so that they want to keep them away at any cost.

12. Second, the Grangerford and Shepherdson families indulge in a violent, tragic dispute. The events reflect a modern day Romeo and Juliet theme. A Grangerford daughter and Shepherdson son run off. This causes a familial slaughter. Ironically, the two lovers are the only ones that survive. Huck explains how civilized, wealthy and respected the Grangerford family is, but then shatters this image by detailing the feud's excessive and tragic killings. Here, Twain demonstrates the utter stupidity of even the most educated and respected families, who can destroy themselves through nonsensical behavior and excessive pride. Their belief in the old traditional romantic literature is of no relevance but they adhere to it and ruin the whole of their families.

13. The third escapade occurs when the King cheats an entire congregation out of money. His story about being a pirate and wishing to convert his brethren is preposterous and ridiculous. At the revival meeting, everyone is so overcome by the love of God and their fellow man that they believe him and make a generous contribution to his cause. The king collects the huge amount of money and gets away with it.

14. All the way through these chapters, Huck over and over again assumes different characters and roles in order to survive and to protect Jim. At the Grangerford's, he pretends to be an orphan, to the slave-hunters he pretends to be an innocent boy living with a sick family, and to the Duke and Dauphin, he pretends to be an orphan traveling with his only slave. Each of these roles provides great insight into Huck's personality.

15. He and Jim both are quite conscious that the two men are cheat artists. This compels the reader to inquire why they put up with them. In reality, Huck is frightened of the consequences of crossing either man. He compares the men

to Pap and remarks, "*I learnt that the best way to get along with his kind of people is to let them have their own way*". As a consequence, Huck and Jim realize that rather than rouse up trouble with either of the men, it is best to play along and pretend they have been duped. Jim is unhappy with the situation. He observes at the end of Chapter 20 that he would prefer it if no more kings arrived during the trip.

16. Twain again provides interpretation of human nature and presents a biting portrayal of society. Twain's 'version' of Shakespeare, Boggs's death, Jim's feelings about his family, and the Royal Nonesuch all seek to provoke the reader into analyzing the idiotic ways of society. These aspects of social life show how we are wasting our life by choosing the wrong and inferior things. Huck assists in this encouragement by adding commentary that brings Twain's critiques into sharper focus. He works as Twain's mouthpiece.

17. Twain also makes several piercing comments about the general mind-set towards blacks when Jim discusses his family. Huck comments that he is surprised to find that Jim is almost as concerned about his family as a white person. This prevailing attitude, often invoked to justify breaking up slave families, is something Huck is beginning to overcome. Jim's touching story about his daughter Elizabeth, in which he hits her for not obeying him, is a powerful indication to Huck that Jim is in fact more concerned about his children than Huck's father ever was about him. Blacks are just as human as whites are. The social order failed to acknowledge this truth.

18. As the story develops, we discover new events and happenings. These chapters mark Huck's first moments of maturity. Before this stage of development, he followed the authority of the elderly people around him, such as Pap, the Widow, Miss Watson, Judge Thatcher, and the King and Duke. The moment Huck decides to steal the money, he breaks free of this authority. For the first time, Huck acts on his convictions and morals to help other people, rather than simply acting on his personal desires. He shows signs of growth and a capacity of taking independent decisions.

Huck's relation with Mary Jane also highlights a budding aspect of his growth. For the first time in the novel we find that he shows an interest in women. In The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Huck viewed girls as nothing more than an annoyance and did not believe they were to be taken seriously. The protagonist is absolutely different here. Huck calls Mary Jane beautiful, and comments that when he saw her light a candle in the window, his "*heart swelled up sudden, like to burst*". The feelings for the young woman are very raw, sincere and natural here.

19. The most powerful and touching scene occurs when Huck writes a letter to Miss Watson explaining where Jim is, only to tear it up, accept his fate no matter what the consequence of following his conscience, and set out to free Jim. Huck is willing to sacrifice his soul for Jim's freedom, showing a tremendous amount of personal growth. This scene indicates how his relationship with Jim has changed over the course of the journey downriver, from companion, to respected friend, to the only family Huck will acknowledge. Huck decides to free Jim after remembering all the times Jim protected and cared for him, something which no one else has ever done for Huck. In this manner Twain successfully establishes the relationship between man and man.

20. There is bitter irony in Huck's story about the steamship cylinder exploding. Huck concocts the tale as an excuse for arriving in town so much later than expected, and when aunt Sally asks him if anyone was hurt, he replies "*No'm, killed a nigger*". Aunt Sally is pleased to hear that no white people were hurt or killed. She does not care that a black person died.

21. In this section, Twain's writing style also returns to that of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer. Tom's return signifies that reasonable thinking will fade away, and a disproportionate sense of adventure and fantasy will take over. Huck quickly takes a backseat when Tom's unlimited creativity is released upon the Phelps home. This way the spirit of adventure once again takes the upper hand.

22. Tom's enthusiasm to steal a slave is surprising to Huck. It is somewhat of a surprise to the reader too, considering the long moral journey Huck experience to decide he would risk hell for his friend. Thus, Huck questions Tom's motive, and finally concludes it is simply Tom's juvenile love for adventure that is spurring him on. The reader must recognize this as a bogus hypothesis. Tom has never committed a true crime with serious moral repercussions, and is thus unlikely to do so now. As the reader discovers in later chapters, Tom knows that Jim is already free, although Jim is unaware. Therefore, Tom knows he and Huck aren't breaking the law, but keeps this information from Huck so he will continue to play the prisoner game. Tom is in fact a fun loving kind of a person and will always choose the path in which there is some thrill and fervor.

23. There are a number of key facts revealed in the final chapters that affect how the reader views each character. Tom announces that Jim is free. This declaration reveals why Tom was willing to help Huck in what Huck thought was a true offense. Since Jim was already a free man, Tom was not breaking any laws and therefore thought the entire tribulation was a great adventure. His boyhood temperament is a source of fun for the readers.

24. There is a radical change in the character developed by Twain. In the beginning of the novel, Huck is a deprived, simple, uneducated boy. Conversely, by the conclusion of novel, Huck is a shrewd, intelligent, prosperous young man who simply does not care to be a part of a boring middle-class lifestyle. Huck changes overwhelmingly in the course of this novel. He struggles with powerful moral issues, risks his life for those he cares about, and thrives in the process.

25. At first, slaves are just background characters, carrying out household tasks while white characters dominate the plot. Nevertheless, this changes with the introduction of Jim. The turn of events continues to develop even when Jim leaves the plot for short periods. As a consequence, the King's forced break-up of the Wilks's slave family strongly impacts the reader, whereas before getting to know Jim, it might not have been supposed as so noteworthy. In

addition to being a story about Huck's growth and maturation, and resulting freedom from his Pap, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is also a story about Jim's expedition towards freedom. By ending the novel with Jim becoming a free man, with money to his name, Twain provides a clear social commentary about the immorality of slavery.

20.10.2. Answers to Multiple Choice Questions

1.	Rousseau	2.	Snuff	3.	Money
4.	Pap	5.	Obeying him	6.	Mary Jane
7.	Jim	8.	Adventure	9.	Huck
10.	Tom	11.	Jim	12.	Pap
13.	Jim	14.	Fourteen	15.	Happy

20.11 SUGGESTED READING

1. Budd, Louis J., ed. *New Essays on* The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

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3. De Koster, Katie, ed. *Readings on* The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1998.

4. Doyno, Victor A. *Writing* Huck Finn: *Mark Twain's Creative Process*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992.

5. Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. *Was Huck Black?: Mark Twain and African-American Voices*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

6. Hoffman, Andrew Jay. *Twain's Heroes, Twain's Worlds*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988.

7. Pizer, Donald, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism: Howells to London.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

8. Powers, Ron. *Mark Twain: A Life.* New York: Free Press, 2005.

9. Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.* New York: Penguin Classics, 1986.

10. ———. *Life on the Mississippi.* New York: Penguin Classics, 1986.

11. Wieck, Carl F. *Refiguring* Huckleberry Finn. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2000.

THE PURLOINED LETTER

UNIT STRUCTURE

21.1 Introduction

21.2 Objectives

21.3 Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) A Biographical Sketch

21.4 The Purloined Letter

21.5 Analysis

21.6 Let Us Sum Up

21.7 Multiple Choice Questions

21.8 Examination Oriented Questions

21.9 Suggested Reading

21.1 INTRODUCTION

Edgar Allan Poe was a 19th-century American writer and poet known for his macabre and gothic works. Renowned for his mastery of horror and mystery, Poe's tales such as "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Fall of the House of Usher" delve into themes of madness, death, and the supernatural. Additionally, his poem "The Raven" is one of the most famous and haunting pieces in American literature, cementing Poe's legacy as a pioneering figure in the genres of horror and detective fiction.

21.2 OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the lesson is to acquaint the learners with the author and his works.

21.3 EDGAR ALLAN POE (1809-1849) A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

To a world fascinated by the bizarre and the macabre, Poe has often seemed an embodiment of the satanic characters in his own fiction, the archetype of the neurotic genius. He left no diaries, had few intimate friends, to set straight the details of his life, and the vivid derangements portrayed in his writing and the tales of his own depravities (many of which he told himself for their shock effect) created a false portrait not completely corrected to this day.

So firmly fixed in the public mind is the portrait of the typical romantic poet singing immortal words as he sinks prematurely into the twin despairs of love and death that, once a poet is identified with the romantic image, his own personality and artistry are difficult for criticism to recapture. Such was the fate of Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849). The known facts of his life seem to provide the necessary outline for such a portrait, but many of them were planted in his own day by contemporaries like Rufus Griswold who had been stung by Poe's just but acid criticism or who were jealous of his brilliance. The myth of blighted genius which early grew up about him was fostered also by his own self-pity and his consequent eagerness to arouse the pity of others for his failures and his regrets. It has been further augmented by the psychological interpretations of later biographers who often look to the poet for a reflection of their own frustrations and fail to appreciate the poetry through which he escapes to the harmony of an imagined ideal. Poe was the first American writer to succeed in creating a total life in art as a foil to the conflicts and frustration of the human predicament. In so doing, he seemed alien to his time and his country, a strange dark bird like his own raven, appearing suddenly and as suddenly disappearing into the night.

Over against this picture should be set that of the finest critical mind of his generation, with a poetic sensitivity keyed to impressions of sight and sound, an

intense introspective searching of soul, and a belief in the mathematical logic of the universe. Poe's art was the romantic art of contraries and of compensations. In his way he was as much the spokeman for America as were Cooper and Irving in theirs, but he gave voice to eternal human hungers for the unrealizable and the unrealized. His was the eagerness of the pioneer, astray in the wilderness, for the beauty and the richness of Old World culture, rather than the aspiration of the pioneer whose goals lie in a sunset that can be pushed further and further back toward the new and undiscovered country to the West. The intensity of his dreams and the firmness of his conviction of the validity of art as a way of life are as native to America as it Leatherstocking, for like the portrait of Cooper's trapper of the north woods, they are the products of the special conditions of life on the Western continent at the period of its awakening cultural consciousness. Poe as introspective and deliberate artist may be thought alien to America only in that he moved further than did Cooper from the circumstances that conditioned his writing into the realm of the imagination where all artists are kin. American artists from Brockden Brown and Poe to Henry James and Eliot have suffered this fate. They have been thought of as expatriates while acclaim has come to them from abroad, and they have been denied a place in the literary history of the nation that first shaped their art because they idealized or criticized its civilization. Poe did not become the less American because he turned from the world of commerce to that of the imagination in an attempt to express his inner life rather than the life about him. His revolt was not merely an imitation of that of Byron or of Coleridge or of Goethe. It was his personal and private experience although by contraries -with the America of his own day. His literary tradition was that counter to realism, and he was but the first of a series of such major writers in the literature of the United States.

On January 19, 1809, the self willed, reckless, brilliantly gifted Edgar Allan Poe was born at Boston. His father, of good Irish stock, was destined for the Bar, but preferred the calling of an actor. For this, and for his marriage when nineteen, to a young widow, also an actress, his parents cast him off, and a grim struggle with poverty ensued. Five years later the young couple died of consumption in the same year, leaving three young children.

Edgar, the second child, was adopted by the Allans. Mr. Allan was his godfather and a wealthy tobacco merchant. This good fortune was more apparent than real, and the picture we have a pretty, precocious child, indulged and petted, standing on a dinner table glass in hand, proposing toasts, can scarcely be considered the best method of youthful training.

When Poe was six years old the Allans crossed to England and the boy was put to school at Stoke Newington; here he remained till 1821, when he returned to the States. After a year's idleness he was sent to a day school at Richmond, Virginis, where the Allans resided. On leaving in 1825 he was a good linguist, and a fair Latin scholar, a voluminous writer of verse, and an excellent swimmer.

Surely the contrast between the Bohemianism of Poe's inheritance and the strict prudence of his early environment was sufficient to cause an inner violence that must erupt ultimately in some form. His life long effort to find beauty and harmony in art must have some inverse connection with this division in his emotional background. His childhood was externally happy, internally moody and at times dark. Living the normal life of a boy of good social standing, he played, studied, fell in love, and prepared for college. At the same time he was writing poems of longing for unattainable beauty and for death:

"*From childhood's hour I have not been*
As others were _ "

And reading them to is "Helen," the sympathetic mother of his school friend Bob Standard. With the world weariness of the adolescent, he cried:

"*Is all that we see or seem*
But a dream within a dream?"

Perhaps some of this sense of unreality came from the contrast of the winter darkness and ivied ruins which he remembered from a residence in London and Scotland when he was six year sold, with the Virginia sunlight and freshness about him.

In January of the following year he was entered at the University of Virginia.His

choice of companions at college was unfortunate. He fell into intemperate habits, and at the end of his first year was heavily in debt through gambling. Mr. Allan was a generous and good natured man while he had everything his own way, but he was also capricious and exacting, and failed to see that by his own injudicious training of the child he was mainly responsible for the lad's want of moral stamina. He, however, refused to pay Poe's debts of honour, so his career at the university came to an end. A place was then found for him in Mr. Allan's office, but from this uncongenial occupation he shortly ran away and enlisted.

While stationed in Boston, he arranged the publication of a slim volume of verse, *Tamerlane and other Poems*(1827), his first book of poetry. In April 1829 he gained his release from the army, and eight months later, his second volume of poems, *Al Aarraf*, *Tamerlane, and Minor Poems*, was published in Baltimore. Following the death of his foster mother, Poe was briefly reconciled with Allan, who helped him secure appointment to West Point. Poe entered the academy as a cadet, when he was twenty one, but he remained only eight months. Galled by academy regulations and angered by a lack of support from his foster father (Poe knew the army was no career for a poor man with literary interests), he deliberately violated a series of minor regulations, cut his classes, disobeyed order to attend church, and early in 1831 he was dismissed. Just after he left West Point his third volume of poetry was published, dedicated to the U.S. Corps of Cadets. He then moved to Baltimore, where he lived with his aunt and devoted himself to earning his way as a writer.

With a third edition of his poems called *Second* in 1831, Poe was ready to declare his poetic creed. His preface, the *Letter to Mr.* _____, is a violent protest against rational control of the imagination as it was argued by Wordsworth and Coleridge. "A poem, in my opinion", he concludes, "is opposed to a work of science by having, for its immediate object, pleasure, not truth; to romance, by having, for its object, an indefinite instead of a definite pleasure…. To which end music is an essential, since the comprehension of sweet sound is our most indefinite conception." In his later and matured definition ("*Poetry is the rhythmic creation of beauty*"), he held firmly to the positive aspects of this proposition, although he recanted on his rejection of science or reason. Of the three divisions of the mind which he so often reiterated,

Pure Intellect, Taste, and the Moral Sense, he took always as his own special province that of Taste, which he placed in the middle as mediator. In doing so he was not at first fully aware of the discipline of art itself which demands that its own structure of laws be understood before beauty can be fully realized. Later the effort to achieve mastery of this structure of aesthetic law became his consuming passion, Unity rather than Beauty his primary goal.

It was "Helen", standing statue-like in the window-niche, who brought him home

To the glory that was Greece
And the grandeur that was Rome."

The classic restraint of this poem marks the turning point of his career in art. Before it, the long poems *Tamerlane* and *Al Aaraaf* wandered in the realm of pure sensuous beauty; after it, *The Raven* and *Annabel Lee* could be constructed with what, for some, seems an all too deliberate architecture. Beauty restraint, unity of effect – these are the three stages in Poe's mastery of his medium. The small body of his poetry, the best of which was not collected until the volume of 1845 and some not published until after his death, has had an influence far beyond even its own intrinsic worth because it is so perfect an embodiment of his theory of art.

The angle Israfel whose heart strings are a lute and who, according to the Koran, was to sound the trumper for the resurrection, is Poe's for the poet, as Merlin was to be Emerson's. Through him the earth bound versifier could associate poetry with music, the real with the ideal.

"If I could dwell
Where Israfel
Hath dwelt, and he where I,
He might not sing so widely well
A mortal melody
White a bolder note than this might swell
From my lyre within the sky

But there was no confusion of identity. Poe was not Israfel, nor was the world of the ideal to be attained as a day by day experience. In the mathematical order and harmony of music, the poet might find the necessary controls for his imagination. Chaotic fancy, lost in the labyrinth of the sense, could become a shaping power through aesthetic control of the emotions when projected to the level of the ideal. Neither Intellect nor the Moral Sense need be called upon to govern; in art itself the visual image and the harmonic pattern could be trusted to provide a universe of meaning and relation into which the disordered and worldly spirit of the poet might escape.

As his own life became more and more disrupted by the violent consequences of his divided personality, the wings of Poe's angel Israfel became stronger and the course of his flight more certain. Poems like *Ulalume*. *Annabel Lee*, and *For Annie* have a firmness of texture as symbol and rhythm which is belied by the emotional chaos that they express. Poe had found a way into the dark recesses of the human soul and he had created a form in which its torments could find direct symbolic expression. His poetry is insight revealed in music and picture, in rhythm and image. The further task for him, as well as for Hawthorne and later students of human motivation, was to give that insight a more analytical expression in fiction. Poe's own poems and criticism show how, in the romantic organic philosophy, the imagination may, at the higher levels, create its own rules of order. Once he had conquered his own diffuse sentimentality, he tended to err in the direction of an almost mechanical formalism (as in *The Raven* and *The Bells*), but he never again made the mistakes for which he attacked his contemporaries Drake, Halleck, and Longfellow. His conception of the functions of the poetic imagination and the rules for its control had to be understood and applied by a whole generation of French poets before American poetry could continue from the point at which he left it.

In 1832 five of Poe's stories were published in the Saturday Courier, a Philadelphia literary weekly. In 1833 he won first prize of $ 100 in a short story contest run by a Baltimore newspaper. He then returned to Richmond, where he was appointed editor at a salary of $10 a week of The Southern Literary Messenger, in which he published a series of stories, poems, and acid literary reviews. When he was

twenty seven, he married his thirteen year old cousin, Virginia Clemm, and it was hoped that his love for his child wife would have a restraining influence upon his vicious habits, but it was not to be. He successively filled the editorial chairs of The Southern Literary Messenger, The Gentleman's Magazine, and Graham's, in which appeared *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, and *The Descent into the Maelstrom*, and from each of these posts his dissolute ways procured his dismissal and late in 1836 he left the Messenger and Richmond after a bitter argument with the owner at angry scene that Poe was to repeat throughout his career as a magazinist.

In 1833 he sent his story, *A Manuscript Found in a Bottle*, to The Saturday Visitor. With this he gained the prize offered of 100 dollars, and from this period Poe had no difficulty in procuring work. His worth was quickly recognized, and for two years he contributed largely to the magazines.

In 1844 Poe settled in New York with his invalid wife and her mother, whose devotion to her unstable son in law was remarkable. On January 29, 1845, *The Raven* appeared in The Evening Mirror, and shortly afterwards Poe went on the staff of The Broadway Journal; within the same year he was jont editor, sub editor, and proprietor, and on January 3, 1846, the paper was issued with the following note:

Unexpected engagements demanding my whole attention, and the objects being fulfilled, so far as regards myself personally, for which The Broadway Journal was established, I now, as its editor, bid farewell as cordially to foes as to friends. Mr. Thomas H. Lowe is authorized to collect, all money due the Journal.

The little household was then removed from New York to Fordham, Westchester Country. Mrs. Poe's health was rapidly failing, and she died on January 30, 1847.

In the last three years of his life, when Virginia was slowly dying and he had lost through his own restless his ability to hold a job and support her, his outer life became a more frantic seeking for pleasure, his inner life an effort to transfer his discovery of aesthetic unity to the laws of being. *Eureka*, a Prose Poem (1848), is testimony to his final effort to discover, in the mathematical plan of the Newtonian

universe, the harmonious counterpart of the human soul that he had previously sought, and found, in art. It is ironic that, having denied and scoffed at the dualism of Emerson, he should at last have discovered a similar dualism of nature and art in his own metaphysics. But it was too late to rescue the poet Poe, now with emotions worn thin and nerves ready to snap, from the dissolution that his body had already reached, even though Poe the artist lived on.

It is but fair to Poe's memory to record that after his wife's death he endeavoured to throw off his bad habits, but they had gained too firm a hold upon him. He then had recourse to opium, and the last two years of his life are too sad to recall.

"I have absolutely no pleasure in the stimulants in which I sometimes so madly indulge", he wrote a year before his death. "It has not been in the pursuit of pleasure that I have periled life and reputation and reason. It has been in the desperate attempt to escape from torturing memories – memories of wrong and injustice and imputed dis-honour from a sense of insupportable loneliness and a dread of some strange impending doom".

A brilliant though erratic critic, with a naturally fine literary plate, and a bundle of prejudice; an ingenious versifier with flashes of greatness, and a master craftsman in the romance of horror. Thus briefly may we sum up the work of this unhappy man of genius. As a writer of fiction he belongs to the Gothic school; only he achieves with remarkable skill what Mrs. Redcliffe, Horace Walpole, Maturing, and Monk Lewis did in cruder and more stumbling fashion; revels as they did in the eerie side of things; but he is a professional artist in horrors, while they were well meaning amateurs succeeding only by fits and starts and more or less accidentally, in the art of blood curdling. Maturing, in his Eastern Romances, approaches the closest to Poe in grim power; but a wide gulf divides *Vathek* from masterly studies like *The Pit and the Pendulum*, and the *Fall of the House of Usher*.

In certain respects Poe resembles his greater contemporary, Hawthorne. He brings to bear upon his work an analytical intellect, a prying imagination. Like Hawthrone he is attracted towards the night side of things, and is fascinated by

pathological problems. But here the likeness ends. Poe externalized his horrors; Hawthorne spiritualized them. Hawthorne stimulates our imagination; Poe sears it. In constructive power, Poe is superior; he has a more meticulous mind, a more masculine genius. But the beauty, the delicacy, the essential sanity of Hawthorne is without his range. Even while he grips he disgusts you. There is the reek of the charnel house in the majority of his tales, and his intensely morbid preoccupation with pain and death oppress one like a miasrra. His most agreeable work lies in the direction of the puzzle story. Here his ingenuity and power of ratiocination mark him out as the pioneer of the modern detective story. He is the protagonist of Gaboriau and Du Bopisgobey, Anna K. Green, and Conan Doyle. Of their kind, nothing could well be better done than his *Murder in the Rue Morgue*, his mystery of *Marie Roget*, or *The Gold Bug*.On a somewhat lower plane come his pseudo scientific tales such as *The Descent into the Maelstrom* ; but even here he opens a new field in fiction which has since his time been more fully exploited by Jules Verne and Mr. H.G. Wells.

His studies in morbid psychology exhibit yet a third side of his genius; and if he is excelled here in range and delicacy by his successor, Hawthorne, yet he certainly prepared the way; and putting aside the spiritual clamminess which R.H. Hutton found in his tales, the haunting intensity with which he can depict a guilty conscience, or trace the growth of some terrible obsession, as in *The Tell Tale Heart*, is horribly effective and arresting.

Poe's work, therefore, when viewed in relation to certain developments in the later fiction of the age, is of undeniable interest, even apart from its intrinsic merit. It is a pity that he wasted his genius so much in the merely gruesome; for his imagination was strong enough to dispense with those adventitious horrors. I do not find fault with him, as some do, because he elected to deal with problems of mental pathology; I blame him because he treats them too little as an artist, too much as a scientist.

Poe's fiction follows his theory as closely as does his later poetry. Less concerned now with beauty for its own sake, he realize that emotional impact on the reader is the primary purpose of a prose tale and he tried to discover the internal laws

which produce the most impelling effect. An avid reader of *Blackwood's* and other contemporary magazines, he decided to exploit the Gothic methods with which Brown and Freneau had already experimented. On the assumption that the most basic emotion is fear, he turns to the supernatural for his material. Here he had the idea of the pseudoscience of the time: mesmerism, phrenology, and other efforts to explore what we today would call the subconscious. In the area between waking and sleeping, life and death, he found the sense more alert, the emotion least inhibited. Insanity, telepathy, and other abnormal or unusually states of the mind become instrument of his art. The phenomenal analytical power of Auguste Dupin-that forerunner of Sherlock Holmes, the ability of the anther's dead love Ligeia to seize and momentary inhabit the dying body of the Lady Rowena, the failing mind of the Roderick Usher at moment when he, his family, and his very house are on verge of collapse-such are the central figure of these blood-curdling tales. The outside world with its people becomes mere system of symbols for the constructs of his deliberately overwrought mind.

The monitor in the artist's consciousness is never swept away by the horror of the tale. Poe, the creator, is in control. His early tales, like *A Descent into Maelstrom*, take their form chiefly from the sequence of the events, but the later tale the artist is as prices and deliberate in laying brick upon brick as is his merciless teller of the tale in walling up the unfortunate Fortunate in *The Cask of Amontillado*. Plot, says Poe, is "*that in which no part can be displaced without ruin to the whole*." Again artistry is achieved, as the poetry, by a studied unity and totality of effect.

Poe himself classified his tales as grotesque, arabesque, and ratiocinative, to indicate variations in his intentions. The arabesque are those in which horror or other emotion in violent expense gives the tale its power, in the grotesque tales, like *The Masque of the Red Death*, the effect is achieved by a grim and ironic humor; in the ratiocinative, of which *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Gold Bug* are the best known, the effect comes from the use of rational analysis in reconstructive a series of events in the best manner of association psychology. All three methods developed rather than invented by Poe, but his careful study and systematic use of them made him the master of a new form, the short story of psychological effect.

21.4 THE PURLOINED LETTER

The *Purloined Letter* is a short story by Edgar Allan Poe and is the third of his three detective stories featuring the fictional C. Auguste Dupin, the other two being : *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Mystery of Marie Roget*. These stories are considered to be important early forerunners of the modern detective story and Dupin the precursor of later logical detectives as Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot. The story first appeared in the Gift in 1845 and was soon reprinted in numerous journals and newspapers. In these tales of ratiocination are presented Poe's most consistent social and moral views, all together amounting almost to a system.

The story begins with an epigraph of Seneca in Latin – which translated reads thus, *Nothing is more odious to good sense than too great cunning*. (Though attributed to Seneca this quotation has not been found in Seneca's works).

The unnamed narrator describes that he was luxuriously enjoying the effects of meditation and meerschaum (a tobacco pipe) at gloaming of a gusty evening with his friend C. Auguste Dupin. In the profound silence the narrator was ruminating upon matters of macabre murders and mysteries when he and Dupin were joined by the Prefect of the Parisian Police, a man known as monsieur G-The Prefect had called to discuss some official business with Dupin, a case which had occasioned a great deal of trouble. The narrator enquired of Monsieur G – whether the case involved any assassination to which monsieur G replied "*On, no: nothing of that nature. The fact is, the business is very simple indeed, and I make no doubt that we can manage it sufficiently well ourselves; but then I thought Dupin would like to hear the details of it, because it is so excessively odd*".

"*Simple and odd", said Dupin.*

"Why, yes; and not exactly that, either. The fact is, we have all been a good deal puzzled because the affair is so simple, and yet baffles us altogether".

Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault," said my friend.

"What nonsense you do talk!" replied the Prefect, laughing heartily.

"Perhaps the mystery is a little too plain", said Dupin.

Oh, good heavens! Who ever heard of such an idea?"

"A little too self evident".

Dupin keeps insisting that the Parisian police was baffled because the mystery involved was too simple and plain with a self evident solution staring, them in the face.

When asked to relate the case the Prefect replied,

"Why I will tell you", replied the Prefect, as he gave a long, steady, and contemplative puff, and settled himself in his chair. "I will tell you in a few words; but, before I begin, let me caution you that this is an affair demanding the greatest secrecy, and that I should most probably lose the position I now hold, were it known that I confided it to any one".

The case ran thus: An important letter had been pilfered from the private sitting room of the royal apartments. It belonged to an unnamed female belonging to the illustrious aristocracy. The individual who had purloined it was the unscrupulous Minister D- and he was seen to have taken it. He still had possession of the letter and its contents if revealed to a certain third person would jeopardize the honor of the lady in question.

"Well; the disclosure of the document to a third person, who shall be nameless, would bring in question the honor of a personage of most exalted station; and this fact gives the holder of the document an ascendancy over the illustrious personage whose honor and peace are so jeopardized", said the Prefect.

The Prefect then describes the bold and ingenious method in which the letter was stolen. The lady upon receiving the letter in her royal boudoir was perusing it intently whereupon she was interrupted by the entry of a certain exalted person from whom she wished to hide the letter in particular. The lady's vain attempts to hide the letter in the drawer ultimately compelled her to place it upon the table in full view of

everyone. At this moment the minister D-entered and his 'lynx eye' immediately recognized the handwriting and one look at the agitated lady, the minister could fathom the secret contents of the letter. The Minister switched this letter supposed to contain some compromising information with a letter of no importance. And he had since been blackmailing his victim "*the power thus attained (by the Minister) has, for some months past, been wielded, for political purposes, to a very dangerous extent*". The lady was now desperate to reclaim the letter. Dupin told the narrator that he had what would make the ascendancy complete "*the robbers knowledge of the robbery*".

The Prefect then made two deductions with which Dupin whole heartedly agreed: 1) The contents of the letter have not been revealed, as this would have led to certain circumstances that have yet not arisen. Therefore Minister D–still has the letter in his possession. 2) The ability to produce the letter at a moments notice is almost as important as the possession of the letter itself. Therefore he must have the letter close at hand.

The Prefect said that his first care was to make a thorough search of the minister's mansion and this he had to do without letting the Minister know of this…." *And here my "and here my chief embarrassment lay in the necessity of searching without his knowledge. Beyond all things, I have been warned of the danger which would result from giving him reason to suspect our design*".

The Parisian Police being expert at such investigations they had no difficulty in ransacking the minister's house and the ministers having it made the search of his premises quite easy for the police.

"*The habits of the minister gave me, too, a great advantage. He is frequently absent from home all night. His servants are by no means numerous. They sleep at a distance from their master's apartment, and, being chiefly Neapolitans, are readily made drunk. I have keys, as you know, with which I can open any chamber or cabinet in Paris. For three months a night has not passed, during the greater part of which I have not been engaged, personally, in ransacking the D – Hotel. My honor is interested, and, to mention a great secret, the reward is enormous. So I did not abandon the search until I had become fully satisfied that the thief is a more astute*

man than myself. I fancy that I have investigated every nook and corner of the premises in which it's possible that the paper can be concealed". (Dupin then asked the details of the search carried out.

They even waylaid the minister to search his person but the letter could not be found. And Dupin's logical reply was:

"You might have spared yourself this trouble, said Dupin. "D-, I presume, is not altogether a fool, and, if not, must have anticipated these waylaying, as a matter of course".

"Not altogether a fool", said G., "but then he's a poet, which I take to be only one remove from a fool".

The Police checked behind the wallpaper and under the carpets. His men had examined the tables and chairs with microscopes and then probed the cushions with needles but had found no sign of interference; the letter was not hidden in these places.

"But you could not have removed you could not have taken to pieces all articles of furniture in which it would have been possible to make a deposit in the manner you mention. A letter may be compressed into a thin spiral roll, not differing much in shape or bulk from a large knitting needle, and in this form it might be inserted into the rung of a chair, for example. You did not take to pieces all the chairs?"

"Certainly not; but we did better – we examined the rungs of every chair in the hotel, and indeed, the jointing of every description of furniture, by the aid of a most powerful microscope. Had there been any traces of recent disturbance we should not have failed to detect it instantly. A single grain of gimlet dust, for example, would have been as obvious as an apple. And disorder in the glueing – any unusual gaping in the joints – would have sufficed to insure detection."

"I presume you looked to the mirrors, between the boards and the plates, and you probed the beds and the bed clothes, as well as the curtains and carpets.

That of course; and when we had absolutely completed every particle of the furniture in this way, then we examined the house itself. We divided its entire surface into compartments, which we numbered , so that none might be missed; then we scrutinized each individual square inch throughout the premises, including the two houses immediately adjoining, with the microscope, as before."

They minutely examined the moss between the bricks of the ground to see if it had been disturbed. They opened every package and parcel and most zealously even measured the thickness of every book cover with microscopic scrutiny but to no avail.

Dupin then suggested the Prefect to make a thorough re-search of the premises.Dupin then made the Prefect give him a minute description of the purloined letter which he memorized. Having read aloud an account of the internal and especially of the external appearance of the missing document a depressed Prefect then bade them good day.

A month later, the Prefect returned, still bewildered in search for the missing letter. He was motivated to continue his fruitless search by the promise of a large reward, recently doubled, upon the letters safe return, and the Prefect said he would pay 50000 francs to anyone who would help him. Dupin immediately asked him to write that cheque then and he would upon receiving the cheque, produce the purloined letter.

The narrator was speechless and the Prefect appeared absolutely thunder stricken. *"For some minutes he remained speechless and motionless, looking incredulously at my friend with open mouth, and eyes that seemed starting from their sockets; then, apparently recovering himself in some measure, he seized a pen, and after several pauses and vacant stares, finally filled up and signed a check for fifty thousand francs, and handed it across the table to Dupin. The latter examined it carefully and deposited it in his pocket book; then, unlocking an escritoire, took thence a letter and gave it to the Prefect. This functionary grasped it in a Prefect agony of joy, opened it with a trembling hand, cast a rapid glance at its contents, and then, scrambling and struggling to the door, rushed at length unceremoniously*

from the room and from the house, without having uttered a syllable since Dupin had requested him to fill up the check".

Alone together, the narrator asked Dupin how he had found the letter. Dupin explained that the Paris police were competent within their limitations, but had underestimated who they had been dealing with. The Prefect mistook the Minister D – for a fool because he was a poet. For example, Dupin explained how an eight year old boy made a small fortune from his friends at a game called "Odds and Evens" . The boy was able to determine the intelligence of his opponents and play upon that to interpret their next move.

"The boy to whom I allude won all the marbles of the school. Of course he had some principle of guessing; and this lay in mere observation and measurements of the astuteness of his opponents. For example, an arrant simpleton is his opponent, and, holding up his closed hand asks". Are they even or odd? Our schoolboy replies, odd, and loses; but upon the second trial he wins, for he then says to himself, the simpleton had them even upon the first trial and his amount of cunning is just sufficient to make him have them odd upon the second: I will therefore guess odd: he guesses odd, and wins. Now with a simpleton a degree above the first, he would have reasoned thus: This fellow finds that in the first instance I guessed odd, and, in the second, he will propose to himself upon the first impulse, a simple variation from even to odd, as did the first simpleton; but then a second thought will suggest that this is too simple a variation, and finally he will decide upon putting it even as before. I will therefore guess even; he guesses even, and wins. Now this mode of reasoning in the schoolboy, whom his fellows terms lucky, what in its last analysis, is it?"

"It is merely", I said, "an identification of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent."

He explained that D – knew the police detectives would have assumed that the blackmailer would have concealed the letter in an elaborate hiding place, and thus hid it in plain sight.

This response of the schoolboy lies at the bottom of all the spurious profundity

which has been attributed to Rochefoucauld, to La Bruyere, to Machiavelli, and to Campanella.

And the identification, I said, of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent, depends, if I understand you aright, upon the accuracy with which the opponent's intellect is admeasured".

Since there was no variation of principle in the investigation method of the Parisian Police and that is why all the boring probing, sounding and scrutinizing with a microscope failed to field any result.

"Do you not see he has taken it for granted that all men proceed to conceal a letter, not exactly in a gimlet-hole bored in a chair-leg – but at least, in some out of the way hole or corner suggested by the same tenor of thought which would urge a man to secrete a letter in a gimlet-hole bored in a chair-leg? And do you not see also, that such recherches nooks for concealment are adapted only for ordinary occasions, and would be adopted only by ordinary intellects; for, in all cases of concealment, a disposal of the article concealed a disposal of it in this recherché manner is, in the very first instance, presumable and presumed; and thus its discovery depends, not at all upon the acumen, but altogether upon the mere care patience, and determination of the seekers".

The Prefect's failure lay in his assumption that the Minister was a fool, "*because he has acquired renown as a poet*". "*All poets are fools*" and this flaw in the logical reasoning of the Prefect leads to a false conclusion. The Minister is both a poet and a mathematician and because of his mathematical reasoning "*long regarded as the reason par excellence*" he was able to befool the Prefect. "*The mathematics are the science of form and quantity, mathematical reasoning is merely logic applied to observation upon form and quantity*". Dupin then goes into a long exposition of how mathematical and algrabiac truths are different from general truths.

"In the consideration of motive it fails; for two motives, each of a given value, have not, necessarily, a value when united, equal to the sum of their values apart. There are numerous other mathematical truths which are only truths within the limits of relation.

But the mathematician argues, from his finite truths, through habit, as if they were of an absolutely general applicability – as the world indeed imagines them to be".

If the minister did not have mathematical reasoning Dupin would have never received the cheque. He was not only a poet and a mathematician but also a bold 'intriguant' (schemer or plotter)

"Such a man, I considered, could not fail to anticipate and events have proved that he did not fail to anticipate – the waylayings to which he was subjected. He must have foreseen, I reflected, the secret investigations of his premises. His frequent absences from home at night, which were hailed by the Prefect as certain aids to his success, I regarded only as ruses, to afford opportunity for thorough search to the police, and thus the sooner to impress them with the conviction to which G —, in fact, did finally arrive – the conviction that the letter was not upon the premises."

Dupin then drew an analogy as to how the Minister's game could have a parallel with a game of puzzles played upon a map. A player is given to search a given word – the name of any town, river, state or empire upon the motley mosaic of the map.

"A novice in the game generally seeks to embarrass his opponents by giving them the most minutely lettered names; but the adept selects such words as stretch, in large characters, from one end of the chart to the other. These, like the over-largely lettered signs and placards of the street, escape observation by dint of being excessively obvious; and here the physical oversight is precisely analogous with the moral inapprehension by which the intellect suffers to pass unnoticed those considerations which are too obtrusively and too palpably self-evident. But this is a point, it appears, somewhat above or beneath the understanding of the Prefect. He never once thought it probable, or possible, that the Minister had deposited the letter immediately beneath the nose of the whole world, by way of best preventing any portion of that world from perceiving it".

Dupin having thus ruminated upon the daring, dashing and discriminating

ingenuity of D- concluded that the document needed to be always at hand and "*the minister had resorted to the comprehensive and sagacious(wise) expedient of not attempting to conceal it at all*".

Dupin said he had visited the minister at his hotel. Complaining of weak eyes he wore a pair of green spectacles, the true purpose of which was to disguise his eyes as he searched for the letter. In a cheap card rack hanging from a dirty ribbon, he saw a half-torn letter and recognized it as the letter of the story's title. Striking up a conversation with D— about a subject in which the minister was interested, Dupin examined the letter more closely. It did not resemble the letter the Prefect described so minutely; the writing was different and it was sealed not with the "ducal arms" of the S— family, but with D—'s monogram. Dupin noticed that the paper was chafed as if the stiff paper was first rolled one way and then another. Dupin concluded that D— wrote a new address on the reverse of the stolen one, re-folded it the opposite way and sealed it with his own seal. The soiled and torn condition of the paper was not in keeping with the true methodical and meticulous habits of the minister. The radicalness of this difference led Dupin to believe that this was the purloined letter. Dupin left a snuff box behind as an excuse to return the next day. Striking up the same conversation they had begun the previous day, D— was startled by a gunshot in the street. While the minister went to investigate, Dupin switched D—'s letter for a duplicate. "The disturbance in the street had been occasioned by the frantic behaviour of a man with a musket. He had fired it among a crowd of women and children. It proved, however, to have been without a ball, and the fellow was suffered to go his way as a lunatic or a drunkard. When he had gone, D- came from the window, whither I had followed him immediately upon securing the object in view. Soon afterwards I bade him farewell. The pretended lunatic was a man in my own pay".

Dupin explained that he left a duplicate to ensure his ability to leave the hotel without D— suspecting his actions. If the minister had once suspected Dupin's motives he would never have left the place alive. As a political supporter of the Queen and old enemy of the Minister, Dupin also hoped that D— would try to use the power he no longer has, to his political downfall, and at the end be presented

with an insulting note that implied Dupin was the thief: Un dessein si funeste, S'il n'est digne d'Atrée, est digne de Thyeste (If such a sinister design isn't worthy of Atreus, it is worthy of Thyestes).

"The good people of Paris might have heard of me no more. But I had an object apart from these considerations. In this matter, I act as a partisan of the lady concerned. For eighteen months the Minister has had her in his power. She has now him in hers; since, being uaware that the letter is not in his possession, he will proceed with his exactions as if it was. Thus will he inevitably commit himself, at once, to his political destruction. His downfall, too, will not be more precipitate than awkward. It is all very well to talk about the facilis descensus Averni, but in all kinds of climbing, as Catalini said of singing, it is more easy to get up than to come down. In the present instance I have no sympathy – at least no pity for him who descends. He is that monstrum horrendum, an unprincipled man of genius".

21.5 ANALYSIS

Dupin did not leave a blank letter because it would have insulted the Minister's genius. Dupin is not a professional detective. In *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, Dupin takes up the case for amusement and refuses a financial reward. In *The Purloined Letter*, however, Dupin undertakes the case for financial gain. He is not motivated by pursuing truth, emphasized by the lack of information about the contents of the purloined letter. Dupin's innovative method to solve the mystery is by trying to identify with the criminal. The Minister and Dupin have equally matched minds, combining skills of mathematician and poet, and their battle of wits is threatened to end in stalemate. Dupin wins because of his moral strength: the Minister is *unprincipled*, a blackmailer who obtains power by exploiting the weakness of others. Poe may have identified with both Dupin and D—. Like Poe, these two characters command both the power of analysis and a strong imagination. *The Purloined Letter* completes Dupin's tour of different settings. In *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* he travels through city streets; in *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt* he is in the wide outdoors; in *The Purloined Letter* he is in an enclosed private space. French linguist Jean-Claude Milner offered in Détections fictives , Le Seuil, collection Fictions & Cie, 1985, supporting

evidence that Dupin and D— are brothers, based on the final reference to Atreus and his twin brother, Thyestes. In May 1844 Poe wrote to James Russell Lowell that he considered it "*perhaps the best of my tales of ratiocination*" just before its first publication. Of Poe's three tales of ratiocination, *The Purloined Letter* is generally considered the best. When it was republished in the 1845 edition of *The Gift*, the editor called it "*one of the aptest illustrations which could well be conceived of that curious play of two minds in one person*." The story was used by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and the philosopher Jacques Derrida to present opposing interpretations: Lacan's at once structuralist, Derrida's mystical, depending on deconstructive chance. The two exchanged a series of letters concerning the nature of desire.

Edward H.Davidson in Poe: A Critical Study writes

In the tale of ratiocination or the detective tales are presented Poe's most consistent social and moral views, all together amounting almost to a system. Though these tales have their antecedents in the hoaxes and in such exercises as *The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall* and *MS. Found in a Bottle*, their ideas reach completion in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Mystery of Marie Roget*, *The Gold-Bug*, and *The Purloined Letter*. They were moral, philosophical and as autobiographical as Poe ever became. And, as everyone knows, they contributed to, if they did not actually bring into being, the modern detective tale and novel.

There are several interesting matters concerning the hero of these tales. From his first appearance as the all-knowing "I" in *MS. Found in a Bottle*, he is fully grown and wholly in command not only of himself but of all the events through which he must go: sometimes he even exercises control beyond his own death. In fact, he is so wholly master of all situations that, despite all of Poe's efforts to make him special and different, he conforms to a very general American type. He is the perpetual American boy man, the smart aleck, the sharper who really hurts only the foolish and evil, the Tom Sawyer, the traveling salesman: he is the most frequently duplicated young man in American legend and worship from the jaunty adventures of Captain John Smith, that first modern supersalesman, to the gods of comedy in the twentieth

century. Yet this hero has another, and less frequently noted, qualification which makes him part of the American dream: he is the lonely one. He belongs to the people and yet he must make his great decision of undergo the major trial in the waste places or in the solitude of the anguished soul. He is one of us; yet he must, to express himself, go above, away from or beyond our commoner range of experience in order to bring his message, the fire from heaven, the solution to the crime. This is the Dupin who figures in the three memorable stories in which he is the hero-god: he reverses the clock and lives vividly while the rest of the world sleeps. Poe's hero-god Dupin did not, however, try to "corrupt" anything or anybody. Poe's Dupin had long passed through and come out on the other side of the commercial formula: he had been able to make the commercial designs of society conform precisely to his own private ethic; yet he has made himself indispensable to society by being able, at will, to reduce society's madness and murder to a logic so simple that, if people were but aware of it, they could be Dupin too. But that measure of difference was Dupin's triumph. He had simple ingenuity, which anyone can possess, and analytic power, an ability granted only to genius. Dupin exhibited a degree of acumen which appears to the ordinary apprehension preternatural. He results, brought about by the very soul and essence of method, have, in truth, the whole air of intuition.

Dupin's method is actually the grotesquerie of any rational system and was no doubt so intended in terms of Poe's calculated attack on the sacred institution of money-getting. The mind of Dupin began with the assumption that the world was in total disorder. His is the unproductive sterility of a mind which can solve every ethical problem by acts of irrational, unethical intuition. Poe's Dupin get one more revenge on his own or Poe's time world: he is not only a lonely man and a success (however much his success reduces logic to absurdity), but also a man of intellect for whom other men's problems are matters of mere and momentary amusement; apart from the amusement, the struggle and the solution are not worth the bother; Dupin is excused from any moral intention. He is the ultimate dream of the artist who has nothing more to do but enjoy his art.

Dupin was that total success who, as an exponent of an artistic inquiry, admitted no flaw; he was what Poe wanted the artist and his art to be with such completeness

that, as an extreme, Dupin ended not in art or as an artist, but as an analyst and businessman. Poe therefore posited, behind all of his tales of ratiocination, a final relationship between reality and the ideal, the seen and the unseen, the perceived and the imagined. These two realms of being and cognition never seem to coincide in the normal world of man's experience. A crime is, however, a sudden and startling thrust of what lies behind the bland surface of existence into the presumed reality; that reality instantaneously breaks down and, while in its fragments, sustains or reveals the ideal. A crime is a disruption of the ostensible order of things – their temporal and physical relationships in which man a puts his trust and is, therefore, a glimpse into ideality, into the very nature of things. It is an instance whereby Accident is admitted as a portion of the superstructure of the world of things. A *"true philosophy"*, Poe elsewhere stated, "*will show, that a vast, perhaps the larger, portion of truth arises from the seemingly irrelevant*". At such a moment the detective-philosopher sees the total relevancy not only of being but of non-being; he can begin to relate the irrelevant and seemingly meaningless action in the brute world to the total, primal calculus of relationship which can be apprehended only by the creative imagination. The man who solve a crime is a poet: he is a re-creator of things as they truly are, not as they seem in reality to the common gaze.

Any human problem or crime thus required, to be understood, a reduction of the common and generally false ideas of human nature to a basic, primordial simplicity, which is itself identical with the primal order of the natural world. Every human idea or action is, if it is truly known, a simulacrum of the universal metaphysical and physical realms of being; every activity of a human mind is a paradigm in little of the function of the universe. Dupin read the criminal mind by reducing all its exercises to a fundamental, primordial simplicity, its basic 'Calculus of Probability'.

Yet it must be insisted that the human mind does to conform naturalistically to the laws of physical science; the two exist in separate realms of being, and a law of one cannot be directly applied to the other. But both mind and physical reality conform to an ideal set of logical determinants which, as though in a third realm of being, reach toward identity and unity. Just as the scientific laws approach a single Newtonian or transcendent formulation, so human intelligence and behavior, no matter what the

background and experience, move toward uniformity and respond to stimuli in identical ways. Once this pattern of behavior or thought can be traced to its origins, the outcome or solution is open to precise exposition.

Poe's term for this unitary characteristic of both mind and world was simplicity or the unvarying nature of the human mind to conform to a pattern of behavior which can at every stage be anticipated or discovered. In order to explain this calculus of relevance whereby human behavior could be explained as not like but ultimately parallel to scientific law, Poe set up a formula by which the several modes of human thought and action might be understood. First, there was the action of the commonplace, ordinary mind – the real side of man which conformed to a calculus of probability simple to unmask merely by putting one's own mind in logical reference and identification with it: Poe's analogy was the boy who could easily outwit his fellows by guessing in which hand the marble was held. Next, the more complex, original mind was impelled toward simplicity, toward final and ultimate comprehension. It was the character of this mind to conceal itself, as did Minister D – in *The Purloined Letter*, behind some other or inverted calculus of relevance. This reach toward simplicity approached, however, the original and primordial simplicity nature, itself based on the organization of the universe in some logical, all knowing mind. What appears so baffling to the ordinary or rational mind is, in this category, the ultimate simplicity and relevance.

Human perception led Poe straight to a unitary theory of mind and nature unified not in nature or the world about man but in the ultimate order of mind and matter in the total simplicity. *The material world*, Poe asserted in *The Purloined Letter*, "*abounds with very strict analogies to the immaterial …*" Note that Poe insisted on "analogies" not identities. The ordinary mind is physically dimensioned and behaves according only to normal, material contours of reality: an object in the mind is supposititiously the thing seen, a rose is a rose, a letter is a letter. But shift ever so slightly the position of an object in relation to the observed calculus of probability, and it may become something other than what it was. If it penetrates far enough behind the illusion of ostensible reality, the human mind has the capacity to destroy the world of confusion in which its normal experience is gained and reach

toward a wholly new keying of reality whereby the appearances of things are dispelled and the total coherence is revealed. A tale of ratiocination is very like the poem: each in its special way proceeds from multiplicity and confusion to the primal simplicity; just as the material world chemically and metaphysically moves through its various phases from Unity to Multiplicity and back again, so the human mind may struggle to return to the functioning Idea behind the mask of appearances.

The tales of ratiocination are one direction of the artist's quest : by renouncing the actual world, Poe was free to construct a totally fictive playground of the mind which could still maintain workable likenesses to the world of common affairs. At the end, Poe came to a concept of God, part mind and part craftsman, who existed at one time in and then removed Himself from His creation. God and nature are thus dual; through nature, however, man essays to arrive at truth; but all the while he discovers in nature a frightening variety of discordant and cancelling propositions. In their origin, Poe stated, these laws were fashioned to embrace all contingencies which could lie in the future. Man perceives these laws as special in place and time, and thus he is forever confused by the jarring discrepancies between what is and what his mind tells him is probability. What appears as an accident is merely a misapprehension of what is: Modern science has resolved to calculate upon the unforeseen. Poe's 'Calculus of Probabilities' is a solution to his need of admitting that the mind is the only reality and that all it can know is itself and its operations which are concordant with the primal laws of the universe. The ratiocinative exercise of the detective is simply an allegory of how the mind may impose its interior logic on exterior circumstance.

21.6 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed the biographical sketch of E. A. Poe. We have also discussed the story of 'The Purloined Letter' and analysed the story in detail.

21.7 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. The Purloined letter is a _____

   (a) Detective story (b) Gothic Romance

(c) Epic Poem (d) Essay

2. Who is the friend of the narrator?

(a) Monsieur G (b) Sherlock Holmes
(c) C.Auguste Dupin (d) Minister D

3. Who has purloined the letter?

(a) Dupin (b) The narrator
(c) Monsieur G (e) Minister D

4. The prize money offered is _____.

5. The minister is considered a fool because he is a _____.

21.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Why is the purloined letter so important?

2. Why is it easy for the Paris Police to search Minister D's house?

3. How does Dupin explain the logic behind the game of "Odds & Even"?

4. Why did all the probing and searching by the Paris Police yield no result?

5. The minister hoodwinked the police because he was a mathematician as well. Explain.

21.9 SUGGESTED READING

1. Edgar Ellan Poe by Lenore

2. The works of Edgar Allan Poe [The Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 78 (5541 - 554)]

COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 22**

AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–IV**

THE OVAL PORTRAIT

UNIT STRUCTURE

22.1 Introduction

22.2 Objectives

22.3 Edgar Allan Poe : The Oval Portrait

22.4 Analysis

22.5 The Philosophy of Composition

22.6 Let Us Sum Up

22.7 Short Answer Questions

22.8 Multiple Choice Questions

22.9 Examination Oriented Questions

22.10 Suggested Reading

22.1 INTRODUCTION

"The Oval Portrait," a short story by Edgar Allan Poe, is a dark and haunting tale that explores themes of art, obsession, and the sacrifice of life for beauty. The story is framed as a narrative within a narrative, where an injured narrator takes refuge in an abandoned mansion and becomes captivated by a lifelike portrait of a young woman. As he reads the accompanying story, he learns that the artist, consumed by his desire to perfect the painting, unwittingly drains the life from his beloved wife, leading to her death as the portrait reaches completion.

Poe's masterful use of gothic elements and psychological depth in "The Oval Portrait" exemplifies his skill in blending horror with poignant commentary on the cost of artistic creation.

22.2 OBJECTIVES

The aim of the lesson is to familiarize the learners with Poe's works prescribed in Syllabus.

22.3 EDGAR ALLAN POE : THE OVAL PORTRAIT

Poe's best known fiction works are Gothic, a genre he followed to appease the public taste. His most recurring themes deal with questions of death, including its physical signs, the effects of decomposition, concerns of premature burial, the reanimation of the dead, and mourning. Many of his works are generally considered part of the dark romanticism genre, a literary reaction to transcendentalism, which Poe strongly disliked. He referred to the followers of the movement as 'Frogpondians' after the pond on Boston Common and ridiculed their writings as 'metaphor-run', lapsing into '*obscurity for obscurity's sake*' or '*mysticism for mysticism's sake*'. Poe once wrote in a letter to Thomas Holley Chivers that he did not dislike Transcendentalists, "*only the pretenders and sophists among them*".

The story begins thus : The narrator who was badly injured and his valet Pedro had to make a forcible entrance into an abandoned chateau, since Pedro did not want the narrator to sleep outside. The chateau although grand had a gloomy and melancholy air about it as is common in the Apennines and was a classic example of the fancied horror of Mrs Ann Radcliffe who rather prided herself on describing the macabre. The chateau seemed to have been lately occupied, the narrator and his valet proceeded to spend the night in one of the smallest and sparsely furnished rooms which lay in small turret. The apartment was furnished with rich but decadent decorations including tapestries, trophies and paintings. The narrator describes it thus its decorations. "Its decorations were rich, yet tattered and antique. Its walls were hung with tapestry and bedecked with manifold and multiform armorial trophies, together with an unusually great number of very spirited modern paintings in frames of rich golden arabesque".

The weird architecture of the chateau had made the hanging of some paintings in many nooks and niches necessary and in a semi delirious state he started taking an intense interest in the paintings. He had Pedro close the shutters, light a candelabrum and throw open for and wide the fringed curtains of black velvet which enveloped the bed itself. And the narrator decided that if sleep evaded him he would scrutinize the pictures and read a slim volume which he had found on the pillow.

He read and gazed and the hours flew by till deep midnight came. The position of the candle being displeasing he shifted it to throw more light on the books.

"Long-long I read-and devoutly, devotedly I gazed. Rapidly and gloriously the hours flew by and the deep midnight came. The position of the candelabrum displeased me, and outreaching my hand with difficulty, rather than disturb my slumbering valet, I placed it so as to throw its rays more fully upon the book".

The unexpected effect of the narrator's movement of the candle immediately threw into sharp vivid relief a portrait that had been hidden in the dark near one of the bedposts. "It was the portrait of a young girl just ripening into womanhood". He closed his eyes constantly and pondered as to why he had shut them so quickly. When he opened his eyes again, he saw that his senses had momentarily deceived him and startled him into wakefulness.

The portrait displayed a vignette of a young girl head and shoulders done in the style of Thomas Silly, an American portraitist. The details below the bust faded into vague darkness of the shadowing background and the oval frame was covered with gold filigree in Moorish style. He describes it thus:

"The arms, the bosom, and even the ends of the radiant hair melted imperceptibly into the vague yet deep shadow which formed the back-ground of the whole. The frame was oval, richly gilded and filigreed in Moresque. As a thing of art nothing could be more admirable than the painting itself". The painting had a deep moving impact on the narrator because he momentarily mistook it for a living person. "But it could have been neither the execution of the work, nor the immortal beauty of the countenance, which had so suddenly and so vehemently moved me. Least of all,

could it have been that my fancy, shaken from its half slumber, had mistaken the head for that of a living person".

He continued to observe the painting intently to determine how the painting had caused such an impact before returning the candelabrum to its previous position. "I had found the spell of the picture in an absolute life-likeliness of expression, which, at first startling, finally confounded, subdued, and appalled me. With deep and reverent awe I replaced the candelabrum in its former position".

He then eagerly scanned the volume to read about the oval portrait. It described the maiden painted therein as a naturally blithe and cheerful. "*Maiden of rarest Beauty.*" But in an evil hour she fell in love with the painter and married him. The painter the book related, was "*passionate, studious and austere*" and as much in love with his Art as with his wife. The young wife, vivacious and full of life love and laughter cherished everything except the painter's Art considering the art to be her rival and despising the pallets and brushes which deprived her of the countenance of her lover. It fell as a terrible blow upon her when the painter expressed his desire to portray his young wife. She disliked the idea but being a modest and obedient wife, she agreed to sit as a model for a portrait in the dark tower where the only light that shone came from above. She sat there patently for weeks without complaining. The painter, passionate about his work gloried in it and in his wild and moody dreaminess did not notice that the young bride was wasting and pining away in the dark. Inspite of her withered spirits she smiled on and still on uncomplainingly, because she saw that the painter (who had high renown) took a fervid and burning pleasure in his task, and wrought day and night to depict her who so loved him, yet who grew daily more dispirited and weak.

The portrait was so life like that everyone who saw it marveled at it and concluded that his obsession for his art and his love for his wife alone could produce such a beautiful portrait. However, as the portrait neared completion the painter shut himself and his wife into the turret away from visitors so he could place all his concentration on his work. Grown wild with his passion and obsession for his art he would not pay heed to his wife. As the tints of the portrait grow rosier that of his

wife's countenance grew paler. And when he was putting the last strikes of brush to his painting the spirit of the lady flickered once again to burn brilliantly and when the last shade was painted the painter, mesmerized by the painting exclaimed, "*This is indeed life itself*" and growing tremulous and pallid turned suddenly to regard his wife only to find that she was dead. Poe gives a suitable ending to the story thus : "*And then the brush was given, and then the tint was placed; and, for one moment, the painter stood entranced before the work which he had wrought; but in the next, while he yet gazed, he grew tremulous and very pallid, and aghast, and crying with a loud voice, '*This is indeed Life itself!' turned suddenly to regard his beloved:-She was dead!"

22.4 ANALYSIS

As one of the shortest of Poe's stories, *The Oval Portrait* consists of a brief one-paragraph story framed within a larger vignette whose main purpose is to establish the romantic gothic mood in which the story occurs. The setting and basis of the plot are shrouded in mystery; the narrator does not explain how or where he is wounded, and with his servant, he enters an abandoned, decaying chateau that offers no more answers than the narrator. The dark gloom of a deserted house is a classic background for a Gothic story, and the tapestries and strange architecture of the building give the narrator's choice of apartment a feeling of removal from the contemporary world. Nothing of consequence occurs during the night, but the details provide a romantic feeling of loss that serves as an introduction to the story of the oval portrait.

The Oval Portrait indicates the tension between the impermanence of life and the intransience of art. The portrait's subject is full of life when she marries the painter, but the as the guide book says, "The tints which he spread upon the canvas were drawn from the cheeks of her who sat beside him." With his artistic powers, he has created a double of his wife, but as in William Wilson, both cannot simultaneously subsist for long without one defeating the other. The history of the painting suggests that although the metamorphosis from life to eternal art may create a masterful work of beauty that simulates life, the narrator is only deceived by his dreamy stupor and by the sudden reveal of the painting from the dark. A second, more intense look at the

painting reveals the illusion, and similarly, the painter of the story ends by giving up his wife for a mere image.

The destruction of loved ones is a common theme in many of Poe's short stories, but unlike in Poe's other stories, the painter does not cause his wife's death because of hate or any negative emotions. Instead, his passion for his art simply overwhelms him to the point where he can no longer see his wife except though the lens of his painting. Thus, the story associates art and creativity with decay, not only within the story of the painting but in the juxtaposition of spirited modern paintings with rich, yet tattered and antique decorations within the narrator's room. In the stories of C. Auguste Dupin, Poe praises the power of creativity tempered by the ability to maintain emotional removal, but the passion of the painter in *The Oval Portrait* is unrestricted and hence ultimately harmful in his search to immortalize his wife's image.

The association of beautiful women with death is prevalent in Poe's works, and is especially prominent in *The Oval Portrait.* The painter's wife is a beautiful woman even before she agrees to model for her husband's portrait, but as she begins to fade away under the influence of the tower, she becomes pale and wan and as a result could easily fit the Romantic and Gothic ideal of the ethereal woman. Finally, as she dies, the process of transfer between life and art completes, and her portrait captures her immortal beauty before it can fade away in old age and memory. Art and aesthetics are intrinsically connected, and the relationship between art and death places the painter's wife next to other Poe characters such as Ligeia from the eponymous story, who also become beautiful as they approach death.

Although *The Oval Portrait* centers on the painting of a woman, the painter's wife is essentially a passive figure within the story. Docile and loving, she is akin to the canvas of the portrait in that both are manipulated by the male painter, whose passion and drive make him the active figure in the history of the painting. Furthermore, the wife is never the active, observing character. She is only observed, both by her husband, who in the throes of his art sees her only as a model, and by the narrator, who peers at her image in order to while away the night (we know that the narrator

is male because his servant is described as a valet, a term commonly used for the male servant of a man). The wife's fate acts as a criticism of the male domination of art, but her compliance and submissiveness prevent her from serving as more than a silent warning.

Richards uses Tzvetan Todorov's definition of the term 'Fantastic' to describe the literary genre in which *The Oval Portrait* was written. Of *The Oval Portrait*, she writes: "As described in the volume that the narrator is reading, Art is no longer just an enterprise or a perception, but it becomes an actual woman who will rival with the young woman who serves as model for the affection of the painter. Along with the personification of Art, there occurs a de-personification of the woman . . . . The copy becomes the reality, thereby achieving the ultimate of man's ego fantasies: the need to preserve himself, and that which he loves, against the ravages of time, to create a stasis, but at the same time to enclose and capture the ephemeral beauty of life".

James Twitchell, in *Poe's The Oval Portrait and the Vampire Motif* (*Studies in Short Fiction)* interprets *The Oval Portrait* as being a story that uses vampirism as a motif. Twitchell feels Poe used a variation of the vampire theme to demonstrate how artists take life from the animate object and transfer it to an inanimate object. According to Twitchell, "The paradox the artist doesn't recognize is that the vitality of his art drains the very life-strength of the people he loves . . . . The vampire myth was an ideal paradigm for love that is too demanding or, in the case of The Oval Portrait, art that is too life-consuming". Thus artists, troped here as vampires, must kill in order to renew life. Twitchell cites the original title of the story, Life in Death, as proof that Poe was writing of vampirism, because a vampire's life depends upon the death of another: "Instead art is the love, art itself is involved in the transfer of vitality; the process of creation is vampiric".

22.5 THE PHILOSOPHY OF COMPOSITION

An essay written by Edgar Allan Poe : *The Philosophy of Composition* elucidates Poe's theory about how good writers write when they write well. He asserts that Length, unity of effect and a logical method are important considerations for good writing.

He begins by the examination that Dickens made which said that Godwin wrote his *Caleb Williams* backwards. William Godwin (1756-1836) English essayist and novelist reported in the 'Preface' to his novel of crime and detection, that first he conceived the ending of the novel and then wrote the beginning. "He first involved his hero in a web of difficulties, forming the second volume, and then, for the first, cast about him for some mode of accounting for what had been done".

Poe finds that this precise mode of procedure of Godwin was very much in keeping with the idea of Charles Dickens himself. Every plot, however conceived, must keep in mind first the denouement – the final revelation which shows the outcome of the plot before a writer proceeds to write. Says Poe, "It is only with the denouement constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequences, or causation, By making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention."

Poe is of the opinion that the usual procedure of writing a story has a radical error to it. "The writer finds his source either in history or some untoward incident triggers the plot or….." the author sets himself to work in the combination of striking events to form merely the basis of his narrative." The author then fills the gaps, wherever visible or manifest, with inane description or dialogues or auctorial comments.

The essay states his conviction that a work of fiction should be written only after the author has decided how it is to end and which emotional response or 'effect' he wishes to create, commonly known as the 'unity of effect'. He discusses as to what 'effect' would appeal to the heart, the intellect or the soul and then how an author can combine incidents and the tone of his writing to achieve that effect. "Of the innumerable effects, or impressions, of which the heart, the intellect, or (more generally) the soul is susceptible, which one shall I, on the present occasion select? Having chosen a novel, first, and secondly a vivid effect, I consider whether it can be best wrought by incident or tone whether by ordinary incidents and peculiar tone, or the converse, or by peculiarity both of incident and tone afterward looking about me (or rather without) for such combinations of event, or tone, as shall best aid me in the

construction of the effect. Once thus effect has been determined, the writer should decide all other matters pertaining to the composition of the work, including tone, theme setting, characters, conflict and plot."

Poe dismissed the notion of artistic inaction and argued that writing is methodical and analytical, not spontaneous. He further explains that no author has yet admitted this because most writers would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes, At the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought, at the fully matured fancies discarded in despair as unmanageable at the cautious selections and rejections. Poetry from him is not "*a spontaneous, overflow of powerful feeling*." The poet labours at his art painfully erasing some, interpolating other. He compares the poet to a literary 'histrio' a performer in a ring with all the paraphernalia – "the wheels and pinions – the tackle for scene shifting – the step ladders and demon traps the cock's features, the red paint and the black patches ……".

In the essay, Poe traces the logical progression of his creation of *The Raven* as an attempt to compose a poem that should suit at once the popular and the critical taste. Poe recounts the idealized forces by which he says he wrote *The Raven* to illustrate the theory as a deliberate contrast to the spontaneous creation, explanation put forth by Coleridge as an elucidation for his poem *Kubla Khan*. The poem was composed in a highly methodical manner, Poe said. "It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its composition is referable either to accident or intuition that the work proceeded, step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem."

Poe commences with the length of a poem. He believed that all literary work should be short. He writes a distinct limit, to all works of literary art, the limit of a single setting. But if any literary work required more than one setting than the reader must be prepared to give up the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression – which would be destroyed by the interruption of mundane affairs. Nothing can compensate for the loss of unity of effect. Lengthy poems are therefore brief poetical effects. A poem when it excites or elevates a soul perusing it, excites it but briefly. And that is why half of Paradise Lost is for Poe, essentially prose – "a succession

of poetical excitements interspersed, inevitably, with corresponding depressions the whole being deprived, through the extremeness of its length, of the vastly important artistic element, totality, or unity of effect".

The intensity of excitement or elevation that a poem generates is mathematically proportionate to the true poetical effect which it is capable of inducing through its brevity. Prose composition citing Robinson Crusoe, says Poe may not demand such brevity, "demanding no(such) unity" but it can never properly be overpassed in a poem. Poe settles on a length of one hundred and eight lines (the brevity must be indirect ratio of the intensity of the intended effect).

The choice of an impression according to Poe should be "*universally appreciable*". And Poe is of the opinion that "*Beauty is the sole legitimate province of the poem*". The most pure profound ennobling and sublime pleasure is to be found in the contemplation of the beautiful. "When indeed, men speak of Beauty, they mean, precisely, not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect – they refer, in short, just to that intense and pure elevation of soul not of intellect, or of heart…. And which is a experienced in consequence of contemplating, The beautiful". Truth and Passion satisfying the intellect and heart respectively are more suited to prose because truth demands precision and Passion a homeliness, Even if Truth and Passion are introduced in a poem they would always be subservient to Beauty.

With Beauty established as the province of poetry Poe's next task was to find "the tone of its highest manifestation – and all experience has shown that this tone is one of sadness." Ephemeral or eternal, beauty always moves a sensitive soul to tears and Poe says "Melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones".

Poe decided that the topic of the poem would be Death because according to the universal understanding of mankind death is the most melancholy. Poe further elucidates that this most melancholy of topics is most poetical "when it most closely allies itself to beauty: the death, then, of a beautiful women is, unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world". And undoubtedly the lamenting lover would be the most suitable person to express this woe.

Poe logically decides that "the death….. of a beautiful woman as it is, is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world and equally it is beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereared lover."

Poe then looks for some "keynote in the construction of the poem – some pivot upon which the whole structure might turn". As he started considering, "all the usual artistic effects", he perceived "refrain". as being the most universal. Since refrain or repetition depends on the force of monotone in sound and thought repeated and pleasure is deduced solely by repetition he determined to produce continuously novel effects, by the variation of the application of the refrain – the refrain itself remaining, for the most part, unvaried. Next he settled upon a single word as the best refrain as the nature of his refrain.

As regards the sound or character of the word – a refrain implies stanzas, and the refrain closes each stanza; to close the stanza with force meant that the sound must be sonorous and susceptible of protracted emphasis, and he concluded that the long o is the most sonorous novel in connection with r as the most producible consonant.

Poe, then decided that the choice of the world must be in keeping with the sad and melancholy tone of the poem and 'Nevermore' was the first word which flashed across his thoughts. But then if a human being were to repeat the word it would be odd. So a plausible voice for repeating the word so often was found not in a parrot, although it was given consideration, but in a Raven 'equally capable of speech, and infinitely more in keeping with the intended tone".

So far: A raven, the bird of ill omen, monotonously repeating the word 'nevermore' at the conclusion of each stanza in a poem of lachrymose tone, and in length about one hundred lines. What next?

How to combine a raven repeating 'Nevermore' with a distressed lover lamenting his dead mistress. "The only intelligible mode of such combination is that of imagining the Raven employing the word in answer to the queries of the lover." To make the repetition more varied the questions would begin with nonchalance and at length the ominous repetition would excite the lover to superstition. And so the lover

keeps asking the bird questions, "not altogether because he believes in the prophetic or demoniac character of the bird…. but because he experiences a frenzied pleasure in so modeling his questions as to receive from the expected "Nevermore" the most delicious because the most intolerable of sorrows".

The true beginning of the poem thus commenced with the climax in mind where in the concluding query the word 'Nevermore' should involve the utmost conceivable amount of sorrow and despair.

"*Here then the poem may be said to have it beginning at the end, where all word of art should begin*…"

Why begin here? Poe does this:

- So that "*by establishing the climax, I might the better vary and graduate, as regards seriousness and importance, the preceding queries of the lover*"
- "*and secondly, that I might definitely settle the rhythm, the metre, and the length and general arrangement of the stanza*"
- He chose this pattern of repetition for its originality:

  "*each of these lines taken individually has been employed before, and*

  originality the "Raven" has, is in their combination into stanza;

  "*nothing even remotely approaching this has ever been attempted*"

The effect of this originality of combination is aided by other unusual and some altogether novel effects, arising from an extension of the application of the principles of rhyme and alliteration.

Next, how to bring the lover and the bird together?

Locale:

He decided on the lover's chamber because "*a close circumscription of space…has the force of a frame to a picture*".

"*a chamber rendered sacred to him by memories of her who had frequented it. The room is represented as richly furnished out of achieving the effect of Beauty, as the sole true poetical thesis*".

o Method of entry:

- The window, obviously
- He delays this to increase the reader's curiosity, and to make the lover half-imagine "*that it was the spirit of his mistress that knocked.*"

o The tempestuous night

- To explain why the raven would seek admission
- To "*contrast with the (physical) serenity within the chamber*".

o The bust of Pallas

- "*for the effect of contrast between the marble and the plumage*"
- "*in keeping with the scholarship of the lover*"
- "*and…for the sonorousness of the word, Pallas, itself*"
- The approaching denouement:

O "*with the Raven's reply, "Nevermore", to the lover's final demand if he shall meet his mistress in another world- the poem, in its obvious phase, that of a simple narrative, may be said to have its completion*".

A raven, having learned by rote the single word "*Nevermore*" and having escaped from the custody of its owner, is driven at midnight, through the violence of a storm, to seek admission at a window from which a light still.

Gleams – the chamber window of a student, occupied half in poring over a volume half in dreaming of a beloved mistress deceased. The casement being thrown open t the fluttering of the bird's wings, the bird itself perches on the most convenient seat out of the immediate reach of the student, who, amused by the incident and the oddity of the visitor's demeanor, demands of it, in jest and without looking for a

reply, its name. The raven addressed, answers with its customary word, "*Nevermore*" -a word which finds immediate echo in the melancholy heart of the student, who, giving utterance aloud to certain thoughts suggested by the occasion, is again startled by the fowl's repetition of "*Nevermore*". The student now guesses the state of the case, but is impelled, as I have before explained, by the human thirst for self torture, and in part by superstition, to propound such queries to the bird as will bring him, the lover, the most of the luxury of sorrow, through the anticipated answer "*Nevermore*". With the indulgence, to the extreme, of this self-torture, the narration, in what I have termed its first or obvious phase, has a natural termination, and so far there has been no overstepping of the limits of the real.

No aspect of the poem, Poe claims, was an accident; it was under total control of the author.

To appeal to the artistically eye, Poe says, Two things are invariably required- first, some amount of complexity, or more properly, adaptation; and, secondly, some amount of suggestiveness -some under current, however indefinite, of meaning. It is this latter, in especial, which imparts to a work of art so much of that richness (to borrow from colloquy a forcible term) which we are too fond of confounding with the ideal.

With these opinion in mind he added the two concluding stanzas of the poem - their suggestiveness being thus made to pervade all the narrative which has preceded them. The under-current of meaning is rendered first apparent in the lines –

"*Take the beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door*!"

Quoth the Raven "*Nevermore*".

Poe says that this metaphorical expression leads the mind to seek a moral in all narration that has preceded it. The reader begins now to regard the Raven as emblematical but it is not until the very last line of the very last stanza, that the intention of making him emblematical of "Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance" is permitted distinctly to be seen :

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting,

On the pallid bust of Pallas, just above my chamber door;

And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,

And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;

And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor shall be lifted nevermore.

The raven itself, Poe says, is meant to symbolize Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance. This may imply an autobiographical significance to the poem, alluding to the many people in Poe's life who had died.

Biographers and critics have often suggested that Poe's obsession with this theme stems from the repeated loss of women throughout his life, including his mother Eliza Poe, his foster mother Frances Allan and, later, his wife Virginia.

It is uncertain if Poe really followed the method he describes in "The Philosophy of Composition. T. S. Eliot said: "It is difficult for us to read that essay without reflecting that if Poe plotted out his poem with such calculation, he might have taken a little more pains over it: the result hardly does credit to the method". Biographer Joseph Wood Krutch described the essay as, a rather highly ingenious exercise in the art of rationalization than literary criticism.

22.6 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed the story of the Oval portrait and analysed it in detail. We have also discussed Poe's philsophy of compsitionwith reference to the story.

22.7 SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Describe the chateau and its decorations.
2. What was the unexpected effect when the narrator moved the candle?
3. What did the slim volume tell about the maiden of the oval portrait?

4. What was the painter obsessed with?
5. Describe the tragic ending of the story.
6. Write a detailed analysis of "The Oval Portrait".

22.8 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. What is the title of the short story by Edgar Allan Poe in which a portrait plays a significant role?

   A) The Fall of the House of Usher
   B) The Masque of the Red Death
   C) The Tell-Tale Heart
   D) The Oval Portrait

2. Where does the protagonist find the oval portrait that becomes the center of the story?

   A) In a gallery B) In a secret chamber
   C) In a museum D) In a haunted mansion

3. What is the subject of the oval portrait?

   A) A landscape B) A still life
   C) A woman D) A man

4. What is the relationship between the narrator and the injured man in the story?

   A) Brothers B) Friends
   C) Father and son D) Husband and wife

5. What does the narrator do to the injured man while reading the history of the portrait?

   A) Kills him B) Ignores him
   C) Takes care of him D) Interrupts the story

6. What artistic quality does the portrait have that makes it seem almost real?

A) It has an extraordinary size
B) It is painted in vivid colors
C) It is depicted in a three-dimensional style
D) It has a lifelike expression

7. What does the injured man comment about the portrait when he sees it?

A) He thinks it is the most beautiful thing he has ever seen
B) He believes it is a work of dark magic
C) He finds it eerily familiar
D) He criticizes the artist's technique

8. What is the tragic twist in the story of the portrait's creation?

A) The artist died while painting the portrait
B) The model died while sitting for the portrait
C) The artist painted the portrait using only black and white
D) The portrait was stolen before completion

9. How does the injured man eventually die?

A) He succumbs to his injuries B) He is killed by the narrator
C) He dies of a sudden illness
D) He is haunted by the ghost of the woman in the portrait

10. What is the main theme of "The Oval Portrait"?

A) The power of art and beauty
B) The dangers of forbidden love
C) The consequences of betrayal
D) The inevitability of death

Answers: 1. The oval Portrait 2. In a secret chamber 3. A woman 4. Friends 5. Kills him 6. It has a lifelike expression 7. He thinks it is the most beautiful thing he has ever seen 8.The model died while sitting for the portrait 9. He is killed by the narrator 10. The power of art and beauty.

22.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. What in Poe's opinion is wrong with the usual procedure of writing?
2. How can a writer achieve "unity of effect"?
3. Poe said that writing is methodical and analytical, not spontaneous. Contrast his views with those of Wordsworth's.
4. Describe Poe's opinion about the length of a poem citing the example of Paradise Lost.
5. What according to Poe is the province of poetry and why?
6. Describe the use of 'refrain' in the Raven.
7. How does Poe bring the lover and the raven together?
8. What is the raven's method of entry? Why does he seek shelter?

22.10 SUGGESTED READING

1. Edgar Ellan Poe by Lenore
2. The works of Edgar Allan Poe [The Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 78 (5541 - 554)]

COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 23**
AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–V**

SONGS OF MYSELF (SELECTED POEMS)

UNIT STRUCTURE

23.1 Introduction

23.2 Objectives

23.3 Walt Whitman : His Life & Works

23.4 The Development of Various Editions of *Leave of Grass*

23.5 Let Us Sum Up

23.6 Examination Oriented Questions

23.7 Suggested Reading

23.1 INTRODUCTION

Walt Whitman, often hailed as the father of free verse, revolutionized American poetry with his expansive and innovative style. His seminal work, *Leaves of Grass*, celebrates the individual's connection to nature, democracy, and the human spirit. Whitman's poetry is characterized by its rhythmic cadences, vivid imagery, and an unbridled enthusiasm for life and humanity.

23.2 OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the lesson is to acquaint the learners with the author's life and works and focuss upon the book *Leaves of Grass.*

23.3 WALT WHITMAN: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

Walter "Walt" Whitman was born on 31st May 1819, in a farming community near Huntington, Long Island with Dutch and Yankee, Quaker and Calvinist in his ancestry. His mother Louisa Van Velsor and his father Walter were semi-literate parents with a large family of nine children. Walt was the second son. Just before his fifth birthday, his family moved to Brooklyn. It was a small town then of about 7,000 persons, and it grew into a large city during his lifetime. Walt Whitman spend his formative years here but for the next thirty years he returned again and again to Long island for visiting his grand parents and becoming familiar with the countryside and the shores of the Atlantic nearby. From his childhood his patriotic family taught him to regard men within the boundaries of the republic as American like himself, differing only in their labours, fortunes, and separate traits of personalities. This made him a true American and an 'Expansionist' on a new model less concerned with the class and region unlike Emerson, Thoreau and Melville. Whitman saw America as a whole. The jumble mixture of country and city scenes, where the poet spent his youth in alternation between the farms on Long Island and the streets of Brooklyn, impinged on his imagination and the mature poet denied neither but exultingly embraced both.

In Brooklyn, Walt Whitman went to elementary school and after only six years of formal education left the school at the age of eleven to go to work as an apprentice printer. He worked as a printer until 1835 in Brooklyn and later in New York. From 1836 to 1838, he taught in various schools in Long Island. It was in 1838 that he began his career in journalism, which he pursued intermittently for over twenty years. In other works, he grew from printer and reporter, as an editor with a special interest in politics as well as poetry. This cleavage in self-interests in his youth gave him a temperament of New World men and women. His imagination was dominated by the idea of expansion, by the dream of a continental cosmopolitan state, a true New World.

Walt Whitman was at home in Brooklyn, a respectable man, member of a growing American small town, but the great bay of New York lay just beyond

Brooklyn Ferry which took him to Manhattan Island and New York- a great metropolis, cosmopolitan, turbulent, rich and incredibly expanding. It became for the young man a great source of his passionate relationship with the sea, which for him held the secrets of the mystery of life and death.

However, to expect that a large family of such low literacy and limited resources would be able to retain a reliable account of Whitman's youth is indeed, demanding the impossible. A few clues and the poet's own projections in his poems like *There was a Child Went Forth* give us the glimpses into the domestic scene during his youth and his relationship with his family :

My mother at home quietly placing the dishes on the supper–table,

The mother with mild words, clean her cap and gown, a wholesome odor falling off her person and clothes as she walks by,

The father strong, self-sufficient, manly, mean, anger'd, unjust.

The blow, the quick loud word, the tight bargain, the crafty lure,

The family usages, the language, the company, the furniture, the yearning and swelling heart,

Affection that will not be gainsay'd, the sense of what is real, the thought if after all it should prove unreal,

The doubts of day–time and the doubts of night-time .....

The portraits of the parents are realistically drawn and the gradual shift from the concrete and palpable to the metaphysical speculation and ultimate thought about the nature of everyday reality of life is extraordinarily convincing.

Whitman's education was partly self–education and partly vocational education, it lent him a voice of the common sense. So far as the self-education is concerned, it came by his personal reading. He was deeply influenced by the political essays of Tom Paine, which were the guiding spirit behind the American Revolution and his democratic ideas. Besides, the novelists like Walter Scott, the

thinkers like Hegel, Carlyle, Emerson, George Sand and hundred such writers, whom he read with a great fervor, added something of a mystic and dreamer to his personality. Whitman's vocational education was the by-product of his occupation as a journalist. He found nothing irrelevant or alien to his purpose, which was

> *"To articulate faithfully, to express in literary and poetic form, and uncompromisingly, my own physical, emotional, moral, intellectual and aesthetic Personality in the midst of, and tallying, the momentous spirit and facts of its immediate days, and of current America–and to exploit that personality, identified with place and date, in a far more candid and comprehensive sense than any hither to poem or book".*

Thus, Whitman defined his goal as a poet very early in his life. He captured this Personality and cherished this epic ambition in *Leaves of Grass* which is an archetypal poem, a national epic. On the one hand, he represented the voice of American people, on the other he himself became the symbol of American expansiveness even in his journalistic writings.

As he himself admitted in 1846, Whitman was given what he calls his "*best sit*" by which he meant the situation as an editor on the Daily Eagle**,** the leading Brooklyn Newspaper of the day. It was a successful and respected paper of Democrats, and was growing at an enormous pace. For nearly two years he worked with this paper as an Editor. This is the period when he rounded up the news of the town, of America and the world for the local readers as the most responsible and public-spirited citizen. Whitman was very keen to take part in active politics and see to it that the benefits of American democracy reach every individual. However, Whitman came into conflict with the political opinions of the owners of this newspaper and in January 1848, he was made to resign from his position. He was on the open road "*leading wherever/I choose*". Fortunately, he did not live without a job for long. Soon he took the Editorship of the paper called Daily Crescent. Though he stayed there for three months only, this brief span of time brought great change in his outlook and attitude toward many seminal issues,

especially about sex-an area which in the case of Whitman is full of supreme contradictions. His journalistic writings through the 1840s and 1850s provide a very fertile ground for his poetry. These newspaper writings, however, have all been collected and published including even a journalistic novel, *Franklin Evans*; or *The Inebriate: A Tale of the Times* (1842), which was not an impressive piece of fiction. These writings are of great bulk filling many volumes but they have nothing to match the greatness of his master–work *Leaves of Grass*. When the first edition of the remarkable book *Leaves of Grass*. published in 1855, it made the readers feel as if a poet was born overnight.

Whitman carefully planned his career as a poet and cultivated his proper physical appearance for his roles as a writer, editor and poet. If as an editor he was living the full life of the city man – son of Manhattan, as a writer and poet there were two different voices — of a Romantic poet and a Social Reformer. Even as a poet both the voices combine in one note to fulfill his aim which was to bring about a revolution in American Poetry and also in American life. His moods and masks — as a Dandy, a Vagabond on the open road or a Bohemian or an Opera goer who was delighted to feel and share the pulse of the masses or as a *Carpenter Christ*, "*the divine worker, the humble carpenter filled with a boundless love for mankind*" — are analyzed so effectively by James Miller Jr. in his book on Whitman. On the one hand it established the connection between poetry and life which is the core of his theory of poetry, and on the other, it extended the relationship between the poet and his poetry and makes it actually and emotionally autobiographical. This literal identification between the poet and his poetry is confirmed when Whitman says about his book, *Leaves of Grass* :

"Camerado, this is no book,

Who touches this touches a man."

Whitman told his friend Dr. Bucke : "Remember, the book (Leaves of Grass) arose out of my life in Brooklyn and New York from 1838 to 1853, absorbing a million people, for fifteen years, with an intimacy, an eagerness, an abandon, probably never equaled". Whitman actually furnished his imagination

with facts, which he used as tools, and poetic symbols. The change of his inner life became articulate when his maturing imagination began to draw upon experiences lying at deeper levels.

23.4 THE DEVELOPMENT OF VARIOUS EDITIONS OF LEAVES OF GRASS

Before one studies comprehensively the details of each of its nine editions, it is necessary to note two things : (a) The book grew thematically as well as technically with each new edition and (b) It shows Whitman's development as the greatest American poet of the New World. As he himself stated in the Prefaces, he wrote a new kind of poetry "*new in every way–in subject matter, in form, in spirit, in its message, and in its style and diction*." His main ambition was to break away from the European tradition as he wrote in his letter of Emerson:

> "*Walking freely out from the old tradition, as our politics has walked out, American poets and literates recognize nothing behind them superior to what is present with them....*"

Whitman tried hard to create the new taste and succeeded to a large extent in his effort. Poetry for him is not a *pure* art, but an art with a purpose, a use. According to him poetry should be as eclectic as possible and should express all the needs and aspirations of Modern Man–political, social, material and spiritual. Hence, he retains his 'two voices' the voice of an inspired singer to enhance the spiritual development and the voice of a utilitarian to be the instrument of social and political reform.

The remarkable event of publishing the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* occurred on 4th July 1855 when he was thirty-six years old. It was a slender volume of 93 pages containing 12 untitled poems and a Preface. Whitman used only one general title for all the poems, *Leaves of Grass***.** In the Preface he gives almost all of his main approaches and aims of poetry. Though there are echoes of many well known pronouncements on poetry made by English poets and critics like Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley and American poet and critic like Emerson, Whitman made a

clear distinction how the new poetry must differ from the old. Whitman emphasized through out the Preface that an ideal poet must maintain the connection with everyday life:

> "*Men and women and the earth and all upon it are simply to be taken as they are, and investigation of their past and present and future shall be unintermitted and shall be done with perfect candor. Upon this basis philosophy speculates ever looking to the poet, ever regarding the eternal tendencies of all toward happiness never inconsistent with what is clear to the senses and to the soul. For the eternal tendencies of all toward happiness make the only point of sane philosophy .....Sanity and ensemble characterize the great master.....The great master has nothing to do with miracles.*"

However, Whitman made it absolutely clear that as a poet serious office to perform keeping in mind two things: (a) The 'sense' and the 'soul' are equal partners in search for happiness and (b) the great poets must take interest in 'political liberty' to "*cheer up the slaves and horrify despots*." In his earliest Preface (1855) he wrote : "*The art of art, the glory of expression and the sunshine of the light of letters is simplicity.*"

Whitman, on the whole, kept this ideal of simplicity even in his eloquence. As Whitman was intimately acquainted with the art of printing, it was easy for him to prove his originality by giving a rather unusual appearance to his book. He chose for his *Leaves of Grass* a large format, a green cover with an intricate leafy design on it, gold lettering on the back-strip and gilt edge. He also included a portrait of himself in workmen's clothes.

The poet obviously expected that the rich appearance of the book without the author's name on the title page would arouse the curiosity but the book, unfortunately, failed to catch the attention of the reading public. Instead, the external appearance of the book and the eccentricities in printing were adversely criticized.

In 1856, Whitman brought out the second edition of *Leaves of Grass* which was considerably larger as it was of 385 pages and contained 32 poems including the original 12. In fact, Whitman was encouraged by the famous literary figure, Emerson who responded with enthusiasm to the first edition stating in a letter to the author that he found the book to be "the extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed.....I find the courage of treatment, which so delights me, and which large perception only can inspire. I greet you at the beginning of a great career..." Whitman was so much excited and encouraged by this praise from the eminent writers and philosopher like Emerson that he prophetically declared in his reply to him; "*the work of my life is making poems*". From this excellent testimonial he used one line on the back-strip of the second edition of his book. *Leaves of Grass* grew in quantity with almost every new edition. Its third edition was published in 1860. It was a large volume of 546 pages containing 124 new poems and the old ones were extensively revised and were given many new titles. This volume grouped one set of poems in praise of the American nation, while another group entitled *Children of Adam* were about love which registers his rebellion against the conventional attitudes toward sex, admiration of all natural physiological functions and hope that a new race would be procreated in the future restoring to man his original strength and vitality. Another group called *Calamus* poems were about with 'manly love'- a subject which Walt Whitman deals with frequently in his poetry. *Drum-Taps and Sequel to Drum–Taps***,** 1865, are two pamphlets of poems about the Civil War and President Lincoln. He was oppressed by the horrors and depredations of war, and by the division of the nation in whose progress and increasing unity he had such a great faith. The poems of this volume reveal a darkening mood and nowhere are his treatment of death more profound than in the elegy "*When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*". The forth edition of *Leaves of Grass* appeared in 1867, with only eight new poems but a great deal of revision of the previous work. The revision of his own poems, even changing the titles of some of his poems or arranging and rearranging the "groups" of poems has been associated with the "evolution" of Whitman which has been carefully and critically traced out by some of the critics.

Meanwhile in 1871, Whitman brought his prose work, *Democratic Vistas,* which carries his essays on 'Democracy' and 'Personalism'. The former was written in response to Carlyle's views on Democracy and expressed his belief in the soundness of the common people and their capacity to rectify their shortcomings, the latter was about his theory based on his conviction that political progress was dependent on the spiritual health and development of each individual in the society.

Next edition of *Leaves of Grass,* that was the fifth edition, appeared in 1871 and was reissued in 1872, to include *Passage to India*. The title piece of this collection was suggested by the engineering feats of the Suez Canal, the trans–Atlantic cable and the railway from the Atlantic to the Pacific. These engineering triumphs filled him with optimism. Through these poems Whitman once again proves two things: (i) Whitman's appreciation for Science as a source to solve the problems of modern man and (b) His faith that is topical, is as significant as eternal. As his letters to his friends convey, he believed in a thoroughly integrated personality of Man as well as Woman is a necessary ideal for poetry and for the progress of mankind. For illustration, take his letter to a Danish poet and editor, Rudolf Suhmidt, where he clearly states:

"The main object of my poetry is simply to present– sometimes directly, but often indirectly the model of a sound, it also aims at depicting emotional, moral, intellectual and spiritual Man, as a good son, brother, husband, father, friend and practical citizen- where as Woman a good wife, mother, practical citizen–adjusted to the modern, to the New World,. My verse strains its every nerve to arouse, brace, dilate, excite to the love and realization of health, friendship, perfection, freedom, amplitude. There are other objects but these are the main ones....."

In the seventh edition of *Leaves of Grass,* 1881, the poems appeared in their final arrangement. Whitman has made it absolutely clear that his poetry is the poetry of everyday life and written for the common reader, that man's normal activities are far more important than his exceptional ones. For him nothing is useless or low. Whitman deserves all praise for his strong championship of the democratic man as against the hero. He frankly speaks of the ordinary life of the

ordinary people as the most befitting subject for poetry. Describing the nature of identity of man he writes in his Preface of 1876:

"Then I meant **Leaves of Grass,** as published, to be the Poem of Identity, (of Yours, whoever you are, now reading these lines). For genius must realize that, precious as it may be, there is something far more precious, namely, simple Identity, One's–self....Yourself, your own Identity, body and soul".

Though in innumerable poems, Whitman has referred to his own intention of speaking in his poetry of the ordinary life of ordinary people even though it would make his poetry sound drab and prosaic. In one of his short poems, the emphasis on the average man is combined with other principles which the poet consciously followed :

I was looking a long while for the Intentions,
For a clew to the history of the past for myself, and for
these chants–and now I have found it,
It is not in those paged fables in the libraries, (them I
neither accept not reject,)
It is no more in the legends than in all else,
It is in the present–it is this earth today,
It is in Democracy–(the purport and aim of all the past,)
It is the life of one man or one woman of-day–
the average man of to-day
It is in languages, social customs, literatures, arts,
It is in the broad show of artificial things, ships, machinery,
Politics, creed, modern improvements, and the
Interchange of nations.

All for the modern—all for the average man of to-day.

Here it is pertinent to note that subject alone does not make a poem; it is an all-pervasive point of view, a subtle poetic atmosphere that adds an organic unity to it. In Whitman's case, who was a conscious artist casting and recasting his lines, it was really true.

Since 1869, Whitman had been keeping indifferent health and at the age of 54 in 1873. He suffered a paralytic stroke which affected his left arm and leg. The same year in May his mother, whom he loved deeply, died. But, nothing daunted his spirit; he was still writing poetry and delivering lectures. His only regrets were that he had not intended to stay in Camden but his last days passed here only and secondly that he was not favourably treated by the publishers. Whitman's friends like William Rossetti and Mrs. Stafford rendered him valuable service and it raised his spirit and restored his health to some extent though he never fully recovered from his paralytic stroke. However, the royalties from the 1881 edition of his *Leaves of Grass* and the financial assistance from his English and American friends in Boston and a benefit lecture organized by Colonel Robert Ingersol made his life somewhat comfortable. He brought out a volume of prose, reminiscences, personal notes and records entitled *Specimen Days and Collect* in 1882-83, and *November Boughs,* seventy-five poems of "Sands at Seventy" full of reminiscences were published in 1888. The same year the eighth edition of *Complete Poems and Prose of Walt Whitman,* 1855-1888, appeared. It was in 1892, that the ninth edition, which is known as "Death-Bed Edition" of *Leaves of Grass,* appeared under the supervision of Whitman during the last days of his life. He realized that there was to be no more shifting but there would be addition. Therefore the poems published in *November Boughs* and the thirty-one poems of *Goodbye My Fancy* written after 1891 were added in appendixes.

It is not, therefore, justifiable to say that Whitman's *Leaves of Grass,* is only a literary attempt; it should be taken as a spiritual autobiography or as a record of the growth of a poet's mind. Actually, the successive nine editions of

the poet's life time grew out of his vivid sense of endless materials, a creative pressure welling from the profound depths, and a boundless acceptance, which expressed itself in an urgent inclusiveness rather than in the artful limits of a deliberate design. Therefore, Whitman was surely justified in insisting upon identifying the growth of his *Leaves of Grass,* with himself and with the growth of his country. He had new things to say, new approaches, insights and shift of moods to recommend as he and his land developed.

23.5 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed the life and works of Walt Whiteman. This lesson also traced the development of songs of myself through various editions.

23.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Give a general estimate of Whitman as a poet.

b) Briefly discuss merits and demerits of Whitman's poetry.

23.7 SUGGESTED READING

1. Critical essays on Walt Whiteman by James Woodress

2. Walt Whiteman : An encyclopedia by J. R. Le Master and Donald D. Kummings

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COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 24**
AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–V**

SONGS OF MYSELF (SELECTED POEMS)

STRUCTURE

24.1 Introduction

24.2 Objectives

24.3 Walt Whitman's Theory of Poetry and Art of Versification.

24.4 Let Us Sum Up

24.5 Examination Oriented Questions

24.6 Suggested Reading

24.1 INTRODUCTION

Walt Whitman, often hailed as the father of free verse, revolutionized American poetry with his expansive and innovative style. His seminal work, *Leaves of Grass*, celebrates the individual's connection to nature, democracy, and the human spirit. Whitman's poetry is characterized by its rhythmic cadences, vivid imagery, and an unbridled enthusiasm for life and humanity.

24.2 OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the lesson is to acquaint the learners with the author's poetry and art of versification.

24.3 WALT WHITMAN'S THEORY OF POETRY AND ART OF VERSIFICATION

As a conscious artist Whitman had certain definite views on the nature and

function of poetry. He believed that poetry has a function to perform, a mission to pursue. He repeatedly explained in the Preface and in other prose writings that his primary aim was to write "*A New American Poetry*" for the New World. He pleaded for American Imaginative Literature which must be based on the value of democracy and greater personalism so that it could reveal grand and archetypal models. He not only disliked the other feudal poets of Europe including Shakespeare but also did not want anything from Europe, from the Mediterranean to be repeated in America.

According to Whitman, poetry must represent reality. However, it does not mean that poetry merely copies or reflects life, because in the poem we have the poet's mirror, that is, his point of view. It is this mirror that reveals the inner life or realities or meaning of things or experiences and thereby offers the true realities, eidolons. Whitman believed that modern poet's frame of reference has to be different. Within the frame of science and democracy, the poet must mirror the inferior or spiritual life. This was the religious purpose which Whitman set out to accomplish.

Whitman, like Wordsworth, defines the function of a true poet stating that he reveals the hidden possibilities and potentialities. He brings to the surface the experiences buried in the racial memory in the collective consciousness. He refers to the poet as the common referee, as the arbiter of the diverse and as the equalizer of his age and land. Whitman stated that "the known universe has one complete lover and that is the greatest poet ..... He is the seer; he alone sees. He is also the priest as he put in Passage of India and is viewed as the true son of God

> *Nature and man shall be disjointed and diffused no more, The true son of God shall absolutely fuse them.*

A poet is, thus, a Bard rather a bardic prophet who chants and sings. Whitman knows that it is neither the experiences of an average man nor the inner vision would create a poem. In his *Specimen Days* he remarked :

> "*The play of imagination, with the sensuous objects of nature*

for symbols and faith-with love and Pride as the unseen impetus and morning-power of all, make up the curious chess-game of a poem."

It needs a conscious poetic technique to suggest because according to Whitman, "The indirect is always as great and real as the direct. The spirit receives from the body just as much as it gives to the body". The individual being the basis of his poetry becomes at every step indirectly the suggestive of the universe.

Form in verse means, as a rule, metre. Whitman, felt rightly, that no metre or combination of metres could serve the peculiar purpose he had in view. At the same time he was not averse to metre. He introduces metrical fragments here and there, and even shows a partiality for jingling, musical effects. As the primary requisite for form of *Leaves of Grass* was its spaciousness, its gigantic mould should be duly recognized, he was justified in staying away from the common forms. Basil De Selincourt has resolved the issue of excluding the metre thus: "..... if he rather transcends than refuses metre, it is not the less true that recognizably metrically lines are out of keeping with the spirit of his poetry .... The identity of the lines in metrical poetry is an identity of pattern, the identity of the lines in Leaves of Grass is an identity of substance. This is in effect by far the subtler and more exacting condition of the two".

Whitman believed in the theory of the organic form. Like Emerson he believed that the poem is the meter-making argument. It is a natural deduction from his determining constructive principles. He looked upon each of his poems as the leaf or branch of a tree. The line to his poem is what the poem is to the work as a whole. Therefore, certain forms are to be excluded and certain kind of lines and other poetic devices like metaphors, symbols and images should not work as they hang between me and the rest. They should be functional and not ornamental.

When Whitman remarked to Horace Traubel, "I sometimes think the Leaves, is only a language experiment—that is, an attempt to give the spirit, the

body, the man, new words, new potentialities of speech—an American, a cosmopolitan range of self-expression", he was expressing his confidence in one of the fundamental aspects of poetry. Emerson seemed to be pointing to this aspect of Whitman's poetry when he stated in his letter written in 1855 that "I find the Leaves the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed". Whitman's wit inheres in his language; in his indiscriminate mixture of levels of usage; in his comic and even grotesque use of foreign words representing a multitude of mingled voices James Miller Jr. has aptly observed that "His language is America's linguistic melting—pot; In it all the languages of all the people are mixed and stirred into one heady, hearty stew".

Whitman said that if there is anything, which describes the quality of *Leaves of Grass* fully, is the word 'Suggestiveness.' Whitman could achieve this effect by the sublet use of language, by putting himself in the poem as the typical human being using the first and second person and not the third person on record. Like Shelley, he believed that it is the use of first person 'I' which could add intensity and precision to a poem. When he wrote in '*Song of Myself*'. 'I know perfectly well my own egotism, Know my omnivorous lines and must not write any less' he was conducting one of the experiments in his poetic theory and practice. The connotations of the slightly bizarre word 'omnivorous' which begins with a sense of wonder mixed with terror or even sinister note leave the line crammed with meaning. This sort of use of diction make Whitman's individual line an independent entity. Such independence in lines could not encourage the poet to be confined by metrical pattern or rhyme. In other words, each true line of Walt Whitman comes to us floating separately on an independent breath. Hence, he employs the idea of the free verse which has the influence of the Bible, the dramatic rhetoric of the Elizabethan stage and even the rhythms of the rolling waves of the sea-the major symbol in his poetry Like the sea-waves to which he himself often compared them, his lines are of variable shapes and sizes. The lines are independent and even discontinuous. They leap up from the page as if they have independent life of their own but the richness of metaphor, which makes a fresh use of the familiar and unfamiliar words and ideas, create other seemingly incompatible qualities of

continuity and independence. Whitman's craftsmanship confirms that "*The line is a personality, the poem is battalion, the book is an army*".

When he says "*The damp of the night drives deeper into my soul*" he expresses his emotional state metaphorically. Sometimes the brilliance of the line seems to derive its strength from the use of metaphor, for example, take the closing line from Section 41 of 'Song of Myself': "*Putting myself here and now to the ambush'd womb of the shadows*." The startling image of "*ambush'd womb*" suggests that the moment of fruition is about to arrive and "*womb of shadow*" indicates the uncertainty of the future. The juxtaposing the words connotes a potency, which he realizes as a creator. Thus, through the metaphor of procreation he makes the line carry the meaning effectively. Similarly, towards the end of Section 26 of *Song of Myself* he speaks about the power of music through the finest metaphorical structure. Within the five lines he renders the impact of the sensuous ecstasy, violent fear, stasis of death and the sense of being haunted by music. In Section 39 the following lines

Behaviour lawless as snow-flakes, words simple as grass,

Uncombed head, laughter, and naivete

Slow-stepping feet, common features, common modes and emanations.

They descend in new forms from the tips of his fingers,

Two metaphors are joined to simple detail to evoke the impression of an individual filled with a wild and refreshing freedom. The vivid metaphors brilliantly describe the complex emotional states.

Another constructive principles of Whitman's theory of poetry is to evoke the vivid and sharply drawn pictures solely from the simplicity of detail, for illustration, take the line "*Leaving me baskets cover'd with white towels swelling the house with their plenty*". The transference of *swelling* from the basket to the house is curiously effective. If many lines of Whitman seem to succeed through the very simplicity of the detail or metaphor, others acquire the desired effect through the fusion of a series of related details. For example, take the line : "*The blab of*

the pave, tires of the carts, sluff of boot-soles, talk of the promenaders" which is unsurpassable in evoking in the fewest possible words, the hectic chaos of a busy street scene. In "*The shape of the sly settee, and the adulterous unwholesome couple*" two details are sufficient to suggest an entire world of guilt and deceit.

Frequently, the effect in Whitman's line derives from a distortion of language, or from incongruous combinations whose very incongruity offers fresh insight. For illustration, consider the following line known for such an ingenious concoction :

No dainty dolce affettuoso I,

Bearded, sunburnt, gray-necked, forbidding I have

arrived.....

One need not be bothered much about the meaning of "*dolce affettuoso*" which is a gross misjudgment of a foreign word. Its very placement in the line and sound are enough to convey its meaning and justify it. Similarly, the "irrelevant" tone becomes the whole basis for *Song of Exposition* in which the invocation to the muse is made in a chatty and intimate style.

If the blending of the levels of language creates a kind of discord in Whitman's style, he also has a careful ear attuned to the melody of words and cadence of lines. De Selincourt aptly, observed that "The progress of Whitman's verse has much in common with that of a musical composition.... There we have a diminuedo; its point lies in the crescendo that preceded it; and behold, while the sound lessens, the meaning grows." Through the magic of incantation, Whitman achieves the desired effect in his lines.

The use of parenthesis is a recurring feature of Whitman's technique. He frequently begins a paragraph or ends one with a bracketed sentence, begins or ends some section of a poem with a bracketed paragraph; some-times he even begins or ends a poem parenthetically. For example, the *Song of Exposition* which opens with the beautiful aside :

Ah little recks the laborer,

How near his work is holding him to God.

The loving Laborer through space and time.

The bracket serves two purposes, (a) it secures a peculiar detachment for its contents and (b) that it enhances the flow of meaning by breaking it for the time being. "*We have thus as it were a poem within a poem... A double stream of poetry*." De Selincourt makes an insightful observation in this context: "Continuity and independence being Whitman's opposing principles of composition, independence emerges in the bracket into relative prominence. The disjunctive spirit of language asserts itself; literature contemplates music". In other words, Whitman uses words and phrases as if they were notes of music.

For Whitman the meaning of repetition lies in the fact that it is impossible to have the same experience twice. When words are repeated, they convey varying contexts being partly vehicles of truth and partly vehicles of emotion. At each repetition the words in a poem acquire different dimensions of meaning. Gradually, "*the poem becomes less and less a form of words and more and more a key to life*".

It is relevant to note that the absence of 'recognized formalities' in Whitman's theory of poetry, which is characteristic of *Leaves of Grass* also, robs the language of the high-pitched associations and suggests us to interpret it in accordance with the dictates of mere common sense. As in the content of his poetry in his language too, he guides us not to lose sight of these everyday simplicities. Whitman's instrument for carrying these simplicities to the profundities was repetition-repetition of forms, of phrases, of themes. He manages to communicate not merely a poem, an example of poetry, but the spiritual attitude. Whitman through these determining principles could discover and elaborate a form, which other poets seem to have been searching in vain. If "*Modernity is a question not of date but of outlook*" as Sir Richard Livingstone remarked, "*Whitman is a modern poet in his outlook and the constructive principles of his poetry. He makes an original contribution*

to the poetic craft in that he discovers and exhibits new standard, new basis for variation." Precisely, these poetics of Walt Whitman are adapted for his purposes. Hence, as Saintsbury rightly, observes:

> "*the rhythm is many-centered, it takes fresh departures as it goes on. The poet uses freely alliteration, chiasmus, antithesis, and specially the retention of the same word or words to begin or end successive lines, but none of these so freely as to render it characteristic. The result, though perhaps uncouth art first sight and hearing, is a medium of expression by no means wanting in excellence.....*"

The rhythm of Whitman has at least three plausible sources. First, he assimilated the rhythm of the rolling waves of the sea which has given the sonorous music of the flowing lines in his poetry. Second, he absorbed the hectic noises of the city to such extent that he was delighted to introduce the frantic moment of the hustle and bustle of the city life in his poetry by skipping, skimming and overflowing lists of catalogues and finally, the Bible taught him the art of balance and parallelism, that resolved the paradoxes, repetitions, inversions and other anomalies into rhythmic patterns. Besides, he imbibed the rhythm of the Hebrew prophets and the recitative opera music, which he called 'Heart Music' as against the 'Art Music'. These devices enabled him to balance long phrases and to suspend the meaning to the final word of the paragraph. Indeed, Whitman realized it from the beginning that writing poetry was largely a technical matter. In his case, it had to be free verse or nothing and he seldom varied from that practice.

24.4 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed the theory of poetry and art of verification with reference to songs of myself, which shows how poetry has a function to perform and mission to pursue.

24.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Comment on Whitmans' language, diction and versification.

b) Discuss Whitman as a poet of Science.

24.6 SUGGESTED READING

1. Critical essays on Walt Whiteman,s by James Woodress

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COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 25**
AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–V**

SONGS OF MYSELF (SELECTED POEMS)

UNIT STRUCTURE

25.1 INTRODUCTION

25.2 Objectives

25.3 Whitman as a poet of democracy and his treatment of the theme of Love and Death.

25.4 Let Us Sum Up

25.5 Examination Oriented Questions

25.6 Suggested Reading

25.1 INTRODUCTION

Whitman's poetry encompasses a broad spectrum of themes, including democracy, individualism, nature, and the human experience. He passionately explores the idea of America as a melting pot of diverse cultures and voices, advocating for unity and equality. Themes of death and immortality also feature prominently, reflecting his deep contemplation of life's cyclical nature and the eternal.

25.2 OBJECTIVES

The aim of the lesson is to acquaint the learners with the author's style of writing, focussing on the themes.

25.2 WHITMAN AS A POET OF DEMOCRACY AND HIS TREATMENT OF THE THEME OF LOVE AND DEATH

Whitman had clearly stated that a poet should have special attributes of assimilating in him the existing reality of the world around him. In 1855, Preface of *Leaves of Grass,* he commented, "The proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it." In 23rd song of '*Song of Myself*' he says:

I accept Reality and dare not question it,
Materialism first and last imbuing.

What makes his poetry truly democratic in themes and poetics is that he employs 'reality' in the ordinary or external sense of the term. Combining it with the creative power he manages to disengage it from the surface of reality and transforms it into a powerful instrument to change the 'unchanging' in the human society. In other words, through his poetry the poet attempts to create a new social and political order— 'a brave new world,' which would break through the sterile existential conditions and would accept 'the normality of change.' To achieve this end, he practises two important ideals which can not be dispensed away : (a) Faith in individual and individuals, i.e., "En-masse" and (b) Full committment to freedom... Whitman firmly established both the ideals in his poetry. He promises in the poem '*I Hear It Was Charge Against Me*' that

"Only I will establish in Manhattan and in every city of these
States inland and seaboard,
.....
The institution of the dear love of Comrades."

and in the 10th song of 'Starting from Paumanok' he invites his 'Comrade'

"*to share with me two greatnesses; and a third one rising*
.....
The greatness of Love and Democracy, the greatness of Religion.

Whitman's ideas and ideals were sponsored by two great Revolutions of the 18th century-The French and The American. It was actually The French Revolution that shook the foundation of feudalism and erected in its place the edifice of democracy. In a self-posed question in a '*Salut A Monde*' Whitman asks:

"*What do you hear Walt Whitman*?"

And then replies:

"*I hear fierce French Liberty songs*."

In another song entitled '*For You Democracy*' from '*Calamus*' poems Whitman greets Democracy saying :

For you these from me, O Democracy, to serve you ma femme

For you, for you I am thrilling these songs.

His interest in democracy had its root in his transcendental view of the Self and he fully believed that democracy was not only a political doctrine. Rather, it was a dynamic process in which human beings were continually tested and stimulated to grow from strength to strength.

Whitman absorbed the total spirit of the French Revolution, i.e., faith in individual and distinctive, national identity, faith in its doctrine of liberty, equality and fraternity, faith and full reliance on 'movement' as an exclusive means for 'Rebuilding' the society which maintains the *Status quo* of man... No doubt, in different countries, different ages and in the case of different poets the implication and association with these three magic words has been different but Whitman is perhaps the only major poet of the world, who advocated these ideals to which he adhered in real life, and who spoke about them among his audience and readers in both this prose and poetry from his sincere conviction and not from merely theoretical adoration of them as slogans. It has been openly acknowledged that in Whitman the prophecy of the famous French author, Alexis de Tocqueville, came true. Prof. Dowden, one of the earliest critics to recognize Whitman's greatness, appreciated his 'poetry of democracy.'

Whitman strongly believed that to claim the status of 'perfect and free individual' man must develop his natural propensities-for which he urgently needs liberty, equality and fraternity-the Trinitarian slogan popularized by the French Revolution. Among the numberless pieces that reveal the cry for liberty is the 10th poem of '*By Blue Ontario's Shore*' where he says,

For the great idea of perfect and free individuals,

For that, the bard walks in advance, leader of leaders,

The attitude of him cheers up the slaves and horrifies foreign despots,

Without extinction is Liberty, without retrograde is Equality

They live in the feelings of young men and the best women

(Not for nothing have the indomitable heads of the earth been always ready to fall for Liberty.)

The sense of liberty promotes in an individual an idea of 'selfhood' as Whitman presents in '*A Song of Joys*'—

O the joy of manly selfhood,

To be servile to none, to defer to none, not to any tyrant

Known or unknown.

A man just can not be fitted into a straight jacket of monistic thought. Whitman values even man's complexity and says :

Do I contradict myself ?

Very well then I contradict myself

(I am large, and I contain multitudes.)

What sounds like a careless rejection of all commitment to thought is actually a process of growing which tends to be the right of all individuals.

Whitman includes the idea of equality in his concept of Democracy and

regards the average man as an asset to every country in the world. He believed that "The average man of a land at last only is important". His celebration of the common man is based on the conviction that the glorification of all normal and basic occupations and activities of man is the primary duty of a poet. Whitman's belief in equality is not merely a political belief it is his noble faith :

In all people I see myself, none more and none a
Barleycorn less and the good or bad I say of myself I say of them.

Whitman gave these rights not only to men but to women as well. In *Song of Myself* he says :

I am the poet of the women the same as the man,
And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man.

Henry Alonzo Myers aptly points out that Whitman's concept of equality has its origin in American Democracy : "But with Whitman, equality is much more than a political idea; it is an eternal fact in the real world of unlimited personalities; it is the great first principle." If Whitman's writings have a special significance for the social thinkers, it is because they have the conviction that once the gaps caused by the inequality are bridged, the new society would emerge where

Neither a servant nor a master I,
.....
I will be with you and you shall be even with me.

In his *Democratic Vista,* which is obviously his most significant discussion on Democracy, he repeatedly pointed out that the bond of friendship is far more relevant in the world of today than mere 'individualism' and the 'romantic love.' It is true that without the bonds of friendship, which need not always have sexual implications, 'sympathy' or affection and Democracy will merely be an academic concept. In other words, the self discovers itself truly in the company of the masses or Comradeship. He says :

One's self I sing, a simple separate person,
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-massee.

Whitman realized that the course of a revolutionary is uncharted and hence uncertain, but his faith in the infinite worth of the individual makes his aim clear, that is, to change, develop and progress. Hence, he prefers to call himself an 'evolutionist' while the critic like Middleton Murry calls him a 'mystic' because his concept of democracy is essentially spiritual. It is indeed a tribute to Whitman's genius that despite knowing the limitations of American democracy, and cruelties of the Civil War, he never gave up hope and strives to reshape the human existence and human society, and always dreamt of achieving the universal peace, and brotherhood through democracy. D.H. Lawrence makes a very perceptive remark about Whitman when he observes: "Whitman is drunk with the strange wine of infinitude.... Item by item he identifies himself with the universe, and this accumulative identity he calls Democracy, En Massee, One Identity and so on." Whitman, who has always been a kind of rebel and revolutionary, impressed and shocked his readers by the unconventional and unorthodox presentation of these complex themes of love and death. He never separated the body from the soul, or 'sense' from 'spirituality' and the social from the spiritual. It naturally added two important dimensions to his poetry (a) It revealed the poet's point of view on love and the relationship of sexes and (b) It gave new angle - morals, psychological and sociological—to Whitman love-poems. His poems of love make him one of the greatest love poets of the world, and a prophet of sexual love. Though in his own days it made him face neglect and even reject as he was called the indecent poet, but in the 20th century he was hailed as a pioneer love poet who spoke about love and sex in astonishing terms. D.H. Lawrence, paying a tribute to the genius of Whitman, remarked:

"Ahead of Whitman, nothing; Ahead of all poets, pioneering into the wilderness of unopened life, Whitman".

Whitman's love poems celebrate 'normal' love and 'abnormal' love or homosexuality. He borrowed terms from the popular science and according to many modern scholars, only a pseudo-science, of phrenology for describing the two types of love. It is also believed that the study of phrenology gave him the necessary confidence for the development of his own personality and poetry.

Whitman used two words frequently which are based on the study of this science—'*amative*' and "*adhesive*" to define two kinds of love. Whereas, the term 'amative love' refers to normal love between man and woman as expressed in the string of poems in *Children of Adam*, 'adhesive love' is used to describe 'manly love' as celebrated in a group of poems in *Calamus*. The critics have not taken a favourable stand on these two sections of *Leaves of Grass,* for the former because of its frankness and obsession with the physical form of the male and the female, and for the latter because of its unnatural and illegal preposition. Glorification of human body is one of the basic tenets of Whitman's approach to love. Without any inhibitions he speaks of the magnetism and deliciousness of the human body and asserted, "*If anything is sacred, the human body is sacred*". In this context E.L. Masters observed, "He was a great influence in inaugurating this better respect for the body which we know today." Whitman speaks about love and sex with such a great tenderness and rapture that it ceases to be vulgar or obscene and becomes the most sophisticated and beautiful utterances about love. He avoids any mention of the physical beauty but reveals in details his admiration for the perfection of physical form. He also detects a delicate sympathy and harmony between the lovers and between man and Nature. Whitman firmly asserts :

> *If marriage is sacred, the ultimate comradeship is utterly sacred since it has no ulterior motive whatever, like procreation.... It is a relation between fearless, honorable, self-responsible men, a balance of perfect polarity... Marriage must never be wantonly attacked. True marriage is eternal; in it we have consummation and being. But the final consummation lies in what is beyond marriage.*

For Whitman "*Sex contains all, bodies, souls, meanings, proofs, purities, delicacies*..." Thus, he extends the meaning of sex in and through his complex vision and intense feelings as, for example in the *Children of Adams* and in *Calamus* groups of poems. Though in *Democratic Vista* he had already provided a theoretical base for 'manly love' stating that 'fraternity' might include the love of 'man' for persons of his own sex. Whitman tells in 'Drum Taps' that "This comradeship is to be the final cohering principal of the new world, the new Democracy". It was

only for the bond of 'friendship' of fellow-feeling so necessary for democracy, none would have challenged his view. But, he suggests in some of his poems and prose writings that homosexuality was commonly known form of love in America and elsewhere, though the writers were, for the obvious reasons, reticent on this issue. Whitman wanted the new poets to write about it without any fear or conventional standards of respectability.

Henry Adams in his book *The Education of Henry Adams,* puts an important question to himself thus : "Whether he knew of any American artist who had ever insisted on the power of sex, as every classic had always done; but he could think only of Walt Whitman..... All the rest had used sex for sentiment, never for force.... He actually treated it as 'Life Force' because of its procreational aspect of experience....." He wrote in A Backward Glance O'ver Travel's Roads, Leaves of Grass' is avowedly the song of sex.....

Whitman juxtaposes the two kinds of love—man-woman and man - man in order to dramatize the difference as well as to dramatize the successive states of sexual consciousness of the poetic hero. Here he anticipates the modern psychologists and is, to use the words of D.H. Lawrence, "a great beginner and pioneer. He is like a forerunner of Freud". In its ultimate meaning, then, the poet's sexual vision connects with his mystic vision, for the first leads to the universal identification while the second attempts to achieving the spiritual Union. This sort of co-relation between the dissimilar experiences makes Romain Rolland describe Whitman as "the ridiculous mixture of the New York Herald and the Bhagwad Gita. Whitman's Absolute being all-inclusive and comprehensive, the poet cannot be expected to exclude the physical from the concept of Reality in totality. Hence, he transforms the physical into the spiritual : "It is man's maximum state of consciousness.... It is reached through embracing love" to use the expression of Lawrence. In this context Whitman adds: "And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his own funeral dressed in his own shroud".

When D.H. Lawrence called Whitman 'A Great Post Modern Poet', he hinted at the central concern in his poetry. George Saintbury made a candid

observation about Whitman that:

> *There are two subjects on which he is especially eloquent, which seem indeed to intoxicate and inspire him the moment he approaches them. These are Death and the sea. In the latter respect he is not, indeed peculiar... and in his special devotion to death, he is more singular. Death is viewed as the one event of great solemnity and importance which is common to all—the one inevitable, yet not common place incident in every life, however commonplace; and, further, it must not be overlooked that Death is pre-eminently valuable in such a system as this, in the capacity of reconciler, ready to accommodate all difficulties, to sweep away all rubbish. The cheeriest of optimists with the lowest of standards cannot pretend to assert or expect that everyone will live the ideal life—but Death pays all scores and obliterates all mistakes.*

A survey of Whitman's poetry clearly depicts that he had "*a very great understanding of death and even a great devotion to death*." In his poem *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking* Whitman traces the moment of his birth as a poetic moment leading to his mystic communion with the sea who whispered in his ear the low and delicious word death. It shows how death experience is associated with him deeply and thoroughly right from his birth. It was a mystery, which he wishes to solve in his life. In Whitman's poetry, death is viewed as a general phenomenon, which affected every aspect of life. This event is of great solemnity and importance, and is common to all—the one inevitable and yet not commonplace incident in every life. Whitman's awareness of the mysterious role of death had its roots in his own family experiences of disease, poverty, neurosis, ill luck and death. The American Civil War, which broke out in 1861, was the greatest shock of his life. He found himself suddenly thrown amidst the cruel realities of the aftermath of war, face to face with the wounded, the dying and the death. It was highly disturbing to see "*man thus reduced to a futility, a meaningless nothing, a living absurdity, born only to die*" as Horace M. Kallen stated. It is this point of no return that makes human life so lonely and hopeless. Here, a true poet has a task

to perform that is to prepare him face death boldly and at the same time to invite and spur him on the living of life. Horace M. Kallen rightly points out that :

> *This conviction of Whitman's that the true poet's vocation is a summons and a challenge answering to all human challenges and answers is, of course, of Whitman's essence." In his poetry he presented the "singularities of death" which like all singularities clash among themselves. Their contradictions are natural events of "the ongoing flux of diversifications and contradictions which is existence and why should the moments of death be otherwise?*

So, in one place Whitman declares :

The smallest sprouts shows that there is really no death.

And if ever there was, it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it,

And ceased the moment life appeared. He realizes that death and life operate simultaneously, one following the other. Hence, he says :

And I know that I am deathless.

I know this orbid of mine can not be swept by a carpenter's compass,

I know that I shall not pass like a child's carlicue cut with a burnt stick at night.....

My foothold is tenoned and mortised in granite
I laugh at what you call dissolution,
And I know the amplitude of time.
I am the poet of common sense and of the demonstrable and of immortality.

Once he develops this faith in the possibility of the immortality of man death attains new roles. It becomes pre-eminently valuable in the capacity of a deliverer, a liberator as he says in "*When the Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*:

When it is so, thou hast taken them I joyously singing the dead,
Lost in the loving floating ocean of thee, laved in the food
Of thy bliss O Death.

In another poem he says:

And I say to mankind, be not curious about God
For I who am curious about each am not curious about God

(No array of terms can say how much I am at peace about God and about death).

Whitman deals with the reality of death at two levels—the conceptual and the experiential. Prof. G.S. Amur states: "The duality does not disturb Whitman's transcendental vision of death because there is no real conflict between the conceptual and the experiential mode that Whitman adopts to realize it. On the contrary they affirm and reinforce each other".

Whitman's vision of death finds an elaborate expression in the Preface to his two volume Centennial edition of *Leaves of Grass* where he speaks about his aim of writing poems, "estimating death, not at all as the cessation but as somehow what I feel must be the entrance upon by the greatest part of existence, and something that life is as much, for as it is for life itself." He says:

And as to you, death, and your bitter hug of mortality, it is idle
to try to alarm me
.....

And as to you life, I reckon you are the leavings of many deaths No doubt I have died myself many tens of thousands times.
before.....

Whitman's vision of death is outlined in the poem called *Death's Valley* where he welcomes death:

....Holiest minister of heaven-envoy, usherer, guide at last of all.
Rich, florid, loosener of the stricture-knot call'd life,
Sweet, peaceful, welcome death...

Even in the face of suffering, pain and anguish of uncertainty as in the

poems like '*Of the Terrible Doubt of Experiences*' or '*Scented Herbage of My Breast*,' Whitman never gave in completely. His serene acceptance, as in '*To Think of Time*', always added the tone of philosophical and prophetic stance to his attitude towards death and immortality at the conceptual level. However, there are more noteworthy poems like *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking* and *When the Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*, which are the poem about the experiences during the Civil War and the personal losses. They are the poet's final envisionment of the place of death in life, its final expression. He says that he would lay that first bloom of spring on very death itself :

For fresh as the morning, thus would I chant a song for you O
Sane and sacred death.

One of the celebrated critics said about this poem. "In the great Lincoln elegy the theme of death reaches its lyrical climax in Whitman's poetry and to some extent its conclusion." He tries to bridge the way between the life and the death but would never believe that death is the end of life. He would never be convinced that death can annihilate life, for instance, take *Song of the Open Road*. It can only bring some change, which is another beginning, "*something to make a greater struggle necessary*". There is no cure for birth or death, George Santayana advises, save to enjoy the interval of existing.

To enjoy it, Walt Whitman declares, is to die living and live dying, by loving." as Horace M. Kallen sums up.

Whitman had such a strong faith in immortality that he remarked "*if there is no immortality then the universe is a fraud*."

All, all, for immortality : Love like the light, silently

wrapping all

Death for Whitman is a period of transition and not an end of life, for instance, take the following lines from *Song of Myself*:

I depart as air, I shape my white locks at the runaway sun.,

I effuse my flesh in eddies,

And drift it in lacy jags.

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

If you want me again look for me under your bootsoles....

This may sound like his belief in the transmigration of the human soul. Whitman in one of his anonymous reviews about *Leaves of Grass*, which he himself published, said :

> "*He is a true spiritualist. He recognizes no annihilation, no death or loss of identity. Thus we can conclude that Whitman must have at the back of his mind the theory of transmigration of soul. Whitman's works do suggest his knowledge of it*".

Many critics have dealt in detail that Whitman had the knowledge of Indian, particularly Hindu Scriptures like The *Upnishads* and The *Bhagwad Gita* before he wrote *Leaves of Grass*. To enter into this debate may or may not change these facts : (a) that Whitman was acquainted with these oriental or Hindu texts through Emerson and (b) that his vision of death and immortality is exclusively his own which developed gradually due to the external circumstances and some inner awakening. His poem *Death-Carol* does confirm his belief that death is a part of this progressive universe, a renewal and a part of the evolutionary movement in creation:

The poem opens with the lines:

Come lovely and soothing Death,

Undulate round the world serene arriving, arriving

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

Sooner or later, delicate Death.

It ends in the following stanza :

The night, in silence under many a star;

The ocean—shore, and the husky whispering waves whose voice I know;

And the soul turning to thee, O vast and well-veiled death,

And body gratefully nestling close to thee.

Over the tree-tops I float thee a song.

Over the rising and sinking waves-over the myriad fields and the prairies wide;

Over the dense-packed cities all and teeming wharves and ways,

I float this carol with joy, with joy to thee, O Death.

Whitman, who had taken death as one of his major themes, had written a farewell poem to conclude his book, *So Long* which ends with the following lines :

"*Remember my words, I may again return,*

I love you, I depart from materials,

I am as one disembodied, triumphant, and dead.

Whitman confirmed that Death rounds off a role but can not end life.

25.4 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed the theme of love and death in songs of myself along with Whiteman as a poet of democracy.

25.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Comment on the theme of love and death in Whitman's poetry

b) Discuss Leaves of Grass as the epic of America.

25.6 SUGGESTED READING

1. Critical essays on Walt Whiteman by James Woodress

2. Walt Whiteman : An encyclopedia by J. R. Le Master and Donald D. Kummings

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COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 26**
AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–V**

SONGS OF MYSELF (SELECTED POEMS)

UNIT STRUCTURE

26.1 Introduction

26.2 Objectives

26.3 Mysticism in the Poetry of Walt Whitman

26.4 Let Us Sum Up

26.5 Examination Oriented Questions

26.6 Multiple Choice Question

26.7 Suggested Reading

26.1 INTRODUCTION

Mysticism in Whitman's work is evident in his exploration of the transcendental and the divine within the ordinary. He often blurs the boundaries between the physical and the spiritual, suggesting a profound interconnectedness between all beings. Whitman's poems frequently convey a sense of cosmic unity, portraying the self as part of a larger, universal whole.

26.2 OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the lesson is to acquaint the learners with the mystic element of Whitman's poetry.

26.3 MYSTICISM IN THE POETRY OF WALT WHITMAN

In his poetry Whitman attempted to discover and plumb the nature

and depths of human identity to solve "*the puzzle of puzzles... that we call Being*". If the first half of *Song of Myself* represents the poet as essentially discovering within himself, the intimate relationship of the body and soul, through his awakened senses, the second half of the poem reveals that the poet is liberated from the bonds, which held him being endowed with his new knowledge of his link with a *supreme power*. He immediately realizes that "*I am afoot with my vision*". In his essay *Over Soul* Emerson said: "*Man is a stream whose source is hidden. Our being is descended into us from we know not whence*". Like Emerson, Whitman believed in the hidden source but unlike him, he had the urge to actively discover it. He gave himself up to the uninhibited explorations of the self. It has made Whitman a great modern poet though many critics disagree with the idea to call him a mystic poet because he did not have a coherent philosophy of life. F.O. Matthiesen asserts :

> "*No arrangement or rearrangement of Whitman's thoughts can resolve the paradoxes or discover in them a fully coherent pattern. He was incapable of sustained logic, but that should not blind the reader into impatient rejection of the ebb and flow of his antithesis. They possess a loose dialectic of their own .....*"

It is interesting to note that as it happened in the case of Whitman, the mysterious nature of 'mysticism' has invited so many discussions but before they begin in the real sense. They get derailed because it is such a vague and disputable term. James Miller jr. has offered an acceptable answer to this problem when he suggests that "Without becoming tied up in knots distinguishing among religious, psychological, or philosophical concepts, I propose that we define mysticism, as a state of consciousness characterized by the noetic (states of transcendent, non-intellectual insight, revelation) and the ineffable (the "knowledge" cannot be imparted; to be known it must be experienced). Without being skeptical like the psychologists or being committed to an Official definition like the orthodox thinkers, the dimensions of Whitman's mysticism can be studied".

It is perhaps easy to trace the mysticism of Whitman to Emersonian transcendentalism, and envision Walt Whitman as merely fulfilling. Emerson's doctrine of self-trust, the doctrine which asserts that every man should commune with the divinity (or the animating over-soul) within himself. There can be no doubt that in the mystical insights of his poems Whitman resembles Emerson who declared: "*In self-trust all the virtues are comprehended. Free should the scholar be, -- free and brave*". Emerson used the similar expression in his famous letter to Whitman in 1855 and knew that Whitman was not imitating the transcendental doctrine superficially. He said, "*I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed*". Thoreau found him more than merely imitating transcendentalism and said that he is so wonderfully like the Orientals whom Whitman had not read till then but showed the curiosity to know them. Whatever the source of his mystical insights Whitman was conscious of the immanence of the divine in the universe. Rabindranath Tagore said he was the highest name in American literature and exclaimed, No American poet has such an extraordinary grasp of the oriental tone of mysticism as Whitman. W.D.O. Connor and John Burroughs find in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* the qualities that could make it the Bibles of the nations because of the long train of revelations. However, it was the Canadian psychiatrist, Richard M. Bucke, who first tried to describe with some precision the essential distinctiveness of Whitman's mysticism in his book, *Cosmic Consciousness*. He expounded the theory of three levels of consciousness--Simple, an attribute of animals; Self, an attribute of man and Cosmic, a rare power of prophet, seer, mystic-including Gautam the Buddha, Jesus the Christ and (among others) Walt Whitman. James agreed with Bucke and cited Whitman as an example because he had the sporadic type of mystical experience. They believed that Whitman had some specific spiritual experience in his life underlying the mystical elements of his poetry.

Moreover, there are two significant attempts to define the essence of Whitman's mysticism. First, *A Critical Guide to Leaves of Grass* by James E. Miller Jr., which shows the relevance of the Mystic way, as defined by

Evelyn Underhill in a study of Christian mystics in *Mysticism*. According to it Whitman's poetry dramatizes all the steps of the true mystic : (a) 'the Awakening of Self' as in *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*, (b) "the Purification of Self" (Whitman inverts this step), (c) the Illumination as in *Out of Cradle Endlessly Rocking*, (d) the Dark Night of Soul and (e) the Union as in *Passage of India*. Malcolm Cowley, in *Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass : The First (1855) Edition* has contended that Whitman's sources are not literary and he is more oriental than Christian mystic because he includes such non-Christian concepts as metempsychosis and *karma* like the *Bhagwad Gita*. Miller rightly points out that:

> *Perhaps the critical task that lies ahead is not so much the identification of Whitman's mysticism as Eastern or Western, but rather the reconciliation of his mysticism with his strong materialism, his assertion of self, his restless vagabondage, his celebrated sexuality .... Whitman's temperament seems eminently unsuited to the selflessness of the Christian mystic and to the passivity of the Oriental. It is possible that Whitman .... created a unique mysticism designed for America, a "democratic" mysticism available to every man on equal terms, embracing both the body and the soul, science and myth, life and death, the active and passive, material and spiritual. But whatever the ultimate nature of his mysticism, it must be granted a central role in the meaning of his greatest poetry in Leaves of Grass.*

Whitman essentially dramatizes his mystical experiences and does not give an orderly and systematic view of these revelations. There is a narrative thread which informs and makes meaningful the 'lyricism' and the 'philosophy' of the poems. First of all, we do not find in his poetry the major issues and ideas dramatized in the third person. Even the second person is given a limited space. All the thoughts and experiences, beliefs and convictions are dramatized in first person through the 'self.' He totally identifies himself with the unwashed, struggling and suffering masses and says:

Agonies are one of my changes of garments.
I do not ask the wounded person how he feels,
I myself become the wounded person,
My hurts turn livid upon me as I lean on a cave and observe.

He becomes a spectator of the world and projects himself in the image of Christ who walked silent among disputes and assertions. He does not yield to sorrow and disillusionment in the evolution of this world which must progress. His

Call is the call of battle, I nourish active rebellion
He going with me must got well armed.

These bitter facts of life are to be transmuted by "*the travelling souls*" on "*the grand road of the Universe*". The metaphor of journey is befittingly used to convey how step by step he is heading towards his goal. A traditional mystic purged and mortified his senses in order to purify himself, Whitman transfigures and celebrates the senses, purging not the senses but the notion of the senses as evil, as the means to achieve purification. He admits that:

I am the poet of the body and I am the poet of the soul,
The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me,
The first I graft and increase upon myself, the latter I translate into a new tongue.

In elevation the body with the soul, in translating the pains of hell into a new tongue, Whitman departs markedly from the traditional mystic. Indeed, in Whitman there is far too much assertion of self as in *Song of Myself*, and too much of wanderlust and involvement as in *Song of the Open Road*, to identify him explicitly with Christian or Oriental mysticism. Still, the mystical elements dramatized in his poetry extend down into his deepest meanings. The vital relationship of the body to the mystical experience is

strongly suggested in the key Section 5 of *Song of Myself* in which the poet seems to be going into the mystic trance even though the context is a physical drama of ecstatic sexual experience. Actually, it is a mystical interfusion of the body and the soul as the poet says in the following lines:

> *I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase*
> *itself to you,*
> *And you must not be abased to the other.*

Thus, even in the passionate love-scene, the participants are the body and the soul; the soul plays the male role to the body, which is female here with its inmost privacy. At this intense moment of feelings Whitman embodies the healthy-minded approach to life and achieves transcendental illumination:

> *Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that pass all the argument of the earth,*
> *And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,*
> *And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,*
> *And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the Women my sisters and lovers,*
> *And that a kelson of the creation of love.*

Like all the mystics, Whitman asserts that the knowledge of this sort of infinite and eternal nature can not be logically defined as it is an intuitive knowledge that has its center in the soul. It cannot be imparted by any other medium and has to be known only through experience. It pervades the cosmos at the same time it is democratic, it is for all:

> *The whole theory of the universe is directed. Unerringly to One single individual-namely to you.*

Whitman postulates that a democratic society of free individuals can flourish only in a free city so that man becomes aware of his true identity, which is divine. He says,

Why should I wish to see God better than this day?
I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four and
each moment then.
In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own
Face in the glass.

Whitman creates this awareness in all and seeks to transform our attitudes and quality of life.

You know not what you are, you have slumbered
upon yourself all your life,
Your eyelids have been the same as close most of the time.

Again he insists :

You would have to give up all else, I alone would expect
to be your sole and exclusive standard,
Your novitiate would even then be long and exhausting,
The whole past theory of your life and all conformity to
the lives around you would have to be abandoned.

Whitman fulfills his duty of guiding the stray mankind to the mystic way. His love for the common men prompts him to take them to the regions infinite so that they could achieve their knowledge of the supreme power independent of him. It gives him the freedom to escape from us, to discover the still further ranges of the mystical experiences. In *Inscriptions* Whitman writes:

I myself but write one or two indicative words for the future,
I but advance a moment only to wheel and hurry back in the darkness.
Like the entire mystic,

Whitman asserted throughout *Leaves of Grass* that these experiences are untranslatable and whatever he could say was inadequate. Hence the reader must follow his own discoveries through his own efforts and experiences. He says:

When you read these I that was visible am become invisible
Now it is you, compact, visible, realizing my poems, seeking me.

One quality of all kinds of the mysticism, whether Christian or Oriental or Secular, is their apprehension of the unity pervading the entire universe. The ultimate stage of their experience is the Union with another, which is all. Whitman's poetry constantly proceeds in that direction from diversity to unity. His technique of giving endless catalogue of things, persons and experiences, that has irritated some of his critics as indiscriminate inventories, always move toward some kind of unity either in the imagination of the poet or in the spiritual world it constructs. For illustration take *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*, which derives its main impulse from this point of view; all the dumb, beautiful ministers of the poem—the river, the scallop-edg'd waves the clouds, the masts of Manhattan and beautiful hills of Brooklyn and more—are transfigured into spiritual unity within the beholders of all ages and flow into the grand spiritual Union of All : "We plant you permanently within us,/.... You furnish your parts toward eternity,/Great or small, you furnish your parts toward the soul".

It is in *Passage of India* that Whitman's mysticism most clearly stresses Union. From the physical and material union achieved by the world, the poem moves swiftly and surely to the spiritual union, that is the central province of mysticism. The poet invites his soul to venture father transcending the barriers of time and place:

O soul thou pleasest me, I thee,
Sailing these seas or on the hills, or waking in the night,
Thoughts, silent thoughts, of Time and Space and Death,
like water flowing,
Bear me indeed as through the regions infinite,
Whose air I breathe, whose ripples hear, lave me all over,
Bathe me O God in thee, mounting to thee,

I and my soul to range in range of thee.

At this point of a mystic merge, the poet attempts to name the 'nameless', 'transcendent', 'light of the light, shedding forth universes', but always feels that his experience is beyond words, and words are just inadequate. He turns upon himself and at times succeeds in conveying the sense of Union, the mingling of self with the All :

Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,
At nature and its wonders, Time and Space and Death,
But that I, turning, call to thee O soul, thou actual Me,
And lo! Thou gently masterest the orbs,
Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death,
And fillest, swellest full the vastness of Space.

By its endless extension into eternity and by its unlimited expansion into infinity, Whitman's soul apprehends the Union directly. The mystics of all the ages and the lands have sought it and so does Whitman, whose democratic mysticism plays a central role in the meaning of his greatest poetry in *Leaves of Grass*.

26.4 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed the mystical quality of 'songs of myself". Poet reveals the intimate relationship of body and the soul through his awakened senses.

26.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Comment on the symbolism in Whitman's Poetry.

b) Briefly discuss Whitman as Mystic.

c) Comment on Whitman's treatment of love and sex in his poems.

26.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTION

1 In "Song of Myself," what is the speaker's attitude towards the individual self?

A) The self is unimportant and insignificant
B) The self is a source of isolation and loneliness
C) The self is interconnected with all things and is celebrated
D) The self is a source of conflict and struggle

2. What does the speaker mean by the recurring line "I celebrate myself"?

A) The speaker is self-centered and narcissistic
B) The speaker is expressing a sense of pride
C) The speaker is embracing the diversity and universality of humanity
D) The speaker is rejecting societal norms and values

3. How does the speaker view death in "Song of Myself"?

A) Death is the end of existence with no afterlife
B) Death is a peaceful release from suffering
C) Death is a frightening and mysterious phenomenon
D) Death is a transition to a higher form of existence

4. What does the speaker mean by the line "I am large, I contain multitudes"?

A) The speaker is physically large and imposing
B) The speaker has many personal accomplishments
C) The speaker has a complex and contradictory nature
D) The speaker has a close relationship with nature

5. In "Song of Myself," what is the significance of the grass mentioned throughout the poem?

A) It symbolizes human frailty and mortality
B) It represents the speaker's longing for nature
C) It is a metaphor for the speaker's poetic inspiration and creativity
D) It signifies the limits of human knowledge and understanding

6. What is the primary tone or emotion that runs through "Song of Myself"?

A) Anger and resentment B) Fear and anxiety
C) Joy and celebration D) Sadness and despair

7 What does the poem suggest about the relationship between the individual and society?

A) The individual should conform to societal norms and expectations
B) The individual should isolate themselves from society
C) The individual and society are interconnected and interdependent
D) The individual should prioritize their personal desires over societal needs

8. What imagery does Whitman use to convey the interconnectedness of all life in the poem?

A) Ocean waves B) Mountains and valleys
C) Starry skies D) Threads and grass

9. What is the significance of the title "Song of Myself"?

A) It emphasizes the speaker's ego and self-centeredness
B) It suggests that the poem is a personal reflection with no broader meaning
C) It indicates the poem is about the speaker's personal experiences and perspective, yet also universal
D) It indicates that the poem is solely focused on praising the individual

10. What literary style is "Song of Myself" often associated with due to its free verse and unconventional structure?

A) Romanticism B) Realism
C) Gothic fiction D) Transcendentalism

Answers: 1. The self is interconnected with all things and is celebrated 2. The speaker is embracing the diversity and universality of humanity 3. Death is peaceful release from suffering 4. The speaker has a complex and contradictory nature 5. It is a metaphor for the speaker's poetic inspiration and creativity 6. Joy and Celebration 7. The individual and society are interconnected and interdependent 8. Threads and grass 9.It indicates the poem is about the speaker's personal experiences and perspective, yet also universal 10. Transcendentalism

26.7 SUGGESTED READING

1. Walt Whiteman : An encyclopedia by J. R. Le Master and Donald D. Kummings

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COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 27**

AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–V**

SONGS OF MYSELF (SELECTED POEMS)

UNIT STRUCTURE

27.1 Introduction

27.2 Objectives

27.3 The Structural Design, Recurrings Images and Symbolism in Whitmans's Leaves of Grass.

27.3.1 Grass

27.3.2 The Sea

27.3.3 The Bird

27.3.4 Celestical Bodies

27.3.5 The Trees and the City

27.4 Let Us Sum Up

27.5 Examination Oriented Questions

27.6 Multiple Choice Question

27.7 Suggested Reading

27.1 INTRODUCTION

Whitman employs rich symbolism to convey his themes, using natural elements like grass, rivers, and stars to represent larger concepts. For instance, grass in *Leaves of Grass* symbolizes the commonality of humanity and the cycle of life and death. His use of the body as a symbol reflects his belief in the sanctity of the individual and the inherent divinity of the human form.

27.2 OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the lesson is to acquaint the learners with the structure and symbolism in Whitmans's poems.

27.3 THE STRUCTURAL DESIGN, RECURRING IMAGES AND SYMBOLISM IN WHITMAN'S LEAVES OF GRASS

Whitman's epic, *Leaves of Grass*, explores the possibilities in free verse that gives it seemingly "an elusive structure", but there is a rare compatibility between his form and his themes. It comprises a double structural design: (i) A systematic outline of the themes and (ii) A technical logic in the ordering of its parts. Both the levels are duly supported by such standard devices as assonance, alliteration, repetition, inverse word order, parallelism etc. on one hand, and images, symbols and metaphors on the other. Collectively, they carry on successfully the complex structure of meaning and make it one of the greatest literary achievements of America.

Though there are many proposals for the structure of *Leaves of Grass*, for example, of William Sloane Kennedy in *Reminiscenes of Walt Whitman* who finds three major groups of poems— *Poems of Life and the Body*, *Poems of Democracy*, and *Poems of Religion*, or of Irving C. Story in *The Structural Pattern of Leaves of Grass* which appeared in *Pacific University Bulletin,* expostulates fifteen groups of poems which he rearranges in six larger clusters. James E. Miller's approach in *A Critical Guide to Leaves of Grass* is really useful. For the purpose of analysis we can say that in *Leaves of Grass* there are at least five thematic groups of poems which form three basic parts of the book. However, it is the last or death-bed edition which represented his book as he wanted it.

First, the introductory portion of the book opens with '*Inscriptions*' and it is followed by a long poem, *Starting from Paumanok* which begins in autobiographical form but it soon embraces the whole range of its major themes, "*The greatness of Love and Democracy, and the greatness of Religion*." It is by

far the bulkiest section of the book and include such significant clusters of the poems as *Song of Myself*, *Children of Adams* and *Calamus* etc. These poems define a New World Personality. The personality may be linked to the hero of the old world epics but unlike him, the New Personality is one of the masses full of emotional complexity and intellectual questionings. Whitman provided here the outlines of the epic hero of democracy. Celebrating *Myself* and *Comradeship*, the poems combine in them the quality of lyricism, observation and objectivity. The section can be suitably called *The Modern Man I Sing*. In the second section, the self-celebration serves the most purpose, that is, to discover the divine self of man. *Song of Myself* represents the self-awakening which dives deep within and discovers the secret, the undiscovered mysteries of the self.

The poet magnifies himself thus :

> *I celebrate myself, and sing myself,*
> *And what I assume you shall assume,*
> *For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.*

The new consciousness born in *Song of Myself* and reborn in *Children of Adams* continues to create another kind of garden of Eden, with its own kind of innocence as in *Calamus* poems in which the male replaces the female in the central role. Here, Whitman projects a new kind of society where "*the soul of man I speak for rejoices in comrades*". The image of earth dominates the entire song section as in *Salut au Monde*! The New Personality is launched on his journey. If *Song of the Answerer*, *our Old Feuillage* and *Song of Joys* form a kind of interlude, the cluster of poems like *Birds of Passage*, *Sea-Drift* and *By the Roadside* together form the final part of this section. The dominant image is not of space but time which suggests movement, first by air then by water and last on land; they are a series of images of decreasing speed. The poet is no longer taking the sweeping and spiraling philosophical view of the passing events both of joy and sorrow; he is evolving his all—healing mystical personality. He is at this stage impersonal and disengaged. Another section introduces a particular historical moment of Civil war and national crisis. *Drum—Taps* and *Memories of President Lincoln* forms the

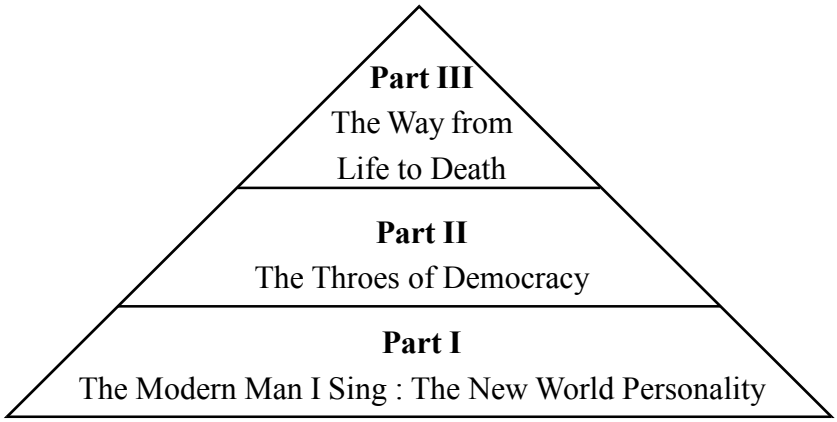
greatest body of war poetry, *By Blue Ontario's Shore* and *Autumn Rivulets* shows America at the threshold of her future and the task of rehabilitation. Whitman projects his personal and public sentiment on a high public occasion, especially about *The Throes of Democracy*.

The forth major theme is "*The Way from Life to Death*" to borrow the phrase of Miller. The poems like *Whispers of Heavenly Death* and *Proud Music of the Storm* represent a dream vision of the poet who invites his soul with a new rhythms, "*Come forward O my soul, and let the rest retire*" to share with him the mystery of death and its meaning in the context of life. The cluster of poems such as *Passage of India*, *Prayer of Columbus*, *The Sleepers* and *To Think of Time* reveal his venturing to peer into eternity. *The Sleepers*— a symbolic drama of dreams-derives its meaning from its placement in this thematic grouping. Whitman walks out to move toward the unknown region. In the last section, he suggests that the time has come for him to go; the cluster of poems like *From Noon to Starry Night*, *Thou Orb Aloft Full-Dazzling* and *Song of Parting* deal with death after the real fulfillment of democratic promise. The poet departs saying :

Remember my words, I may again return,
I love you, I depart from materials,
I am as one disembodied, triumphant, dead.

This last section is aptly named as *Special Songs before I go*.

The annexes that follow are just the additions essentially superfluous to the main structure. They are the afterthought, though some poems like *Sands at Seventy*, *Good-bye My Fancy*, and *Old Age Echoes* are vivid and vigorous poems.



James Miller insightfully observes : "In effect the structure of **Leaves of Grass** is pyramidal, a metaphor that seems especially apt when the comparative bulk of the three basic parts if taken into account. Part I is a bit over twice the length of Part II, Part II double the size of Part III. The pyramid not only suggests the relative dependence of the various parts but also suggests the proportionate preoccupations of the Modern Man : mostly personal and involved with identity of self in life, but maturely concerned for society and the state, and with profound moments of spiritual meditation on the bridges leading from Life to Death." As Whitman's *Leaves of Grass,* is a complex and intricate poem, its meanings and wealth of suggestions is carried on by a number of recurring images. Every time an image is repeated, it gathers more meanings till at last it acquires a new dimension of meaning and becomes a symbol. The dominant images and symbols of *Leaves of Grass* are as follows :

27.3.1 GRASS : The central image-symbol of Whitman's book is the simple and separate leaf of grass. It not only had a significant place in the title of the book in 1855 edition, but also served as a cluster-title in several subsequent editions. How did Whitman choose to use the term 'leaves' instead of the usual term 'blades' of the grass? No body knows about it. May be it is so because both are the common products of nature; and because they grow in plenty like common masses and remain unnoticed. However, two things are absolutely clear (i) He is fully aware of the novelty of this fusion of images of the blades of grass

and leaves of the tree. (ii) He could realize that this image-symbol could successfully carry the weight of his concept of democracy, where the individuality stands in balance with the mass, distinguished singleness in harmony with massive grouping. Whitman felt that a spear of summer grass symbolizes in its simplicity the miracle of the universe. Hence, it is an object of contemplation and can provide a key to exploring further ranges : "*I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey—work of the stars*". To Whitman the grass seems to mean many things. It may be the flag of his disposition; the handkerchief of the Lord of a uniform hieroglyphic, and its adhesiveness, that is, manly attachment is symbolic of comradeship. Indeed, the grass may have as many meanings as there are the blades/leaves of grass but each one is significant in its own right. It is pertinent to remember that the symbols of Whitman play the same role as the characters in a drama. They carry the meaning and action of the plot (which here means the poetic idea and execution) effectively.

27.3.2 THE SEA : The image of the sea and related water images such as, rivers, lakes and ponds are established almost from the beginning as the major symbols. The third poem in *Inscriptions* introduces The boundless blue on every side expanding with its large and imperious waves. In this poem entitled *In Cabin'd Ships at Sea*, the land-ocean dichotomy, which functions through out Leaves of Grass symbolically as the point of union, plays an important role. The land and the sea are contraries, their meeting ground being the seashore makes it a poem of both the body and the soul.

The sea becomes the dominant image in the *Sea—Drift* cluster. Here the emphasis is placed on one attribute of the sea, that is, of throwing up the refuse by the waves on the shore of what it does not want. Besides, the poet wants to highlight all the connotations of the word 'drift'. First of all the word suggests the inner restlessness, irresistible questioning and endless repetition of the word "*Death, death, death, death, death*". The poet through the association of images, links birth with death and death with birth. Consequently, the death is not an end but a beginning; it becomes word of sweet song. Although the sea is described as "*the fierce old mother*" in *As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life*, it offers to the

poet a clear insight as in *By Blue Ontario's Shore*. Its charm was upon the poet "*till the tissues that held me parted their ties*". The mystic occean is the realm of the spirit. Whitman leaves the rest to his readers to do their part of finding the meanings but one specific sense is always there as Miller pointed out : "*Throughout Leaves, water is associated with death; but in Whitman's view, death is birth, a rebirth, an entry into the spiritual world comparable to the previous entry into the physical world*". Thus, the sea itself becomes the symbol and source of eternity.

27.3.3 THE BIRD : Whitman writes most frequently about the three birds- the mocking bird, the thrush, and the hawk. They are first introduced in *Starting from Paumanok* and they play the dramatic roles later on in Whitman's poetry as the adjectives associated with their names mocking, mountain and hermit convey. It is not until the *Birds of Passage* section that the bird-image comes into prominence and attains specific symbolic meanings. The mocking-bird is for the first time given the significant role in *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking* where the two feathered guests from Alabama suffers the loss of his blissful existence by the disappearance of the she-bird. The mocking bird symbolizes the creative transfiguration brought by consuming but unfulfilled love. The bird hawk, with which the poet identifies himself and his primitive nature, is introduced in *Song of Myself*, *Children of Adams* and then in *We Two, How Long We Were Fool'd*. In these poems, the hawks symbolizes the realization of the transcendent fulfillment of primitive, natural and uninhibited sexuality. The hermit thrush first appears in *When Lilacs Last in Dooryard Bloom'd* and the poet makes full use of the attributes of the bird chosen to play a major role in the poem :

> *Solitary thrush,*
> *The hermit withdrawn to himself, avoiding the settlements,*
> *Sings by himself a song.*

The bird sings in the secluded recesses and consoles the lamented death.

Whitman's three birds seem clearly to relate to three themes :

Mockingbird—Love
Mountain Hawk—Democracy
Hermit-thrush—Religion

Near the end of *Leaves of Grass* in *Thou Mother With Thy Equal Brood* the poet envisions the nation itself as a bird in flight. Here America is like the hovering 'uncaught bird'. Thus, there are various symbolic functions, which the bird images perform systematically.

27.3.4 CELESTIAL BODIES : The earth, sun, moon and stars appear separately or frequently in various groups of poems wherever celestial destiny is cited as a proof of the existence of the spiritual. For instance, in *Eidolons*–the very title presents the images as symbols of ideas or reality. The most impressive scene of this kind is presented graphically in *Song of Myself* :

Wider and wider they spread, expanding, always expanding,
Outward and outward and forever outward.
My sun has his sun and round him obediently wheels,
He joins with his partners a group of superior circuit,
And greater sets follow, making specks on the greatest inside them.

The circuits and superior circuits serve to imply to man that beyond the disorder lies a greater harmony. In other words, the balance and rhythm of an infinite universe are the basis for a faith in a cosmic plan in which man serves his purpose, as Miller suggests. The star is the perhaps the best known of the celestial images in Whitman. The drama of the dark cloud obscuring the bright star is a recurring symbolic event as, for example, in *On the Beach at Night*. This simple but vivid celestial image signifies for the poet the rebirth that is inherent in death. By their very nature— the star in its fixedness and the cloud in its transience-symbolizes the triumph of the eternal over the illusoriness of death.

In *Drum—Taps* poems and *Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun* the sun receives its fullest treatment. The sun here is associated with the rich fertility of

the orchard, grass, fruit and other unhampered areas of nature. It is also the symbol of the 'primal sanities', and creativity. Therefore he says

Shine! shine! shine!
Pour down your warmth, great sun!
While we bask, we two together.

The moon serves in some mystic way to reconcile the poet to the tragic deaths he witnesses. In *Drum-Taps* poems the moon also seems to transfigure death and its horror. In a poem called *Look Down Fair Moon*, he pleads

Look down fair moon and bathe this scene,
Pour softly down night's nimbus floods on faces ghastly,
Swollen, purple,
On the dead on their backs with arms toss'd wide,
Pour down your unstinted nimbus sacred moon.

Whitman seeks to capture the effect of the ethereal beauty of the moon and invests the moon with his keen sense of tragic loss in death.

27.3.5 THE TREES AND THE CITY : Among many additional images, which recur throughout *Leaves of Grass*, are the images of trees and city. They are the representative images and reveal Whitman's individual use of them according to the context. The tree was destined to have a larger role to play as the title of the *Leaves of Grass* confirms. Whitman at first wrote many of *Calamus* poems under the title *Live Oak, with Moss* Whitman's New World has a lot to show to his readers. He says "*See, pastures and forests in my poems–see animals wild and tame—see, beyond the Kew, countless herds of buffalo feeding on short curly grass*". In *Song of Myself* when he refers to Earth of slumbering and liquid trees, the image of earth and tree acquire a symbolic function of the feminine earth waiting for her lover, the poet. Briefly, the tree has become identified with the procreative processes of life. "*I saw in Louisiana a Live Oak rowing*" indicates that the tree has become the symbol of 'manly-love' and at the same time it represents the spiritual love, which transcends the earthly love of man and woman. The trees are, of course, in the cast of characters in *Song of*

the Broad-Axe where they appear as the symbols of wilderness, while in *Song of the Redwood Tree*, the tree is personified and becomes the protagonist. In the description of the life experienced by the dying tree, the poem becomes clearly symbolic.

Whenever Whitman sketches the city image in a few brief strokes, it invokes a sense of excitement, awe and pleasure. Whitman saw both country and city with equality being himself a composite American belonging to both the city and the country. He himself has been the lover of populous pavements, and the Dweller in Manhattan and the clank of crowds.

Whitman succeeds admirably in evoking in the fewest possible words the busy, noisy and peopled city, and the entire complex and exciting life of a city by rapid listing, one after another, of evocative details of those images that are designed for the ear, for instance take the lines :

> "*The impassive stones that receive and return so many echoes,*
> *What groans of over—fed or half-starv'd who fall sunstuck*
> *or in fits*"

In *First O Songs for a Prelude*, the opening song of *Drum-Taps* Manhattan is personified in a dramatic scene. Companionship, friendship, comradeship or other such relationship, all the strong attractions of the city of a million people form a part of his emotional causes of celebrating the city. Precisely, through the poetic images and symbols repeatedly employed by the poet, the dramatic tension between the self and the other selves that is the society and nature or the self and not-self enters into the lyrical harmony with the whole universe. And these images and symbols add sensibility and sensuality to his poetic experiences and a cosmic vision to his masterpiece—*Leaves of Grass.*

27.4 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed the structural design of the poem along with various images and symbols used in the poem like grass, sea, bird, celestial bodies, trees and cities.

27.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Discuss the structure and growth of the Leaves

b) Comment on the democratic note in Whitman's poetry

c) Leaves of Grass is a mirror to American life. Illustrate.

27.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. What does the grass symbolize in "Song of Myself"?

   A) Human mortality B) Nature's beauty
   C) The interconnectedness of all life
   D) Physical strength

2. What does the image of the "kosmos" symbolize in the poem?

   A) The vastness of the universe B) The Earth's ecosystem
   C) A mysterious force D) Human creativity

3. What does the "savage" in the poem symbolize?

   A) An uncivilized and dangerous individual
   B) An untamed aspect of human nature
   C) A wild animal
   D) A person of Native American descent

4. What do the "glistening and drooping" leaves symbolize?

   A) The changing seasons B) The fragility of life
   C) Joy and sorrow D) Freedom and captivity

5. What does the "matron" symbolize in the poem?

   A) A strong and powerful woman
   B) An elderly person C) A motherly figure
   D) A wealthy aristocrat

6. What does the "flag of disposition" symbolize in the poem?

A) A national flag B) An emblem of surrender
C) A signal for war
D) An individual's inner state of mind

7. What does the "two great hulls" symbolize in the poem?

A) Ships B) Houses
C) Trees D) Mountain

8. What does the "journey-work of the stars" symbolize?

A) Celestial bodies B) The movements of the planets
C) The cyclical nature of life D) Dreams and aspirations

9. What does the "fireman" symbolize in the poem?

A) A person who starts fires B) A firefighter
C) A passionate individual D) A symbol of destruction

10. What does the "starched long white robe" symbolize in the poem?

A) Purity and innocence B) Wealth and status
C) A religious figure D) A formal garment

Answers: 1) The interconnectedness of nature 2) The vastness of universe 3) An untamed aspect of human nature 4) The fragility of life 5) The motherly figure 6) An individual's inner state of mind 7) Ships 8) The cyclical nature of life 9) A passionate individual 10) Purity and innocence

27.7 SUGGESTED READING

1. Walt Whiteman : An encyclopedia by J. R. Le Master and Donald D. Kummings

2. Critical essays on Walt Whiteman by James Woodress

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COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 28**
AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–VI**

EMILY DICKINSON (SELECTED POEMS)

UNIT STRUCTURE

28.1 Introduction

28.2 Objectives

28.3 Emily Dickinson: Her Life & Work

28.4 Let Us Sum Up

28.5 Examination Oriented Questions

28.6 Suggestd Reading

28.1 INTRODUCTION

Emily Dickinson, a reclusive yet profoundly influential American poet, is renowned for her innovative and introspective verse. Her work, largely unpublished during her lifetime, explores themes of death, immortality, and the human soul with remarkable depth and sensitivity.

28.2 OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the lesson is to acquaint the learners with the life of poet and her works.

28.3 EMILY DICKINSON: HER LIFE AND WORK

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson was born in Amherst, Massachusetts (a New England state in America) on December 10, 1830. She died where she was born, at the city of Amherst, after a life completely devoid of outward event, in 1886.

Her inner life, too, was not much known except her available works. Her father, Edward Dickinson, was a lawyer, and the Treasurer of Amherst College. One thing that seems certain was that whatever social or intellectual life was available in that bleak era was available for her. The fact also seems equally clear that she did not choose to avail herself of the social and intellectual life available to her, except perhaps in very slight degree. It has also become known now that this choice, which was gradually to make of her life an almost inviolable solitude, was made rather early in her life. This fact is made clear by her letters now available to us in published form.

In a letter dated 1853, when she was twenty three years of age, she remarked, "*I do not go from house*". By the time she was thirty years of age, her habit of sequestration had become quite distinct. In fact, it was a subject on which she was quite explicit and emphatic in her letters to T. W. Higginson. Higginson was an essayist and emphatic contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly* at that time. She made it clear that if there was to be any question of a meeting between them, he would have to come to Amherst, that she would not go to Boston, an all-important city those days for the cultural, religious, and literary life of America. Higginson, as a matter of fact, saw her twice, and his record of the encounter is practically the only record we have of her from any literary personage of her lifetime. In fact, even this record is rather meagre. Higginson saw her superficially, as was inevitable. Brave soldier, courtly gentleman, gifted amateur of letters, he was too much of the old school not to be a little puzzled by her poetry. If he was fine enough to guess the fineness, he was not quite fine enough wholly to understand it. The brief correspondence between Emily and Higginson is an extraordinary document of unconscious irony – the urbanly academic essayist reproaching his wayward pupil for her literary insubordination, her false quantities, and reckless liberties with rhyme. The wayward pupil always replied with a humility, beautiful and pathetic, but remaining singularly, with unmalleable obstinacy, herself.

Higginson once wrote, "I saw her but twice, face to face, and brought away the impression of something as unique as Undine or Mignon or Thelka".

Later, after thirty years had passed of their acquaintance and Emily Dickinson had been dead for four years, when Higginson was asked for assistance and advice in making a selection from her poetry, practically none of which had been published by then, his scruples were less severe. He came out to speak of her with generosity and insight. As he remarked, "After all, when a thought takes one's breath away, a lesson on grammar seems an impertinence". In many cases these verses will seem to the reader like poetry torn up by the roots. And again, "a quality more suggestive of the poetry of Blake than of anything to be elsewhere found – flashes of wholly original and profound insight into nature and life". Thus, began and ended Emily Dickinson's only important connection with the literary life of her time.

Another literary acquaintance, so to say, that Emily Dickinson can be said to have had was with Helen Hunt Jackson, who was a poet herself. A slender evidence to this effect available to us is that Emily gave for Jackson's anthology of poems, *A Masque of Poets,* her poem *Success*. This was in fact, one of the few poems she allowed publication during her life time. There is also evidence to show that Emily knew the Bowles family, owners and editors of the *Springfield Republican,* which was considered at that time the *Manchester Guardian* of New England. As Emily once put it mischievously, *Springfield Republican* was one of "*such papers... as have nothing carnal in them*". Emily Dickinson seldom saw the Bowles family and aside from the acquaintances just mentioned she had few intimates outside of her family. In fact, the circle of her world grew steadily smaller. This is indeed a point of cardinal importance for a proper understanding of her poetry, which she always composed for her own satisfaction, not to be made known to the outside world.

It can be asserted without any reservation that Emily Dickinson became a sort of hermit by her own deliberate and conscious choice. "*A recluse*", Higginson wrote, "by temperament and habit, literally spending years without setting her foot beyond the doorstep, and many more years during which her walks were strictly limited to her father's grounds, she habitually concealed her mind, like her person, form all but a very few friends; and it was with great difficulty that she was persuaded to print, during her life time, three or four poems." One of

the co-editors of *Poems: Second Series* assures us that she was not an invalid. She had tried society and the world, and had found them lacking. But this, of course, does not reveal much of her person. Her letters reveal to us more convincingly that her early years were normally social – she was active, high-spirited, and endowed with considerable gift for extravagant humour. In fact, as a young woman she had, as informed by Mrs. Bianchi, a niece of Emily Dickinson, in the preface to *The Single Hound,* several love-affairs. There is no evidence, however, that any of these affairs was a serious one. As such, it will not be fair to attribute, as some have attempted to do, to these affairs, or to any one of these, the singular psychological change that came over her. The only clue of sorts available to us is the hint from one of her girlhood friends, that, perhaps, "*she was longing for poetic sympathy."* Well, perhaps! But this, too, does not go far enough. Anecdotes about her being mischievous, about her wit, her waywardness are actually, not enough. It can be said amusing, if anything, to know that once, being anxious to dispose of some kittens, she put them on a shovel, carried them into the cellar, and dropped them into the nearest jar – which, subsequently, on the occasion of the visit of a distinguished judge, turned out to have been the pickle-jar. One would also like to know how even when her solitude was most remote she was in the habit of lowering from her windows, by a string, small baskets of fruit or confectionery for children. But there are other things one would like to know and much more.

There seems no possibility now, however, of our ever knowing anything more. Also, if we look for the causes of the psychic injury which so sharply turned her in upon herself, it can only be speculated. In this regard, even her letters do not reveal much. They only speak of the injury, not its causes. They only reiterate that the injury was deep. There is also evidence enough that she did suffer acutely for intellectual drought. The letters do show her vividly, but only perpetually withdrawing into isolation, always discovering anew, with dismay, the intellectual limitations of those writing letters to her. So far as Emily Dickinson is concerned, she emerges, from these letters, rather discreet, pathetic, baffled, a little humbled, and draws in her horns. At times, she can be seen taking

perverse pleasure in indulging more than ever, on the occasion of such a disappointment, in her love of a cryptic style. We encounter, that is, a delicate bombardment of parable and whim which she perfectly knows will stagger, only retreating again to the safe ground of the superficial. It is perhaps for this very reason that the letters reveal to us absolutely no information about her literary interests. The paucity of literary allusions is, in fact, astonishing. We do come across references to the Brontes and the Brownings. Besides, she finds Alexander Smith "not very coherent", and as for Joaquin Miller, she "could not care about."

About her own work Emily Dickinson speaks only in the brief and rather unsatisfactory correspondence with Higginson. In 1863, she wrote to him, "*I wrote no verse, but one or two, until this winter.*" Other than this, there is no scrap of her own literary history. In fact, she appears to have existed almost in a vacuum. Of the literary events, so significant for America, which were taking place in America during her formative period, there is hardly any mention in her letters. Emerson was at the height of his career, living only sixty miles away from Amherst where Dickinson lived. When his poems came out, she was only seventeen years of age. Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* came out when she was twenty, and *The House of the Seven Gables* the year after. The same year, 1851, came out Melville's *Moby Dick.* The death of Poe took place in 1849, and in 1850 was published the first collected edition of his poems. Emily Dickinson was only 21 at that time. Thoreau's *Walden* appeared when she was only twenty four. And the next year came out Whitman's *Leaves of Grass.*

It can be reasonably observed here that Emily Dickinson became fully conscious at the very moment when American literature became truly American. She knew this seems beyond doubt; nor seems in doubt the fact that she was stimulated and influenced by the literature of the American Renaissance. It can be safely assumed that she found in her immediate environment no one of her own stature, with whom she could share and deliberate the issues related to her literary interests. It is also clear from the circumstantial evidence available to us that she lacked the energy of effrontery to travel out into the unknown in search of such

a companionship. Not less clear is also the fact that she lacked courage to dare and defy the traditions dominating her milieu. Consequently, she quite easily became a prey to the then current Emersonian doctrine of mystical individualism. It may not be unreasonable to suggest in this regard that her extreme self-seclusion and secrecy was both a protest and display. In other words, it was a sort of vanity masquerading as modesty. She became increasingly precious, of her person as of her thought. Her letters too, are a witness to this vanity, where she seems to believe that whatever she utters, however brief or casual, will be precious and valuable. She seems to feel certain that however cryptic her remarks, they will be deciphered. Quiet clearly, she enjoys being something of a mystery. In fact, quite often she deliberately and awkwardly exaggerates it. Even in her notes of condolence-for which she, seems, had a morbid passion-she is vain enough to indulge in sententiousness. For example, writing to a friend whose father died on her wedding day, she pontificates: "*Few daughters have the immortality of a father for a bridal gift.*"

Moving from her letters to her poetry one discovers that Dickinson's art is centred on the subject of (Emersonian) individualism. What Henry James said of Emerson can, in fact, be aptly applied to Emily Dickinson as well. James's observation in question runs as under:

> *The doctrine of the supremacy of the individual to himself, of his originality and, as regards his own character, unique quality, must have had a great charm for people living in a society in which introspection, thanks to the want of other entertainment, played almost the part of a social resource ... There was ... much relish for the utterances of a writer who would help one to take a picteresque view of one's internal possibilities, and to find in the landscape of the soul all sorts of fine sunrise and moonlight effects.*

This seems to sum up excellently well the social case of Emily Dickinson as well. It provides us with a shrewd picture of her singular introversion, suggesting that we are perhaps justified in considering her the most perfect flower of New England Transcendentalism. In her mode of life she inculcated the doctrine of self-sufficient individualism farther than Thoreau did, or the naïve zealots of the Brook

Farm Experiment. She carried this mode in her poetry, with its complement of passionate moral mysticism, farther than Emerson. In other words, it can be claimed that as a poet she had more genius than Emerson.

It is necessary to speak of Emerson's influence on Dickinson, which was substantial and significant. Like Emerson, whose essays must have exercised great influence on her, and whose poetry, especially his gnomic poems, only a little less, she was from the very beginning, and remained all her life a singular mixture of Puritan and free thinker. The problems of good and evil, life and death, obsessed her; the nature and destiny of the human soul; and Emerson's theory of compensation. As reported by one of her early critics, towards God "*she exhibited an Emersonian self-possession*". As becomes evident her writings, she did not, and could not, accept the Puritan God at all. In fact, she was rather irreverent, so much so that her editors felt a little uneasy on that account. Of course, her irreverence is not towards God as such, but to the Puritan attitude towards him. For instance, she observes in *Drowning* the following:

The maker's cordial visage,
However good to see,
Is shunned, we must admit it,
Like an adversity.

Also, we find her referring to God as a noted clergyman, in one of her poems. In another, she salutes Him as *Burglar, banker, father*. These descriptions of God could have caused annoyance even to the most advanced of her contemporaries, the orientation of the era being such. Her perfect metaphysical detachment is, however, stated most precisely and unabashedly in the famous mock-prayer (in *The Single Hound*), in which, addressing God, she quite impertinently apologizes to Him for His own duplicity.

We need to repeat here that Dickinson's opinion of the traditional "God", who was still, in her day, a portentous Victorian gentleman. Her real reverence, the reverence that made her a mystic poet of the finest sort, was reserved for Nature, which seemed to her a more manifest and more beautiful evidence of Divine will

than creeds and churches. This she saw, observed, loved, with a burning simplicity and passion which nevertheless did not exclude her very agile sense of humour. Her Nature poems, however, are not the most secretly revelatory or dramatically compulsive, nor, on the whole, the best. Often, they show extraordinary delicacy, which is always expressed with deft brevity, the exact in terms of the quaint. But, also, they are often superficial, a mere affectionate playing with the smaller things that give her delight. In order to see her at her best and most characteristic and most profound, one must turn to the remarkable range of metaphysical speculation and ironic introspection which is displayed in those sections of her posthumous books which her editors have captioned Life, and Time and Eternity. In the former sections are the greater number of her set "meditations" on the nature of things, For some critics they have always appeared too bare, bleak, and fragmentary. They have no trappings, except that here and there one finds a shred of purple. It is as if Emily Dickinson, who in one of her letters uttered her contempt for the obtrusive body, had wanted to make them hard, bright, and clear. No less clarity is there in her use of metaphors, of which she could be quite prodigal. Her symbols too, have an analogous clarity and translucency.

Emily Dickinson's poetry is also marked by a downright homeliness which springs a perpetual surprise and delight. She generally tends to turn up Emerson's gnomic style to the epigrammatic. Also, she often carries the epigrammatic to the point of the cryptic. Thus, she becomes what one might call an epigrammatic symbolist. Note, for instance, the following:

Lay this laurel on the one
Too intrinsic for renown.
Laurel! Veil your deathless tree, –
Him you chasten, that is he!

This seems to verge perilously on the riddle. In fact, quite often her passionate devotion to concise statement in terms of metaphor leaves for us a small rich emblem of which the colours tease, the thought entices, but the meaning escapes. But then there is also, against the escaping meaning, her

capacity, when occasion demands, for a granite simplicity. The only parallel to this granite simplicity can be found in the seventeenth century English poetry. Note, for instance, the following from her poem *Parting*.

My life closed twice before its close;
It yet remains to see
If immortality unveil
A third event to me,
So huge, so hopeless to conceive,
As these that twice befell.
Parting is all we know of heaven
And all we need of hell.

The poem, it will be noted, deals with death. In fact, the number of poems she has written on the subject of death is one of the most remarkable things about her. Death, and the problem of life after death, seems to have been quite an obsession with her. She must have thought of it constantly – she died all her life, she probed death daily. "*That bareheaded life under grass worries one like a wasp*", she wrote. Ultimately, what had started as an obsession turned into morbidness. Her eagerness for details, after the death of a friend – the hungry desire to know *how* she died – became almost vulture-like. However, the preoccupation, with its horrible uncertainties – its doubts about immortality, its hatred of the flesh, and its many reversals of both positions – gave us her sharpest work. The theme of death and life after death was of enormous interest to her, which, despite its treatment in the numerous poems, remained inexhaustible for her. If her poetry seldom became lyrical, seldom departed from the clourless sobriety of its bare incumbics and toneless assonance, it did so most of all when the subject was death. She felt irresistibly attracted towards the subject. It was most of all when she tried *"to touch the smile"*, and dipped her *"fingers in the frost"*, that she took full possession of her genius.

It may be said in conclusion that Emily Dickinson's genius was as erratic as it was brilliant. Her disregard for accepted forms or for regularities was incorrigible. Grammar, rhyme, metre–anything went by the board if it stood in the

way of thought or freedom of utterance. Sometimes, her arrogance seems justified; sometimes not. She did not care in the least for variety of effect – of her six hundred-odd poems practically all are in octosyllabic quatrains or couplets, sometimes with rhyme, sometimes with assonance, sometimes with neither. Everywhere, when we first encounter her poems, we feel there is nothing but a colourless dry monotony. However, when we get back and ponder over them, we discover the deceptive nature of this monotony, concealing rich reserves of depth and splendour, subtleties of mood and tone. Once we are adjusted to the spinsterly angularity of the mode, its lack of eloquence or rhetorical speed, its naïve and often prosaic directness, we discover felicities of thought and phrase in every poem. The magic can be felt tersely and surely. Ultimately, we find ourselves sighing at her singular perversity, her lapses and tyrannies, accepting them as an inevitable part of the strange and original genius which she was. Her lapses and tyrannies became a positive charm– one even suspects they were deliberate. They seem to have satisfied here and hence, they satisfy us. Her charm, we find, is irresistible, marked by her highly individual gift, and to the singular sharp beauty, present everywhere, of her personality. The two things cannot be separated; and together, one must suppose, they suffice to put her among the finest poets in the language.

28.4 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed the childhood, litrary career and major works of Emily Dikinson.

28.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Briefly discuss Emily Dickinson as a poet.

28.6 SUGGESTED READING

1. The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson by Wendy Martin.

2. Thematic pattern of Emily Dickinson's poetry by Neeru Tandon.

COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 29**
AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–VI**

EMILY DICKINSON (SELECTED POEMS)

UNIT STRUCTURE

29.1 Introduction

29.2 Objectives

29.3 The Poems

29.4 Let Us Sum Up

29.5 Multiple Choice Questions

29.6 Examination Oriented Questions

29.7 Suggested Reading

29.1 INTRODUCTION

Dickinson's writing style is distinctive, marked by short lines, slant rhymes, and unconventional punctuation. Her use of dashes and unique capitalization adds an enigmatic quality to her poetry, reflecting her contemplative and introspective nature.

29.2 OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the lesson is to acquaint the learners with the poems of Dickinson prescribed in the syllabus.

29.3 THE POEMS

Emily Dickinson, like Robert Frost and W. B. Yeats, is a poet of the short

poem. Writing lyrics reflecting her momentary reactions to an idea or an emotion exercising her mind. It is as if she were prepared to register rather than shape. This seems to make her vulnerable to Blackmur's charge, that her poems are merely the random products of diverse occasions, and that they offer little guidance for a reader. The charge is not entirely true, though it hits at a crucial aspect of her art. As we shall see reading some of her poems, she was not lost in the pathless woods of life. Besides, as Tennyson remarked, honest doubt is any time preferable to mindless dogmatism. Of course, we need to thread our way through a number of paradoxes. The reason is that the tone of some of her poems may be firm, but the impression made by the whole work is that she is not confident. Edgy, nimble, restless, needing to keep her wits about her, she says many things and is not, at least seemingly, consistent. Of course, all this does not make her poetry incoherent. What finally emerges is that she is a poet of passing away (death is one great form of this, of the elusive and the transient, and the fugitive, of what she called "*a quality of loss*"). Her great success is with this and with the ominous, the vague, the threatening, the non-arrival, the not-quite-grasped, the not-quite realized, the missing. At first sight, she may not seem unusual in this, but most poets who consider these states do so in order to lament them. She, on the contrary, celebrates them, making a poetry of prisons and perturbations which others usually shrug off or seek to rationalize. With these preliminaries, let us take up the poems prescribed for our special reading. The first of these is *Just Lost When I Was Saved*, which runs as under:

Just lost when I was saved!
Just felt the world go by!
Just girt *me for the onset with eternity,*
When breath blew back,
And on the other side
I heard recede the disappointed tide.
Therefore as one returned, I feel,
Odd secrets of the time to tell!

Some sailor, skirting foreign shores,
Some pale reporter from the awful doors
Before the seal!
Next time, to stay!
Next time, the things to see
By ear unheard,
Unscrutinized by eye.
Next time, to tarry,
While the ages steal, –
Slow tramp the centuries,
And the cycles wheel.

On recalling Robert Frost's poem *The Onset*, where too, the theme is death. The two poems move in two very different directions while dealing with a common theme. Whereas, Frost depicts the onset of death as something like a winter storm but soon takes to a proverbial assurance of "*can spring remain behind*", Dickinson refuses to take shelter behind any such proverbial wisdom. Unlike Frost's poem, her's does not fall into the simplified form of *beginning in delight and ending in wisdom*. On the contrary, it stays with the strange experience, tries to grapple with that strangeness, feels it slipping out of her hands, and ends hoping to have and know more of it the next time. Dickinson gives us only as much of life as she experiences, without any attempt at falsification through the constructs of custom, or beaten tracks of tradition. And it is here, that her strength lies.

The next poem for our reading is *I Taste a Liquor Never Brewed*, which runs as under:

I taste a liquor never brewed,
From tankards scooped in pearl;
Not all the vats upon the Rhine
Yield such an alcohol

Inebriate of air am I,
And debauchee of dew,
Reeling, through endless summer days,
From inns of molten blue.
When landlords turn the drunken bee
Out of the foxglove's door,
When butterflies renounce their drams,
I shall but drink the more.
Till seraphs swing their snowy hats,
And saints to windows run,
To see the little tippler
Leaning against the sun!

Here is a poem which can be termed tipsy. It is not a poem whose gaiety will be patient of the gravity of Calvinist divines, nor of the textual attentions of literary critics, for neither of them has a vocabulary suited to jocularity. It is worth observation that, as with the volcano poems, the poet herself is here also the centre of interest. She will drink the more "*Till Seraphs swing their snowy hats*," etc. Such uproarious spectacles, like the unlicenced wits of graffiti writers, carry little weight – until the Saints or the party managers get to hear them. They are a part of that Emily Dickinson who chuckled over beating a retreat from a privy, vanquished by a resident spider, or who enjoyed the chance for a joke when it offered and so reported one day: "*No one has called so far, but one old lady to look at a house. I directed her to the cemetery to spare expense of moving*," and on another that her Aunt Elizabeth was: "*the only male relative on the female side*." This seems to come straight from Charles Dickens who in one of his novels speaks of ladies of both sexes.

The third poem for our special reading is *Hope Is the Thing With Feathers*, which reads as under:

Hope is the thing with feathers

That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never steps at all,
And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.
I've heard it in the chillest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

Here, as elsewhere, we can see that Dickinson is not just jotting her thoughts and feelings; she is consciously composing a poem, in shape and form well designed. Her strength as a poet lies, as is exemplified in the present poem, by her use of metaphor. Since, she is generally writing about things invisible, impalpable, metaphor alone can make them available to the reader in the form of experience. Her poems, the present included, also establish the purity and innocence of the life of solitude, of remaining aloof from the din and dust of mundane life. Living among people one's mind gets stuffed with the petty affairs of men corrupted by their intercourse with material events and pursuits. Too much experience of worldly things gives one the stuff of fiction; too much of solitude gives the stuff of poetry. It is pure poetry that we have in the poems of Emily Dickinson. The present poem amply illustrates it. We can see how the single emotion of hope is made visual and auditory through various images familiar to us in nature. Hope is a thing of feathers, a bird; it is made something living, an experience one goes through.

The fourth poem for our reading is *I Felt a Funeral in My Brain*, which runs as under:

I felt a Funeral in my Brain,
And Mourners to and fro

Kept treading –treading–till it seemed
That sense was breaking through–
And when they all were seated,
A service, like a Drum –
Kept beating – beating – till I thought
My mind was going numb –
And then I heard them lift a Box
And creak across my soul
With those same Boots of lead, again,
Then space – began to toll,
As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,
And I, and silence, some strange Race
Wrecked, solitary, here –
And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
And I dropped down, and down –
And hit a World, at every plunge,
And finished knowing – then–

This one is not, as we can see, a customary poem of analysis. It is not retrospective. It is a dramatic enactment of the kind that leaves us asking where we start from and checking biographies of the poet to discover a cause so that we can more confidently rationalize the poetry as a mere fact. It does not offer us any easy route through our own experiences. It is abrupt and without occasion or location other than those it requires for its own seemingly hermetic processes. The first stanza of the poem illustrates all this amply well.

As is obvious from the poem, the poet has not been bereaved. There is only an idea of a sad occasion. She has not been jilted. She has not lost her religious faith. Perhaps! But explanations proliferate, it may be as an understandable human wish to be shielded from the disorder which is the very frame of the

poem's setting. We like to know where we are, and wish to account for a poem whose success is to bring to us an extreme disruption. The stanzas following the first depict all that so powerfully. Then, there is no confident aphorism at the close. There is only an end without conclusion, and yet we do seem to have been uncannily near a procession, a service, a mourning bell and the lowering of a coffin. Such ceremonies are things we do collectively to abate the mystery of bereavement. They are formal and ordered and, in a manner, an inheritance and therefore not the product of a private volition. Their nature is to be sombre, respectful, consolatory, a demonstration, a collaboration, a salute. In each of these stanzas, however, what should be a salute comes through as an oppression. "*Brain*", "*Mind*", "*Soul*", "*Being*", "*Reason*", in each, too, there is a suffering presence of consciousness that records what is being done to it as inscrutable, only felt and heard. The poet is a unique witness victim at her own funerary tribute. The poem enacts, as its fundamental horror, burial alive.

It is perhaps doubtful if there could be a more extreme contradiction between the self and its circumstances than to have the leaving treated as if they were dead but, though some of the poem's force comes from Gothic sensationalism ("*creak across my Soul*," "*Boots of Head*"), a weird inversion takes place and the congregation seem more insensible than the poet. They are Mourners, established by name rather than emotion and they tread and tread till they tread out all possibility of personal feeling. Connections are not made. There are mourners, but we are not told what they mourn. "*A Service*" occurs, but seemingly independent of them. They like "*a Box*", but it is not "*my*" box-nor anyone's box. Space tolls, but no one is pulling the bell-rope. A plank breaks, but again without perceived cause. This world is not accessible because, instead of being a human world of interchange, it is a world of unstoppable ritual and motion. "*To and fro*", "*treading – treading*", "*beating - beating*": the activity (in the main, the noise expresses itself as activity rather than sound) is unrelenting. There is not a single, still moment. "*Till*", "*and when*", "*till*", "*And then*", "*again*", "*then*", "*And Then*", "*then*": the torment is the change of torments before we have adjusted to the old. The sequence goes on, unresponsive to our emotional need

that we should be able to intervene to stop it.

Yet there is a regularity – order in the poem and it is of a still– recognizable, human ceremony, albeit where elements have become magnified so that again and again they impinge on the poet as varieties of heavy rhythm, indications of the irresistible process which has the plank break and which, today, it is usual to refer to familiarity as pressure. Utterly a receiver, the poet uses a ceremony for the dead to define herself as a helpless victim, not of persons but of orders. She tumbles through booming space, utterly cut off from the order which exists elsewhere.

The fifth poem we have for discussion here is *The Soul Selects Her Own Society*, which runs as under:

The soul selects her own society,
Then shuts the door;
On her divine majority,
Obtrude no more.
Unmoved, she notes the chariot's pausing
At her low gate;
Unmoved, and emperor is kneeling
Upon her mat.
I've known her from an ample nation
Choose one;
Then close the values of her attention
Like stone.

Quite often, we encounter in Dickinson's poems a Puritan emphasis on the individual as the primary agent of meaning, which can easily re-express itself as Romanticism. She does seem, however, more concerned, not with plentitude of being, but with resilience, fortitude, self-reliance as witnessed in separation and exclusion. There is a cluster of poems, including the present one, praising these qualities. The present poem is, in fact, representative of the cluster. These poems do not celebrate communion – even the limited communion of Saints. There seems

to be more merit in rejecting the many than in rejecting over 'the Society' selected, and to indicate that merit by declaring that it spurns even Emperors when it closes the values of its attention is to betray a preoccupation with rank.

The sixth poem meant for special reading from the poetry of Emily Dickinson is *There Came a Day at Summer's Full*, which runs as under:

There comes a day at summer's full
Entirely for me;
I thought that such for the saints,
Where resurrections be.
The sun, as common, went abroad,
The flowers, accustomed, blew,
As if no soul the solstice passed
That maketh all things new.
The time was scarce profound by speech;
The symbol of a word
Was needless, as at sacrament
The wardrobe of our Lord.
Each was to each the sealed church,
Permitted to commune this time,
Lest we too awkward show
At supper of the Lamb.
The hours slid fast, as hours will,
Clutched tight by greedy hands,
So faces on two decks look back,
Bound to opposing lands.
And so when all the time has leaked
Without external sound,
Each bound the other's crucifix-

We gave no other bond.
Sufficienty troth that we shall rise–
Deposed, at length, the grave –
To that new marriage, justified
Through Calvaries of Love.

As in most other poems of Dickinson, what strikes one's eye first of all is a certain freshness of expression, her dangling diction, her curious coinages. Even when she uses the familiar Christian rituals and ceremonies for analogy, she imparts to them all a certain freshness, with her purity of vision, with her honesty of communication. Her images are not only sharp and striking, but also deeply disturbing, shaking us out of complacency, giving us jerks and jolts, compelling us into seeing the same old thing from a point of view altogether new. In the present poem, on the traditional themes of transcience of life and mystery of death, the central stanza in the poem (No. 5) compels an extraordinary attention and conscious concentration. Her favourite stanza, the four-line quatrain, maintains her favourite steps in the steady march towards her inevitable end, the door of death, deposing the grave, rising to that new marriage. Dickinson's poem after poem shows how even very traditional and too much written about themes can be given new feel and form by the power of novel expression, by the magic of innovative art.

The next poem (the seventh) we need to give special attention is called *Exultation Is The Going*, which is rather short (only two quatrains), and runs as under:

Exultation is the going
Of an inland soul to sea, –
Past the houses, past the headlands,
Into deep eternity!
Bred as we, among the mountains,
Can the sailor understand
The divine intoxication

Of the first league out from land?

Whatever aspect of life Dickinson may choose for the theme of a poem of hers, the basic thought always remains the release of energy, which is generally liberating. Orthodoxy has always mistrusted such spontaneity (which it identifies as purposelessness). The early Puritans in America discouraged the free spirit amongst Quakers and, at the first Pentecost, disciples speaking in tongues were immediately accused of drunkenness. The Transcendentalists like Emerson and Thoreau, Whitman and Dickinson, valued that free spirit. 'Divine Intoxication' was a favourite metaphor of Emily Dickinson, rejoicing solo in a thoroughly Romantic reverie at the dangerous absence of restraint, as in the present poem.

Can the sailor understand? No, of course, not. He would not be intoxicated if he could. But the poem is not so far gone that it does not keep both sea and land in sight. It is not out on the fathomless ocean. It still has its reference-points and this explains not only its coherence as an artwork but also its "exultation". It can enjoy leaving because it has something to leave. The headlands and houses are as much part of the seascape as the vineyards, birds, grass and cities are of the volcanic landscape: it needs them. We can see how the same theme of death, the event of exit from life, is expressed in so many ways in different poems. Each poem comes with its own fresh idiom, its own new metaphor, its own new analogy, its own new force, to make us see the harsh fact of death in numerous ways, each adding something new to our consciousness of that fact, each undercutting our conventional way of responding to the fact.

We are left with another set of seven poems, besides the seven we have covered in the preceding Lesson (No. 11), to read from the poetry of Emily Dickinson prescribed in the course on American Literature. The first of these seven is entitled *Because I Could Not Stop For Death*, which is perhaps the most popular poem of Emily Dickinson.

The poem reads as under:

Because I could not stop for Death,

He kindly stopped for me –
The carriage held but just ourselves
And Immortality.
We slowly drove, he knew no haste,
And I had put away
My labor, and my leisure too,
For his civility.
We passed the school, where children strove
At recess in the ring;
We passed the fields of gazing grain,
We passed the setting sun.
Or rather, he passed us.
The dews grew quivering and chill,
For only gossamer my gown,
My tippet only tulle.
We passed before a house that seemed
A swelling of the ground;
The roof was scarcely visible,
The cornice in the ground.
Since then 'tis centuries, and yet
Feels shorter than the day
I first surmised the horses' heads
Were toward eternity.

Considered one of the perfect poems of Dickinson, at times entitled *The Chariot*, it illustrates better than anything she wrote the special quality of her mind. Some critics, Allen Tate among them, have considered it one of the greatest in the English Language. The rhythm charges with movement the pattern of suspended action back of the poem. Every image is precise and, moreover, not merely beautiful, but fused with the central idea. Every image extends and intensifies every other.

The third stanza especially shows Miss Dickinson's power to fuse, into a single order of perception, a heterogeneous series: the children, the grain and the setting sun have the same degree of credibility; the first subtly preparing for the last. The sharp "*gazing*" before "*grain*" instills into nature a cold vitality of which the qualitative richness has infinite depth.

The content of death in the poem eludes explicit definition. Death is presented in the poem as a gentleman taking a lady out for a drive. But note the restraint that keeps the poet from carrying it so far that it becomes ludicrous and incredible. Also note the subtly interfused erotic motive, which the idea of death has presented to most romantic poets, love being a symbol interchangeable with death. The terror of death is objectified through this figure of the genteel driver, who is made ironically to serve the end of Immortality. This is, in fact, the heart of the poem : she has presented a typical Christian theme in its final irresolution, without making any final statement about it. There is no solution to the problem; there can be only a presentation of it in the full context of intellect and feeling. A construction of human will, elaborated with all the abstracting powers of the mind, is put to the concrete test of experience: the idea of immortality is confronted with the fact of physical disintegration. We are not told what to think; we are told to look at the situation.

The framework of the present poem is in fact, the two abstractions, mortality and immortality (or eternity), which are made to associate in equality with the images! she sees the ideas, and thinks the perceptions. She did, of course, nothing of the sort; but we must use the logical distinction, even to the extent of paradox, if we are to form any notion of the rare quality of mind. She could not in the proper sense think at all, unless we prefer the feeble poetry of moral ideas that flourished in New England in the eighteen eighties, we must conclude that her intellectual deficiency contributed at least negatively to her great distinction. She is probably the only Anglo-American poet of the nineteenth century whose work exhibits the perfect literary situation – in which the fusion of sensibility and thought is possible. Unlike her contemporaries, she never succumbed to her ideas, to easy solutions, or to her private distress.

Another poem for our special reading is *I Took My Power in My Hand*, rather a short poem, but pithy as usual with Dickinson. Although unusual in being a little more abstract than the usual Dickinson poem, it does give in the second stanza the much expected concrete image drawn from everyday life, but given an extraordinary significance. The poem reads as under:

I took my power in my hand
And went against the world;
'Tis was not so much as David had,
But I was twice as bold.
I aimed my pebble, but myself
Was all the one that fell.
Was it Goliath was too large,
Or only I too small?

As Frost puts into it, every poem is a metaphor. The general statement that Frost makes here, may not be true of all poems, it makes lot of sense in dealing with Dickinson's poetry. Most of her poems measure upto the general statement of Frost just cited, especially, the present one. Just as a metaphor acts like a pebble thrown into a pool of water, setting in chain of never-ending waves, one leading to another, the poem in hand does precisely the same. The poet literally throws a pebble into the settled pool of the world of custom, of tradition, of dogmatism. But very much like Newton, she discovers that her act of disturbing the pool, more daring it may be than that of the Biblical saint David, is only a small stirring in the too large a pool for any individual. Minus the mock-heroic mode of Eliot's Prufrock, one is reminded of the lines.

Do I dare?
Do I dare disturb the universe?

In the present poem, the pool, in fact, remains undisturbed, unsettled; only the daring disturber falls on the ground, realizing the unequalness, her smallness, for the too large a pool that is the universe. The poem's beauty lies in its coherence

and compactness, its pithiness and perfection. In her typical fashion, Dickinson does not attempt any resolution of the problem posed in the poem; she only places the problem before the reader, placing it in all the bare bones, in all its nagging nudity, leaving it teasing the reader, just as Shakespeare's (or Buddha's) smile teases in Arnold's sonnet on the Bard of Stratford. It is the mystery in which the image or the event is shrouded, yielding no answers, that teases the reader. And yet the image or event compels engaging attention.

The next poem for our special reading is The Last Night That She Lived, which runs as under:

The last night that she lived,
It was a common night,
Except the dying; this to us
Made nature different.
We noticed smallest things, -
Things overlooked before,
By this great light upon our minds
Italicized, as 'twere.
As we went out and in
Between her final room
And rooms where those to be alive
Tomorrow were, a blame
That others could exist
While she must finish quite,
A jealousy for her arose
So nearly infinite.
We waited while she passed;
It was a narrow time,
Too jostled were our souls to speak,

At length the notice came.
She mentioned, and forgot;
Then lightly as a reed
Bent to the water, shivered scarce,
Consented, and was dead.
And we, we placed the hair,
And drew the head erect;
And then an awful leisure was,
Our faith to regulate.

Here is an artistic beauty, though the theme is the inevitable event of death. Dickinson's great art lies in saying things without speaking or emotions, without inducting ideas, only by talking of doings, our routine works at the time, here the time of death of an unknown "*She*". Dickinson hardly uses an epithet, seldom to raise a sensation, never to raise a hue and cry. She uses the plainest language. She uses the simplest diction. She writes in the straight sentences. And yet the simpler she becomes in her narratives, the more effective the evocation of the emotion or event, the more weighty is the question that quietly lies behind the narrative. Here, in the present poem, the emptiness of customary conduct and the functionality of faith, are effectively conveyed, with a word directly said about either. The 'objective correlative' does it all, the "*thing left out*" is the thing actually conveyed.

Yet another poem for our special reading from the volume of poems Emily Dickinson penned in her privacy is *He Ate and Drank the Precious Words*. It is one of the shortest of his standard short poems, not consisting of his usual quatrains, consisting only of eight lines in a single stanza. The poem runs as under:

He ate and drank the precious words,
His spirit grew robust,
He knew no more that he was poor,,
Nor that his frame was dust.

He danced along the dingy days,
And this bequest of wings
Was but a book. What liberty
A loosened spirit brings!

"*In the beginning was the word*", says the Bible. Emily Dickinson probably would have accepted a literal translation of this phrase from the Gospel of Saint John. Language and communication exercised an almost hypnotic fascination over her. The power of the individual word, in particular, seems to have inspired her with great reverence. Many of her poems, the present included, seem less concerned with a total conception than with expressing a series of staccato inspirations occurring to her in the form of individual words. She seems to have a worshipful attitude towards silence, the reason being her intimate knowledge of human experience. She shows awareness of the profound complexities of experience which accompany, like the submerged mass of an iceberg, the apparent simplicity and superficiality of daily life. These complexities, she seems to suggest, defined the limits of communication and made inevitable the fact that the essential nature of human beings must always remain secreted in the lonely isolation of the individual. Thus, the significance of silence is not comprised in lack of something but in a tremendous excess existing within the human being. Extremes of emotion, such as joy or grief, often underlie a meaningful silence. She knew from her own experience that verbalization was hopelessly inadequate beyond a certain point to express joy or grief.

Dickinson's attitude towards words was, in fact, something of a paradox. Her intellect and imagination told her that human communication was unavailing before the mystery of the universe and the complexity of human experience within it. But her emotional nature, her delight in defiance, especially of custom and tradition, including the rites and rituals of religion, and her unlimited courage in doing so, had made her attempt regardless of its futility. As long as her poetry could suggest the infiniteness and wonder of the universe and uniqueness of human experience (proving custom and tradition hollow and arbitrary), she thought the

effort was worthy. If nothing else, she could at least vividly call attention to poetry's inadequacy for the most significant communication by, paradoxically enough, communicating that very idea as profoundly as she could to any possible reader of her poems. Thus, the awe-inspiring mysteries with which she as poet was concerned would be dramatically focused in the reader's mind through a striking incongruity : powerful poems confessing their powerlessness. The paradox inherent in such a situation is the result of the poet's attempt to bridge the gap between a mortal and superhuman consciousness.

Also involved in the present poem is the paradox which urges us away from the firm and the familiar (the word of God or the life of faith in this particular poem) in terms which are a transformation of the firm and the familiar (ironically the "*precious words*"). So when, in an extreme moment, she talks about "*living without the life*", that is as when she said "*when I died*". Language allows it, but life does not. There, and elsewhere, hers is the poetry of experience as much as any other poet's; in fact, more so. Poetry requires it to be so. The man who "*ate and drank precious words*", that is lived by the customary faith actually "*lived without the life*". Life came to him only when he freed himself from the customary, the other – directed, life, and lived his own life, life of liberty. The letter gave him a tremendous sense of freedom, of elation. The former was a life of bondage, of constraint, existentialist terms, inauthentic.

The next poem for discussion is *I Had Been Hungry All These Years*, which reads as under:

I had been hungry all these years
My noon had come to dine;
I, trembling, drew the table near,
And touched the curious wine.
'Twas this on tables I had seen,
When turning, hungry home
I looked in windows, for the wealth

I could not hope for mine.
I did not know the ample bread,
'Twas so unlike the crumb
The birds and I had often shared
In Nature's dining-room.
The plenty hurt me, 'twas so new -
Myself felt ill and odd,
As berry of a mountain bush
Transplanted to the road.
Nor was I hungry; so I found
That hunger was a way
Of persons outside windows,
The entering takes away.

Dickinson, as borne out by many poems, including the present, seems to disparage what you do hold - and such disparagement is wholly characteristic of that Puritanism which mistrusts the senses, which must always be moving on because something better has been promised, which will not stop and relish. When she is enjoying herself at the expense of the stiffness and narrowness, the human incompleteness of received religious instruction, her light-heartedness is engaging and effective, but she is perfectly capable of producing her own brand of restraints and austerities in the name of the ideal.

Remarkably, the temperamental reluctance to be satisfied becomes, when it is codified in aphoristic verse, a cramping doctrine itself, as it does in the present poem. Wearingly, she gnaws at contentment. Again and again, she tells us that the value of something lies in not having it. "*Success is counted sweetest/ By those who never succeed*"; "*My Portion is Defeat*." A gem is better not displayed but kept out of sight; a riddle is better not solved; ownership is less to be valued than deprivation; a relation better unconsummated than not; a face more intriguing veiled than revealed; uncertainty better than knowledge; but, more than anything

else, a feast is better not eaten (as in the present poem). Why so ? Well, privation sharpens the appetite. The food is more valued. Eating is actually a disappointment. Satisfaction is suspect. It is in this general context of her hierarchical binaries, in which deprivation is privileged over satisfaction denial over fulfillment, that the present poem must be studied.

Dickinson is good at finding reasons and she says the same type of thing so often that we become suspicious of her need to say it, but she is perhaps not in the position of the fox celebrating frustration by speculating that fulfillment must be sour (the reference is to the moral fable called *The Grapes are Sour*). It is rather that it is evasive to treasure the pangs of hunger because it inhibits full confrontation with the challenging bewildering range of life that opens when the mind is taken off the stomach (we make use here of her food metaphor). She does not always distinguish between, on the one hand, clear-eyed awareness that there is more to life than the satisfaction of the moment (however deep) and, on the other, truncation of experience, or even frightened flight from it. Whatever (what might be called) her precepts may have produced in her life, they did not produce the creative effort that went into lines on the hummingbird, the snake, the spider, the mushroom.

In the present poem, hunger assumes metaphoric meaning. Those hungry are materially inclined, living life on the physical level; those not hungry, like the poet, are inclined otherwise, that is, spiritually. The opposition in the poem between material and spiritual is extended to that of outside windows and entering, home and nature, civilized people and natural beings (birds included). Here, the word wealth, too, acquires double meaning – for the materialist, it has one sense; for the spiritualist, quite another. Thus, Dickinson uses the simplest details of life and imparts symbolic meanings to them, carrying an effect of a religious discourse, though the emphasis always undercuts the orthodox religion.

After reading many of her poems, it can be said that Emily Dickinson as a poet distinguishes herself by the power of the voice, her tone. What is this tone? How does this unforgettable voice speak to us? For one thing, and most obviously, it is a wholly spontaneous tone. There is no literary assumption of posture or pose

in advance. There in no sense that a subject has been chosen-that a theme is about to be developed. Occasionally, in the nature pieces the sunset scenes, which are so numerous in the early poems, one feels the presence of the pad of water-colour paper and the mixing of the tints, but when she began to write as poet, which she did, miraculously, within a few months of her beginning as writer, all that awkwardness disappeared. Breath is drawn and there are words that will not leave you to watch her coming toward you. Poem after poem – more than a hundred and fifty of them – begin with the word "*I*", the talker's word. She is already in the poem before she begins it, as a child is already in the adventure before he finds a word to speak it. To put it differently, few poets, and they among the most valued – Donne naturally comes to mind – have written more dramatically than Emily Dickinson, more in the live location of dramatic speech, words born living on the tongue, written as though spoken. Few have committed themselves as actors more livingly to the scene. It is almost impossible to begin one of her successful poems without finishing it. The punctuation may bewilder you. The density of the thing said may defeat your understanding. But you will read on nevertheless because you will not be able to stop reading. Something is being said to you and you have no choice but hear.

The second characteristic of this voice is, that it not only speaks but speaks to you. We have been accustomed, since the age of Modernism, to the poetry of the overhead soliloquy, the poetry written by the poet to himself or to a small group of the like-minded who can be counted upon in advance to "understand". Poetry of this kind can discover words when the poet is Rilke, but even in Rilke there is something sealed and unventilated about the discovery which sooner or later stifles the birds. The subject of all poetry is the human experience and its object must therefore be humanity as well, even in a time like the present when humanity is viewed as a pluralism of racial, ethnic, cultural, gender, regional, linguistic groups, competing with each other in divisive politics. It is no excuse to a poet that there is no such thing as humanity, universality, or essentiality; or that there are no values, moral or ethical, acceptable to all.

Emily Dickinson stands out, in contrast to the modernist and contemporary poets, as a poet of life and humanity, nature and universality. The materialism and vulgarity of those years after the Civil War when she reached her maturity as an artist may not have been as flagrant as the materialism and vulgarity in which we are living today, but the parochialism was even greater. America was immeasurably farther from Europe, where the arts were at least domesticated, and Amherst was farther from the rest of America, and in and about Amherst there was no one near enough to see the poems she was writing except for the occasional verse sent across the lawn to her brother's wife or mailed to Colonel Higginson in Boston, or to her father's friend, the editor of the *Springfield Republican,* or shown to his sister Lavinia. But her poems, notwithstanding, were never written to herself. The voice one hears in them is never a voice overheard. On the contrary, it is a voice which speaks to us, strangers so urgently, so immediately, so individually, that most of us are half in love with this true and authentic voice.

The fact that she was an American, the fact that she belonged to an age far removed from ours, the fact that she was born a Puritan, brought up in an alien culture, makes no difference to the readers, whether they are Indians, or Americans, British or European, Asian or African. The experiences she has written about are ours as well. We possess those experiences as much as she possessed them. We feel the authenticity of them all. We see and recognize them to be true. And in recognition lies the pleasure, as Aristotle has remarked, the pleasure of poetry. And it is in sharing of a life experience, in recognizing it as true to life, that the universality of art lies. And it is the universality that proves the presence of essential human nature in all of us.

29.4 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed the poems of Emily Dikinson which are prescribed in our syllabus. We have also analysed Dikinson as a poet.

29.5 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. What does the speaker of "I tasted a liquor" describe tasting?

A) A physical beverage B) Success and fame

C) Happiness and joy D) Bitterness and despair

2. In “The last night that she lived,” what event is being described?

A) A birthday celebration B) A wedding ceremony
C) A funeral D) A farewell party

3. In “I tasted a liquor,” what does the speaker feel happening after tasting the liquor?

A) They become sad and lonely
B) They experience a loss of control
C) They become physically ill
D) They feel a deep sense of peace

4. What is the tone of “The last night that she lived”?

A) Joyful B) Hopeful
C) Sad and reflective D) Indifferent

5. In “I tasted a liquor,” what happens to the speaker’s sense of reality?

A) It becomes heightened and clear
B) It becomes distorted and dreamlike
C) It remains unaffected
D) It becomes dull and numb

6. What aspect of the funeral does the speaker in “The last night that she lived” emphasize?

A) The beauty of the flowers B) The sadness of the mourners
C) The time of day D) The religious rituals

7. How does the speaker in “I tasted a liquor” describe the impact of the liquor on the senses?

A) It makes everything taste sweeter
B) It heightens the colors of the surroundings
C) It dulls the senses and impairs judgment
D) It enhances the sense of smell

8. What is the significance of the "great light" mentioned in "The last night that she lived"?

A) It represents hope and salvation
B) It symbolizes the afterlife
C) It suggests an impending storm
D) It is a literal description of a lamp

9. What theme is explored in "I tasted a liquor"?

A) The joys of sobriety B) The consequences of excess
C) The fleeting nature of happiness
D) The importance of moderation

10. What is the speaker's attitude towards death in "The last night that she lived"?

A) Acceptance and tranquillity B) Fear and resistance
C) Indifference D) Celebration and excitement

Answers 1) Happiness and joy 2) A funeral 3) They experience a loss of control 4) Sad and reflective 5) It becomes distorted and dreamlike 6) The time of the day 7) It heightens the colors of the surroundings 8) It symbolizes the afterlife 9) The fleeting nature of happiness 10) Acceptance and tranquillity

29.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Critically analyse the poem "I Taste a Liquor Never-Brewed".

b) Comment on the themes in Dickinson's poetry

c) Critically analyse the poem "The Last Night that She Lived"

d) Discuss the use of symbols in Dickinson's poetry.

29.7 SUGGESTED READING

1. The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson by Wendy Martin.

2. Thematic pattern of Emily Dickinson's poetry by Neeru Tandon.

COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 30**
AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–VI**

EMILY DICKINSON (SELECTED POEMS)

UNIT STRUCTURE

30.1 Introduction

30.2 Objectives

30.3 Dickinson as a Mystical Poet

30.4 Let Us Sum Up

30.5 Examination Oriented Questions

30.6 Suggested Reading

30.1 INTRODUCTION

Mysticism in Dickinson's poetry is evident in her frequent exploration of the metaphysical and the spiritual. She often delves into existential questions and the mysteries of existence, infusing her work with a sense of wonder and profound insight into the human experience.

30.2 OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the lesson is to familiarize the learners with the mystical aspect of the poet.

30.3 DICKINSON AS A MYSTICAL POET

The term 'mystical poetry' has been rather problematic, for there have been divergent, often contradictory, views on the subject. In a materialistic society like the present, the terms 'mystic' and 'mysticism' have become all the more inaccessible,

even suspect. It is therefore very necessary that these terms are defined at the very outset. Mystics have appeared, it would seem, with fair frequency at many periods, in many cultures, but there should not be any doubt that when, in the West, anyone speaks of true mysticism, it is often the example of the Christian saints one has in mind. As Evelyn Underhill has observed, "In Christianity, the natural mysticism... which is latent in humanity and at a certain point of development breaks out the every race, came to itself; and attributed for the first time true and distinct personality to its Object" - namely God. Thus, true mystics are not supposed to indulge in diffuse pantheism or hold to the aim of the occult, which wishes to wrench supernatural power to human uses. In the words of another critic, "The aim and content of Christian mysticism is not self or nature, but God."

Here, one can see that given definition of mysticism, there remains a difference between the characters, as well as the aims, of true mystics and of poets. It seems also doubtful that the two gifts (of the mystic and of the poet) can exist in one and the same person. But close points of resemblance, no doubt, do exist between the mystic experience, at its purest and best, and the experience of poetic – or indeed, any creative – expression. Poets down the centuries, visited by that power which the ancients called the Muse, have described their experience in much the same way as the mystic describes his ecstatic union with Divine Truth. This experience has been rendered at length, and dramatically, by Dante, as well as by St. John of the Cross. In fact, certain poems in the literature of every language attest to moments when, for the poet, the deep and primal life which he shares with all creation has been roused from its sleep. It is also true that both poets and mystics have described with great poignance that sense of deprivation and that shutting away from grace which follows the loss of the vision (or of the inspiring breath), which is called, in the language of mysticism, "the dark night of the soul."

Decidedly, one of the triumphs, which is the emergence of the Romantic spirit in English poetry, brought about at the end of the eighteenth century, was a feeling and an enlargement of poetic vision. Then, in the nineteenth century, we came upon a multiplication of poets whose spiritual perceptions were acute. Beyond the Metaphysical poets such as Vaughan and Herbert (who, in the seventeenth

century, worked from a religious base) we think of Blake, of the young Wordsworth; of Keats and Shelly; of Hopkins. In fact, the list can be extended into the twentieth century to include W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot. After going through the works of these poets one finds that the progress of the mystic towards illumination, and of the poet towards the full depth and richness of his insight are much alike. Both work from the world of reality, towards the realm of essence; from the microcosm to the macrocosm. Both possess an intense and accurate sense of their surroundings. We cannot find anything vague or floating in their perception of reality; it is indeed as though they saw "*through, not with, the eye*." And they are filled with love for the beauty they perceive in the world of time– "*this remarkable world*", as Emily Dickinson called it.

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

One of the dominant aspects of Emily Dickinson's poetry is its spirit of religious unorthodoxy. Her deeply religious feeling always ran outside the bounds of dogma. This individualism, so pronounced in most poems, was perhaps an inheritance from her Calvinist forbears, but it seemed out of place when contrasted to the Evangelicanism to which, in her time, so many protestants had succumbed.

She set herself quite early against the guilt and gloom inherent in this revivalism. She avoided the constrictions which a narrow insistence on religious rule and law put upon her. She had read Emerson with delight. However, as our writer has observed, it is a mistake to think of her as a Transcendentalist in dimity. Here again she worked through a standpoint and an interpretation of her own. Her attitude towards pain and suffering, towards the shocking facts of existence, was far more realistic than Emerson's. As one examines her spiritual preoccupations, one discovers that she is closely related to the English Romantic poets who, a generation or so before her, fought a difficult and unpopular battle against the neo-classical old logic and mechanical view of the world. The names of Blake and Coleridge come to mind; we know that to both these poets the cold theory of Locke represented a deadly heresy on the nature of existence. Without going into greater detail of the early Romantic breakthrough and its later dissipation into all sorts of excess, we can only remember that Blake attached the greatest importance to the human imagination as an aspect of some mystery beyond the human, and to listen to his ringing words : "*The World of Imagination is the World of Eternity. The world of generation is Finite and Temporal ...*" It is equally important to remember that "*Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelly and Keats shared the belief that the imagination was nothing less than God as he operates in the human soul*." It is surely in the company of these English poets that Emily Dickinson belongs. At its most intense, her vision not only matched, but transcended theirs. She crossed the same boundaries with a like intransigence; and the same vigorous flowers sprang from different seeds, in the spirit of a woman born in 1830, in New England, in America.

Making comparisons between the life and circumstances of poets can often prove an unrewarding effort. But in certain cases, it can yield results highly useful for better understanding of both. In the case of Emily Dickinson, whose career for long was considered highly isolated, it seems interesting to make certain comparisons. One such comparison is between the lives, temperaments and works of Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson. Another equally rewarding comparison can be made between William Blake and Emily Dickinson, although in this case the comparison

is more restricted, confined only to one or two resemblances. Blake as a lyric poet, not as a prophet, seems to have been a model for Dickinson, who closely imitated the former's from in at least two poems. Both took over the simplest forms of the song and the hymn and turned this simplicity to their own uses and advantages. Both can be seen working straight from almost dictated inspiration. In fact, Blake had claimed that his poems were dictated to him intact and entire. However, on close examination of their now available manuscripts it becomes clear that both worked over their original drafts with meticulous care. In other words, the seeming simplicity of their verses was actually achieved with great pains.

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

In his essay on Blake, T. S. Eliot speaks of Blake's peculiarity "which can be seen to be the peculiarity of all great poetry. It is merely a peculiar honesty, which, in a world frightened to be honest, is particularly terrifying. It is honesty against which the whole world conspires, because it is unpleasant. Blake's poetry has the unpleasantness of great poetry. Nothing that can be called abnormal or perverse, none of the things which exemplify the sickness of an epoch or a fashion, have this quality; only those things which, by some extraordinary labour of simplification, exhibit the essential sickness or strength of the human soul." Eliot then goes on to say that the question about Blake the man "is a question of the circumstances that concurred to permit this honesty in his work. The favouring conditions probably include these two : that, early apprenticed to a manual occupation, he was not compelled to acquire any other education in literature than he wanted, or to acquire it for any other reason that he wanted it; and that, being a humble engraver, he had no journalistic-social career open to him. There was,

that is to say, nothing to distract him from his interests or to corrupt these interests – neither ... the standards of society, nor the temptation of success ; nor was he exposed to imitation of himself or anyone else ... These circumstances are what make him innocent."

The circumstances which led to Emily Dickinson's very nearly complete seclusion are, of course, different from those which Eliot mentions as applying to Blake. It was physical frailty which put an end to her formal education. But later, as we read the record of her withdrawal, as this record appears in the *Letters* (and, of course, the full reasons are not given) we can detect the element of choice working. By the time Dickinson wrote Higginson in 1862 she had made that choice, and only wanted to have it confirmed. She wished to know whether her poems were 'alive' or not – if they 'breathed.' She received a certain confirmation that they were and did; and she kept to her solitude. This solitude was not harsh. Her love for her friends never diminished, nor for delight in their occasional presence. Her family ties were strong; her daily round sustained her; and the joy she felt in the natural world-particularly in flowers and in children-continued. Until a series of tragedies (beginning with the death of her father) began to break down her spiritual balance, she held to that balance over a long period of years. Balance, delicacy and force- fed by the exquisite senses and her infinitely lively and inquisitive mind– these are the qualities which reinforce her vision into the heart and spirit of nature, and into her own heart.

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

she never altered a poem of her's according to any suggestion of his. In fact, at one time, she had perhaps been willing to be published, but later, she decided to do without print.

The definitive edition of her poems published in 1955 shows as complete a record of the development of a lyric talent as exists in literature. Scholars have scanned the record quite thoroughly. We know that she most frequently names the purple colour, and that her favourite reading were the plays of Shakespeare and The Bible. We ourselves can also discover even in the index to the three volumes, that her most written subject was not, in fact, death, as is generally supposed; for life, love, and soul are also equally recurring subjects. The greatest interest, however, lies in her progress as a poet, and as a person. We find the young writer moving away, by gradual degrees, from her early slight addiction to graveyardism, to an Emersonian belief in the largeness and harmony of nature. Step by step, she advances into the terror and anguish of her destiny; she is frightened, but she holds fast and describes her fright. She is driven to the verge of sanity, but manages to remain, in some fashion, the observer and recorder of her extremity. Nature is no longer a friend, but often an inimical presence. Nature is a haunted house. And - a truth even more terrible – the inmost self can be haunted.

At the highest summit of her art, Dickinson resembles no one, neither Blake, nor Bronte. She begins to cast forward towards the future, to produce poems in which we recognize, as a French critic has pointed out, both the voyant faculty of Rimbaud and Mallarme's feeling of the mystery and sacredness of the word. This high period begins in the early 1860's and is not entirely consistent; the power seems to come and go, but it is indubitably there. And when it is present, she can describe with clinical precision the actual emotional event, the supreme moment of anguish, and even her own death itself. Above all, she can find symbols which fit the event – terrible symbols, indeed. The experience of suffering is like dying of the cold; or it resembles the approach of a maelstrom, which finally engulfs the victim; one escapes from suffering as from the paws of a friend, from whose grasp one emerges more dead than alive. One poem, written about 1863, defies analysis:

the poem which begins "*My Life Had Stood – A Loaded Gun*", which needs to be read and understood. It runs as under:

My life had stood – a Loaded Gun
In corners – till a Day
The Owner passed – identified –
And carried Me away –
And now We roam in Sovereign Woods –
And now We hunt the Doe –
And every time I speak for Him –
The mountains straight reply –
And do I smile, such cordial light
Upon the Valley glow –
It is as a cap. vesuvian face
Had let its pleasure through –
And when at Night – Our good Day done –
I guarded My Master's head –
'Tis better than the Eider-Duck's
Deep Pillow – to have shared –
To foe of His – I'm deadly foe –
None stir the second time –
On whom I lay a Yellow eye –
Or an emphatic Thumb –
Thought I than He – may longer live
He longer must – than I –
For I have but the power to kill,
Without – the power to die –

Should we call it an allegory? If so, allegory of what? Is it a cry from some psychic deep where good and evil are not to be separated? In any case, it is a poem

whose reverberations are infinite, as in great music, as in any piece of great art; and we can only guess with what agony it must have been composed.

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

We can recall Blake here, who said, "*My business is to create*." "*My business is circumference*," said Emily Dickinson. We know that the physical centre of that circumference was to remain the town of Amherst, which about one hundred and fifty years ago Emily Dickinson described with great charm and deep affection, in a letter (dated December 10, 1859) to Mrs. Samuel Bowles : "It storms in Amherst five days—it snows, and then the days turn Topaz, like a lady's pin ....." It is indeed as delicate a description as a New England town and New England winter weather have ever received.

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

30.4 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed the mystical qualities of the poems of Dickinson.

30.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Discuss Emily Dickinson as a Mystic Poet.

30.6 SUGGESTED READING

1. Thematic pattern of Emily Dickinson's poetry by Neeru Tandon.

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COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 31**
AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–VI**

EMILY DICKINSON (SELECTED POEMS)

STRUCTURE

31.1 Introduction

31.2 Objectives

31.3 Dickinson's Poetic Art

31.4 Let Us Sum Up

31.5 Examination Oriented Questions

31.6 Suggested Reading

31.1INTRODUCTION

Dickinson's writing style is distinctive, marked by short lines, slant rhymes, and unconventional punctuation. Her use of dashes and unique capitalization adds an enigmatic quality to her poetry, reflecting her contemplative and introspective nature.

31.2 OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the lesson is to familiarize the learners with Dickinson's Poetic Art.

31.3 DICKINSON'S POETIC ART

It is generally agreed that it was around 1860 that Emily Dickinson made the discovery of herself as a poet and began to develop a professional interest in poetic techniques. Although she did not put down her views on the art of poetry

in any formal theoretical piece, her thoughts about poetry and the function of the poet can be gathered from her poems and letters. In this regard, she can be grouped with Shakespeare; for, like him, her writing techniques were self-taught. However, it is quite clear that she did not follow traditional theories, and developed instead her own along highly original lines. Although her proficiency in prose was no less, she thought in poetry rather than prose. By 1858, at ease with the way of life she had elected and found congenial, she had begun to let the form of her verse derive from the images and sensations that she wished to realize. Her development as a poet can be traced by way of her experiments in prosody. She steadily worked at her professional work during 1860 and 1861, and by 1862, when she feared that the loss of her muse would overwhelm her, she had mastered the craft of poetry.

Although the writers of free verse have been acknowledging a debt to Emily Dickinson, she did not compose anything which today would be called *vers libre* (cadenced verse, as distinguished from that which is metrical or rhymed). Her first attempt to do so was the poem *Victor Comes Late*, written in 1862. And that also became her last because it seems to have convinced her that such a form was not the medium which best transmitted her moods and ideas. In fact, free verse is not the only way to gain liberty. She evidently felt that she needed rhyme and metre. To her contemporaries, and to most commentators of the time, her seemingly unpatterned verse appeared to be the work of an original but undisciplined artist. For comparison, Shakespeare again comes to mind; for, we know how he was for long considered an untutored genius. Actually, Emily Dickinson was creating a new medium of poetic expression.

Going through the bulk of her poems, one can see how her poems employ metres derived from English hymnology. They are usually iambic or trochaic, but occasionally dactylic. They were the metric forms familiar to her from childhood as the measures in which Watts's hymns were composed. Copies of Watts's *Christian Psalmody* or his collection of *The Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs* were fixtures in every New England household. Both were owned by Edward Dickinson (Emily's father) and are inscribed with his name. Musical notations for proper

rendition accompany each song, and the metre is always named. Introductions set forth an explanation of how effects may best be achieved, and discuss the relative advantage of one metre over another for particular occasions. Emily Dickinson's own experimentation went beyond anything envisioned by the formal precisionists who edited Watt's hymns and songs. The interesting point, however, is that she did not have to step outside her father's library to receive a beginner's lesson in metrics.

The principal iambic metres are these: *Common Metre*, alternately eight and six syllables to the line; *Long Metre,* eight syllables to the lines and *Short Metre*, two lines of six syllables, followed by one of eight, then one of six. Each of these metres have properly four lines to the stanza, so that their syllables scheme goes thus: CM, 8, 6, 8, 6; LM, 8, 8, 8, 8; SM, 6, 6, 8, 6. Each may also be doubled in length to make eight-line stanzas. Each may also have six lines to the stanza. The *Common Particular Metre* has the metric beat 8, 8, 6, 8, 8, 6; and *Short Particular Metre,* 6, 6, 8, 6, 6, 8. Other popular arrangements were *Sevens and Sixes* (7, 6, 7, 6) and *Sixes*. The principal trochaic metres are *Sevens, Eight and Sevens, Eights and Fives, Sevens and Fives, Sixes and Fives,* and *Sixes.* Of the dactyls, which were arranged principally in *Elevens, Elevens and Tens,* and *Tens and Nines*. Emily Dickinson used almost exclusively the last named when she chose it as the metre for an entire poem. But she used the dactyle sparingly and almost always as an adjunct to one or the other metres.

We need to note that it is not without significance that every poem Dickinson composed before 1861 — during the years she was learning her craft — is fashioned in one or another of the hymn metres named above. Her use of Long Metre was sparing, for as her hymn-book instructions pointed out, it tends to monotony. A very large number of her poems are in Common Metre. Next in order are Common Particular, and Sevens and Sixes, in equal proportion. She chose Short Metre for relatively few, but achieved with it some of her best effects. Her trochaics are chiefly Eights and Sevens, and Eights and Fives — a new metre introduced into hymnody towards the mid-nineteenth century.

Of course, we do not mean to say that the metres we have mentioned here exhaust the variations that hymnodists were coming to use, but one need not believe that Dickinson's later combinations of Nines and Sixes were based on many models. The metres we have here do not in any way exhaust the variations that hymnodists were coming to use, but it is not necessary that Emily Dickinson's later combinations of Nines and Sixes, Nines and Fours or Sixes and Fours were based on a model. In fact, by the time she began to use these metres, she was already striking out for herself. Her techniques would indeed be of her models, and enforced her rhymes with similar regularity. The great contribution she made to the English prosody was, for sure, precisely because she perceived how to gain new effects by exploring the possibilities within traditional metric patterns. She then took the final step towards the flexibility within patterns she chose to practice. She began merging in one poem the various metres themselves so that could be made to supply the continuum for the mood and ideas of the language. Thus, iambs shift to trochees, trochees to dactyls, and on occasion all the three are merged.

Even as she innovated the above she put into practice her evident belief that verse which limits itself to exact rhyme is denied the possible enrichment that other kinds can being. She did a pioneering work here too, in the new order erected on old foundations. She did not feel bound to one kind of rhyme just as she was charting a lonely to one metre. She should have realized that she was charting a lonely voyage, and in some degree she did, but her independent nature gave her age, and in some degree she did, but her independent nature gave her self-assurance. Her way of poetry was to prove far lonelier than she expected, for it denied her in her own life time all public recognition. Her innovations in metres might have been tolerated, but in her day no commentator of English verse would have been able to accept her rhyme. However, no one in Dickinson's time, reader or critic, was ready to let it be supple and varied. On other words, absence of rhyme could be condoned, but not "Whimsical" variations, the Kind Dickinson used.

In Dickinson's day, it was customary to use exact patterns and exact rhymes in English poetry, with concessions to a spare use of eye rhymes (such as *some-*

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

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

One of the earliest poems of Emily Dickinson to adopt combinations of patterns is the following composed in 1858:

I never told the buried gold
Upon the hill – that his–
I saw the sun – his plunder done

Crouch low to guard his prize.
He stood as near
As stood you have–
A pace had been between–
Did but a snake bisect the brake
My life had forfeit been.
That was a wondrous booty–
I hope twas honest gained.
Those were the fairest ingots
That ever kissed the spade!
Whether to keep the secret–
Whether to reveal–
Whether as I ponder
"Kidd" will sudden sail–
Could a shrewd advise me
We might e'en divide–
Should a shrewd betray me–
Atropos decide!

Here, in this poem, the metric and rhyme shifts are quite a few, and are, obviously, made deliberately. The first two stanzas, in common metre, are followed by a third in Sevens and Sixes. The fourth, starting in nine too, moves to trochaic Sixes and Fives, with which the poem comes to an end in stanza five. The rhymes are exact in the first second, and last stanzas; imperfect in the third, and suspended in the fourth. There are internal exact rhymes in the first and third lines of stanza one and two. The poem survives in two fair copies, and in both she has deliberately arranged the second stanza in five lines.

As can be seen, the variations in the poem are studies and so elaborate that they tend to distract the reader. The poet appears to be depicting a bright sunset, but seems rather undecided whether or not to "share" the secret. However,

when she narrates the facts of the event, the poem's structural form is exact in metre and rhyme. Both shift uncertainly as she points out her own indecision. It is not an important poem. The imagery in it is rather imprecise, and the intent rather unrealized. The poet seems still a tyro (a learner, in Spanish), but such skill as the poem displays, unmistakably bearing her stamp, lies in the blending of the form with the mood.

Another poem, also written in 1858, is an accomplishment of the first order. The skills Dickinson were developing as a beginner are more easily handled in two quatrians here than in five in the earlier poems. This more accomplished poem runs as under:

I never lost as much but twice,
And that was in the sod.
Twice have I stood a beggar
Before the door of God!
Angels-twice descending
Reimbursed my store–
Burglar! Banker–Father!
I am poor once more!

Here, as we can see, the first stanza uses Common Metre with a characteristic third line – that is, it lacks a final syllable. The device was one that she developed with uncanny skill to break the monotony of exact regularity. In the second stanza, there is the use of a trochee in Sixes and Fives. Here, the metric irregularity is balanced by exact rhymes. The exactness of the rhymes gives finality to the terseness of the thought. The metrical change turns the resignation of the first statement into the urgency of the second.

Around the year 1860, Emily Dickinson wrote this:

Just lost, when I was saved!
Just felt the world goes by!

Just girt me for the onset with Eternity,
When breath blew back,
And on the other side
I heard recede the disappointed tide.
Therefore, as One returned, I feel,
Odd secrets of the line to tell!
Some Sailor, skirting foreign shores–
Some pale Reporter, from the awful doors
Before the Seal!
Next time, to stay!
Next time, the things to see
By Ear unheard,
Unscrutinized by Eye–
Next time, to tarry,
While the Ages steal–
Slow tramp the Centuries,
And the Cycles wheel!

As can be seen, the poem is arranged in several metrical patterns, and altered so swiftly that no single form is allowed to predominate. The final short stanza alternates iambs with trochees, to give the effect of applying brakes, and thus brings the slow tramp of the centuries to a halt. The final words of each stanza, and most of the rhymes are exact. The main rhyme word in the first stanza is in the line preceding, whereas it is separated by three intervening lines in the second stanza. In the last two stanzas (both short) it is at the point normally expected, that is, in the alternating line. Also there are further rhymes in the first two stanzas, exact, vowel, and suspended. This elaborateness is shaped throughout to the mood the poem is meant to convey. It is a mood of awe in facing the fact that any vision of immorality seen by mortals is a mirage. The structure of the poem allows great latitude in tempo and shading. This poem is, for sure, one of

her best early attempts to create by way letting the form be shaped by the mood. The method employed here demands a skill which cannot be a matter of learning, but must be guided by instructive taste. She herself did not win through to full success on all occasions. But the universal pleasure this poem has imparted is in some measure of its fulfillment.

Dickinson made experiments with new models in a large number of poems written during 1860 and 1861. She used much the same technique as in the poem cited above when she created *At Last, To Be Identified*, evidently with intent likewise to suggest breathlessness. She also composed, in 1860, the expertly realized *How Many Times These How Feet Staggered*. It is the quiet meditation of one who gazes upon the face and form of a dead friend. The metrics are coldly regular. The hovering rhyme of the first stanza becomes exact in the remaining two stanzas. The artistry of the poet lies in the vivid concreteness of the detail, set forth with great restraint. On the privacy of this moment no rhetorical extravagance is allowed to obtrude.

The new order of Dickinson's love poems is exemplified by the following:

I'm 'wife'–I've finished that–
That other state–
I'm Czar–I'm 'Woman' now–
It's safer so–
How old the Girl's life looks
Behind this soft Eclipse–
I think that Earth feels so
To folks in Heaven–now–
This being comfort–then
That other kind–was pain–
But why compare?
I'm 'Wife'! Stop there!

Here, suspended rhymes join each pair of lines expect the last, which conclude the poem with exact rhymes. Each stanza has its individual metric form, allied to but not identical with the others. The Sixes and Fours of the first stanza become Sixes in the second. In the third, the Sixes are paired, as are the Fours. Besides, in our own time, the poem assumes importance from the viewpoint of the feminist theory of the interpretation. Although not known as a vocal feminist, Dickinson, in the present poem, focuses the issue of gender justice, quietly but subtly she lays stress on the point.

Looking for rhythmic exactness in Dickinson's poetry, one naturally thinks of "*Did the Harebell Loose Her Girdle/To the Lover Be*," which is as studied as the irregularity in *What is Heaven*, which was written around the same time. The most excellent example, however, of both her concern with and indifference to rhyme and metrical exactness is the following:

I taste a liquor never brewed –
From Tankards scooped in Pearl –
Not all the Frankfort Berries
Yield such an alcohol!
Inebriate of Air – am I –
And Debauchee of Dew –
Reeling – thro endless summer days –
From inns of Molten Blue –
When "Landlords" turn the drunken Bee
Out of the Foxglove's door –
I shall but drink the more!
Till Seraphs swing their snowy Hats –
And Saints – to windows run –
To see the little Tippler
From Manzarilla come!

As we see, Dickinson uses in this poem Common Metre, but she breaks the regularity in two ways. The third line in stanza three and stanza four is catalectic, and the rhymes in these two stanzas are imperfect. Unquestionably, these variations could not be unconsciously done, for they are typical of her modifications of traditional forms. Yet, the only extant copy of the poem is a semifinal draft on which she offers alternative readings for two lines. For line three she suggests: "*Not all the vats upon the Rhine*," and for the final line: "*Leaning against the sun*," if adopted, the first alternative would supply the missing half foot; the second would create an exact rhyme. Of course, it cannot be inferred from the fact that the suggested changes exist that she would have adopted them in a fair copy. Quite often, she did not do so. In fact, there are instances where two fair copies, each sent to a friend, show equal indifference to rhyme and metric patterns. One may guess the opinion that her choice in any event would have been determined by her preferences for one image rather than another, not by a desire to create exact metre and rhyme.

Emily Dickinson, like any poet having her kind of seriousness, must have been grouping for ways of expression that said things as she individually wished to say them. Some of what are generally turned her idiosyncrasies in language and grammar are considered obtrusive when sprinkled too freely. However, it is also true that more than anything else she cared for the precise communication of her thought and feeling, rather than the mechanical perfection of her verse. Her concept of language is allied to, though different from that, which prompted her to cultivate elliptical phrases as a way of paring words that complete sentences grammatically but do not communicate. Of course, on occasion she cut too deeply into the quick of her thought because she truncated her predication to the point where readers must perpetually grope for meaning. But where her intent is realized, the attar becomes haunting and unforgettable. Besides, her elliptical phrases and broken sentences are effective means of making the language of her poetry highly dramatic. Here, Robert Browning comes to mind for parallel. We know how he brought out, through these very dramatic devices, the very soul of his character speaking the dramatic monologue.

In the case of Dickinson, the poet herself is the speaker of the monologue, dramatizing herself equally effectively. John Donne provides, in this regard, another parallel to Emily Dickinson; he too, made the language of poetry most dramatic. Shakespeare of course, is the most dramatic of poets so far as the use of language is concerned.

31.4 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed the poetic art of Emily Dikinson. We have seen how she did not follow traditional theories but developed her own original high lines.

31.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTION

1. Discuss Emily Dickinson as a mystic poet.
2. Is Dickinson a Transcendentalist, Romantic, or Symbolist poet? Discuss.
3. Write a note on the significance of "Solitude" in Dickinson's poetry.
4. Discuss Dickinson's "Art of Poetry" as illustrated in the poems prescribed for reading.
5. Write a note on the themes of Love and Death in the poetry of Emily Dickinson.
6. How do Nature and Civilization stand in relation to each other in the poetry of Emily Dickinson? Discuss.
7. Discuss Dickinson as a poet of "Privacy". Use illustrations from the poems you have read.

31.6 SUGGESTED READING

1. Thomas H. Johnson, *Emily Dickinson : An Interpretative Biography* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1955).
2. Charles R. Anderson, *Emily Dickinson's Poetry : Stairway of Surprise* (New York, 1969).

3. Albert J. Gelpi, *Emily Dickinson : The Mind of The Poet* (New York, 1971).

4. David Porter, *Dickinson : The Modern Idiom* (Cambridge, Mass, 1981).

5. John Robinson, *Emily Dickinson* (London : Faber and Faber, 1986).

6. Paul J. Terrazzo (ed.), *Critical Essays on Emily Dickinson* (Boston, Mass., 1984).

7. Richard B. Seawall (ed.), *Emily Dickinson : A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963).

COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 32**
AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–VI**

ROBERT FROST (SELECTED POEMS)

UNIT STRUCTURE

32.1 Introduction

32.2 Objectives

32.3 Robert Frost : Life and Works

32.4 Let Us Sum Up

32.5 Examination Oriented Questions

32.6 Suggested Reading

32.1 INTRODUCTION

Robert Frost, one of America's most cherished poets, is celebrated for his profound and deceptively simple depictions of rural life and the human condition. His writing style, characterized by traditional verse forms and conversational language, often delves into complex themes of nature, isolation, and the passage of time. Frost's poetry, such as the iconic "The Road Not Taken" and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," blends accessible language with deep philosophical insight, making his work resonate with a broad audience.

32.3 OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the lesson is to familiarize the learners with the author, his life and his works.

32.3 ROBERT FROST : LIFE AND WORKS

Widely celebrated as one of the greatest poets of America, Robert Lee Frost was born in San Francisco on March 26, 1874. He was the son of William, Prescott Frost, Jr., of Lawrence, Massachusetts, and Isabelle Moodie Frost of Edinburgh, Scotland. From his father, who was doggedly honest Democrat, Frost inherited an active and inquiring mind, a certain recklessness of temperament coupled with enough of rebelliousness, and from his mother, who after studying Emerson became a Swedenborgian, he inherited the intellectual and artistic interests, slightly oblique humour, contrasting religious temperament and Gaelic poetic traits.

But the mixed tendencies and unorthodoxies of his parental background worked the other way too, which made Frost's life right from his childhood a series of strange and accumulative paradoxes. Being Victorian parents, they were deadly against the matter of lying and cheating, and cruelly punished their child for the errors in manners and minor 'sins'. They would reproach him for the things he could not help doing as an imaginative child. For instance, take Frost's poem *Auspex* which repeats a sensational and melodramatic event. Frost thought he met? in his childhood. Once as he was returning alone over a bridge, an eagle tried to carry him off, as he avers. The boys, who according to the parental view, showed no intellectual interests, told them once that he had built a bridge over brook and a rabbit had run over it. Did he make this up, or did it happen? He wondered later on the favourite and darling of a politician father, he was inducted into the corrupt and brash male world of politics when he was very young. The result was that Rob became something of a hero with the "bad" boys of the streets while his sister, Jeanie Florence, born in 1876, was a very tender girl.

Frost's own remark about his early schooling is definitely the most convincing account and reveals the basic traits of his unorthodox personality :

> *"The first school I went to ... was in San Francisco along about fifteen years after the Civil War ..... I cried myself out of that first school in one day .... on general principles. I did not get back again for two years. I have been jumping school ever since."*

The sudden death of his father on 5th May, 1835, when Frost was just eleven years old, exposed the family to the grim realities of existence. The colour of life, so high in San Francisco, had faded into the man and gray. He, along with his widowed mother, younger sister and the coffin of his beloved father returned to Lawrence where his father was buried in the family graveyard. Frost's grand-parents, though aware of their duty and the ties of blood, were on the whole querulous and disparaging. Hence, in the spring of 1886 Frost's mother managed to find a district school to teach and a modest lodging to live peacefully along with her children whom she instructed herself as pay was only nine dollars a week, it created a financial crisis which gave Frost, to use Louis Untermeyer's words, "*a crowded youth*". As early, as, the age of twelve, he had to accept various odd and hard jobs. He worked as a bobbin boy at his grandfather's mill and as a helper on the alien fields in planting and harvesting season. At thirteen, he worked in shoe shop. At sixteen, he pushed wagons full of metal spools in textile mill. At eighteen, he tended the dynamos and trimmed carbon lamps over the spinning machines. He edited a weekly newspaper also. Actually, there is no end to the jobs he tried and the experience in which his imagination stuck roots. Everything he did in life offered him a scanty living, but rich material for property. For example, take his poem *A Lone Striker* which narrates the incident when Frost was actually dismissed from the factory for being late. It is pertinent, to note here that Frost's poetry shows little evidence of his interest in the growing industrial world to which he was considerably exposed.

Robert Frost, though a late starter with books, suddenly developed an intense pleasure in learning. In the fall of 1883, he matriculated at the age of fourteen from the Lawrence High School. He, later on, recalled how these high school days brought two rewarding changes in him : "*one is the improvement in his spelling which has never been perfect because his ears apprehended more than his eyes do*", and, the second is, his passionate interest in Latin poetry and verse forms. It was in 1890, Frost began to write poetry and published his first poem *La Noche Triste* in the Lawrence High School, 'Bulletin'. It is a generous-hearted, heroic narrative poem in ballad form based on an incident befalling a

group of Indians for whom he felt poignantly. Frost has given an account as to how it came to him on the way home from school :

> "*I recall how there was a wind and a darkness. I had never written a poem before, and as I walked, it appeared like a revelation, and I became so taken by it that was late at my grandmother's*."

A month later Frost again published *The Song of the Wave* a poem with a personal notation of nature and then a poem entitled "A Dream of Julius Caesar" which is a study of personality arising from classic studies and hero of worship. This immature work, undoubtedly, shows a genuine poetic impulse and considerable skill in form. Thus, his intellectual and literary talents came to prominence, and he was elected, editor of the high school 'Bulletin'. However, he soon became impatient of the tardiness of his contributors, so, he wrote all the contents of one issue under assumed names and resigned.

Robert Frost graduated from the Lawrence High School in 1892 and shared valedictory with Miss Elinor Miriam White. Both of them gave valedictory addresses; Frost spoke on an extraordinary subjective theme, "*A Monument to After-Thought Unveiled*", while Elinor took "*Conversation as a Force in Life*" as the subject for her valedictory essay. Meanwhile, something happened quite unexpectedly. Frost fell in love with Elinor White whom he married in 1895.

As Frost's grandmother wanted him to be lawyer, it was decided especially by his grandmother that he should go to Dartmouth College for four years. No doubt, he was doing well in his studies but the stiff puritanical curriculum, daily college prayers and public worship on Sunday forenoon became unbearable for him, as he had an aversion to routine since childhood. His unsocial ways, his night and days walks in the fine woods and hills puzzles even his friends. Soon, he left Dartmouth College without notice to the Dean or good-bye on the solid pretence that his mother needed him in her school; to control the big and brutal boys.

Within a year of his decamping from Dartmouth; Frost wrote and published a poem *My Butterfly* (1894). It is his first professionally published poem, which

appeared in *Independent* a weekly literary magazine of that period. In the same year, Frost arranged five of his poems to be printed privately in the form of a booklet entitled *Twilight.* The edition, consisted of only two leather bound copies; one for his fiancee, Elinor White and the other for himself. Elinor who had joined St. Lawrence, a Universalist College in New York State, taking him to be a drifter, thought of him poorly. Her momentary indifference left Frost despondent, and he destroyed his own copy of the book. Luckily, with in a year, all the differences dissolved; and they got engaged in the old-fashioned way to be married after a few months. Miss Sergeant gives a suggestive description of the life of the newly-wedded couple:

> "*All Rob had to give Elinor when they married was himself, the young lover and husband, and himself the poet, who had something like a cold crystal, and otherness at the center of his being. The two, poet and lover, were not separable. Elinor knew this, married it, accepted it with all the deprivation, sorrow, joy, as such an endowment offers a wife*."

On the material side their lives continued to be indeterminate and baffling. They taught in Mrs. Frost's school and shared in the common family purse. On September 25, 1896 their first child, Eliot, was born. In 1897, Robert Frost entered Harvard as a candidate for a degree, unfortunately, things did not go well again, especially his health, and he returned home *to die*. His daughter Lesley was born in 1899, and in July, 1900, his first child, Eliot, died. Elinor's passionate maternal sorrow filled the house, but the pressing demands of domestic life made her reconcile to the loss in her high Puritan way.

Robert Frost who had shifted his intellectual dependence "*from teachers to writers who had written before me*" firmly decided to find a hearing as a poet, "*a Maker*" and said, "*I probably would have gone on writing poetry all my life just for my own amusement and satisfaction*." To meet his personal and financial demands, he requested his grandmother to buy him a farm in Derry. She agreed on certain conditions. Thus, Frost got a farm near West Derry Rockingham Country, New Hampshire where he farmed, did his poultry business and wrote poetry. As

a farmer he failed, and could only partly earn his living, but as a poet he grew spontaneously. He himself acknowledged it later on :

> "*To a large extent the terrain of my poetry is Derry landscape, the Derry farm. Poems growing out of this, though composite, were built on incidents and are, therefore, autobiographical. There was something about the experiences at Derry which stayed in my mind, and was tapped for poetry in the years that came after. It is, all fact, no fancy, but a lot of teasing. I never invent for poetic expression. No poet really has to invent, only to record.....*"

Farmer Frost knew that the family responsibilities were to be fulfilled anyway; poet Frost knew that he had to keep the poetic spark in him alive somehow. Therefore, he decided to take up only part-time teaching again along with farming. He joined Pinkerton Academy in Derry village, taught chiefly English but also history, Latin and wrote poetry. His life during these years was almost compulsively isolated, ambitionless and purposeless, to use his own words, "*it was an escape into dream*". They were the years of a quiet creative gloom though he created by the year, not by the day or month. The total environment appealed magically to the sensuous perceptions of the young poet, and he wrote more than half of his first and second books which were published later on and quite a little of the third book as well.

Gradually, Frost became a very successful teacher. In the classroom his unconventional attitude, intensely personal interest in the students, genial, kindly, friendly and informal behaviour made him notable. He aroused their latent dramatic gifts by directing several Shakespeare plays, and took his students on botanical and philosophical walks, sharing their interests like baseball and even their personal problems. Hence, Frost during his stay at the Academy won a few remarkable friends; John Bartlett and Margaret Abbott whom Barlett married later on, were formerly his students and became his personal friends. They wrote a very suggestive book, *Robert Frost and John Bartlett : The Record of Friendship* which appeared in 1963.

By this time Frost's family had grown fairly large. He had besides Lesley a son, Carol, born in 1902; Irma, born in 1903; and Marjorie, newborn in 1905. The grown up children were largely educated at home. His eldest daughter was seven when Frost started teaching her and made her write daily in a composition book something she had observed or experienced. Often, he read children poetry and played with them.. Robert Frost and Elinor were dedicated parents and never let their children feel poor or deprived, as Lesley put it.

In spite of a great success and better prospects in the teaching job something prodded him from within to give it up. Perhaps, it was the instinctive force of poetry that caused in him the feeling of restlessness and insecurity. He took a major decision to find a new refuge where it was possible to be poor and write poetry. Consequently, in 1912, he went to England along with his wife and four children. At first he got settled in the town of Beaconsfield, but later on, shifted to Dymock Gloucestershire. His English sojourn introduced him to the Georgian movement in English poetry and to a group of famous literary writers of the day. It was in 1913, that Frost with his first real impulse as a poet in exile sorted out his early poems written between 1892 and 1912 to get them published in the form of a book entitled *A Boy's Will.*

The book was favourably reviewed by an unknown critic and then by Ezra Pound who called Frost "*Vurry Amur'k'n with, I think, the seeds of grace*". Though the lyrics included in the volume were not written in a design to be together, but their arrangement in the book has a circular or spiral pattern of complementary subjective moods searching, questioning, doubting, affirming, denying and cherishing. They responded to the seasonal cycle of nature starting with a subdued enjoyment of the autumnal mood, moving through the deeds and images of winter, spring, summer and finally, returning to the autumnal setting, with difference due to different values which the young poet's moods entertain at different times.

In May 1914, Frost published his second book, *North of Boston*, which virtually created a stir in the literary world of England and America. It is one of

the most revolutionary books of modern times but one of the quietest and least aggressive as Edward Thomas, its first reviewer, put it. It is genuinely called 'A Book of People', and its prevailing mood is dramatic narrative and dialogue. Robert Frost presents in the book, the New England country life, with its stark realities and the responses of its people; to those harder and lonelier human situations; to evoke through them the universal extensions of meaning. Primarily, he focuses on psychological characterization which represents a tragicomic blend of human failures and triumphs.

The first American edition of *North of Boston,* appeared in March 1915. Thus, at the precise moment, when the nineteenth century's political order was collapsing into the violence of the twentieth century, Frost emerged from obscurity and isolation into the foreground of American poetry where he remained for almost fifty years.

Once back in New England, Frost returned to teaching on the college level, teaching at different times at Amherst College, Dartmouth College, Harvard University and the University of Michigan where he served as one of the first 'Poets in Residence' in the United States.

Frost published the third collection of his poems, *Mountain Interval,* in Novemeber 1916. The book takes its title from the hillside New Hampshire farm, above the interval, where the Frost family lived. The previously separated moods of the inner lyric vision and the outer narrative contemplation are inner-mingled in the poems of this volume. Hence, it reveals an increasing poetic subtlety and versatility. With enhancing lyric, sonnets in several formal sonnet forms with Frostian variants, the book is, to use Miss Sergeant's words, "*one of wholly country things, with few exceptions, New Hampshire things*." It was very much Elinor's book who felt it was extremely 'beautiful'.

Now, the pattern of Frost's life began to change; it assumed greater variety and so a far broader circle of friends and acquaintances. More and more of Frost's poems were published in the periodicals and magazines. A collection of his poems entitled *New Hampshire: A Poem with Notes and Grace Notes,* appeard in 1923. It reveals that Frost

had chosen a different field for his poetic art, that is, to present the eccentricities and divergences of temperament in a strong people. The title poem of the book is a satire on the American glorification of commercialism and materialism, but other poems present an extraordinary combination of intellect and emotion. In the same year a volume, *Selected poems,* was published which was enlarged and revised in 1928 and 1934.

From the beginning, Frost as a poet, professor and human being relied on the "wisdom of common place" which made him live out of his own freedoms, and thus face the crucial social, political and literary personal challenges which he had to encounter.

Consequently, in the period from1928 to 1936, Frost got three books published *West Running Brook* (1928), which makes a return to lyricism, received high critical praise. It became a particularly important collection because of the title poem that illuminates one of the major and recurrent themes of Robert Frost and suggests a possible approach to an interpretation of his life and art.

A Further Range was out in 1938. It reveals the same felicity and shrewd wisdom as of old. It is a peculiarly youthful book with some excellent lyrics though the critics like Dudley Fitts felt that the poet has suddenly become "ineffectual". However, it is not true as the variety of the poems included in the volume is a little willful, ingenious and charming in their casual tone.

Through all sorts of circumstances, including illness, poverty and the loss of children; Frost continues to write, to teach and to read poetry to his audiences with fortitude and courage. The death of his wife on 20th March 1938, in particular, left him despairing and broken. He felt sure, at first, that he could not possibly survive. Frost himself wrote to one of his young friends, "*Elinor Frost is now more in my six books than she is anywhere else on earth*." She was actually the unspoken half of everything he ever wrote, his friends tried in vain to console him and to lighten his grief. He decided to renounce Amherst College and went to live with his son, Carol, in South Shaftsbury. From there he wrote, "*Now I am up here with Carol talking my memories as I must and can*." It was in 1939, that he found an accomplished secretary,

Mrs. Theodore Morrison, and moved to Vernon St. Boston to live alone with his aid. Besides, he had a new companion, a greet sheep dog, Gillie.

In May 1939, Frost was offered a post newly created for him at Harvard for two years. He accepted it. After one year something awfully tragic happened. Frost's son, Carol, committed suicide; Frost took the loss with oblique stoicism wasting no fibre in nostalgia or useless regret. Only a little later his daughter, Irma, who was divorced, became a chronic invaild, Frost's personal tragedies made him, "a job in our time", as one minister, aptly, put it. A new note came into his voice, when he later on, spoke of death and burial;

> *Time brings about a different attitude towards these matters. I feel Far the way I once left about them, I have only two out of five children left. We must set down stones and then go away to forget.*

Robert Frost, who still urged the value of poverty now began to realize the importance of money and enjoyed the liberalities, he could make of it. Therefore, in 1940, he acquired first the Homer Noble Farm in Ripton and in 1941, his half double house in Cambridge to have freedom and leisure to write poetry. He published four more small books: *A Witness Tree* (1942), *A Masque of Reason* (1945), *Steeple Bush* and *A Masque of Mercy* (1947). The first book suggests a release of mind, heart and the senses from the old prison. The first half of the book deals with love in its diverse moods, and the second half is concerned with variations on the nature of man's contingencies and existence. It embodies the poet's anxieties regarding the outcome of the clash between man's humanity of the distinctive value of science.

Steeple Bush, the last of Frost's small volumes, was influenced by the ominous facts of war, and the aftermath of war.

A Masque of Reason and *A Masque of Mercy* are complementary works. The former deals with the Forty-Third Chapter of Job, and the latter with the whole Bible. In them Frost returns to the dramatic dialogue form and the debate concerns the problem of good and evil, justice and mercy (which are opposities in Frost's view) in terms of two familiar Old testament Character; Job and Jonah

who were unjustly tried by God. The *Masques* reveal Frost's personal philosophy and his beliefs.

The Complete Poems, published in 1949, introduced a new era in his life. Frost could accomplish this goal because he knew life so closely and so well. The metaphysical and religious considerations which formed the inner core of the *Masques* provided a thematic centre of his last book, *In the Clearing* (1962). Artistically considered, the final volume does not add much to the stature of the poet. Most of the poems were written when the poet was in his eighties, and was near his end. It was on January 29, 1963 that Frost died at the age of eighty-eight from the after effects of an operation for cancer.

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

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

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

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

32.4 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we discussed in detail the childhood, literary career and the poems of Robert Frost.

32.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTION

a) Discuss Robert Frost as a Poet.

32.6 SUGGESTED READING

1. Robert Frost : A literary reference to his life and work by Deirdre Fagan

COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 33**
AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–VI**

ROBERT FROST (SELECTED POEMS)

UNIT STRUCTURE

33.1 Introduction

33.2 Objectives

33.3 Frost's Theory of Poetry

33.4 Frost as New England, Nature & Pastoral Poet.

33.5 Let Us Sum Up

33.6 Examination Oriented Questions

33.7 Suggested Reading

33.1 INTRODUCTION

Robert Frost, one of America's most cherished poets, is celebrated for his profound and deceptively simple depictions of rural life and the human condition. His writing style, characterized by traditional verse forms and conversational language, often delves into complex themes of nature, isolation, and the passage of time. Frost's poetry, such as the iconic "The Road Not Taken" and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," blends accessible language with deep philosophical insight, making his work resonate with a broad audience. As a modern poet, Frost straddled the line between 19th-century Romanticism and 20th-century Modernism, creating a unique and timeless voice in American literature.

33.3 OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the lesson is to familiarize the learners with Frost's theory of poetry. It also introduces Frost as a New England, Nature & Pastoral Poet.

33.4 FROST'S THEORY OF POETRY

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

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

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

The feeling of lump in the throat, of emotional uneasiness, makes a poem an organic unfoldment of a personal discovery or an intimate revelation. It ascertains that Frost has not written consciously on fixed ideas or attitudes. He writes because in a particular mood the poetic impulse compels him to do so. These

moments of "*poetic madness*," to use Frost's words, are the terrific strain. He finds a striking analogy between the course of a true poem and a true love. Each begins as an impulse, a disturbing excitement to which the individual surrenders himself. He says:

"No one can really hold that the ecstasy should be static and stand still in one place. It begins in delight, it inclines to the impulse, it assumes direction with the first line laid down, it runs a course of lucky events, and ends in a clarification of life—not necessarily a great clarification, such as sects and cults are founded on, but a momentary stay against confusion.... It finds its own name as it goes and discovers the best waiting for it in some final phrase at once wise and sad–the happy-sad blend of drinking song".

As for the source of the initial impetus, Frost feels that it grows out of two kinds of recognition. In other words, he believes that there are two different ways in which this sense of interplay between the past and the present is first motivated and finally resolved in the form of a poem. The first way can be termed a fresh perception when some experience in the present inspires an emotional recognition. It is the mental recognition of meaning in this emotional experience that gradually asserts itself on a new plane of metaphorical reference. Frost's familiar lyric *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* is the best example, of this kind of recognition. The second kind of recognition may be called a correlation in which the emotional pleasure is derived from a sudden mental perception of a thought which comes into sharp focus through the discovery of a correspondence or an analogy. Take, for example, *For Once, Then Something*. Lawrance Thompson sums up, the distinctive characteristics of these approaches as follows: "The first begins as an emotional response which gradually finds its resolution in a thought metaphorically expressed; the second being with the perception of the metaphor, and the rational focus is so pleasurable in its sudden discovery that it produces an emotional glow. The first leads the poet to venture into the writing of the poem as an act of faith, without foreseeing the outcome; the second leads the poet to give shape and weight to a rational correspondence which has been perceived clearly before he begins the

writing of the poem". Either way the initial delight lies in a glad recognition which adds the contextual depth to his poetry.

Frost knows that all the fun is in how you say a thing. Hence, to him the form carries an intricate and subtle meaning. It is a discipline of matter and manner both. On the other hand, it stands for the great variety of stanzaic forms including the rich formal relationship of rhyme to rhyme, of line to line, and of sentence to sentence; on the other, it is balance and equilibrium or "controlled unbalance", as Mr. Thompson put it, which forms the inner design of emotion and thought, thought and image, metaphor and symbol. It is the formal fusion of the content and form that gives a new texture and meaning to his poetry. Besides its artistic validity, it gives to his poetry an enduring quality that its best reveals everlasting truths and spiritual values. He asserted that while writing a poem a writer has nothing to concentrate on but form and after completing it he has nothing to boast of but the subject matter. Neither has been made subordinate to the other; rather a classical balance between the two becomes the central quality.

Frost attempts to reproduce in his poetry certain brute throat noises which are created by introducing the tones of voice in a regular metrical utterance. The pre-occupation with sound in poetry is as old as itself; but Frost cares for an altogether different sort of music, that is the music of living speech of men and women. He uses different terms, such as 'Sound of sense', 'Sound-posture'. 'Sentence sound' or 'Vocal gesture' to indicate his attitude towards speech stresses and poetic diction including other sound devices of poetry. Hence, he discovered a style which made him an American Bard–a poet telling the tale of his tribe in the language and tone which is truly American. In 1959, he openly announced, "*do not let your reader be deceived that this is anything new, ...what we do get in life and miss so often in literature is the sentence that underlies the word.....*" Moreover, the tonal variety, which R.L. Cook takes to be of three kinds: 'talking tone' as in '*Mending Wall*', in-toning tone as in *Acquainted with the Night* and combining both 'taking and in-toning tone' as in *Mountain*, gives another characteristically Frostian feature to his poetry i.e., the dramatic mode. It has made every one of Frost's poems 'a little drama.' The height of poetry, he opined, is in dramatic give

and take. Drama is the capstone of poetry, Everything written is as good as it is dramatic or nothing, even in the lyric, the dramatic give and take is within oneself, if not between two people.

In Frost's poetry; metrical ictus is always there, as he believed, that there is nothing that cannot be expressed beautifully in the iambic pentameter. While using the meter, he emphasizes that the greater part should be iambic and that most of the lines should have five stresses; but in the case of departure from this pattern there is nothing to be explained away or condoned. Frost's verse is actually at the opposite pole from that of Swinburne who gallops to an anapaestic tune in a manner which is quite alien to human speech. A survey of Frost's metrical practice lists the large variety of patterns; blank verse, sonnets, heroic couplet, two-stress verse, three-stress verse, four-stress verse, five-stress verse and ballad verse. His poetic techniques, which have an intricately interwoven system, follow a set of course. The dramatic accent is thinly audible behind the natural beats or rhythm. These two enter in a relationship with meter. The combination of the three creates a music which is entirely different from the music of Shakespeare's songs. It is the music that does not lend itself of musical notation though it has its own measures. Frost certainly varies his cadence for a desired flexibility to save it from 'sing-song' rhythm or to differentiate the sound posturing of one poem from another as the subject-matter demands. It is "*not meter but meter making argument that makes a poem*", to borrow Emerson's words, which has a new experience to unfold.

Frost believes that art orders chaos and serves life by clarifying reality. The thing it does to life is to strip it to form. Concentrating on this function of poetry, Frost thinks of metaphor as the rational act of comparison which brings into focus some analogy to sharpen and clarify the apprehension of reality. Hence, Frost says that "*every poem is an new metaphor inside or it is nothing*."

The initial impression of Frost's poetry is that it is simple and direct but a careful study gradually, reveals that the simplicity is deceptive. It is actually the 'indirection' and 'irony' that is skillfully concealed behind the homely details, familiar local features of scene and character with their dry, laconic temper and speech, the

complex and universal meaning. Talking about indirection, which makes him very much a part of the modern poetic tradition, Frost states :

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

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

33.4 FROST AS A NEW ENGLAND, NATURE AND PASTORAL POET

A reader of Frost's poetry invariably notices two things – the speaker's unmistakable voice and the current rural setting – and concludes that Frost is a New England poet. Actually, the poet found his true medium when he discovered New England and decided to give a local habitation and a New England name to his poetry though the region was not known earlier for its vital accomplishments. On the contrary, it was a sad and desperate, though beautiful place. Frost oriented himself to his chosen background of social and economic disturbances which presented the bleakest picture of life. He observed the peculiarities and particularities of the people and the place objectively as well as imaginatively, and saw the morbid diseases of mind that cropped up somewhat too, frequently in the remote region. He wrote honestly how their difficult circumstances seemed to breed such diseased minds as in *Home Burial*, *A Servant to Servant*, and *The Fear*, and practical and sound people as in *The Death of the Hired Man*, the humourist in *A Hundred Collars* and the unpretentious people as in *Blue Berries*. Frost's real subject is humanity and these New Englanders like people elsewhere are caught in the struggle with the elementary problems of existence, they face alienation and

isolation from themselves as well as, from their fellowmen, tragedy and sorrow, failure and defeat, but unlike others, they still retain their tough individualism. They show repeated defiance and resistance. Consequently, if they are not gaining they are not loosing also as Frost presents in *The West – Running Brook*. W. G. O'Donnell has aptly, remarked in this context, "What impressed Frost most of all was not that much of older New England has been but that something had survived, that a vitality remained which was strong enough to meet the challenge of new and potentially disastrous conditions." Thus, Frost believes in the value of affirmation and looks at the world more realistically than Whitman did. His singing strength lies in the knowledge of truth, things as they are. Here it is pertinent to remember two things : that Frost does not claim to describe the whole of New England but the region north of Boston and within the region only the rural areas and farm villages. In other words, Frost indirectly asserts that the real truth about a locality is to be found in its rural rather than its urban life. The fundamental ground for this assumption is the belief in a continuing reaction between man and his environment, land and his inhabitants. He believes that the human nature is purest and most understandable where man is directly related to his physical setting. Therefore, the more a poet dwells on its distinctly local aspects, which find a reflection in human character, the closer he comes to see the life–process itself. Hence, Frost comes to show a distrust of urban life.

Frost's regional world remains exactly the same in poems after poems; *Mending Wall*, *Birches*, *Home Burial* and *Stopping by Woods* – all the poems portray the same New England. The setting of these poems becomes an imaginative framework in which the mind of the poet moves. Frost uses the native details of New England countryside for various purposes. In some of the poems it is an end in itself while in other the local truth in nature is an integral part of the over-all purpose of the poem. In other words, the landscape becomes a functional part of his writing. Many aspects of the beauty of New England countryside have become highly symbolic. Among other things, see how even a black cottage and abandoned celler holes – the classic symbols of decay–express a sense of transience, a realization of the rush of everything to nothingness.

So far as Frost is taken as a voice of New England, he is only a mirror figure in modern literature. What makes him a significant writer is that he makes his New England universal in meaning and implication. He achieves the universality. Because of Frost New England provides not merely the objects, the events, the characters and scenes, but a special perspective and thus, becomes a symbol of a way of life. Secondly, Frost's style is also a deeply personal accomplishment. His language is effective not because it has specific connections with a region but because Frost has made his characteristic rhythms and twists of phrase appropriate to the total experience of the poetry.

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

As usual, Frost does not make any explicit statements on the theory of nature or on man's relationship with nature. According to Frost's scheme of values, it is one of the grave errors to go against nature or natural processes or to tamper with nature. In other words, Frost shows destruction of the unnatural. Consider the poems like *A Brook in the City*, *To a Moth Seen in Winter*, *Mending Wall*, *The Code* and *A Star in the Stone Boat*, *There are Roughly Zones* etc. As the logical consistency demands, he does not believe that

getting permanently in tune with nature would lead to a successful living though there are some poems in which such adjustment appear, for example take *Blue Berries*, *Brown's Descent* and *The Ax-Helve*. It proves that Frost shies away from a merely theoretical consistency and nature to him is a fairly protean term; its meaning changes from poem to poem. George W. Nitchie very perceptively observes that "Frost is ultimately not very much concerned with developing a philosophically consistent concept of nature; important though nature is to him, he is not really concerned with it as an object of disinterested philosophical speculation, as something to be conceptualized. What really interests him is not definitions but attitudes, not what nature is in itself but, how man responds to it in a world he never made, whatever the organization of the world may be. What troubled Wordsworth was 'the meaning of nature' and he managed to find grandeur in it; Emerson too had difficulty rallying on his relation to the universe in the face of a rough world but Frost is rarely disturbed by the debate. However complex the intellectual background of Wordsworth's nature may be, his essential poetic idea remains constant–the union of mind and the external reality or the blending of thought and landscape while Frost never permits himself the Wordsworthian rapure. In other words, the major difference between the two is that Wordsworth quite explicitly does, and Frost does not, perceive an organic relationship–vital continuity–between man and nature. For various socio-historical reasons Frost's vision, values, sophistication and attitude is different from Worthworth's. Frost knew that any traditional handling of nature myth would not have power to stir the modern temper. Besides, the difference between English and American country life–different intellectual habits–made Frost versed in the country things. Consequently, Frost maintains an entirely different attitude, which is not simple but of ironic disillusionment, toward the possible malevolence of the nature world. The contrast between man and nature becomes the central theme of Frost's nature poetry. Even his most deeply felt relationships with nature are dramatic rather than conceptual. Prof. Brower beautifully sums up these aspects of Frost's nature poetry and states: "This consciousness that he is playing a high game–as poet and worshipper–in the presence of nature is

what is most modern in Frost.....” Thus, Frost’s treatment of nature shows that he rejoices in the doubt and uncertainty of vision.

Even in Frost’s most beautiful nature poems there is always a bitter-sweet quality. The charm of these poems results from the vividness with which sweet and delicate things stand out for the stern spirit behind them. For instance, consider *A Boundless Moment* which offers a fresh glimpse of beauty yet deals with essentially the same view of reality as *Bereft*. In the poems like *Most of it*, *Sand Dunes*, *There are Roughly Zones* and *Desert Place* it symbolizes the impersonal force of matter. On the whole, Frost’s nature is impersonal, indifferent and ‘Other’, so it does not evoke the same variety of emotional response as it did in Wordsworth. Frost writes about nature without prettification and without exploiting the emotional effect and there is a fundamental ambiguity of feeling in his view of nature. Inspite of the unflinching honesty in the face of fact, which is a recurrent theme in Frost’s nature poetry, Frost cannot keep from looking farther than the immediate object and that when he does so, the environment opens upon a be-wilderment of landscapes with questions rising like a mist. He sees complexity, inhuman mysteries in nature, and still he desires to find himself the micro-cosmos of nature.

Frost’s poetry reveals that nature to him is primarily a kind of withdrawal according to a plan, a means by which things are simplified and rendered manageable. In other words, it is a strategic evasion which enables him to escape the complexities of the commercial life and complicated choices, because nature ecourages emotional simplification for him as it did for Thoreau. Take, for example, *Birches*, *A Prayer in Spring*, *Putting in the Seeds* or even *Out, –Out* in which nature, like tragedy, affords a kind of ideal simplification.

Frost’s nature wants *life to go on living* but it shows no marked concern for any single life. At times, nature takes up the role deserted by human beings as in *The Woodpile*. Some of Frost’s poems suggest that the world of nature is better than man’s. It is pure, simple and innocent while other poems show that it is far below the human sphere because man thinks, he feels, he suffers, while nature only exists.

Another aspect of Frost's nature poetry is his tendency of personification, which in the case of romantic poets take the form of belief metaphor; but in Frost, it is more explicit, and is nearly always an extended analogy–a means of seeing things. Frost's preference for personifications is indicative of his whole manner of conceiving nature, for such a mode of sustained comparison is only possible within the framework of a world view in which the natural and the human are conceived as distinct and separate yet parallel planes. He reaches a conclusion that man can never find a home in nature, nor can he live outside it. Therefore, the only way out to assert the reality of his spirit is to exist independently by looking at the world of nature squarely. While observing nature closely, Frost moves toward what Nina Baym terms 'The poet's theme'.This theme Frost calls 'flux', 'alternation' in 'New Hamphire' and critics give the theme its old name 'mutability'. Frost, like Emerson, believes that nature can be used to uncover and illustrate the underlying laws of universe, because it operates by such laws. He does not find in nature a transcendental unity or an assurance of rebirth, but the grim laws of change and decay which emphasize the inevitable and ceaseless movement toward death– nightfall, leaf-fall and snow-fall. Fall in Frost's poetry is, less a static season than a process which continues through all seasons signifying the movement toward death.

Frost's view of nature is scientific and like Henry Adams he believes that the universe is an irreversible system and the movement of the universe is the universal contract of death/ That spends to nothingness as he puts in *The West Running Brook*. In such a universe the only meaningful action man can perform is to resist, to assert the human in a non-human world.

In *Our Hold on the Planet* the speaker explicitly states:

> *We may doubt the just proportion of good to ill.*
> *There is much in nature against us. But we forget:*
> *Take nature altogether since time began, Including*
> *human nature, in peace and war, And it must be a*
> *little more in favour of man, Say a fraction of one*

percent at the very least, Or our number living wouldn't steadily more, Our hold on the planet wouldn't have so increased.

Thus, Frost's nature is friendly in a limited sense of the term and is essentially alien. He expresses all kinds of feelings towards nature – outer nature and human nature–in his poetry. And his best poetry is concerned with the drama of man in nature.

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

Before analysing in detail the pastoral structure of Frost's poems, it is essential to denote the term 'Pastoralism' seriously. A pastoral comes to life when the poet writes about rural life with its rustic scenery and humble folk to contrast it with the great outer world of the powerful, the wealthy, and the sophisticated. In short, it is the recognition of a contrast, implicit or expressed, between pastoral life and some more complex type of civilization that constitutes the main elements of the pastoral. Frost's concept to pastoral gives unity to the diverse components of his poetry and reveals at the same time that he, as a pastoral poet, stands outside the conventional form of this genre. He does not idealize the rural life and

keeps the two worlds in equilibrium. Frost knows that with the decay of Arcadian myth and the advent of modern science a new attitude toward rural life is essential so that it becomes representative of human life in general. This is what adds a remarkable depth of reference to his poetry. Instead of eulogizing the unhappy shepherd and the fair shepherdess, the flowery wreaths and the wandering flocks, Frost has discovered a new myth of rural life. As a result, Frost's achievement as a pastoral poet, like Burn's, and Wordsworth's, is a distinctly individual triumph. It has resulted from his discovery of a new and realistic basis for examining the rural scene within the structure of pastoral.

The pastoral mode gives him the setting, events and character of the New England farm life but, more significantly, it furnished the characteristic design for the best of his poems – the speaking voice, imagery and structure. Frost's symbolism in these poems does not work primarily through allusion, metaphor and allegory. Instead, it emerges from the analogies inherent in the very framework of his special vision : a sustained series of contrasts that open out from the rural microcosm to the great world beyond. Thus, Frost discovers that remote rural New England could serve as a novel Arcadia, and when he adopts the points of view of the farmer as his poetic mask he comes into his own as an artist.

33.5 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed Frost's theory of poetry where he believes that a true poetry can not be forced into a matrix of a set theory.

33.6 EXAMINATION ORINTED QUESTIONS

a) Comment on Frost's theory of Poetry.

33.7 SUGGESTED READING

1. Robert Frost : A literary reference to his life and work by Deirdre Fagan

2. Robert Frost letters reveal : He really cared what readers thought by J. P. O' Malley

COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 34**

AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–VI**

ROBERT FROST (SELECTED POEMS)

UNIT STRUCTURE

34.1 Introduction

34.1 Objectives

34.2 Frost as a Modern Poet

34.3 Let Us Sum Up

34.4 Examination Oriented Questions

34.5 Suggested Reading

34.1 INTRODUCTION

Robert Frost, one of America's most cherished poets, is celebrated for his profound and deceptively simple depictions of rural life and the human condition. His writing style, characterized by traditional verse forms and conversational language, often delves into complex themes of nature, isolation, and the passage of time.

34.2 OBJECTIVES

The aim of the lesson is to acquaint the learner with Modernistic aspect of Frost.

34.3 FROST AS A MODERN POET

Frost has been considered as a regional, traditional, classical, romantic, realistic, pastoral and Victorian poet. He had achieved the status of a national icon

at the time of his death in 1963. However, when the critics evaluated his place in the contemporary literature or point out his modernity, they find it difficult to call him a modern poet. Frost's very popularity has been held against him on the grounds that it comes from his lacking the complexities of thought and form central to the best modern verse. Admittedly, Frost differs radically from the dominant school of Eliot and Stevens in both, technique and goal. He retains the surface logic of speech in the present tense because he wants to render his meanings symbolically or dramatically in the immediate scene; while other modern poets abandon it because they want to let their images range through time and take on associated meanings of a long historical tradition. In a word, because of fundamental disagreement about the nature of meaning in poetry they have developed opposite techniques. Obviously, Frost suffers by comparison. But a poet is under no obligation to follow a particular school and because he happens to be different from it is no reason to deny him his place in the contemporary literature.

It has been established already that he uses the old ways to be new, that his simplicity is only apparent and beneath the easy surface of his poetry lurk the disturbing ambiguities, and questionings, distracting loneliness and anxieties, grim tragedies and tensions, that make him "*a terrifying poet*" as Lionel Trilling consummately put it. Neither his speaking voice nor his regional settings are for the sake of picturesqueness but are deliberate devices for a special poetic mode. Even the old-fashioned rural posture has been adopted as a point of view for seeing the modern world in a new light.

Science has posed two peculiar problems to man : (a) how to preserve within the disorganized world of today the sense of order and unity a meaningful life requires, (b) how to correlate man's feelings and values with the objective world. So far as the first issue is concerned, many of the modern writers like Eliot, Pound and Yeats have tried to develop the concept of culture. Frost too, reasserts the value of individual perception against the fragmentation of experience resulting from modern technology. Frost suggests a solution to this problem in terms of withdrawal from the modern city to an agrarian world, not to advocate the "return to the soil" or to propose some social reform, but to adopt an artistic perspective–

a medium for the trenchant analysis and most subtle evaluation of the complex urban world. Thus, Frost's retreat to the country is a strategic retreat – not an escape like that of the Georgians but a fresh approach to reality.

Frost's poetry is concerned with the elements of experience which the scientific scheme excludes. He wishes to be loyal in portraying human experience with its sensations, emotions and values and still recognize the validity of scientific scheme; it has led the poets to the experimentations in style. Imagism which represents an attempt to confront the physical facts of reality in the most direct way, limits poetry to the range of sense impressions and advocates an abandonment of overtly stated ideas, and sentiments because they stand between the poet and the actual things of his experience. Moreover, it is a symbolism which indicates a universal pattern in experience, rather than Imagism, that provides a better answer to the problem. Admittedly, Frost seems at odds with the main lines followed by these Imagists and Symbolists but he is not unaware of the problem. Poetic form, he says, is an experience shaped by pressures from within and from without, "He who knows not both knows nothing." Frost's images and symbols are from the natural world unlike Eliot's but it is a false notion that his use of images and symbols is tame and sparse. Apparently, his images and symbols are functional and make every poem a new metaphor inside. John F. Lynen makes an elaborate study of the structural resemblance between Frost and the Symbolists, and establishes the notion that Frost like them

> "*tends to view the reality through the perspective of contrasting level of being... In Frost's nature poems this technique quite obviously results from his desire to recognize the validity of science.... He can accept nature as the limited, purely physical world which science depicts and yet place it within a larger context which includes the realities of purpose, feeling and value. His method is to unify scientific nature and the realm of human experience, not by blending them, but by viewing reality as a vista of distinct but parallel planes.*"

In this sense, Frost is not only a modern poet but is also a representative

poet who deals with the very problem, which is the main concern of the Symbolists. Both Frost and the Symbolists tend to view the reality through the perspective of contrasting levels of being. In Frost's nature poems this technique obviously results from his desire to recognize the validity of science as he insists on the gulf separating man and nature and directly opposes the Romantic attempt to bring the two together. He is anti-romantic but is able to avoid the assumption that the physical world comprises the whole reality. He conceives the physical world as a distinct level of being. He can accept nature as limited, purely physical world which science depicts and yet places it within a larger context that includes the realities of purpose, feeling and value. His method is like that of the Symbolist poets to unify scientific nature and the realm of human experience, not by blending them, but by viewing reality as a vista of distinct but parallel planes. Frost instantly considers Frost's pastoral perspective where he assumes the world as composed of isolated levels of being. Frost juxtaposes rural and urban life, the regional and the cosmopolitan, the human and the natural. The pastoralism of the New England poems represent Frost's most fully realized development of the way of thinking implicit in the poetry of Symbolist poets. His pastoralism grew out of his nature poetry and his simultaneous growth in these two kinds of poetry is the result of the same intellectual stimulus prompted by the fundamental concerns of twentieth-century thought. His solution to the modern problems involves a withdrawal from the modern city to an agrarian world which belongs to the past. However, he neither turn his back on the world of today nor does he recommend any programme of social reforms which according to him would never resolve the basic conflicts in human life. He rather adopts an artistic perspective. Regional New England is for him a medium for examining the complex urban world of today, a standard by which to evaluate it and discover the order underlying the experience that modern life has obscured and confused. John Lynen rightly points out:

> "*In Frost's poetry the regional world is kept quite separate from everyday life of urban soceity, and the nature from the level of human experience;*

yet the separate contexts, though never allowed to merge, are held together by the contrast between them, which creates a constant reference from one to the other and an awareness of ironic parallels."

Thus, the pastoral structure and other characteristic features of his poetry demonstrate that he is an intellectual as well as chronological contemporary of the Symbolist poets. Mark Van Doren beautifully sums up, this aspect of Frost's poetry and observes,

"*Mr. Frost is as skillful a Symbolist as any one, but the mystery in his poems is never of the sort which make so many contemporary poems sound like puzzles. It is merely the mystery which there is in existence and which he has in his own personal way of feeling*."

Frost's pastoral perspective reveals that he juxtaposes the rural and the urban, the regional and the cosmopolitan, the human and the natural exactly the same way as Eliot contrasts social classes and holds up disparate historical periods for comparison. Like true Symbolists he deals in direction, i.e. analogical mode of thought. The thing he seems to be talking about is never quite the thing he means to be talking about. At the same time, unlike them, he does regard explicit statement as an artistic blemish.

The most striking feature of Frost's thought is that it unifies what at the surface appear to be mutually exclusive dimensions of modern literary mind. At the centre of Frost's theory is the idea we find everywhere in Kant and the romantics that our mental acts constitute the world of our experience. This sort of dynamic thrust of consciousness is Frost's philosophy of common sense realism which posits the world out there independent of our acts of perception. This principle of coherence in Frost's thinking has its basis in the pragmatism of William James. What was basic to the appeal of James for Frost was the naturalistic toughness which kept James from floating out of time in search of resolutions to human dilemmas.

Frost's concept of landscape both in its phenomenological and in the ordinary

sense works as twin impulses issuing out of the needs of a unified human consciousness. Landscape in Frost suggests both a configuration of objects really there in nature and as well as, the phenomenological notion that any particular landscape is coherence because the mind of the artist makes it so. In Frost's Poetry the special qualities of coherence and peculiar dominance of this or that object in the landscape are reflections of the primordial ground of Frost's creative acts : the poet's subjectivity, his deepest inclinations and interests.

The unique form of Frost's nature poetry is essentially modern. He stood against the Romantic and Philosophic speculation of nature poetry that asserted the unity of man and nature, whether it involved seeing man as a part of nature, intuiting the common spirit infused in both, or seeing both as parts of larger reality, the result was a humanizing of nature and a stressing of emotional value in the landscape. In the nineteenth century it seemed less adequate. Though it is founded upon the Romantic premises, the increasing authority of science made the arguments of Tennyson and Arnold about nature reveal that they rejected its philosophical idealism. When Tennyson speaks in *In Memoriam* of *Nature, red in tooth and claw*, he shows the major change inculcated by the scientific scheme of things where the nature is devoid of moral and spiritual content. Robert Frost's poetry also represents this sort of vision of nature in which he reconciles the scientific truth with the perceptions of imagination.

Frost, despite his desire to withdraw, is not more aloof from his contemporary life than the other major poets as some of the critics believed. Lionel Trilling, speaking at a dinner in honour of Frost's eighty-fifth birthdays, refuted very effectively the idea of Frost's inability to deal with modern problems and detachment from the anxieties of our urban society. On the contrary he found at the centre of his poetry a dominant quality of terror because he brings to his poetry "*the terrible actualities of life in a new way*." He called him "*a terrifying poet*" of "*a terrifying universe*" to show how Frost's poetry reflects modern life in which the terror is a mark of a genuine modern poetry.

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

Above all, the intrinsic value of his poems, which make the present moment represent all other times, establishes the permanence of Robert Frost. He has not broken away from the tradition but has enriched it and is a modern poet in his own way.

34.4 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have discussed Robert Frost as a modern poet who is also considered as a regional, traditional, classical, romantic, realistic, pastoral and Victorian poet.

34.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTION

a) Discuss Robert Frost as a Modern Poet.

34.6 SUGGESTED READING

1. Robert Frost letters reveal : He really cared what readers thought by J. P. O' Malley

COURSE CODE : ENG–322 **LESSON No. 35**
AMERICAN LITERATURE - I **UNIT–VI**

ROBERT FROST (SELECTED POEMS)

UNIT STRUCTURE

35.1 Introduction

35.2 Objectives

35.3 Critical Study of Three Different Kinds of Frost's Poems

35.3.1 Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

35.3.2 Home Burial

35.3.3 Fire and Ice

35.4 Let Us Sum Up

35.5 Examination Oriented Questions

35.6 Multiple Choice Questions

35.7 Suggested Reading

35.1 INTRODUCTION

Robert Frost, one of America's most cherished poets, is celebrated for his profound and deceptively simple depictions of rural life and the human condition. His writing style, characterized by traditional verse forms and conversational language, often delves into complex themes of nature, isolation, and the passage of time. Frost's poetry, such as the iconic "The Road Not Taken" and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," blends accessible language with deep philosophical insight, making his work resonate with a broad audience. As a modern poet, Frost

straddled the line between 19th-century Romanticism and 20th-century Modernism, creating a unique and timeless voice in American literature.

35.2 OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the lesson is to familiarize the learners with poems of Robert Frost prescribed in the Syllabus

35.3 CRITICAL STUDY OF THREE DIFFERENT KINDS OF FROST'S POEMS

35.3.1 Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening

Stopping By Woods, one of the best-known lyrics of the twentieth century, is a perfect example of Frost's superb craftsmanship as a master lyricist. The poem came to him after he had been working all night on his long poem entitled *New Hampshire*. He went outside to look at the sun and it came to him. "I always thought", he explains, "it was the product of autointoxication coming from tiredness." Not only that, Frost has made several remarks which stir the reader to grasp the far reaching meaning of the seemingly descriptive poem. He said, *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* was the kind of poem he'd like to print on one page, to be followed with forty pages of footnotes. It contained all I ever knew. Besides, he added, that it is "a series of almost reckless commitments. I feel good in having guarded it so. (It is)..... my heavy duty poem to be examined for the rime pairs".

Thus, Frost, through his remarks, has clearly indicated that the poem, one of the most quietly moving lyrics, has to be explored at various levels. It begins as a dramatic lyric and then breaks into the middle of an incident, so that here is a drama-in-miniature revealed with setting and lightening, actors and all other paraphernalia complete. A rural traveller is the actor. He is attracted by the majestic beauty of the woods and briefly describes the circumstances under which he stops his horse-drawn-sleigh to enjoy, in spite of cold and loneliness, the strange beauty of white snow flakes falling against the background of dark trees. A careful study reveals that the poem is not primarily a description of nature but the dramatic

utterance of a person on the occasion of experiencing the scene of being in the scene. He reveals that there are many common sense reasons why he should not stop but the spell of the moment is so strong that the traveller is reluctant to leave. Gradually, the poem reaches a climax of responsibility, the promises to be kept and the obligations to be fulfilled. It is the last stanza that suggests two planes of reference where the ordinary errand becomes the journey of life–a journey including pleasure and hardships, duties and distances.

A very subtle and perceptive analysis of the poem by many renowned critics has made it an extremely popular poem. John Ciardi says that the dramatic force of the poem is best observable as a progression in the three scenes: The first scene, that presents, the woods as the property of a man which holds for him an economic value and practical purpose, establishes some unspecified relationship between the man and the wood. It is important to note here that the errand is left generalized, perhaps, to suggest any errand in life and therefore, life itself. The owner represents one of the forces of the poem–an order of reality from which the poet has separated himself for the moment. Thus, the scene comes to establish not only a relation between the man and the woods, but the fact that man's relation with nature begins with his separation from mankind. The second scene, that is covered by the second and third stanzas, introduces a foil; the foil here is the horse. The animal has been conditioned to a routine of purposeful behaviour. The traveller imagines and finds himself to be questioned by the horse: What could be the purpose of stopping there away from bin or stall? Implicitly it means that the behaviours of the speaker is not purposeful. He watches the wood towards no other end, but just for watching, for contemplating and for appreciating. Obviously, now the horse becomes a symbol without losing its identity as a horse. One senses that the darkness and snowfall symbolize a death-wish, however momentary, that is, that hunger for a final rest and surrender that a man may feel, but a beast cannot. Thus, by the end of the second scene it becomes clear that the poem establishes man's relation to the world of the wood-owner, his relation to the brute world of the horse and the presence of the unknowable world, the movement of the all-engulfing snow across all the orders of life, the man's, the wood-owner's

and the horse's–with the difference that the man knows of that second dark-within the dark of which the horse cannot, and the wood-owner will not, know. The third scene introduces a new force in the poem that can be named as obligation, personal commitment or duty. Finally, the speaker has a decision to make. Can he indulge in his mood forever or must he move on? He repeats the thought and the poem ends here. It is the repetition in the last two lines that transforms "*miles to go*" and "*sleep*" into symbols. Many critics have given them many interpretations, but Frost himself have given no answer. It must be noted here that there are no pointed or overt symbols, no literary parallels or signposts to guide the reader yet he sees the poet's personal experience as an image of an experience common to all, that of preferring the arduous journey though human experience to an irresponsible indulgence in escapism. Hence, the poem establishes a contrast between the merely natural and the human, a theme which continually preoccupied Frost.

Austin Warren says that Frost achieved the broader area of meaning by the use of "*a natural symbolism*." Sleep, darkness and snow by their very nature suggest death. Likewise, woods are an archetypal image for perilous enchantment. No doubt things have concrete meaning but they also point out certain other things–more fundamental realities beyond one particular experience. The enchantment of the woods is opposed by the promises to be kept; the sleep which he will enjoy after fulfilling the obligation will be a deserved award in contrast to the unearned pleasure of looking at the woods. Hence, the meaning of the poem grows out of the symbolic reference of a special kind. It works not through symbols and allegories but rather grow through a special perspective– the point of view from which they are seen. Here, as in many characteristic poems, the point of vantage is the rural world, and the poetic vision it reveals, pastoral. The poem is truly representative of Frost's art. The indirect and subtly, suggestive quality of its symbolism results from his preference for implication rather than explicit statement. He does not interpret the scene; he uses it as the medium through which to view reality.

It has been truly said about Frost that he did not need to discover a language; it was already for him. The classical regularity of *Stopping by Woods*

is a triumph of its own type for in the simplest diction he invests a commonplace verse pattern with strength and dignity. Frost has given an amusing though exaggerated account of the role played by the formal techniques in the creation of this lyric. With the first line he has set up a four beat pattern but he adds, "I am not committed here. I can do a great many things". But the second line in the same meter and rhyme seemed like a commitment to couplet. With one more rhyming pair "I'd be in for it, I'd have to have the couplets all the way', but "so far I was dancing still. I was free. Then I committed a stanza". The pattern was a quatrain, rhymed, a a b a, but it left the third line still uncommitted. By picking up its end sound for the rhyming lines of the next stanza, and so on to the end he had an interlocking scheme as intricate as one of the early Italian forms but its very success had its own drawback, "How was I going to get out of that stanza?" He solved the problem of his endless chain link by rhyming all four lines of the final stanza with the last two lines identical. It was a magnificent stroke, and no more verse acrobatics but the poem's greatest achievement of meaning. Thus, by the perfect marriage of pastoral subject to sophisticated verse form, Frost has illustrated his own witty definition that "There is nothing more composing than composition." Actually, the rhyme scheme catches on to thought. The speaker rejects the temptation of entering the woods but the rejection though outspoken is as instinctive as the felt attraction to the alluring darkness. From this and similar lyrics, Frost might be described as a poet of rejected invitations to a voyage in the 'definitely imagined regions' that Keats and Yeats more readily enter.

35.3.2 "Home Burial"

Home Burial, the finest of Frost's dramatic dialogues reveals the emotional force of his poetry. The raw material of the poem is the death of the first born infant and the poignant sorrow of the young mother who is persuaded by her husband to express her feelings in words. The conflict between the husband and wife, over the way the loss should be taken, makes it a deeply psychological drama. The clash is deep, persuasive and irreconcilable; the tension, causing the tragic rift between them, is virtually sundering them apart.

How dramatic is the action in opening lines, that is at the moment of revelation :

> *He saw her from the bottom of the stairs Before she saw him. She was starting down, Looking back over her shoulder at some fear ... ... 'I will find out now-you must tell me, dear'. ... . 'You don't, she challenged. 'Tell me what it is, ... But I understand: it is not the stones, But the child's mound..... Don't, don't, don't, don't, she cried.*

He entreats his wife to let him be a part of her grief, and not to carry it this time to someone else. He wants to know why the loss of the child has bred in her such a ranking bitterness towards him; why every word he utters about the child gives her such an offence.

> ..... *'And it's come to this,*
>
> *A man can't speak of his own child that's dead'.*

His willingness to be 'taught', to understand her inconsolable sorrow and his inability to fathom the intensity of her feelings make him a pathetic creature, how exquisitely the strain of the mother's anguish is felt in the naked image :

Making the gravel leap and leap in the air, Leap up, like that like that, and land so lightly.

It is indeed the perfection of poetic realism; both in observation and in deep insight into the heart. Actually, it's utter feelinglessness or rather a callous indifference, while digging the grave of his own child, which keeps causing her pain like a smarting wound: hence, she refuses to accept his love and decides to give her life to the sorrow of her child's death. Analysing the poem John F. Lynen makes a very subtle point that ".....as her husband forces her to talk of these things she at last comes to see that her grief and resentment result from the pain of discovering that human nature is limited and can not sacrifice everything to sorrow." With exquisite felicity Frost has brought into the lines what we so often feel, that is, the lack of genuine grief even at the most touching moments :

Friends make pretense of following to the grave, But before one is in it, their minds are turned And making the best of their way back to life And living people, and things they understand.

She openly expresses that she would not have taken her loss to be so personal if the world were not *evil*. She knows that it will not change; therefore, half hysterically she refuses to compromise with her grief by returning to normal life, even though she senses the absurdity of her attitude.

In the end, the husband with his characteristic reasonableness indicates that she will be led back to life, "I'll follow and bring you back by force, I will."

A close study of the poem shows that it is not seeking a solution as no basis has been found to resolve such conflict–the reaction versus that of wife to one specific thing, grief. For the husband, though there is a great grief, life must go on; for the wife, because there is a great grief, normal life cannot go on. The husband forces the grief beneath and fills the surface of life with everyday affairs; the wife spreads her grief over everything and submerges the affair of everyday existence. In brief, the poem is a powerful statement about the fissure between the masculine nature and the feminine nature, and finally assets that what nature has put as under man cannot join.

The last three speeches of the poem, in spite of being intensely personal, draw it forcefully towards the universal. Out of the stark situation of the infant's death. The poet has created an intensely tragic poem in which he examines the relationship between life and death and shows the failure of all human beings to understand death. As a result, the poem is Frost's masterpiece of deep and mysterious tenderness. For the tragic poignancy this piece stands by itself in American poetry. John Robert Doyle, Jr., with his critical acumen, takes the argument still further and develops by the relationship between husband and wife, man and woman, and even life and death.

The poet could achieve the artistic relief with the help of certain very well thought out artistic devices. His purpose is not to evade reality but to assist the

reader to face reality in its most tragic form. Frost's adroit use of language creates a world apart from that of the actual world. The simple diction, the seeming prose word order, and the liberal substitution of anapaests and trochees give the illusion of the actual speech. It must be noted carefully that it is illusion; for a deeper study of the poem shows that a definite iambic rhythm is present throughout.

The wife of *Home Burial* has a very different voice and her utterances are the fine examples of the drama in speech, of rushes and intensities. For instance, take the following lines as a specimen of Frostian dramatic verse with the subtle effect to breathless and hurrying towards pauses :

'*You can't because you don't know how to speak.*
If you had any feelings, you that dug
With your own hand–how could you–his little grave;
... ...
I thought, who is this man? I did not know you.
And I crept down the stairs and up the stairs.

Prof. Brower admires these lines for the parallel lyric moment in which the past comes back with wonderful clarity. He says, "These lyric expansions in Frost's eclogues fulfill the dramatic impulse and give it meaning, serving a purpose similar to a choric speech in Shakespeare."

It is interesting to observe here how a single word 'undid' presents a much more complicated idea than a mere movement and return:

She was staring down,
Looking back over her shoulder at some fear.
She took a doubtful step then undid it.

'Undid' is the intensifer of 'doubtful', which is not dramatized by the step taken and then taken back, undone.

Another device that aids in softening the tragedy of the loss is the analogy of the graveyard with a bedroom.

The little graveyard where my people are.
So small the window frames the whole of it.
Not so much larger than a bedroom, is it?
There are three stones of slate and one of marble,
Broad-shouldered little slabs there in the sunlight,
On the side hill.

Mr. Doyle Jr., makes the most appealing remark about these lines and emphasizes that the slightness in size enforces the impression that anything so small must somehow be without power to harm. The window is large enough to frame the graveyard. It also serves another purpose, that is, it removes the graveyard from the world of actual experience to the world of art – painting and photographs which are framed and hung on the walls. Moreover, the comparison of the graveyard with a bedroom indicates rest, sleep, in turn, suggests the desirable side of death. *Broad-shouldered* also has desirable connotation –strength and reliability. *Sunlight* gives brightness, warmth and life.

Thus in *Home Burial* even little details take on unusual meanings in a situation which is common in words, uncommon in experience.

Only Frost could create a poem like *Home Burial*, that startles and delights simultaneously, out of the raw material of the child's death and its effect on the young mother.

35.3.3 Fire And Ice

Most of Frost's lyrics begin with a simple idea and coax the reader, almost without his awareness, to extend the implication of the idea far beyond its plain presentation. Robert Frost's words, "*begin with delight and end in wisdom*". Likewise Frost's masterly dramatic lyric begins casually as a speculation concerning the end of the world, and ends with the discovery of the most dreadful passions in man.

The real life of the poem lies not in its contents but in the speaker's

awareness, his point of view. There is no direct reference to any special event but the words vibrate with the consciousness of experience which is actually and intensely felt. The great complexity of meaning is conveyed through the paradoxes it reveals between the bitterness of emotions and the tightlipped manner of the speaker, and between the two fundamental passions in man, desire and hate. The question which the poem imposes on the reader is : What will end the world? Fire or Ice? The opening words of the poem "*Some say*" reveal a merciless coldness and indifference on the part of the speaker while the boldness of the metaphor and the richness of imaginary present his poignantly felt emotions. He finally offers two insights : One, what brings the end of the world is unimportant; the important fact is the end itself. Second, it identifies two of the destroyers of life – desire and hate. These emotions are not usually associated with the end of the world or even recognized as destroyers but they are made to seem more terrible by understatement, by a comparative roughness and artful inadequacy of the speaker's account of them. He introduces the problem casually with "*Some say*"; he pronounces his decision with "*I hold with*" and closes the poem with chill politeness "*Would suffice*". The chill is increased by the usages of the same words and rhymes. John F. Lynen states in this connection : "Consider the daring of Frost's language : the speaker is at one moment casual ("Some say"), at the next politely reticent ("From what I've tasted of desire"), then homespun ("I hold with those who favours fire"), then jocular ("But if it had to perish twice"), then modest, self-effecting ("I think I know enough of hate"), and at last coolly practical ("for destruction ice/is also great/and would suffice"). The colloquial phrasing does not negate the poem's bitterness. Quite the opposite; it is the means of raising it to an extreme pitch."

Thus, Frost manages to transform the style itself into a symbol and every sentence has a nuance of something newly added to the thought. The emotion of intense bitterness is conveyed through images, as is stated earlier, by linking desire to fire and hate to ice, which transform the human emotion into vast impersonal forces that arouse the deepest terror.

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

35.4 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson we have critically analysed Frost's poems in detail. Poem discussed in this lesson are 'Stopping by woods on a snowing evening', 'Home burial' and 'fire and Ice'.

35.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Give the critical appreciation of the poem "Fire and Ice"

b) Discuss the recurring themes in Frost's Poetry.

c) Critically analyse the poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening".

35.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. In "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," what is the speaker contemplating as he stops in the woods?

   A) The beauty of the natural world
   B) His desire to stay in the woods
   C) The responsibilities and obligations of life
   D) The arrival of spring

2. In "Fire and Ice," what do the two elements, "fire" and "ice," represent?

   A) Passion and indifference B) Warmth and coldness
   C) Anger and despair
   D) The seasons of summer and winter

3. What does the speaker fear about staying in the woods in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"?

   A) Becoming lost in the wilderness
   B) Missing out on a social event
   C) The cold and snowy weather
   D) The owner of the woods approaching

4. In "Fire and Ice," according to the speaker, how might the world end?

A) By being consumed by fire
B) By being consumed by ice
C) Through war and conflict
D) Through natural disasters

5. What is the horse's reaction in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" as the speaker stops to admire the snow-covered woods?

A) The horse is eager to explore the woods
B) The horse expresses fear and impatience
C) The horse remains calm and indifferent
D) The horse nuzzles the speaker's hand

6 .What does the speaker suggest is the emotion that leads to the world's destruction in "Fire and Ice"?

A) Fear B) Love
C) Hate D) Indifference

7. What is the tone of "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"?

A) Joyful and lighthearted B) Melancholic and reflective
C) Frustrated and angry D) Excited and adventurous

8. What does the speaker acknowledge about the two destructive elements in "Fire and Ice"?

A) They are natural phenomena
B) They have equal destructive power
C) They are ultimately uncontrollable
D) They are related to human emotions

9. What is the overall mood of "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"?

A) Dark and ominous B) Playful and carefree
C) Peaceful and serene D) Chaotic and frenzied

10. In “Fire and Ice,” what does the speaker imply about the impact of human emotions on the world?

A) Emotions have no impact on the world
B) Emotions can lead to both positive and negative outcomes
C) Emotions are entirely destructive
D) Emotions are beyond human control

Answers: 1) The responsibilities and obligations of life 2) Passion and indifference 3) Missing out on a social event 4) By being consumed by fire 5) The horse expresses fear and impatience 6) Hate 7) Melancholic and reflective 8) They have equal destructive power 9) Peaceful and serene 10) Emotions can lead to both positive and negative outcomes

35.7 SUGGESTED READING

1. Robert Frost : A literary reference to his life and work by Deirdre Fagan

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