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**UNIT 1 WALT WHITMAN-I**

## 1.1. INTRODUCTION

Some writers are so representative of their age that it becomes essential for the reader to understand their times as well. Walt Whitman was one such writer who witnessed in one of the most turbulent times of American history, the American Civil War. The American Civil War was largely responsible for defining Whitman as a thinker and a writer. Thus, it becomes equally important for the reader to understand the America of Whitman's times as well.

Whitman is no doubt one of the giants of American literature, read and appreciated by generation of readers. However, he is chiefly associated with the issues of slavery and war. Slavery was the burning issue of Whitman's times. However, it is worth noting that opposition to slavery did not begin in the 1850s, the decade of the Civil War. Sane voices against slavery could be heard as early as in 1776 when the first draft of the Declaration of Independence was written. The draft opposed slave trade as a "cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty." However, this concern for the slaves did not find its way into the final document and the issue of slavery remained unresolved for almost a century thereafter.

If we trace the history of slavery, it was a legal institution that had existed in the United States since the early years of the colonial rule. Thereafter, it firmly established in 1776, the year United States gained independence from Great Britain. However, with efforts like the Missouri Compromise and the Compromise of 1850, slavery was gradually abolished in the states that lay above the Mason Dixon line. However, slavery existed in the South where slaves worked in large plantations especially cotton. The Southerners defended slavery as they believed that their life blood depended upon it. When all efforts made by the abolitionists to end slavery failed, war became inevitable. This war between the pro slavery and the anti slavery states came to be known as the American Civil War which lasted from 1861-1865. President Abraham Lincoln was one of the main proponents of the rights of the slaves and dreamed of a united, slavery free America. He once stated, "If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong." President Lincoln made untiring endeavours to end slavery through efforts like the Emancipation Proclamation. Eventually his efforts bore fruit when the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery permanently from the United States. However, 15 April 1865, the eve before the final victory of the Unionists, was an ill-fated eve in the history of American literature as President Lincoln, the man behind abolition of slavery was assassinated.

President Lincoln was every man's hero. He was admired by the entire country and was often eulogized by writers as well. One such writer who was greatly influenced by Lincoln was Walt Whitman. Whitman is often identified with Lincoln. Like Lincoln, Whitman had always dreamed of a United and Democratic America. He saw in Lincoln a people's leader and "the comprehensive, all-directing soul he had long been seeking." Lincoln too was drawn towards Whitman in many ways and on one occasion Whitman shared that "…we exchange bows and very cordial ones" and also confirmed that once Lincoln gave him a long friendly stare. When Lincoln was assassinated, Whitman was devastated. He dubbed his death as "the tragic splendor…purging, illuminating all." He paid rich tributes to Lincoln in two of Whitman's best-known poems "O Captain! My Captain!" and "When Lilacs Last in Dooryard Bloomed". In "When Lilacs Last in Dooryard Bloomed" Whitman draws a brilliant analogy when he compares himself to a solitary thrush which is singing a

"Song of the bleeding throat", lamenting the death of Lincoln and likens Abraham Lincoln to the great star that dropped early in the western sky.

Let us now read about Whitman who along with Lincoln is still remembered in America as the champion of American democracy.

## 1.2. OBJECTIVES

In this very first Unit on American literature you will be introduced to one of the most influential of American writers -Walt Whitman. I am sure that most of you will be familiar with his name as his famous elegy "O Captain! My Captain!" is taught in most of the schools worldwide. This unit will introduce you to Whitman, whose experimental techniques and liberal attitude earned him the title of the first modern American poet. Whitman's poetry, like Whitman himself is diverse and can be read through various lenses. It contains multitudes and is often associated with democracy, science, mysticism and at times even pornography. In this unit you will be given a background to Whitman's age and life. It will also focus on Whitman's writing style which will help you in understanding and appreciating his unique and distinct writing style.

## 1.3. WALT WHITMAN-A BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT

Walt Whitman was born as Walter Whitman Junior to Quaker Walter Whitman Senior and Louisa Van Velsor on May 31, 1819 on Long Island and raised in Brooklyn, New York. He was the second of nine children born to the couple. Whitman's father was a farmer, a carpenter and an unsuccessful real estate speculator who could hardly support his large family. Thus, Whitman's formal education came to a standstill at the age of eleven. At the age of twelve Whitman began to learn about printing press and typesetting and later worked for a Long Island weekly*Patriot* which was edited by Samuel E. Clements.

Whitman began his early career as a printer, editor, composer and teacher. Although Whitman was engaged in different trades, He kept the fire of knowledge burning inside him. He had an enormous appetite for books and saw Homer, Dante, Shakespeare and the Bible as his gurus. After trying his luck at various jobs, in 1841, he finally settles as a journalist. He founded a weekly newspaper *Long Islander* and also edited a large number of Brooklyn and New York newspapers. In the year 1848 Whitman left his career as editor of Brooklyn's Daily Eagle to take up the editorship of New Orleans' Crescent. It was in New Orleans that Whitman witnessed slavery first-hand. He was appalled seeing the miserable condition of the slaves there. After spending some time in New Orleans, Whitman toured the country for some time and then returned to Brooklyn and founded a "free soil" newspaper, the Brooklyn Freeman. Meanwhile, Whitman continued experimenting with his writings and developed a unique style of poetry which astonished many including Ralph Waldo Emerson. Finally, in the year 1850, Whitman gave up journalism to devote himself to full time writing. Five years later, he came out with his first edition of Leaves of Grass which consisted of twelve untitled poems and a preface. Hepublished the book at his own expense and also sent a copy of it to Emerson whom he considered his mentor. Emerson spoke highly of the book and called it "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed." The book was also hailed by other major writers especially the Transcendentalists like Amos Bronson Alcott and Henry David Thoreau. Even today, Leaves of Grass is considered the greatest American epic of all times by many. Through the book Whitman attempted to reach out to the masses. However, the book also got negative publicity as it was considered

obscene and prosaic by many. Whitman continued revising Leaves of Grass throughout his life and came out with eight editions of the book in his lifetime. The last edition came out in 1891; just about a year before his death and for that reason is often called the "death bed" edition. Whitman saw his Leaves of Grass "as a single long poem that expressed an evolving vision of the world."

The Civil War had a profound impact on Whitman. His first- hand experience with slavery in New Orleans made him sensitive to the problems of the slaves and at the outbreak of the Civil War, when Whitman saw the wounded and bleeding soldiers at one of the battlefields, he volunteered to serve as a nurse and thus extended a helping hand to the wounded soldiers at various New York hospitals. During the Civil War period Whitman wrote the poem "Beat! Beat! Drums" which became a patriotic rally call for the North. His other notable poems of the war time were "Cavalry Crossing a Ford" and "By the Bivouac's Fitful Flame." Besides these poems Whitman recorded his war time experiences in his work "Great Army of the Sick" and a book Memoranda During the War which came out twelve years after the war.

The year 1864 was a turbulent one for Whitman as a series of domestic crises hit him. His brother George who served as a Unionist soldier was captured by the Confederates and another one, Andrew, died of tuberculosis compounded by alcoholism. In order to make his ends meet, Whitman took up a clerk's job at the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the Department of the Interior, Washington D.C. Shortly after taking up this job, Whitman was fired by the Secretary of the Interior when he learned that Whitman was the author of the controversial book Leaves of Grass. When Whitman was fired by the Secretary of Interior, his long time friend William Douglas O'Connor, who had recommended him for the job came to his rescue. O'Connor also published Whitman's biography The Good Gray Poet to show Whitman in good light.

Throughout his life Whitman strove hard in order to support himself. Besides himself he also shouldered the responsibilities of his widowed mother, an invalid brother and many patients that he had nursed. In the early 1870s Whitman came to Camden, New Jersey, to meet his dying mother. However, he suffered from a stroke there and could not leave the town. He stayed in Camden with his brother for some time and later bought a simple two-story clapboard house where he spent his rest of his life. Besides the "death bed" edition of his Leaves of Grass Whitman also came out with a prose work Good Bye, My Fancy the same year. Whitman passed away on March 26, 1892, after suffering from severe bronchitis. He was buried in the tomb that he had designed for himself in Harleigh Cemetery, Camden.

Walt Whitman lived a life full of controversies. In his biographical account we read that his Leaves of Grass was condemned by many for being overtly obscene. In his personal life too he was accused of homosexuality. Despite all controversies, Whitman stands tall in the history of American literature. He was an ardent supporter of democracy and opposed slavery outright. His role in American literature is pivotal as he was a champion of democracy and through his poetry tried to reach out to the masses. In his own words, "The proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he absorbed it." However, it was unfortunate that Whitman, the "bard of democracy" was not well recognized during his life time. He was paid his dues by the twentieth century writers like D.H. Lawrence, William Carlos Williams, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Adrienne Rich and Gary Snyder. His poetry has been set to music by a number of composers. Recently, in 2009, Whitman was also inducted to the New Jersey Hall of Fame.

## 1.4. WALT WHITMAN AS A POET

### 1.4.1. The Bard of Democracy

Walt Whitman was primarily known for his democratic outlook in life. Unlike most of his contemporaries, he did not see democracy just as a political system but as a way of life. Whitman saw the whole world as one and sought unity with everything around him. It was his life's endeavour to establish equality and brotherhood which he did through his poems. In Whitman's Leaves of Grass, "grass" occurs frequently as a symbol of democracy. Whitman saw grass as a symbol of democracy; just as grass grows freely everywhere, deriving energy and nutrition from soil, democracy derives its strength from the masses, and like grass, the masses are resilient enough to overcome challenges. In his Song of Myself, Whitman does not just celebrate himself but also glorifies everything around him. Whitman sought unity with everything and saw everything as an extension of him. In Song of Myself, Whitman says "…for every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you…" Like William Wordsworth, Whitman widened the subject matter of poetry and gave space to everyday life and everyday people in his poems. Whitman's friend Dr. Richard Maurice Burke once wrote, "Perhaps…no man ever lived liked so many things and disliked so few as Walt Whitman. All natural objects seemed to have a charm for him. All sights and sounds seemed to please him. He appeared to like (and I believe he did like) all the men, women and children he saw…I never knew him to argue or dispute, and he never spoke of money…He never spoke deprecatingly of any nationality or class of men…He never complained or grumbled, either at the weather, pain, illness, or anything else…" and this makes Whitman a truly democratic poet.

### 1.4.2. Whitman's Mysticism

We can see a strong Transcendental influence in Whitman's poems. He shaped his thinking on mystical philosophy of the Transcendentalists. Whitman was a great admirer of Emerson who in turn was inspired by Indian Transcendental philosophy. Like the Transcendentalists, Whitman was aware of the unity of the universe. He studied all the sentient and insentient beings around him minutely and realized that "all selves are potentially divine". Like all mystics Whitman strove to merge his identity with the cosmos and in doing so sought union with the Absolute. In his works Whitman focuses on the universality of existence. In section 20 of *Song of Myself* he says, "In all people I see myself, none more and not one a barley-corn less." This line, like many other lines that occur in *Leaves*, is reminiscent of the Bhagawad Gita, which Whitman read in translation.

Again like a true mystic Whitman emphasizes on the first hand experience of things and also directs the reader towards direct experience. In the second section of "Song of Myself" Whitman tells the reader,

> You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
> You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself.

Like the Transcendentalists Whitman also believed in the immortality of the human soul. In *Song of Myself* Whitman states,

> 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.

However, unlike the oriental mystics who believe that union with the divine is possible only after sacrificing the sensual, Whitman celebrated the human body as well.

### 1.4.3. Whitman as the Worshipper of Human Body

Whitman always remained a subject of controversy as a result of his outspokenness on subjects that were considered socially unacceptable by many. In his personal life too he was derided for his sexuality. In his poems Whitman spoke openly on issues of sex and for that reason is often called the "poet of the body" just as much he was called the "poet of the soul". He tried to reach the soul through the body. He celebrates the human body as much as he celebrates the spirit in his works, in particular, *Leaves.* There are many instances in the book that speak for Whitman's attitude towards sex.In his Calamus poems Whitman talks about "manly love for comrades" frankly. In his words,

> Sex contains all, bodies, souls,
> Meanings, proofs, purities, delicacies, results, promulgation
> Songs, commands, health, pride, the maternal mystery the seminal milk
> All the governments, judges, gods, follow'd persons of the earth,
> These are contain'd in sex as parts of itself and justifications of itself.

Whitman saw truth in Thoreau's statement, "For him to whom sex is impure, there are no flowers in nature." The speaker of "I Sing the Body Electric" also eulogizes the perfection of the human body and worships it because it houses the soul.

### 1.4.4.Whitman's Poetic Style

Whitman is known for his innovative techniques in language. He broke free from the shackles of traditional form and diction and created his own unconventional unique style. As a result of his experimental tendencies he is considered a trail blazer in many ways. In the words of Dr. R.K. Bhushan, "Whitman's style hooks you around the waist, compelling you to see where Whitman sees, feel as he feels, and soar with him as moves at will through time and space…Whitman could make words sing, dance, kiss, do anything that a man or woman or the natural powers can do." Let us now glance at Whitman's poetic style which was a novel contribution to American literature.

#### 1.4.4.1. Whitman as the "Father of Free Verse"

Whitman broke free from the rigid poetic tradition and chose to write in free verse – verse with irregular meter and line length. As Whitman was the first American poet to use free verse, he is known as the "Father of Free Verse." Whitman chose free verse over other verse forms because it allowed him the possibility of free expression. Whitman was a poet of liberation who liberated poetry from its conventional form.

#### 1.4.4.2. Poetic diction

Whitman abandoned conventional approach towards poetry in favour of novel techniques. His approach was experimental and democratic. As Whitman was out and out a people's poet, he voiced their thoughts and wrote in their tongue. One can find a sprinkling of slangs and colloquial speech all over his poems. Wherever he had the option, he chose the common word over the elegant one. Whitman's sentences are irregular and prosaic. He employs this syntax in order to mirror the diversity, complexity and growth of America. Besides this, Whitman was greatly influenced by the long flowing cadences of the Bible, which he adopted in his own writings.

#### 1.4.4.3. Parallelism

Another style that Whitman picked up from the Bible was its parallel structure. Parallelism became most important devices used by many modern American poets including Whitman's. Parallelism repeatedly makes use of the same phrases, clauses or syntaxes to emphasize important ideas or points in literary works. Parallelism creates a sense of unity in a poem. For instance, if you look at the following lines of *Song of Myself,* you will see a recurrent pattern in the structure of the lines which focus on the same thought.

> There was never any more inception than there is now,
> Nor any more youth or age than there is now
> And will never be any more perfection than there is now,
> Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now.

### 1.4.4.4. Cataloging

Whitman frequently uses catalogues in his poems "to suggest the fullness, diversity and scope of American life or of the human experience." A catalog is a list of people, places things or abstract ideas which share common characteristics. Cataloguing is often used by writers to create an impact on the minds of the readers. In "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life", Whitman records all that he sees along the shore,

> Chaff, straw, splinters of wood,
> weeds, and the sea-gluten.
> Scum, scales from shining ricks, leaves
> ofsalt-lettuce, left by the tide.

### 1.4.4.5. Anaphora

Anaphora is another literary device that is used frequently by Whitman. Anapora is the repetition of words at the start of successive clause, phrases or sentences. Whitman starts several lines in a row with the same word or phrase. For instance, the first four lines of "When I heard the Learn'd Astronomer" begin with the word "when". Anaphora has the power to transform an ordinary poem into a powerful chant.

### 1.4.4.6. Symbols

Whitman's poems are highly symbolic. Whitman uses myriad symbols to convey his ideas. Through his symbols Whitman universalizes his themes For instance, in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass,* grass symbolizes both growth and multiplicity of human life. Similarly in "When Lilacs Last in Dooryard Bloom'd", flowers, bushes, trees and other plant life symbolize regeneration after death. In *Song of the Open Road,* the long winding path symbolizes the road of life. In *Out of the Cradle* the cradle connotes continuity of life after birth. Similarly in *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry* the ferry indicates cyclic movement in life and the flood tide symbolizes the sea of life and time.

### 1.4.5. Major Themes of Walt Whitman's Poems

As Whitman's poetry is democratic, it deals with the life and experiences of common folk. His most recognized work *Leaves of Grass* is a "melting pot" where the whole of America comes together and fuses into one master piece. The book, written in free verse, is a book without boundaries and the whole of America ranging from the Indians, slaves, 'slave masters", different states, professions, all a find place in the

book. You read in Whitman's biographical account that he felt for the wounded soldiers of the war provided a helping hand to them. He commemorated the brave soldiers of his land in many of his poems. Whitman saw Lincoln as a kindred spirit and through poems like "When Lilacs Last in Dooryard Bloom'd" he paid homage to the great leader. The individual also finds place in Whitman's works. Like the Advaitist he salutes the Self. Moreover,Whitman believes in the power of an individual and considers it essential for the growth of democracy. The individual in Whitman's poetry is glorified as an all-powerful "I". His *Song of Myself* opens with the line, "I celebrate myself, and sing myself". However, this self should not be confused with just the poet or the speaker. It stands for America as well as the entire humanity. Later in the poem Whitman further says,

> I pass death with the dying, and birth with the new-wash'd
> babe and am not contained between my hat and boots

The speaker of *Song of Myself* is someone who contains everything inside him and speaks on the behalf of everyone. Thus, Whitman's "I" transcending the general boundary of the "Self".

## 1.5. LEAVES OF GRASS

*Leaves of Grass* is a collection of poems by Walt Whitman which celebrates America with all its complexity. It includes themes of democracy, nature, love, friendship, sensuality to name a few. As mentioned in the introduction section, Whitman worked relentlessly throughout his life on this book and came out with its eight editions in his lifetime. Some of the best known poems of this collection include "Song of Myself", "I Sing the Body Electric" "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd".

Through *Leaves of Grass* Whitman desired to create a distinctly American epic which could be compared to the ancient epics. In the preface to the first edition of the book Whitman himself states, "The Americas of all nations upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature, the United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem…America awaits gigantic and generous treatment worthy of it." There are many instances in the poem which call attention to the epic nature of the book. Whitman begins the first book by singing in praise of himself as a 'Democratic self'; He lauds himself in totality, "I celebrate myself, and sing myself… One's self I sing…the Female equally with –Male I sing…the Modern Man I sing."

As Muses are invoked in epic tradition, so does Whitman invoke Muses in *Leaves*. There are instances in the second poem, "As I Ponder in Silence" that as Whitman sits quietly and ponders over his past works;he is visited by the Muse in the form of a Phantom.

> A Phantom arose before me with distrustful as a poet
> Terrible in beauty, age and power,
> The genius of poets of old land…

Heroism, another important feature of epic poetry, finds place in *Leaves of Grass.* However, Whitman's herois the democratic hero of New World. He is America's Everyman. This Everyman is commonplace and stands in stark contrast to the ancient super heroes. However, Whitman's Everyman corresponds to Homer's Odysseus and Virgil's Aeneas as he is a representative of his times just as Odysseus and Aeneas

were of theirs. W.D.O'Conner, Whitman's biographer wrote of *Leaves,* "Behold! in*Leaves of Grass,* the immense and absolute sun-rise, it is our own. The nation is in it, it is distinctly and utterly an American. To understand Greece, study *Illiad*and *Odyssey;* study *Leaves of Grass* to understand America."

After the book came out, Emerson hailed Whitman as the quintessential American hero he had long been waiting for. The first edition of *Leaves of Grass* did not include the author's name and just had his image in "work clothes, a jaunty hat, arms at his side." The final edition of *Leaves of Grass,* also known as the "death bed edition"came out in 1891. When the book came out Whitman wrote to his friend, "*Leaves of Grass* at last complete after thirty three years of hackling at it, all times and odds of my life, fair weather and foul, all parts of the land, and peace and war, young and old." In January 1892 an announcement was published in New York *Herald* which stated,

> Walt Whitman wishes respectfully to notify the public that the book *Leaves of Grass,* which he has been working on at great intervals and partially issued for the past thirty-five or forty years, is now completed, so to call it, and he would like this new 1892 edition to absolutely supersede all previous ones. Faulty as it is, he decides it as by far his special and entire self-chosen poetic utterance.

As mentioned earlier, the book was not well received in the literary circles. Although the book was praised by the Transcendentalists like Thoreau and Emerson, it was not well received by many other writers. John Greenleaf Whittier, for instance, disliked the book so much that he threw his copy of the book into the fireplace. Thomas Wentworth Higginson lashed out at the book saying, "It is no discredit to Walt Whitman that he wrote *Leaves of Grass* only that he did not burn it afterwards." Critic Rufus Wilmot Griswold reviewed the book in *The Criterion* calling it "a mass of stupid filth." However all the negative reviews received by the book did not deter Whitman from expanding and it journeyed over a period of thirty three years and grew from a slender volume of twelve poems to a voluminous book of four hundred poems. As the book developed, the personality of the poet also underwent a sea change and by the time the last edition of the book came out Whitman had moved on from being a man in a neatly trimmed beard to the "Good Gray Poet" of America who with his long flowing beard and a contoured face appeared more intelligent and wise.

The title *Leaves of Grass* is seen a pun by many critics. The word "grass" was often used by publishers of the day to refer to works of minor value and "leaves" was used with reference to the pages on which poems were printed. Whitman may have used this title to show that his poems in the collection were organic and holistic in approach and just as grass spring everywhere, encompassed everyone and everything. His poems are truly democratic as they were essentially of the people, for the people and by a poet who was one of them.

*Leaves of Grass* is a collection of poems which celebrates life with all its complexity. It hovers around themes of democracy, nature, love, friendship, self, soul, and sensuality and perhaps encompasses everything that goes on into the making of life. The book has many layers to it and therefore can be interpreted at many levels. It largely portrays America through Whitman's eyes; America as he saw during his travels through the American frontiers. As the book contains various shades of life, it

appears paradoxical at places. However, Whitman is aware of this contradiction and in stanza 51 of *Leaves of Grass* questions the reader, "Do I contradict myself?" and then goes on to confessing, "Very well then I contradict myself, (I am large, I contain multitudes.) In the words of Mary Smith Whitall, a British friend of Whitman, "You cannot really understand America … without *Leaves of Grass*." The Quaker influence of his parents contributed immensely in the shaping Whitman's thinking and he strove relentlessly all his life to becoming people's poet. It was Whitman's heart's desire to reach out to the American masses through his poetry. As a matter of fact it lingered somewhere in his subconscious that he could not establish a direct connection with people through his poetry and expressed his regret in the following words, "If I had gone directly to the people, read my poems, faced the crowds, got into immediate touch with Tom, Dick and Harry instead of waiting to be interpreted, I'd have had my audience at once." Nonetheless, Whitman remains one of the most representative American poet – a true son of American soil.

## 1.6. GLOSSARY

**Mason Dixon line:** The Mason–Dixon line (or Mason's and Dixon's line) was surveyed between 1763 and 1767 by Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon in the resolution of a border dispute between British colonies in Colonial America. It is a demarcation line among four U.S. states, forming part of the borders of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, and West Virginia (then part of Virginia).

In popular usage, the Mason–Dixon line symbolizes a cultural boundary between the Northeastern and the Southern United States (Dixie). After Pennsylvania abolished slavery, it was a demarcation line for the legality of slavery. However, its latitude was not such a demarcation beyond the Pennsylvania border since Delaware, a slave state, falls north and east of the boundary. Also lying north and east of the boundary was New Jersey where, in reality, slavery existed, in limited numbers, until 1865. It was not until 1846 that New Jersey abolished slavery, but it qualified it by redefining former slaves as apprentices who were "apprenticed for life" to their masters. Slavery did not truly end in the state until it was ended nationally in 1865 after the American Civil War and passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution. The Missouri Compromise Line had a much more definitive geographic connection to slavery in the United States leading up to the Civil War. (source: Wikipedia)

**Quaker:** Quaker is a religious Society of Friends which is also known as the Religious Society of Friends. The Quaker belief holds that Christ descended down from Heaven to teach his people himself. The Quakers believe in establishing a direct relationship with God through Christ. They also focus on a personal and direct religious experience of Christ attained through both direct spiritual experience and the reading of the Bible.

**Self Assessment Questions**

1. Who said, "If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong."
2. Name the newspaper that Whitman founded after he returned to Brooklyn from New Orleans.
3. Who said of *Leaves of Grass,* "It is the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed."
4. What is the last edition of *Leaves of Grass* also known as?

5. Shed light on the state of affairs in America during Walt Whitman's time.
6. Give a biographical account of Walt Whitman's life in your own words.

## 1.7. ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Abraham Lincoln
2. *Brooklyn Freeman*
3. Ralph Waldo Emerson
4. The Deathbed Edition
5. Refer to the discussion at Section 1.2.
6. Refer to the discussion at Section 1.3.

## 1.8. SUMMARY

In this unit you were given a historical background of the Civil War period, a crucial period in American history. Whitman's biography focused on the major events in Whitman's life that helped in the shaping of Whitman as a man and as a writer. The section on Whitman as a poet examined the characteristics of Whitman's poetry like his use of free verse and literary devices like symbols and catalogues. You also saw through various illustrations from Whitman's texts how Whitman was profoundly inspired by mysticism which helped in making him a truly democratic poet. The unit also introduced you to *Leaves of Grass,* Whitman's most central work, a poem which celebrates the America and universality of the cosmos.

## 1.9. REFERENCES

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en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walt_Whitman.
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## 1.10. SUGGESTED READING

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Reynold, David S. *Walt Whitman A Cultural Biography*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Print.

## 1.11. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Whitman as a poet in detail.
2. Write a note on Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* in your own words.
3. Give a biographical account of Whitman in your own words.

**UNIT 2 WALT WHITMAN-II**

## 2.1. INTRODUCTION

This unit is a continuum of the previous unit on Walt Whitman. In the previous unit you were introduced to the life and poetic style of Walt Whitman. You also read a brief write up on his most recognized work *Leaves of Grass*. After reading the previous unit you must have got an idea about Walt Whitman and his poetic style. In this unit we will be taking up four sections from "Song of Myself" which is the longest poem in *Leaves.*

## 2.2. OBJECTIVES

Through a study of this unit you will explore for yourself Whitman's philosophy and his writing style. A thorough study and analysis of the sections prescribed will help you to discover for yourself why Whitman has been conferred with the title 'The Bard of Democracy'. Besides this, the sections of the poems will also be discussed thematically and stylistically which will be useful to you in the understanding of the poet and his poetry in a better manner.

## 2.3. AN INTRODUCTION TO 'SONG OF MYSELF'

"Song of Myself" is the most popular poem in *Leaves of Grass.* It is said that "Song of Myself" 'represents the core of Whitman's poetic vision'. The poem first appeared as the first of the twelve untitled poems in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass.* The poem remained unnamed until the last edition of the book came out in the year 1881-2 in which the poem was called "Song of Myself". The poem received mixed responses. On the one hand it was praised by many for it embodied the American spirit, revealed spiritual truths and in the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson was full of "wit and wisdom." However, there were others who denounced the poem for arousing "homo erotic images". *Leaves of Grass* remained so much in controversy that in 1882 the Boston district attorney threatened to level obscenity charges on the book unless several portions of "Song of Myself"were not changed. The poem is divided into fifty-two sections and deals with a myriad of topics ranging from glorification of the "Self", lineage, animals, quest of the soul to trauma of the slaves. The poem, like most of Whitman's other poems, is written in *verse libre*, a verse form in which abandoned traditional verse form in favour of simple, prose like style for through his poems Whitman wanted to appeal to a mass audience. Moreover, Whitman wanted to encompass the entire nation in his poem and for that reason could not have chosen a verse form with a strict pattern. "Song of Myself" is a poem whichjuxtaposes Realism and Romanticism together. If at places the poem discusses things like the anguish of the runaway slave,

> The runaway slave came to my house and stopt outside,
> I heard his motions crackling the twig of the woodpile,
> Through the swung half-door of the kitchen I saw him, limpsy
> and weak…

at places he soars high into the realms of Romanticism when he, like Blake, sees more wisdom unfolding in a flower than the monotonous books. "A morning-glory at my window satisfies me more than in the metaphysics of books." Whitman's Romanticism gradually takes the shape of Transcendentalism when he starts seeing divinity in everything around him. "Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touched from."

## 2.4. MAJOR THEMES IN "SONG OF MYSELF"

"Song of Myself" is the most central work in *Leaves of Grass* and like Whitman it is extremely diverse in nature. You read in the previous unit that Whitman was a multi-faceted personality who experienced life in all possible ways, and all these experiences ranging from a printer, journalist, journey-man, male nurse, mystic, to name a few, went into the writing of his masterpiece *Leaves of Grass*. 'Song of Myself' is the longest and the most popular poem of the collection. The poem comprises of 52 sections and each section although has a seemingly different theme, is related to the other in some way or the other. As the poet sings of himself and his homeland, it is lyrical in nature and as the poem is the epic of America, it has epical value and significance.

Some of the themes covered in the poem are as follows:

**Selfhood:** The theme of Selfhood is one of the most essential themes of "Song". However, Whitman's concept of "Self" is not to be confused with the identity of a person. Whitman, was a real sage, and unlike any ordinary person did not limit himself from "the top of his hat to his boot-soles". His saw himself as a tiny part of the entire "Kosmos" and like his mentor Emerson, who saw the "Oversoul" connecting all the souls of the world together, identified himself with everything around him. For him the "Self" was not just about the present but he included everything in the past as well as the present in it.

> 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 cane and observe. (Song 33)

Similarly, like the great Mystics, he did not believe in life's isolated experiences but coupled them with the experiences of the entire universe and talked of a Unitive Experience.

> And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the
> women my sisters and lovers,
> And that a keelson of the creation is love,"
> (Song 5)

**America:** *Leaves of Grass* is an American epic and the "Song" is a poemabout America which celebrates American diversity. Americans from all quarters go into Whitman's "Melting pot".

> One of the Nation of the many nations, the smallest the same and
> the largest the same,
> A Southerner soon as a Northerner, a planter nonchalant
> and hospitable down by the Oconee I live,
> A Yankee bound my own way ready for trade, my joints the
> limberest joints on earth and the sternest joints on earth,
> A Kentuckian walking the vale of the Elkhorn in my deer-skin
> leggings, a Louisianian or Georgian,
> A boatman over lakes or bays or along coasts, a Hoosier,
> Badger, Buck-eye;
> At home on Kanadiansnow-shoes or up in the bush, or with
> fishermen off Newfoundland,
> At home in the fleet of ice-boats, sailing with the rest and
> tacking,

At home on the hills of Vermont or in the woods of Maine,
or the Texan ranch,
Comrade of Californians, comrade of free North-Westerners,
(loving their big proportions,)

However, Whitman, through this poem, wants to remind his fellow countrymen that no matter how diverse their country may appear on the surface, they share a common bond which unites them as a nation.

**Democracy:** You read in the previous unit how Whitman supported the cause of abolition of slavery and saw Abraham Lincoln, the Father of Democracy in America as a kindred spirit. Through his poems Whitman popularized democracy and for this reason J. Middleton Murray hailed him as the 'Prophet of Democracy'. Like most of Whitman's other works "Song' also hovers around the theme of Democracy. Whitman explores the theme of Democracy in the hopes, aspirations, dreams, and traumas of American masses. He writes about his fellow countrymen and identified himself with them. Just like his guru Emerson embraced the "common" and the "low", Whitman also declared that "the genius of the United States is…in the common people" whom he calls the "Divine Average". Another interesting characteristic of Whitman's democracy was that for himdemocracy was not just a political way of life but it was an organic way of living. He saw himself living in harmony with everything around him. It was his mission that "…his poems when complete should be a unity, in the same sense that the earth is, or that the human body, (sense, soul, hand, trunk, feet, blood, viscera, man-root, eyes, hair), or that a perfect musical composition is…" As a true champion of democracy, people from all walks of life ranging from the runaway slave, the red-Indian girl, labourers, prostitutes, to name a few, find a place in the poem. With reference to democracy Whitman says,

Endless unfolding of words of ages!
And mine a word of the modern, the word En-Masse.
A word of the faith that never balks,
Here or henceforward it is all the same to me, I accept Time
absolutely.
It alone is without flaw, it alone rounds and completes all,
That mystic baffling wonder alone completes all. (Song 23)

**Glorification of the Physical Body:** As a writer Whitmanhas puzzled many readers. On the one hand he seems to be a mystic soaring high in the realm of spirituality. Just the very next moment he seems to be very much a part of this gross materialistic world again. Thus, he appears self contradictory on many occasions. However, it takes another Whitman to truly understand Whitman's philosophy. Whitman unlike the other spiritualists saw the body and soul as one.

I have said that the soul is no more than the body,
And I have said the body is no more than the soul,
And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's
self is…
In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own
face in the glass,
("Song" 48)

However, for such statements Whitman faced a lot of negative criticism and was labeled an egotist, a heretic and a narcissist. Whitman was also derided for his frank treatment of sexuality in *Leaves.* There are many instances in "Song of Myself"

where sensuality is celebrated by Whitman. Whitman was of the opinion that it is not the physical but the sense of the shame regarding the physical that is condemnable. He considered the sexual experience was essential for spiritual regeneration. Here again Whitman seemed to be inspired by the Bhagwad Gita in which Sri Krishna instructs Arjun to experience things first hand. Whitman saw nothing wrong in sexuality and was of the view that "Man should admitand the glory in the Adamic or Sexual part of his nature. The resurrection of man is in his sexual body." To quote him from "Song":

A woman waits for me—she contains all, nothing is lacking,
Yet all were lacking, if sex were lacking,
or if the moisture of the right man were lacking.
Sex contains all,
Bodies, Souls, meanings, proofs, purities, delicacies, results, promulgations,
Songs, commands, health, pride, the maternal mystery, the seminal milk;

**Mysticism:** As mentioned in the introductory unit on Whitman, Whitman was profoundly influenced by mysticism. He had read the Bhagwad Gita in translation and considered Emerson to be his guru. The mystical aura of the poem speaks volumes of the kind of spiritualist Whitman was. Like a true mystic Whitman bequeaths himself to the dirt only to see himself grow from the grass he loved. However, just as he was denounced for his sexuality, he has equally condemned for his spirituality as well. Whereas William James called his mystical experiences "sporadic type", David Daiches saw him an "Impressionist Prophet." Nonetheless, there have been writers like Anthony Burgess who perceived him as a prophet and a visionary. According to Burgess, "There are passages of Whitman, as of Blake, which have a ring of something from the Apocrypha. This is appropriate for the age of American Vision which produced him or which he - and President Lincoln and Mrs. Beecher Stowe- helped to produce." As mature readers of literature, I leave it to you to explore Whitman through his writings and find your own answer.

## 2.5. SELECTIONS FROM "SONG OF MYSELF"

In the last section you read some of the major themes taken up by Whitman in "Song of Myself." This section will take up three sections from the poem 'Song of Myself" and through a careful examination of these sections you will get a flavour of the poem which could goad you into reading the entire poem. Furthermore, through a detailed analysis of the poem you will get a better understanding of Whitman's writing style and his philosophy.

I CELEBRATE myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.
I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.
My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil,
this air,
Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and
their parents the same,
I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,
Hoping to cease not till death.
Creeds and schools in abeyance,
Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but never

forgotten,
I harbor for good or bad, I permit to speak at every hazard,
Nature without check with original energy.

**2.5.1. Explanation**

This is the introductory stanza of the poem in which Whitman sets on his poetic journey. Whitman begins the poem by glorifying the "Self". However, this glorification of the "Self" can be interpreted at various levels. He is celebrating his physical self, singing the glory of his motherland America in particular and the entire cosmos in totality. Whitman has not undertaking this journey alone but invites the reader also to partake in this journey. At the very advent, Whitman makes it clear to the reader that the reader should believe in the things that the speaker asserts for both the reader and the speaker are the same as that every atom that belongs to him also belongs to the reader. The speaker seems to be in no hurry to embark on this journey as he loiters about at ease, observing a blade of grass and realizing that he is no more than the grass growing everywhere around. The next lines hint that Whitman is addressing an American reader as he reminds themof their common American lineage. "Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same"

At the time of composing this poem the speaker is a young man who is in his late thirties and is keeping and is in good shape. He hopes to venture out on this endless journey and expresses his wish to keep traveling and exploring the uncharted territories. He doesn't wish to cease till his time comes. The speaker wants to set aside all his hitherto acquired knowledge and wishes to start afresh. As he ventures out from into the unknown newworld and he wishes for an open mind, without prejudices and without any prior knowledge.

**2.5.2. Critical Analysis**

This is the opening stanza of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* in which he wishes to undertake a journey with the reader. This journey can be understood at two levels, the tactile and the transcendent. The poem begins with a celebration of the Self. However it is worth noting that Whitman's "Self" is not just limited to his physical body but encompasses the entire cosmos. Furthermore, he sees the whole world as an extension of himself and sees the "Self" as an essential part of the Divine. In this stanza Whitman proclaims, "I loaf and invite my soul", this expression too can be understood at two levels. At one level it could suggest a languorous sensuality while on the other it could stand for the relaxation of mind which is a prerequisite for undertaking a spiritual journey. As you read in the introductory section that Whitman was a mystic, he was well aware of the fact that every particle of his body was formed of this Earth. He was aware that it was not just he but even his ancestors belonged to this Earth and that all of them together were a part of a Greater Existence.

32

I think I could turn and live with animals, they're so placid
and self-contain'd,
I stand and look at them long and long.
They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,
Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of
owning things,
Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands

of years ago,
Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth.
So they show their relations to me and I accept them,
They bring me tokens of myself, they evince them plainly in their possession.
I wonder where they get those tokens,
Did I pass that way huge times ago and negligently drop them?
Myself moving forward then and now and forever,
Gathering and showing more always and with velocity,
Infinite and omnigenous, and the like of these among them,
Not too exclusive toward the reachers of my remembrancers,
Picking out here one that I love, and now go with him on brotherly terms.
A gigantic beauty of a stallion, fresh and responsive to my caresses,
Head high in the forehead, wide between the ears,
Limbs glossy and supple, tail dusting the ground,
Eyes full of sparkling wickedness, ears finely cut, flexibly moving.
His nostrils dilate as my heels embrace him,
His well-built limbs tremble with pleasure as we race around and return.
I but use you a minute, then I resign you, stallion,
Why do I need your paces when I myself out-gallop them?
Even as I stand or sit passing faster than you.

**2.5.3. Explanation**

After spending time in the world of children, slaves and trippers, to name a few, Whitman moves into the realm of animals. Whitman seems to be deeply in love with the animal world and wishes to be an animal himself. Whitman loves animals for their serene and non- interfering nature. Live and let live seems to be their motto. He is so much enamoured of them that he just stands plainly and gazes at them for hours together.To him they appear to be creatures of another realm, far removed from the strife and struggle of the human world. Whitman finds them much more sensible than their grumbling and critical human counterparts. The animals are full of innocence and are unlike the crafty humans who go about erring and weeping for redemption simultaneously. The animals do not belong to the hypocritical world of humans who seldom understand their duty towards their fellow brothers but go about discussing their obligation towards God. Unlike the humans who are preoccupied with the thought of owing things, the animals do not go insane by the drive to conquer others. As Whitman observes the animals, he sees his own lost self in them and he wonders how over the years, caught up in the humdrum of life, he (man) had lost contact with his animal (primitive) nature. Like the grass, the people, and many more things that Whitman encountered during the course of his journey, Whitman also sees the animals as an integral part of the "infinite and omnigenous" cosmos. The animals bring Whitman to the realization that he too was one of them and they are all his long lost siblings and he embracesthem whole-heartedly. Whitman's eyes now fall on a magnificent stallion. He is awestruck seeing his chiseled body and is moved seeing his affection towards him. Like the dog, the horse too is considered to be man's best friend. The horse fought with man in his wars, ploughed his fields, provided

transportation, however, with the advent of modern technology and faster means of locomotion, man ungratefully bid the horse good bye.

### 2.5.4. Critical Analysis

This section, like all other sections of the poem, brings home the point that the whole world is nothing but one large family. Whitman sees the animals as his fellow brothers and traces a common ancestry between them and man before man's evolution and in doing so he endorsed Darwin's third postulate of common descent ie. "Similar organisms are related descending from a common ancestor." In the words of Hertha D. Wong, "Unlike many of his contemporaries, the idea of a mutual progenitor does not shatter the dignity of humankind for Whitman, but rather delights his democratic sensibilities. He finds in the theory of evolution a powerful equalizer because it emphasizes the interconnectedness of everything in the universe." It would be interesting to note that Whitman finds affinity not just with the living things but also with non living things:

I find I incorporate gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss, fruits,
grains, esculent roots,
And amstucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over…

Coming to the poetic diction, like all other sections of the poem, Whitman makes use of colloquial speech. Among the Figures of Speech used by Whitman, we have anthropomorphism in which an interpretation of what is not human is made in human characteristics. For instance, when Whitman says of animals,

"They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God",

he discusses animals in human terms. These lines also show a parallel structure which focus on the same thought. In this section Whitman skillfully uses horse as a symbol of strength, patience and docility and man as a symbol of power,will and craftiness. The horse had been man's natural companion since the beginning of civilization and had served him in war, agriculture, mobility and productivity, thereby contributing human civilization. However, man who is shrewd and mean by nature, soon forgot about the obligations that he owed to the horse and turned away and was labeled as aclumsy beast.

It is worthy to note here that the horse is seen as a symbol of the cosmos as in Brihadaranyaka, the horse is linked to Varuna and is equated to the cosmos. Besides this in the Native American tradition, the horse has long been honoured as a helper, messenger and harbinger of spirit knowledge.

52

The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains
of my gab and my loitering.
I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.
The last scud of day holds back for me,
It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the
shadow'd wilds,
It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.
I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.
You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fibre your blood.
Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you.

**2.5.5. Explanation**

This is the last section of the poem in which Whitman sees a spotted hawk diving across the sky. It seems as though the hawk had been listening attentively to all that Whitman had to say through his song. The hawk seems annoyed with Whitman for all his loitering and gabbing. However, Whitman denies the allegations and fight back with the hawk, telling him that he too possesses the wild and untamable spirit of the hawk. Whitman draws similarity between himself and the hawk when he says that he too soars high up in the sky, singing his song aloud like the hawk. This last stanza of the poem and signifies the end of the song. Whitman says that the inevitable waits for him in the form of the clouds in the Western sky. The 'last scud of the day' also signifies his fate after he has shed his mortal coil. He foresees maggots feeding on his decomposed body while his spirit disappears somewhere in the thin air. Finally, Whitman bids farewell to the world like a Bohemian, waving his flowing hair to the setting sun and signaling his coming. In this section Whitman foresees his physical death and thereby union with the cosmos. Whitman tells his readers that although he will die a physical death, he will continue to survive in some form or the other. Finally, Whitman bequeaths himself to the dirt and sees himself sprouting up again in the form of grass which for him is a symbol of democracy. He gives hope to the reader and says that although he will not retain his earthly identity, he will be omnipresent and if the reader the wishes to meet him, he should look for him everywhere, even under hisboot-soles! He reassures the reader that although he will lose his physical form, he will continue to inspire people and give hope and encouragement to people through his poems.

**2.5.6. Critical Analysis**

This is the last and the most powerful section of the poem for it sums up Whitman's philosophy. After a long and adventurous journey, Whitman appears to be somewhat exasperated, yet he is confident and proud of the legacy that he is about to leaves. In this section Whitman connects to all things and explains it to the reader as to how he will continue to live long after he is physically gone. Here Whitman gives the readers important lessons on temporariness and immortality of life. The section opens with the image of a hawk swooping by, "The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains of my gab and loitering." In these lines, Whitman lashes out at his close-minded critics who like birds of prey have keeneyesight which they use for preying their quarry.However, Whitman is not cowed down by such critics and shouts back his defense. Soon, Whitman realizes that his Song is about to get over. He now conveys his most important message to his readers, the message which epitomizes Whitman.

As Whitman comes to the end of his song, his tone mellows down. Gradually he sees himself mingling with the elements again and thereby unifying with the Universe.Whitman bequeaths himself to dirt he starts seeing himself beyond his

tomb. He sees his decomposing body fertilizing the soil and he shooting up again in the form of the grass he had once loved! In this way Whitman sees himself continuing to live even after his death. He tells the reader that if he wishes to meet him, he should look for him everywhere. His form will have changed, but he will continue to live on in some way or the other.Thus, this stanza is a fitting culmination of Whitman's journey where he sees himself mingling with the cosmos, thereby becoming a larger whole.

In this section, Whitman makes brilliant use of imagery when he compares death to an ending day. Clouds too are personified; "The last scud (cloud) of the day holds back for me." Whitman also makes use of Anthropomorphism ie. Interpretation of what is not human in terms of human characteristics, when the hawk accuses Whitman of his gabbing and loitering. The vocabulary is rich and Whitman makes use of unusual words like scoops, yawp, scud, effuse.

**Self Assessment Questions**

1. Explain the following stanza:
2. Discuss the major themes of 'Song of Myself'.
3. Discuss the element of mysticism in Section 52 of *Leaves of Grass.*
4. Critically analyze Section 32 "I think I could turn and live with animals…Even as I stand or sit passing faster than you." in your own words.

## 2.6. ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Refer to Section 1.5.1.
2. Refer to Section 1.4.
3. Refer to Section 1.5.5. and 1.5.6.
4. Refer to Section 1.5.4.

## 2.7. SUMMARY

In this Unit we discussed a few sections from one of Whitman's most representative poems, "The Song of Myself."Through a study of these sections you glimpsed at Whitman's philosophy and his writing style. You also explored the various themes that occur in this poem.
"Song of Myself" is a celebration in which Whitman commemorates America, the common people, both the sentient and the insentient beings and finally the entire cosmos. The excerpts that you read illustrate the core of Whitman's vision. Through these sections Whitman wants his readers to discover the common thread that binds us all.

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## 2.9. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. How does Whitman portray America in “Song of Myself”?
2. What does Whitman celebrate in the poem “Song of Myself”?
3. Give an estimate of Whitman through a reading of “Song of Myself.”

**UNIT 3 EMILY DICKINSON-I**

## 3.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous two units dealt with Walt Whitman who owing to his democratic outlook in life as well as in his poetry is considered to be the most representative of American poets of all times. This unit will introduce you to another major American poet who through her poems portrayed the inner dimensions of life through deep introspection. This poet is none other than Emily Dickinson, the recluse of Amherst. In this unit you will explore how Emily Dickinson, through her free thinking and bold choices, both in life and works, challenged many of the conventions of the times she lived in. Dickinson was a woman who was truly ahead of her time and ironically enough, was hardly understood until the Twentieth Century. Let us now glance at the poet and some of her most popular poems.

## 3.2. OBJECTIVES

- In this unit you will be introduced to the life of Emily Dickinson.
- You will also be acquainted with the characteristic features of Emily Dickinson's poetry.
- The unit will also shed light on Dickinson's unique poetic technique.

## 3.3. A BRIEF LIFE SKETCH OF EMILY DICKINSON

Emily Dickinson was born in 1830 to Edward Dickinson who was a lawyer and treasurer of Amherst College and Emily Norcross, a gentle and caring housewife. Emily's father was a strict disciplinarian whereas her mother, his exact opposite and was a loving mother and wife. Emily was the second of the three children. Her elder brother Austin like her father grew up to become a famous lawyer and a leading citizen of Amherst while her younger sister Lavinia, who was lovingly, called Vinnie a close confidante.

In her early years, Emily attended district school and Amherst Academy. She later received religious education at Mount Holyoke Seminary. Although Emily was raised as a Calvinist, she could not connect very well with the stereotypical religious beliefs, as a result of which she quit her training at the seminary mid way. Since childhood Emily seemed to be a happy though a quiet child. However, there was something unusual about the young Emily. As Wikipedia puts it, "Dickinson was troubled from a young age by the "deepening menace" of death especially the deaths of those who were close to her." Later on, the theme of death became one of the most prominent motifs of her poems. One could see in Emily the inclination of renouncing the world even at a very tender age. The outside world did not hold much charm to her and she was seldom seen leaving her hometown, Amherst. In the fifty five years of her living years, she had just visited Boston, Philadelphia and Washington D.C. briefly. Rumour has it, her failures in love were also partially held responsible for her aloofness. The death of her father in the year 1874 was also a great blow to her and her sister Vinnie, as just after his death their mother became an invalid. Both the Dickinson sisters never married and devoted themselves to the service of their mother for the rest of her life. On her mother's death Dickinson wrote "We were never intimate ... while she was our Mother – but Mines in the same Ground meet by tunneling and when she became our Child, the Affection came."

Emily Dickinson was a very private poet and never thought of earning money and fame through her writings. Although she wrote over 1800 poems, she hardly got a dozen published in her life time. She was strictly against marketing her poems and

once quipped that publishing was as foreign to her as 'Firmament to Fin". She also expressed her resentment against publication by calling it "the auction of the mind of man". Another reason why she was reluctant about publishing was that she wanted to reach out to her readers on her own terms whereas, her insensitive publishers tried to "smooth out the violent rhythms and the more obscure meanings" in her poems. Nonetheless, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the editor of *Atlantic Monthly*, who too seldom understood her poems, and tried altering her "supposed carelessness of craftsmanship", was her good friend and mentor and she often went to him seeking his opinion about her poems.

As Emily could not find any beauty in the "outside world" she tried looking for it in the world of books and in her soul. In the words of Robert E. Spiller, "Her own retirement from society… was to preserve rather than to renounce the self." As her home was her earthly refuge, she sent a lot of time nurturing her home environment as well. Nature was a comforting mother to her and she spent considerable portions of the day tending her garden. It was here, unlike in Mount Holyoke Seminary, that she could directly communicate with her God. It would be interesting to note that in her lifetime Emily Dickinson was better known as a gardener than a poet. She maintained an impressive herbarium and it is well preserved in Houghton library, Harvard University even today.

As the years rolled by, Emily became more eccentric and shy by nature. She spent the last ten years of her life exclusively in her house and garden and devoted all her creative energies to writing poetry. Her eccentricities became so pronounced that she chose to wear just white dresses and came to be known as "the lady in White". She grew so suspicious of people that even when she suffered from any serious ailment, she allowed the doctors to examine her only from a distance. Gradually she eschewed human company and found companionship in "the hills, the sundown and her dog Carlo…" However, her romance with writing continued even in her last years and she carried on writing, editing and organizing her poems all through her life. She was quite an avid reader and Shakespeare, Charlotte Bronte, Emerson and Wordsworth served as her major influences. As mentioned earlier, Dickinson was not taken seriously by her fellow writers; however, it was Susan Gilbert, her estranged sister-in-law, whom she lovingly called "Sister Sue", who was supportive of her, both as a person and as a writer. She played the role of "the most beloved friend, influence, muse and advisor" to Emily and continued encouraging Emily in her writings even after her relations with Austin went sour.

In the year 1886 Emily Dickinson died of Bright's disease (acute nephritis) at the age of fifty five. She was buried in the family plot at West Cemetery, Amherst. It was only after Emily's death that her sister Vinnie discovered a collection of nearly 18,000 of her poems. Although Vinnie did not share Emily's knack for writing, she was determined to get her sister's poems published. As a result of Vinnie's efforts Emily's poems first saw public light four years after her death. The poems were jointly edited by Mabel Loomis Todd, Austin's mistress and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who edited her poems heavily before publishing them. The poems of Emily Dickinson received mixed reviews. On the one hand there were scholars like the American writer and journalist Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant who paid rich tribute to Dickinson by calling her "daring…one of the rarest flower the stern New England land ever bore." While on the other hand writers like Thomas Bailey Aldrich dismissed her poems outright. Thomas Bailey Aldrich expressed his disapproval of Miss Dickinson's poetic technique in *The Atlantic Monthly* in the following words, "It is plain that Miss Dickinson possessed an extremely unconventional and grotesque fancy. She was deeply tinged by the mysticism of Blake, and strongly influenced by

the mannerism of Emerson ... But the incoherence and formlessness of her — vesicles are fatal ... an eccentric, dreamy, half-educated recluse in an out-of-the-way New England village (or anywhere else) cannot with impunity set at defiance the laws of gravitation and grammar". However, Dickinson started attracting the attention of the twentieth century writers and her talent was appreciated by the New Critics like Yvor Winters, Cleanth Brooks, R.P. Blackmur and Allen Tate appreciated Dickinson's poetry very much. Later twentieth century writers like Vivian Pollak, Martha Nell Smith and Susan Howe analyzed Dickinson from a feminist perspective and established Emily Dickinson as a major American writer. Her poems continue to inspire poets, scholars and feminists even today.

## 3.4. MAJOR THEMES IN THE POEMS OF EMILY DICKINSON

After reading the biographical account of Emily Dickinson you must have developed an idea of the kind of person she was; eccentric, reclusive and a free thinker and all these traits are well reflected in her writings. Emily Dickinson's poems are easily recognizable as she has a unique style. Some of the major themes discussed in her poems are love, death, friends, nature and women. It can be seen that many of the allusions that Emily Dickinson makes use of come from the Bible and classical mythologies. Let us now explore some prominent themes in the Emily Dickinson's poems for ourselves. These themes will help you in discovering the richness and beauty of Miss Dickinson's poems and will further help you in the understanding of her poems in a better manner.

**3.4.1. The theme of love:** Although Emily Dickinson never married, yet the theme of love occurs time and again in her poems. However, her poems are not simply love poems as she couples them with metaphysical conceits and spiritual overtones. This makes her poems somewhat philosophical and ambiguous in nature as a result of which it gets difficult for the average reader to comprehend them. It is mentioned in Emily Dickinson's biographical accounts that although Dickinson never married she was romantically involved with two men in her life. It is also believed that Miss Dickinson had some bitter love experiences in life which led her to becoming a recluse. The intense emotions Emily experienced in her love relationship are vented out through her poems. Her poems such as 'You Left Me' express intense pain that Emily experienced when somebody with whom she was romantically involved and who was very dear to her left her. However, the identity of the person and the reason for separation remains ambiguous in the poem. Nonetheless, it is widely believed that the poem was written for her dear friend Reverend Charles Wadsworth who left for San Francisco in 1862, thus leaving a void in her heart.

> You left me, sweet, two legacies, -
> A legacy of love
> A Heavenly Father would content,
> Had He the offer of;
> You left me boundaries of pain
> Capacious as the sea,
> Between eternity and time,
> Your consciousness and me.

However, it is interesting to note that Dickinson in her poems takes earthly love to a higher pedestal when starts experiencing Divine love in the loss of earthly love and this culminate when she sees herself as the bride of Christ. In this, she can be likened to the Sufis, Mira Bai and the Nuns who seek their beloveds in the Almiighty.

**3.4.2. The Theme of Death:** Death is one of the most prominent themes in Emily Dickinson's poems. Death in its many manifestations; crucifixion, burial, drowning, recur in Dickinson's poems. Very often death is personified as a courtier or as a suitor. "Because I Could not stop for Death-He kindly stopped for me-The Carriage held but Ourselves And Immortality." It is also evident from a close examination of her poems that she viewed death as a "peaceful release from life's pressures and a glorious entry into immortality."According to critics, Emily Dickinson wrote about five hundred poems on the theme of Death. Emily Dickinson's fascination with death seems to be as a result of her disenchantment with life. Moreover, she was troubled from a young age by the "deepening menace' of death especially the ones who were close to her. The theme of death is brilliantly described in poems on death like "Because I could not stop for Death", "I heard a Fly buzz- when I died" and "I heard a Funeral in my Brain".

**3.4.3. The Theme of Immortality:** Wise people say that death is the beginning of eternal life. Like all wise people, Dickinson saw death as a gateway to Immortality. In her poems such as "Because I could not stop for Death" and "I heard a Fly buzz when I died", Dickinson sees immortality closely in relation to death. Dickinson begins the poem "Because I could not stop for Death" by saying

"Because I could not stop for Death-
He kindly stopped for me-
The carriage held but just ourselves-
And Immortality…
…Since then-its centuries – and yet
Feels shorter than the day
I first surmised the Horses' Heads
Were towards Eternity"

Similarly, in the poem "I heard a Fly buzz-when I died" she says that only death has the power to reveal God in all His Glory. "For that last onset, when the king/ Be witnessed in his power…"

**3.4.4. Women:** Feminist streaks can be seen in the life and works of Emily Dickinson. It is interesting to note that Miss Dickinson often referred to as "the recluse of Amherst, Massachusetts", was a feminist in her own right. Being a recluse, she was never associated with any feminist movement, yet she was an "archetypal feminist" as in her own silent ways and through her works (which she never intended to publish) she voiced the concerns of women. Emily Dickinson, through her free thinking and bold choices, both in life and works, challenged many of the conventions of the times she lived in. She was a woman who was truly ahead of her time but ironically enough, was hardly understood by her contemporaries. Through her poems she challenges women's conventional role in society and compels the reader to experience the traumas of being a woman. Dickinson's poem "They Shut Me Up in Prose" expresses her rebellious nature. In this poem she expresses her resentment towards the people who try to restrict her freedom. She begins the poem by saying:

They shut me up in Prose-
And when a little Girl
They put me in the Closet-
Because they liked me "still"-

However, she scoffs at people who try to curtail her freedom by saying that if they they ever peeped into her brain, they would have "seen my Brain-go round". She

further likens herself to a free-willed bird and ironically defies the narrow minded people around her.

In another of her well known poems, "Much Madness is Divinest Sense" she refers to the predicament faced by women in daily life by ironically stating that if a woman conforms to the conventions of society, she is labeled a sane being. However, if she is unwilling to conform and veers off the path designed for her, she is considered insane and needs to be leashed.

Much Madness is divinest Sense.
To a discerning Eye-
Much Sense- the starkest Madness-
'Tis the Majority
Assent- and you are sane-
Demur- you're straight –way dangerous-
And handled with a Chain .

Dickinson wrote a number of powerful verses on women. However, they remained oblivious to the readers at large. However, it was as a result of efforts made by feminist writers like Vivian Pollak, Martha Nell Smith and Susan Howe, whose groundbreaking works on Emily Dickinson helped in establishing Dickinson as a major American writer.

## 3.5. CHARACTERISTICS OF EMILY DICKINSON'S POETRY

Emily Dickinson, like e ecummings, John Ashbery, and other Twentieth Century poets had a unique style of writing. She was extraordinarily gifted and wrote many memorable poems. Among her influences were Shakespeare, Charlotte Bronte and Susan Gilbert, her sister-in-law whom she referred to as "a friend, muse and an advisor." Emily Dickinson had a unique style of writing. She wrote in concentrated phrases and short lines and possessed immense ability to express a great deal in just a few words. As Dickinson's words are loaded with meanings, the reader often finds difficulty in grasping them fully. However, as the meanings get gradually unveiled, her poems make a very lucid and profound reading. Dickinson's poems were also very short and rarely exceeded six stanzas. Her use of punctuation was also very unconventional. She abruptly capitalizes words that seem important to her and leaves the others uncapitalized. She frequently makes use of dashes instead of commas and full stops. Dashes are used by her to separate phrases within a line.

Dickinson's poems are usually short, some consisting of just one or two stanzas. The stanzas are usually quartrains (of four lines) in which the first and third lines consist of four iambic feet and the second and fourth lines have three iambic feet. The iambic foot is a unit of two syllables where the first syllable is unstressed and the second syllable stressed. In her quatrains she usually rhymes only the second and the fourth lines and the rhyme scheme she follows is usually abcb, a feature that characterizes the ballad meter. In her poems Dickinson mainly uses slant rhymes or near rhymes which mean that the two rhyming words rhyme only partially.

In her lifetime Dickinson came out with just one of her publications, a trio of letters called "The Master Letters." As mentioned earlier, Dickinson was very particular about her poems and did not incorporate thecorrections suggested by her peersin her drafts until she was fully satisfied. Whenever Dickinson approached the editors with her poems, they suggested her to bring about certain alterations that would conform the poems to a set pattern, if she wanted to see them published. But Dickinson refused to be cowed down by these conventional editors and chose to remain

unpublished. In 1862 she wrote to the critic and journalist Thomas Wentworth Higginson "…Thank you for the surgery- it was not so painful as I supposed…While my thought is undressed- I can make the distinction, but when I put them in Gown- they look alike, and numb…"

Another unique characteristic of her poems was that she did not give any titles to her poems. Thus, the first lines of her poems become the titles.

On Emily's death, her sister Lavinia found her poems and sent them for publication. The first edition of these poems came out in 1890. In this collection, the editors had changed some of her words, punctuations, and capitalizations thereby giving her poems a conventional look. However, in the later editions, Dickinson's unique style was restored again.

Today, Emily Dickinson's poems are included in the American literature syllabus all across the globe and are memorized and discussed by many of her admirers all over the world.

**Self Assessment Questions**

1. Emily Dickinson was strictly against publication as she felt that it was the auction of _____.
2. In the later years of her life Emily Dickinson came to be known as _____.
3. Who got Emily's poems published after her death.
4. Discuss the theme of Death in Emily Dickinson's poems.
5. Why did Emily renounce herself from the outside world.

## 3.6. ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. the mind of man
2. "The Lady in White"
3. Her sister Lavinia
4. Refer to Section 3.4.2.
5. Refer to Section 3.3.

## 3.7. SUMMARY

In this unit you read about the life of Emily Dickinson. You saw how from a very tender age she was a sensitive child. She carried this sensitivity with her which reflected in her poems as well. During her lifetime she used to be a shy, eccentric spinster and much of a loner. You read examined of the major themes of her poems like love, nature, death, immortality and women. The various techniques Emily Dickinson employs in writing poetry were also taken up in this unit.

## 3.8. REFERENCES

Robinson, John. *Emily Dickinson.*London: Fabre and Fabre. 1986. Print.

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## 3.9. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Give an account of Emily Dickinson's life in your own words.
2. Write a note on the chief characteristics of Emily Dickinson's poetry.

**UNIT 4 EMILY DICKINSON-II**

## 4.1. INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit you were introduced to the life and writing style of Emily Dickinson, the recluse from Amherst, Massachusetts. Emily Dickinson blazed her own trail and succeeded in carving a niche for herself as one of the greatest American poets of all times. Both Whitman, whom you read in the first two units, and Dickinson who followed subsequently, were not just poets but Seers who were on a relentless quest to fathom the deeper meanings of life.

In this unit you will be reading four of Dickinson's most representative poems 'Much Madness is Divinest Sense', 'I heard a Fly buzz when I died', 'The Soul selects her own Society-' and 'The Brain-is wider than the Sky-'. Through a study of these poems you will explore for yourself the profundity of themes and the charmof Ms. Dickinson's poetic style.

## 4.2. OBJECTIVES

- In this unit you will be acquainted with three of Emily Dickinson's poems which will help you in understanding Miss Dickinson as a writer as well as a person.
- You will develop an understanding of Emily Dickinson's poetic style.
- You will recognize and appreciate the uniqueness of Emily Dickinson's poems.

Let us now begin with the first poem, 'Much Madness is Divinest Sense'

## 4.3. 'Much Madness is divinest Sense'

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

### 4.3.1. Introduction to the Poem

In this poem Emily Dickinson talks of the general condition of women of her times. During Emily Dickinson's times, women had no right to property as the husbands had total control of their wives and their property. The condition of unmarried women was no better. It was generally seen that an unmarried woman died at an early age because she was mostly left uncared for. Robert Spiller draws a very moving picture of the women of those days when he says, "Dress and habits allowed no free exercise that could promote your health. Driven in upon herself, she lived intensely in the mirror of her own unrealized passions, and burned out her energies in silence. For her, Emily Dickinson provided a voice…"

Emily Dickinson was a Non Conformist both in religion and in her way of life. A Non Conformist is one who does not conform to, or refuses to be bound by accepted beliefs, customs, or practices. In this poem Emily Dickinson expresses her views as a

Non Conformist and criticizes society's inability to accept free spirited individuals, in particular women.

### 4.3.2. Analysis

In the poem Dickinsontries to redefine things and tries to see the age old conventions of society in new light.

It is often seen that women who are docile often end up becoming a play thing in the hands of their husbands and with the passage of time acquire the irrationality of their husbands. In a subtle manner, she denounces such thick headed people and furtherlaments the fact that such unreasonable people are considered sane by society. Ms. Dickinson says that such people are not just unreasonable but are also selfish and manipulative as they try and govern the world according to their whims and fancies.

Miss Dickinson considers such people, especially the men folk to be dangerous to society as it is their motive to subjugate sound-minded and free-willed women. And if such women do not succumb to them, they label them as insane.

Dickinson laments the fact that such illogical people form a majority in society and have a say in the matters of the world. Dickinson says that if a woman willingly complies with the requirements of her code of conduct, then she is acceptable. However, if she is headstrong and chooses to maintain her individuality, she is considered to be dangerous and is held under control. Through this poem Emily Dickinson lashes out at society's failure to accept women who are radical and independent in their thinking.

In a very satirical manner, Emily Dickinson hits hard at those people who have a wrong attitude towards women in general. She is equally critical of those women who too willingly or unwillingly conform to the stereo typicality of society.

The poem is written in Free Verse and makes use of the third person narration. The various literary device used in the poem are paradox, alliteration, synecdoche and anapest. In a typical Dickinsonianstyle, she uses broken punctuation with frequent use of dashes which reflects her Non Conformist view. Emily was truly a champion of women. Although she was not associated with any feminist movement, she supported the cause of women and raised various issues regarding women in her poems. In life, too, she made bold choices thereby, challenging many of the conventions of her times.

**Self Assessment Questions:I**

1. How is "much madness" viewed in society?
2. How are women treated by society if they do not conform to the rules set for them?
3. Critically analyze the poem in your own words.

## 4.4. I heard a Fly buzz -when i died-

I heard a Fly buzz - when I died -
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air -
Between the Heaves of Storm -

The Eyes around - had wrung them dry -
And Breaths were gathering firm

For that last Onset - when the King
Be witnessed - in the Room -

I willed my Keepsakes - Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable - and then it was
There interposed a Fly -

With Blue - uncertain - stumbling Buzz -
Between the light - and me -
And then the Windows failed - and then
I could not see to see –

### 4.4.1. Analysis

The scene of the poem is very grim as it shows the speaker lying in her deathbed. Indeed, death is a very painful experience both for the dying and for the kith and kin. The atmosphere of the room is just like the lull before a storm. The near and dear ones who had gathered aroundthe death-bed of the speaker had been seeing her suffer for a long time and are shown to slowly coming to terms with the speaker's death. They canbe seen preparing themselves for the inevitable. Having moaned over the speaker's death, theyare nowgetting ready for the speaker's last onset, ie. death as it is considered to be the beginning of an eternal life.

It's interesting to note how not just the relatives but also the dying person now start to view death in new light and view it as a glorious moment; a moment of unification with the Almighty.

The speaker knew that her end was approaching as she had willed her belongings beforehand. And as she wasgetting ready to bid her final adieu, a fly came and disrupted the Union scene with its buzzing. The coming of the fly was unwelcome especially at a time when everyone was waiting for the arrival of the King (the Almighty). The much irritating bee came and stood between the speaker and the Celestial Light. Thereby, severing the much awaited Divine experience. Thus, an ordinary, insignificant fly comes and disrupts the Heavenly Vision as with her coming the windows, which refer to the eyes of the speaker, are shut for ever. Through the means of this poem, Emily Dickinson draws a contrast between the expectation of death and its realistic occurrence.

The fly in this poem severs the divine connection between the dying and the Divine. Critics are of the opinion that it could stand for Beelzebub who is also known as The Lord of Flies. In Milton's Paradise Lost, Beelzebub is Satan's chief lieutenant in hell. Through the fly, Dickinson satirizes the traditional view of Death and the eternal life thereafter.

### Form

The poem is narrated in first form and is written in Trimeter and Tetrameter iambic lines. All the rhymes before the final stanza are half-rhymes (Room/Storm, firm/ Room, be/ Fly) while only the rhyme in the final stanza is a full rhyme (me/ see). The poem skillfully employs literary devices such as synecdoche (eyes used in place of crying relatives), symbols (the fly is used as a symbol or death itself), imagery, metaphor and juxtaposition.

The image of the buzzing fly further suggests the confusion that exists in the dying person's mind.

**Commentary**

In this poem Emily Dickinson gives an account of the last moments of a dying person. The reader almost witnesses a dying scene as the moaning family members, friends and the numbness that the dying person slips into are realistically portrayed. There is a hauntingly mysterious element in the poem for a revelation is about to take place. In all the beliefs, including Christianity, the faith into which Emily Dickinson was born, death brings an assurance for it is considered to be the gateway of Heaven. However, an insignificant fly comes and snaps this Divine connection. Through the intervention of an "insignificant' fly, the whole concept of death being a glorious entrance to immortality is ridiculed.

**Self Assessment Questions: II**

1. What did the speaker hear as she lay dying?
2. What does the speaker compare the stillness of the room with?
3. What comes and disrupts the Heavenly Vision?
4. Briefly comment on the poem in your own words.

## 4.5. The Soul selects her own Society -

The Soul selects her own Society --
Then -- shuts the Door --
To her divine Majority --
Present no more --

Unmoved -- she notes the Chariots -- pausing --
At her low Gate --
Unmoved -- an Emperor be kneeling
Upon her Mat --

I've known her -- from an ample nation --
Choose One --
Then -- close the Valves of her attention --
Like Stone –

### 4.5.1. Analysis

The poem is autobiographical in tone as the choices made by the speaker's soul matches with that of the poetess. The essential feature of this poem is the selectiveness of comradeship. It is human to make selections and just like humans, the soul too makes its own selection. The soul makes a careful survey of the world and then chooses its circle of friends. Once the soul has chosen the few with whom it feel a strong affinity, it shut its doors to the rest of the world without any further considerations. No matter how good the majority of the left out people are, the soul closes its door to them. Besides this, after making the selection, the soul further feels no urge to present itself to the rest of the world. The closed door creates the image of exclusiveness in our minds.

The same idea is carried forward in the next lines also. Once this exclusive selection is made, the soul denies all other entries. The soul remains unmoved by anybody else who wishes to seek entry; even mighty emperors (future suitors) who come riding

their chariots are unable to persuade the soul to open its metaphorical doors to them. The soul described here is an adamant one. It yields to no temptation whatsoever, for it has chosen the one to whom it expresses its fidelity.

It is interesting to note here that Miss Dickinson uses the pronoun 'her' for the soul. Thereby, it becomes more evident that she is referring to her own soul. All these illustrations hint that the poem is an autobiographical one. Moreover, we also know from the life of Emily Dickinson that like the speaker, she too was an extremely personal person who was content in her small circle of friends and sought union with God in her own ways and shut the doors of her life to the rest of the world.

In the final section of the poem there is a hint that the poet has attained emotional and spiritual maturity when she says that she has rejected all others because she has already made her 'One' selection, possibly, referring to God. She ends by saying that once this final choice is made, she shuts the valves of her door like a stone. Thus, the poem ends on a harsh note when the soul's shutting off its doors to the rest of the claimants of her affection is compared to an impervious cold stone.

**Form** The meter of "The Soul selects her own Society-" is irregular and halting. It is written in iambic trimeter with an intermittent line in tetrameter. The rhyme scheme is "abab, cdcd, efef." However, in stanza two, the second and the fourth lines and in the third stanza again the second and the fourth lines are examples of slant rhyme. The poem is typically Dickinsonian in form and style with its use of dashes and unconventional punctuation. The poem makes vivid use imagery and metaphors in expressions such as the soul selecting her own society, shutting of the door, emperor kneeling upon the soul's mat and the closing of the soul's valves like stones.

Note: a valve is a leaf or folding of a double door

**Self Assessment Questions III**

1. Who could the emperors mentioned in the poem possibly stand for?
2. Do you agree that there is an autobiographical note in poem? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Write a note on the form of the poem.

## 4.6. The Brain –is wider than the Sky-

The Brain—is wider than the Sky—
For—put them side by side—
The one the other will contain
With ease—and You—beside—

The Brain is deeper than the sea—
For—hold them—Blue to Blue—
The one the other will absorb—
As Sponges—Buckets—do—

The Brain is just the weight of God—
For—Heft them—Pound for Pound—
And they will differ—if they do—
As Syllable from Sound—

**4.6.1.Analysis**

In this poem Emily Dickinson marvels at the vastness of the human brain and interestingly enough compares it with some immeasurable things that we see around us. Before we begin with the poem, it would be interesting to note that an adult human brain just weighs an average of about three pounds however, because of the immense possibilities it holds, it is one of the most marvelous things to be ever created.

In the first stanza, Miss Dickinson compares the immensity of the human brain to the infinity of the sky. In her view, the brain is vast and limitless like the sky and for this reason can be compared with it. She imagines that if the sky and the brain were to be placed side by side, the sky, although vast, will easily fit into the brain. She says so because she feels that the sky is something abstract whereas the brain is ever expanding with experience and knowledge and for this reason, the sky can easily fit into the brain. Furthermore, both the sky and the brain, because of their limitlessness complement each other and can benefit from each other in many ways; there has always been an aspiration in the human mind to achieve the greatness of the sky and the humans have attained the vastness of the sky through imagination and transcendence. Similarly, the sky also possesses its enormity because it is the humanbrain that has given it this attributes.

Next Dickinson moves on to comparing the human brain with the deep blue sea. She asserts that the brain is deeper than the deep blue sea for the brain can absorb the sea just as sponges and buckets absorb water. The brain has tremendous absorptive power for it can take things from myriad sources and assimilate those things into itself. Just as the sea has depth, the human brain too can attain gravity by building up profundity of thoughts and emotions.

In the final stanza Dickinson invokes a very interesting image when she states that the brain is "just the weight of God". Thereby, hinting that the human brain is the creation of God just like the sky and the sea. She says that if the weight of the two is measured, the difference between the two will be the same as betweenthat of a syllable and a sound. This is a remarkable comparison for by looking at a syllable, one knows how it is pronounced. However, it cannot contain a sound. It should be noted here that both syllable and sound are closely related. However, the difference lies in their tangibilities. It is believed that God created man in His image. Therefore, the brain can be considered to be a smaller part of God's unlimited possibilities. Just as God creates on a higher level, the human brain creates in a limited field, on a lower level. Just as a syllable can be bound but a sound cannot, similarly the human brain, like a syllable is limited in scope and is comprehensible. However, God who is unfathomable cannot be contained like sound.

**Form**

The poem consists of three four-line stanzas metered iambically, with tetrameter used for the first and the third lines of each stanza and trimeter used for the second and the fourth lines. The rhyme scheme used in each stanza is 'abcb'. The poem makes use of full rhyme in words such as (side/beside), (Blue/do), (Pound/Sound). Like a typical Emily Dickinson poem, the poem makes use of dashes, which interestingly forms a rhythmic device in her poems. Miss Dickinson also displays her acumen in making brilliant use of literary devices such as imagery and fascinating figures of speech.

**Commentary**

Just like most of Dickinson's earlier poems like "Success is counted sweetest", "The Brain-is wider than the- Sky" is also written in homiletic mode. It shows the similarity between the human brain and natural elements like the sky and the sea. In this poem Emily Dickinson carefully examines the scope and range of human brain which in many ways is wider than the sky and deeper than the ocean. In the final stanza Dickinson concludes that the brain is just the weight of God for He is the power behind its creation. Nonetheless, in making this comparison, Dickinson astonishingly concludes that there is but a difference between human brain and God and that difference is the same as is between a syllable and a sound.

**Self Assessment Questions: IV**

1. What is the human brain compared to in the first and the second stanzas?
2. How does the human brain differ from God?
3. Summarize the poem in your own words.

## 4.7. LET US SUM UP

This unit took up four of Emily Dickinson's well known poems namely, 'Much Madness is Divinest Sense', 'I heard a Fly buzz when I died', 'The Soul selects her own Society-'and 'The Brain-is wider than the Sky-'. Through a careful study of these poems you developed an understanding of the poetic style of Emily Dickinson. All the poems are typically Dickinsonian in theme and style. The themes selected by Dickinson and the style adopted by her also shed light on the keen insight possessed by Miss Dickinson. The poems reflect the unconventional and non conformist approach Miss Dickinson had in life as well as in her writings. In all the poems she skillfully makes use of various literary devices such as paradox, imagery, symbols, alliteration, metaphor, to name a few.

**Answers to Self Assessment Questions:**

**I**

1. Divinest Sense
2. Women who do not conform to the rules set for them are labeled as insane and dangerous and are held under control.
3. Refer to Section 4.3.2.

**II**

1. The speaker heard the buzzing of a fly.
2. The speaker compared the stillness of the room with the stillness between the heaves of storm.
3. A buzzing fly
4. Refer to section 4.1.

**III**

1. The emperors in the poem possibly stand for the speaker's future suitors.
2. Refer to section 4.5.1.
3. Refer to section 4.5.1.

**IV**

1. The poet compares the human brain to the sky in the first stanza and to the sea in the sea in the second stanza.
2. Refer to Section 4.6.1.
3. Refer to Section 4.6.1.

## 4.8. REFERENCES

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Spiller, Robert.*The Cycle of American Literature.*New York. 1967. Print.
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## 4.9. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. What is the central theme of the poem 'Much madness is divinest Sense'?
2. Critically examine the poem 'The Brain - is wider than the Sky-'
3. Comment on the poem 'The Soul selects her own Society'.
4. In the poem 'I heard a Fly buzz- when I died', what does the speaker's attitude towards death seem to be? How does this attitude reflect in her awareness of the fly?

**UNIT 5 ROBERT FROST-I**

## 5.1. INTRODUCTION

The third great American verse-writer that you have in your course after Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson is Robert Frost. You are now aware of the keen struggles fought for American democratic ideals and Whitman's iconic participation in it. You also are by now quite familiar with the dramatic and paradoxical poetry of Emily Dickinson in shaping typical American poetic sensibilities. After going through richly diversified poems of Whitman and Dickinson, one wonders what else can there is to be seen in American poetry? This is where Robert Frost's poetry mesmerizes us with its deceptive simplicity. His unique contribution to American literature is nothing short of miracle. Robert Frost is arguably the most popular and prolific American Poet of the twentieth century. Given his immense popularity, it is a remarkable testimony to the range and depth of his achievement that he is also considered by critics to be one of the greatest modern American poets. Most Americans recognize his name, the titles of and lines from his best known poems, and even his face and the sound of his voice.

He published his works initially in England before it was published in America. He is quite popular among readers for his realistic depictions of rural life. He sang of rural New England area in a typical American colloquial tone which he made his own. 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.

His poetry has evolved from strength to strength. If we compare his 1st poetry collection "A Boy's Will" with that of his later poetry collection, we see a remarkable notice in his poetry style. His poetic genius underwent a slow and gradual evolution. As written earlier, he is a master in illuminating a rural setting with a unique thought-provoking philosophy. He wrote meditative verses rich with duplicity of meaning. He imparts a skillful combination of an outer lightness with an inner gravity of brooding thoughts. He pictures man as a stranger in an indifferent if not actually hostile world.

He depicted the central facts of modern experience like uncertainty, painful sense of loss and disintegration of human values. In his poetry we find the nature-treatment as quite unique and unconventional. However all the critics unanimously agree that all of his poetry draws heavily from New England. We will see the major features of his poetry in the next sections of this unit.

## 5.2. OBJECTIVES

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

- Understand the broader poetic trends of early 20th century American poetry.
- Understand the influences in the making of Robert Frost as a great poet.
- List the various thematic features of Robert Frost's poetry.
- Draw out a concrete overall estimate of Robert Frost as one of the greatest poets of American Literature.

## 5.3.A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURYAMERICAN POETRY

America is a vast continent and from the very beginning its literature is characterized by immense diversity. It developed along regional lines and expressed local heterogeneity. The American social, cultural and economic scene at the turn of the 20th century is one of great complexity and diversity. This complexity and diversity

is fully mirrored in the literature of the age and more so in American poetry. Most of the literary theorists in fact agree that this poetic renaissance ushered in a fresh wave of poetry to the rest of English speaking nations including of course the Great Britain.

The movement called imagism attracted much public attention. The central canon of this movement is that the poet evokes hard, clear, concentrated images in the language of common speech. They turned to Japanese, Greek and Rome for inspiration and technique. Ezra Pound is generally associated as the pioneer of this movement. Some of the other famous exponents include T.E. Hulme, Amy Lowell etc.

There was unprecedented number of poets who came into prominence like T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Carl Sandburg and Robert Frost to name a few out of the galaxy of renowned poets. There poetry was very obscure and concentrated largely on inner life of the psyche. There was much experimentation with new techniques and new verse forms. As E.S. Oliver succinctly puts it, "Poetry moved towards the development of techniques of dissociation, dissonance, disharmony, discontinuity; it broke with familiar patterns and images and language."

## 5.4. ROBERT FROST: HIS LIFE AND HIS WORKS

Robert Frost (March 26, 1874 – January 29, 1963) was born in San Francisco, California, to journalist William Prescott Frost, Jr., and Isabelle Moodie. His mother was of Scottish descent, and his father descended from Nicholas Frost of Tiverton, Devon, England, who had sailed to New Hampshire in 1634 on the Wolfrana.

As a poet Frost had a wonderful career but his life was as dramatic as his poems. After his college he tried to earn a living in various ways. He worked in mills, took to newspaper reporting and taught in schools.

At the beginning, poetry was just a leisure activity for him. In 1894 he published his first poem "My Butterfly, An Elegy" in his high school's magazine. On 19 December 1895 he married his beautiful school-fellow, Eleanor White and tried to lead a settled life as a school teacher. For more than two years he helped his mother manage a small private school in Lawrence, then spent two year as a student at Harvard College, hoping to prepare himself for college teaching. His life took twist and turns. Eliot his first child was born on September 1896 but he soon died from Cholera in July 1900. This was the first of many family tragedies that Frost would endure.

Frost attended Harvard University from 1897 to 1899, but he left voluntarily due to illness. Shortly before dying, Robert's grandfather purchased a farm for Robert and Eleanor in Derry, New Hampshire; and Robert worked the farm for nine years, while writing early in the mornings and producing many of the poems that would later become famous. Ultimately his farming proved unsuccessful and he returned to the field of education as an English teacher at New Hampshire's Pinkerton Academy from 1906 to 1911, then at the New Hampshire Normal School (now Plymouth State University) in Plymouth, New Hampshire.

In 1912 Frost sailed with his family to Great Britain, settling first in Beaconsfield, a small town outside London. His first book of poetry, A Boy's Will, was published the next year. In England he made some important acquaintances, including Edward Thomas (a member of the group known as the Dymock Poets), T.E. Hulme, and Ezra Pound. Frost befriended many contemporary poets in England, especially after his first two poetry volumes were published in London in 1913 and 1914 (North of Boston).

As World War I began, Frost returned to America in 1915 and bought a farm in Franconia, New Hampshire, where he launched a career of writing, teaching and lecturing. This family homestead served as the Frosts' summer home until 1938. It is maintained today as The Frost Place, a museum and poetry conference site. During the years 1916–20, 1923–24, and 1927–1938, Frost taught English at Amherst College in Massachusetts, notably encouraging his students to account for the myriad sounds and intonations of the spoken English language in their writing. He called his colloquial approach to language "the sound of sense."

In 1924, he won the first of four Pulitzer Prizes for the book New Hampshire: A Poem with Notes and Grace Notes. He would win additional Pulitzers for Collected Poems in 1931, A Further Range in 1937, and A Witness Tree in 1943.

For forty-two years—from 1921 to 1963—Frost spent almost every summer teaching at the Bread Loaf School of English of Middlebury College, at its mountain campus at Ripton, Vermont. He is credited as a major influence upon the development of the school and its writing programs. The college now owns and maintains his former Ripton farmstead as a national historic site near the Bread Loaf campus.

Frost received over 40 honorary degrees, including ones from Princeton, Oxford and Cambridge universities, and was the only person to receive two honorary degrees from Dartmouth College. During his lifetime, the Robert Frost Middle School in Fairfax, Virginia, the Robert L. Frost School in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and the main library of Amherst College were named after him.

Frost was 86 when he read his poem "The Gift Outright" at the historic inauguration of President John F. Kennedy on January 20, 1961. He died in Boston two years later, on January 29, 1963, of complications from prostate surgery. He was buried at the Old Bennington Cemetery in Bennington, Vermont. His epitaph quotes the last line from his poem, "The Lesson for Today" (1942): "I had a lover's quarrel with the world."

**Self Assessment Questions I**

1. What do you mean by Imagism? Name some famous exponents of it.
2. What were the noticeable formative influences in the poetry of Robert Frost?
3. List the critical phases in the development of Frost's poetic career.

## 5.5. ROBERT FROST AS A MODERN POET

Frost's poetry portrays the disintegration of values in modern life and the disillusionment of the modern man in symbolical and metaphysical terms. It is because most of his poems deal with persons suffering from loneliness and frustration, regrets and disillusionment which are known as modern disease. In "An old Man's Winter Night", the old man is lonely, completely alienated from the society, likewise, the tiredness of the farmer due to over work in "Apple-Picking" as a result of it his yielding to sleep:

> For I have too much
> of apple-picking: I am overtired
> of great harvest I myself desired

Frost has commented on the misery of the modern man which is due to his going away from nature. His metaphysical treatment of the subject in some of his poems is also an evidence of his modernity. In "Mending Walls", Frost juxtaposes the two

opposite aspects of the theme of the poem and then leaves it to the reader to draw his own conclusion. The conservative farmer says: "Good fences make good neighbor" And the modern farmer says: "Something there is that doesn't love a wall."

The term modernity simply demands the presence of irregular verse forms, fragmentary sentences, learned allusions, ironic contrasts, erudite and abstruse symbolism in poetic composition. Actually modernism implies a keen perception into the modern psyche, the modern consciousness. However, there are two schools of critic with their different views on considering Robert Frost to be a modern poet. T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Ezra Pound and W. B. Yeats, the contemporaries of Frost, do not regard him as a modern poet but some other 20th Century critics,Cleanth Brooks, Trilling and Lynen establish him to be a modern poet.

Robert Frost's world is rural. Undoubtedly he retires into countryside and such retirement is not a romantic escape from the unpleasant realities of modern life rather it provides him with a point of view, a frame of reference, for studying and commenting on the facts of modern life. In spite of the Pastoral element predominant in Frost's poems, he is still a modern poet because his poetry has been endowed with the awareness of the problems of man living in the modern world dominated by Science and Technology. Frost studies life and strips down to its elemental simplicity - and this simplicity is his norm of judgment - not only the urban life, but of life in general.

Frost has used a method of indirection as used by modern poets like T. S. Eliot and others. In "The Waste Land" Eliot juxtaposes the present and the past. The past here is definitely meant to reveal and interpret the present. Likewise, in Frost's poetry, the rural and the urban are juxtaposed – the rural serving as a standard for and comment on the urban. The metaphoric poem, "Mending Wall" shows the necessity of walls, of clear demarcations of property is emphasized, implicitly criticizing the craze for breaking down walls and imposing brotherhood.

Frost uses pastoral technique only to evaluate and comment on the modern lifestyle. His pastoralism thus registers a protest against the disintegration of values in the modern society and here he is one with great poets of the modern age like T.S.Eliot, Yeats and Hopkins. Another poetic technique adopted by Frost which makes him a modern poet is symbolism. "The Road Not Taken" symbolizes the universal problem of making a choice of invisible barriers built up in the minds of the people which alienate them from one another mentally and emotionally though they live together in the society. Similarly the Birch trees in "Birches" symbolize man's desire to seek escape from the harsh suffering man to undergo in this world.

Frost has an affinity with the modern poets in style and symbolic technique. "Fire and Ice" is a symbolic poem. The speaker of the poem is dwelling on the two theories for the end of the world. Some contend that the world will perish in fire symbolizing passion & ice symbolic of hatred. But the speaker favours passion and upon second thought; he adds that hatred is powerful enough to destroy the world. They both are capable of destroying the world. The underlying symbolic meaning is that the intensity of man's passions, which makes him human, creates the inhuman forces of disaster. The speaker says:"Some say the world will end in fire,Some say in ice."

Like many other modern poets, Frost deals with the tension and problems of modern people. Just as in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by T. S. Eliot, the protagonist is suffering from indecision to propose the woman he loves, so in "Road Not Taken" by Frost, the speaker hesitates to choose one of the two roads. But here he becomes successful in electing one of them after a long period of hesitation. The

speaker's hesitant mind is expressed:"And be one traveler, long I stoodAnd looked down one as far as I could"

Frost's poetry gives evidence that he believes in some kind of God, and that he adheres to a strict sense of values, but that his beliefs are not those of the traditional Christian. He rejects the acceptable idea of heaven. In "After Apple Picking" he suggests that man's life after death is akin to the hibernation of an animal. He also rejects the rigid orthodoxy which he sees in most religions. So there is not denying of the fact that such an approach to religion is modern.

In fact the world of nature in Frost's poetry is not a world of dream. It is much more harsh, horrible and hostile than the modern urban world. Hence he uses his pastoral experiences to comment on the human issue of modern world. His realistic treatment of Nature, his employment of symbolic and metaphysical techniques and the projection of the awareness of human problems of the modern society in his poetry justly entitle him to be looked up to as modern poet.

## 5.6. ROBERT FROST AS A NATURE POET

Frost found beauty and meaning in commonplace objects, such as a drooping birch tree and an old stone wall, and drew universal significance from the experiences of a farmer or a country boy. Most of his poems have a New England setting and deal with the theme of man's relationship to nature.

The influence of nature in Robert Frost's works paints a picture filled with symbolism. You can feel the speakers awe and reflective peace when looking into the woods that night. He doesn't know the owner of the land but is still drawn to the beauty of the scene. Nature poet Robert Frost gives a scene that is taken into the reader and digested for a time in the speaker's mind. It shows us that it is all right to take a minute out of a hurried hour and reflect upon what is around you, whether it is a snowy wood or a quite room. The extreme fascination and acute love to nature makes him a great poet of nature.

The reader can tell that Frost does love water. He also likes the power of it and expressing to through nature. He also brings up other points of nature, but it always has water. The water is always breaking down cliffs, beaches and boulders.

One point of view on which almost all the critics agree is Robert Frost's minute observation and accurate description of the different aspects of nature in his poems. Schneider says: "The descriptive power of Mr. Frost is to me the most wonderful thing in his poetry. A snowfall, a spring thaw, a bending tree, a valley mist, a brook, these are brought into the experience of the reader." In "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" he says:

> The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,
> But I have some promises to keep
> And miles to go before I sleep
> And miles to go before I sleep….

These lines depict not only the beauty and the mystery of the snow filled woods which hold the poet almost spell-bound but also describe the helplessness of the poet who has no time because of his social commitments. Thus the beauty of Nature and obligations of human life are treated by Frost as two aspects of poet's one whole experience in these lines.

Although Frost's verse is lyrical, he is often considered a dramatic nature poet. One of his most admired poems, "The Mending Wall", describes the conflict that arises

between the poem's narrator and his neighbor over rebuilding a wall that separates their farms. The neighbor holds the traditional opinion that "Good fences make good neighbors," but the narrator believes that walls are unnecessary and unnatural between people who should trust each other.

Nature is a dominant subject in the poetry of Robert Frost. In the epitaph that Robert Frost proposed for himself, he said that he had "a lover of quarrel with the world." This lover's quarrel is Frost's poetic subject, and throughout his poetry there are evidences of this view of man's existence in the natural world. His attitude towards Nature is one that of true and mutual respect. He recognizes and insists upon the boundaries which exist between individual man and the forces of Nature. There is almost nothing of the mystic in Frost. He does not seek in Nature either a sense of oneness with all created things or union with God. There is nothing Platonic in his view of life, because it is a foreshadowing of something else.

As regards Frost's attitude or philosophy of nature, it is quite different from that of Wordsworth and the other English romantic poets. Nature for him is not a kindly mother, watching benevolently over man; neither does she have any 'holy plan' of her own for the good of mankind. At best, nature is indifferent, but more often than not he finds something sinister and hostile lurking beneath the apparent calm and beauty of nature. This something sinister is constantly breaking out at the most unexpected moments, and in a most terrifying way. As we have already noted above, in Two Tramps in Mud Time, frost lurks in the earth beneath, and suddenly puts forth, "its crystal teeth". In Bereft the poet finds something, sinister, in the hissing of the leaves. Nature is hostile and alien, and man must constantly struggle against her for survival. Nature is bleak and harsh and the bleakness of nature is constantly used to emphasize human loneliness.

In short, Frost is a great and original natural poet. His nature-treatment is unique and distinctive in many ways. He does not take any theory of nature for granted. Rather, he writes from his own personal experience and observation. His approach is pragmatic and realistic.

## 5.7. ROBERT FROST AS A REGIONAL POET

Frost is a great regional poet. The region north of Boston forms the background to his poetry. Its people, its scenes and sights, appear and reappear in successive poems, and impart a rare continuity and unity to his works. It is this particular region that Frost has made his own. He loved it and knew it intimately, and this firsthand knowledge makes him interpret it so realistically and accurately. Above all, Frost is the poet of the rural New England. He knew every part of this limited world, and he renders it in words with a brilliant, off-hand ease. His characters are all New Englanders, and he has succeeded in capturing the very tone, diction, idiom, and rhythm of Yankee speech. He writes of a particular region, but from the particular he constantly rises to the universal and the general. He writes of the joys and sorrows, loves and hatreds, of the simple Yankees, but he also shows that such joys and sorrows, loves and hatreds are common to all humanity. Regionalism in his hands acquires a universal appeal.

The particular region which he has selected for his purposes is New England and he has represented and interpreted this region, accurately and precisely, in one poem after another. Its physical features, its people, its ways and manners, its habits, traditions, customs, beliefs, and codes of conduct, appear and reappear in one poem after another. But he does not render and interpret the whole of New England. He deals only with that part of it which lies to the north of Boston. The other parts of New England such as Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Maine appear only rarely in

his poems. Further, the industrial sites and fishing villages are ignored by him. There is no mention of railway train and automobiles, and factories giving out smoke and gas, or of radios or of large scale migration to the cities. As Granville-Hicks points out he is not a poet of skyscrapers, factories, machines, mechanics and truck-drivers, but of fields and brooks, and of farmers at their humble tasks. His subject is the region north of Boston and of that region also, only the rural areas and farms and villages. He takes one particular kind of locality to stand for New England as a whole, one particular kind of Yankee to stand for the essential character of the New England people. In New England, there are also Poles and French, Canadian but they are ignored by the poet. As J.F. Lynen points out, "He chooses, not simply what is real in the region, what is there, but what is to his mind the most essential, what is representative. The delimiting of rural New England is only the first step. Even within the area we still find the great mass of detail suppressed in favor of a few significant local traits. Now it should be clear that this process of representing the locality as a whole through a limited set of visual images and of portraying the culture and mentality of the region through a particular kind of character is really a mode of symbolism. What emerges from Frost's scrupulous selection is not reality itself, but a symbolic picture expressing the essence of that reality. Frost's regionalism is both symbolic and creative."

It is the region which lies north of Boston which forms the background to the poems of Frost, "It is a landscape, pearly in tone, and lonely to those who do not recognize its friendliness. It is a landscape broken in outline, with views but not giant views, mountains but not too high ones, pastures, swamps, farms deserted and farms occupied." According to Malcolm Cowley, Frost is the poet "neither of the mountains nor of the woods, although he lives among both, but rather of the hill pastures, the intervals, the dooryard in autumn with the leaves swirling, the closed house shaking in the winter storms." In the same way, he is not the poet of New England in its great days, or in its late nineteenth-century decline; he is rather a poet who celebrates the diminished but prosperous and self-respecting New England of the tourist home and the antique shop. It is a region where people have lived long enough to build granite defenses for themselves. Nowhere else in America can the people have as a saying, "Good fences make good neighbors". Everything that he describes is true. The broken walls, the wood pile that, "warmed the frozen swamp as best as it could", the white tailed bird whose suspicion was that of, "one who takes everything said as personal to himself" all these, and many others, can easily be recognized by anyone who travels through this part of the country.

The scenery he describes, the people and their occupations which he presents and the language which he uses, are all peculiar to this selected region. The massive birches swinging in fierce winter storms is a common sight in New England and Frost has immortalized it in his famous poem The Birches Blueberries brings out the skill and vividityof New England berry-pickers. Similarly, true is Frost's picture of the tired fanner going home for rest after the day's labor of picking apples:

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
Towards heaven still
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill
Beside it, and there may be two or three
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.
But I am done with apple-picking now.
Essence of winter sleep is on the night.
The scent of apples; I am drowsing off.

Thrift is the recognized trait of the inhabitants of New England.

> Perhaps the rugged land fostered in the settlers of New England an attitude of making the most of what was available to them. Whatever the causes, the Yankees early developed the fine art of making the best of things. Thrifty and hard-working, they had little time for idle talk.

The farmer in Blueberries, who fed his entire family on blueberries, is thrifty, one who has put to use Shakespeare's adage, "Sweet are the uses of adversity":

> They eat them the year round, and those they don't eat
> They sell in the store and buy shoes for their feet.

In a similar way, the farmer in Mending Wall, who would say no more than, "Good fences make good neighbors", is not being silly or adamant, but is merely trying to make secure for himself the land he has acquired, the garden he has reared, through hard work and dedication. The swinger of birches too has the New England spirit of adjustment in him. He lives far away from the city where alone he could learn to play baseball. So he makes do with what was at hand—playing on the birches:

> Some boy too far from town to learn baseball
> Whose only play was what he found himself
> Summer or winter, and could play alone.
> One by one he subdued his father's trees
> By riding them down over and over again.

The idea of adjustment to situations and determination in the face of adversities is again the key-note of Mowing. Two Tramps in Mud Time illustrates the resourcefulness—the Yankee ingenuity—of the tramps in making theirs what others has a right to. In The Code, the hired man will not be taught how best he should work and drives a severe lesson into his master for having attempted to teach him. The Vanishing Red studies a situation where the farmhand is a Red Indian. It is Yankee speech that we constantly hear in Frost's poetry. He has succeeded in capturing the very tone, accent, and rhythm, idiom and phraseology, of the conversation of New Englanders. The very spirit of the place is enshrined in his pages.

Another important aspect of Frost's regionalism is the fact that he shows the environment, the region, and acting on the mind of his people, and determining their natures and attitudes. Thus a strong link is established between the individual mind and the land itself. He constantly associates aspects of landscape and psychological traits. Says Lynen,

> The clear, frank gaze of the Yankee persona is related to the chill air of New England and his strength of mind to its rugged terrain, in the same subtle way that Michael's courage and dignity are related to the grandeur of the Lake Country Mountains. Since the Yankee mind reflects the landscape, the whole sense of values which forms the centre of this mentality seems to have an organic relation to the land.

In other words, Frost's regionalism is thoroughly social. It is concerned more with the rural way of life than with its scenery, more with the sense of values shared by the local society than with the intuitions of a single mind. Not that the community and the individual are opposed: the speaking voice in Frost's lyrics is certainly that of a particular person, but this person is also the spokesman for a community.

To conclude, Frost's regional art is creative and symbolic. Frost achieves universality by the simplest of means and raises regionalism to the level of the highest art. He

explores other worlds and other levels of experience, through the rural world that he has chosen as the basis of his poetry.

**Self Assessment Questions II**

1. Discuss the estimate of Robert Frost as a Modern poet.
2. Delineate the unique features of the Nature Poetry of Robert Frost.
3. Outline the various factors which make Robert Frost as arguably the greatest Regional poet of America.

## 5.8. SUMMING UP

After going through this unit now you know that Frost's poetry is richly diversified and highly meritorious. His technique of communication is essentially symbolic and oblique. His poetry reveals layers within layers of meaning on a careful reading. He wrote in the natural, everyday speech of New Englanders, to capture the speaking voice with all its rich inflections & intonations. There is constant expansion and extension of intentions and much is conveyed within a little space.

On the deeper probing of the seemingly nonchalant verses we find the simmering themes of isolation & alienation. This concern with barriers resulting in loneliness is a recurrent theme in his poetry. In the manner of the metaphysical poets he juxtaposes such opposites as man and nature, the rural and the urban, and the regional and universal. He seeks to achieve a synthesis of such opposites like that of the modern poets who were indirect and symbolic. These poems simply highlight the conflicts of modern values and do not give any judgment on it.

In his Nature poems too, he does not attribute a soul or personality to nature. His natural world is impersonal, unfeeling and dramatic. Man must constantly struggle to conquer nature's wilderness and subdue them to his use. In most of the Nature poems the resemblances between man & nature are explored at length. They serve as ironical comments on man and his activity. Realism is a marked feature of Frost's nature poetry. Frost seeks to study everyday activity of man and its relation to his physical environment with searing honesty.

All of his seemingly regional poems have rich universal implications. He deals with a particular region and makes it an instrument to light up the whole argument. In this way the region north of Boston become symbolic not only of New England as a whole, but also of human life at large. The greatness of his regionalism lies in the fact that he surmounts the limitations of regional art, and makes it universal in appeal. There is much sifting and selecting of material, yet the impression of wholeness is created making him arguably the greatest regional poet of America.

## 5.9. ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT

**I.**

1. Refer to the discussion at 5.3.
2. Refer to the discussion at 5.4.
3. Refer to the discussion at 5.4.

**II.**

1. Refer to the discussion at 5.5.
2. Refer tothe discussion at 5.6.
3. Refer tothe discussion at 5.7.

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## 5.9. TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Give an account of the evolution of Frost's poetic genius.
2. To what extent is it correct to describe Frost as a "modern" poet? Give reasons to support your answer.
3. Discuss Frost's treatment of Nature, bringing out clearly the typical qualities of him as a Nature-poet.
4. Bring out the salient features of Robert Frost as a regional poet.

**UNIT 6 ROBERT FROST-II**

## 6.1. INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit you have studied all the unique features of poetry of Robert Frost. In the poems that have been selected in this unit, a special attention has been paid that they become the representative sample of his unique features. According to the most pundits, poetry chiefly serves two functions: to delight us and to instruct us. Frost's poetry does both and with some aplomb.

In all of his poems he gently prods on the established stream of thoughts. He has this uncanny knack of finding out uncommon from the seemingly common observations. His piercing observations go far beyond the clichés of the normal poems. He has this ability to make out universal implications from the regional settings of his poems.

To tag Robert Frost under the cramped titles such as a 'regional poet' or a 'nature poet' would be to grossly misunderstand the poetic spirit of his poems. His poetry is more of an invitation for the reader to share the spirit of enchanted musings on apparently non-consequential situations of the life. Poems like 'Mending wall' and 'after apple picking' becomes a metaphor for the self preached morality of the common rural man. There deceptive simplicity is highly infectious to the common reader. It triggers a systematic unraveling of the inner consciousness leading to the much sought after aesthetic pleasure in us.

## 6.2. OBJECTIVES

- To have a broader understanding of the poetic genius of Robert Frost.
- To develop a keen insight into each of his selected poems.
- To list the rare merits of the selected poems of Robert Frost.

## 6.3. "MENDING WALLS"

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:

There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors'.
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows?
But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me~
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."

**6.3.1. Substance of the Poem**

This is one of the most anthologized poems of Robert Frost. This poem is the first work in Frost's second book of poetry, "North of Boston," which was published upon his return from England in 1915. On the surface, the poem seems to be a plain dialogue between two farmers on building a wall that has been broken by the inclement weather. It is the underlying meaning of the poem that makes it such a hit among the readers. The poem in a mildly ironic tone scratches the issues of need of boundaries in modern life.

The neighbour resorts to an old adage: "Good fences make good neighbors." The speaker remains unconvinced and mischievously presses the neighbor to look beyond the old-fashioned folly of such reasoning. His neighbor will not be swayed. The speaker envisions his neighbor as a holdover from a justifiably outmoded A stone wall separates the speaker's property from his neighbor's. In spring, the two meet to walk the wall and jointly make repairs. The speaker sees no reason for the wall to be kept—there are no cows to be contained, just apple and pine trees. He does not era, a living example of a dark-age mentality. But the neighbor simply repeats the adage.

The narrator is skeptical of this tradition, unable to understand the need for a wall when there is no livestock to be contained on the property, only apples and pine trees. He does not believe that a wall should exist simply for the sake of existing. Moreover, he cannot help but notice that the natural world seems to dislike the wall as much as he does: mysterious gaps appear, boulders fall for no reason. The neighbor, on the other hand, asserts that the wall is crucial to maintaining their relationship, asserting, "Good fences make good neighbors." Over the course of the mending, the narrator attempts to convince his neighbor otherwise and accuses him of being old-fashioned for maintaining the tradition so strictly. No matter what the narrator says, though, the neighbor stands his ground, repeating only: "Good fences make good neighbors."

**6.3.2. Analysis**

While living in England with his family, Frost was exceptionally homesick for the farm in New Hampshire where he had lived with his wife from 1900 to 1909. Despite the eventual failure of the farm, Frost associated his time in New Hampshire with a peaceful, rural sensibility that he instilled in the majority of his subsequent poems. "Mending Wall" is autobiographical on an even more specific level: a French-Canadian named Napoleon Guay had been Frost's neighbor in New Hampshire, and the two had often walked along their property line and repaired the wall that separated their land. Ironically, the most famous line of the poem ("Good fences make good neighbors") was not invented by Frost himself, but was rather a phrase that Guay frequently declared to Frost during their walks. This particular adage was a popular colonial proverb in the middle of the 17th century, but variations of it also appeared in Norway ("There must be a fence between good neighbors"), Germany ("Between neighbor's gardens a fence is good"), Japan ("Build a fence even between intimate friends"), and even India ("Love your neighbor, but do not throw down the dividing wall").

In terms of form, "Mending Wall" is not structured with stanzas; it is a simple forty-five lines of first-person narrative. Frost does maintain iambic stresses, but he is flexible with the form in order to maintain the conversational feel of the poem. He also shies away from any obvious rhyme patterns and instead relies upon the occasional internal rhyme and the use of assonance in certain ending terms (such as "wall," "hill," "balls," "well").

In the poem itself, Frost creates two distinct characters who have different ideas about what exactly makes a person a good neighbor. The narrator deplores his neighbor's preoccupation with repairing the wall; he views it as old-fashioned and even archaic. After all, he quips, his apples are not going to invade the property of his neighbor's pinecones. Moreover, within a land of such of such freedom and discovery, the narrator asks, are such borders necessary to maintain relationships between people? Despite the narrator's skeptical view of the wall, the neighbor maintains his seemingly "old-fashioned" mentality, responding to each of the narrator's disgruntled questions and rationalizations with nothing more than the adage: "Good fences make good neighbors."

As the narrator points out, the very act of mending the wall seems to be in opposition to nature. Every year, stones are dislodged and gaps suddenly appear, all without explanation. Every year, the two neighbors fill the gaps and replace the fallen boulders, only to have parts of the wall fall over again in the coming months. It seems as if nature is attempting to destroy the barriers that man has created on the land, even as man continues to repair the barriers, simply out of habit and tradition.

Ironically, while the narrator seems to begrudge the annual repairing of the wall, Frost subtly points out that the narrator is actually more active than the neighbor. It is the narrator who selects the day for mending and informs his neighbor across the property. Moreover, the narrator himself walks along the wall at other points during the year in order to repair the damage that has been done by local hunters. Despite his skeptical attitude, it seems that the narrator is even more tied to the tradition of wall-mending than his neighbor. Perhaps his skeptical questions and quips can then be read as an attempt to justify his own behavior to himself. While he chooses to present himself as a modern man, far beyond old-fashioned traditions, the narrator is really no different from his neighbor: he too clings to the concept of property and division, of ownership and individuality.

Ultimately, the presence of the wall between the properties does ensure a quality relationship between the two neighbors. By maintaining the division between the properties, the narrator and his neighbor are able to maintain their individuality and personal identity as farmers: one of apple trees, and one of pine trees. Moreover, the annual act of mending the wall also provides an opportunity for the two men to interact and communicate with each other, an event that might not otherwise occur in an isolated rural environment. The act of meeting to repair the wall allows the two men to develop their relationship and the overall community far more than if each maintained their isolation on separate properties.

The poem literally says that a stone wall separates the speaker's property from his neighbor's. Every year the wall is damaged from harsh weather and hunters. In the spring, the two neighbors walk the wall and jointly make repairs. Also, the speaker sees no reason for keeping the wall because there are no cows to be contained or anything, only apple and pine trees.

The theme is that you won't get to know a person unless you put down your wall or barrier.

The speaker can be characterized as philosophical, amiable, and unconvinced. The philosophical aspect comes from figurative language and diction such as when the speaker says that "spring is the mischief in [him]" (line 28). The speaker is also amiable for he friendly converses with his neighbor about the necessity of the wall. The speaker remains unconvinced about why the neighbor wants to keep the wall. Lastly, the speaker's tone is one that is inquiring for change and an end to the wall.

One auditory observation in the poem is its harmonious and dramatic quality that is created through the device of euphony. Also, a cold and harsh sounding quality is produced through the repetition of stones and boulders. Additionally, there's a cacophonous auditory quality that's produced by the improper grammar visible in line one that says "something there is that doesn't love a wall". It grabs the reader's attention.

(http://voices.yahoo.com/analysis-summary-mending-7464786.html)

### 6.3.3. Critical Appreciation of the Poem

Blank verse is the baseline meter of this poem, but few of the lines march along in blank verse's characteristic lock-step iambs, five abreast. Frost maintains five stressed syllables per line, but he varies the feet extensively to sustain the natural speech-like quality of the verse. There are no stanza breaks, obvious end-rhymes, or rhyming patterns, but many of the end-words share an assonance (e.g., wall, hill, balls, wall, and well sun, thing, stone,mean, line, and again or game, them, and him twice). Internal rhymes, too, are subtle, slanted, and conceivably coincidental. The vocabulary is all of a piece—no fancy words, all short (only one word, another, is of three syllables), all conversational—and this is perhaps why the words resonate so consummately with each other in sound and feel.

The structure of this poem is that it is blank verse with no stanza breaks, obvious end rhymes, or rhyming patterns. The writer's intention with this form is that it sustains the natural speech and conversational quality of the poem. Also, the poem's physical structure and appearance on the paper resembles a solid stone wall which would explain the reason for no breaks.

One of the main literary devices visible in this poem is metaphors and figurative language. Its presence is all throughout the poem from beginning to end. This device functions to display ambiguity and inspire all kinds of interpretations of the text. It

also functions as a means of portraying humor, which is discernible when the speaker tells the neighbor "[his] apple trees will never get across and eat the cones under his pines" (lines 25-26).

Another poetic device that's observable all throughout the poem is visual imagery. It produces a beneficial effect by aiding the speaker in elaborating the details of mending the wall. This can be discerned in line two and three because every winter, "the frozen ground-swell spills the upper boulders in the sun" (lines 2-3).

Another perceivable device is diction. There are at least ten lines throughout this poem that noticeably portray the speaker's intentional word choice. Diction functions to develop ambiguity such that is seen in line one. In addition, it provides emphasis in order to draw and focus the reader's attention on a certain concept or idea. This can be distinguished when the speaker states "there where it is we do not need the wall", because it is a main concept discussed (line 23).

Furthermore, symbolism of the wall is another device that is visible mostly in the heart of the poem. This stone wall symbolizes a divide between properties that puts up confinements and boundaries. This symbol develops a theme of barrier-building and segregation. The symbol of this wall also functions to develop the character of the neighbor as having an ancient and old fashionedway of thinking, which is noticeable through words such as "spells" and "elves" and an "old-stone savage".

Finally, irony is a device that's distinguishable in this poem. It is portrayed in several humorous remarks by the speaker, throughout the poem. The irony of the wall is that the speaker and his neighbor rebuild the wall every spring, only to have it broken again next year. Mending the wall is a pointless act because it will inevitably be damaged once again. SOURCE: Spark Notes

## 6.4. AFTER APPLE PICKING

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still,
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill
Beside it, and there may be two or three
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.
But I am done with apple-picking now.
Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.
I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight
I got from looking through a pane of glass
I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough
And held against the world of hoary grass.
It melted, and I let it fall and break.
But I was well
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,
And I could tell
What form my dreaming was about to take.
Magnified apples appear and disappear,
Stem end and blossom end,
And every fleck of russet showing clear.
My instep arch not only keeps the ache,
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.
And I keep hearing from the cellar bin

The rumbling sound
Of load on load of apples coming in.
For I have had too much
Of apple-picking: I am overtired
Of the great harvest I myself desired.
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.
For all
That struck the earth,
No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,
Went surely to the cider-apple heap
As of no worth.
One can see what will trouble
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.
Were he not gone,
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep.

**6.4.1. Substance of the Poem**

"After Apple-Picking" was published in Frost's second collection, North of Boston, in 1915.In this 42 lines musical reverie, Robert Frost captures the essence of a long hard earned sleep of a farmer and contrasts it with "human sleep".

After a long day's work, the speaker is tired of apple picking. He has felt drowsy and dreamy since the morning when he looked through a sheet of ice lifted from the surface of a water trough. Now he feels tired, feels sleep coming on, but wonders whether it is a normal, end-of-the-day sleep or something deeper. Throughout the poem, both rhyme and line-length are manipulated and varied with subtlety. The mystery of the rhymes—when will they come and how abruptly—keeps words and sounds active and hovering over several lines. We find the greatest separation between rhyming end-words at the poem's conclusion. Sleep comes seven lines after its partner, heap, and in the interim, sleep has popped up three times in the middle of lines. Sleep is, in fact, all over the poem; the word appears six times. But the way it is delivered here, the last rhyme is masterful. Heap first rhymes internally with sleep, then again internally with sleep, and then again, and only pairs up with the end-word sleep in the poem's last line. At this point, we've nearly forgotten heap. Sleep seems to rhyme with itself, with its repetition, like a sleepy mantra or a sleep-inducing counting of sheep. The poem arrives at final sleep not through a wham-bang rhyming couplet but more "sleepily."

"There are many other things I have found myself saying about poetry, but the chiefest of these is that it is metaphor, saying one thing and meaning another, saying one thing in terms of another, the pleasure of ulteriority." This is Robert Frost in 1946, in an essay for The Atlantic Monthly. "After Apple-Picking" is about picking apples, but with its ladders pointing "[t]oward heaven still," with its great weariness, and with its rumination on the harvest, the coming of winter, and inhuman sleep, the reader feels certain that the poem harbors some "ulteriority."

"Final sleep" is certainly one interpretation of the "long sleep" that the poet contrasts with human sleep. The sleep of the woodchuck is the sleep of winter, and winter, in the metaphoric language of seasons, has strong associations with death. Hints of winter are abundant: The scent of apples is "the essence of winter sleep"; the water in the trough froze into a "pane of glass"; the grass is "hoary" (i.e., frosty, or Frosty).

Yet is the impending death destructive or creative? The harvest of apples can be read as a harvest of any human effort—study, laying bricks, writing poetry, etc.—and this poem looks at the end of the harvest.

The sequence and tenses of the poem are a bit confusing and lead one to wonder what is dreamed, what is real, and where the sleep begins. It's understandable that the speaker should be tired at the end of a day's apple picking. But the poem says that the speaker was well on his way to sleep before he dropped the sheet of ice, and this presumably occurred in the morning. The speaker has tried and failed to "rub the strangeness" from his sight. Is this a strangeness induced by exhaustion or indicative of the fact that he is dreaming already? Has he, in fact, been dreaming since he looked through the "pane of glass" and entered a through-the-looking-glass world of "magnified apples" and the "rumbling sound / Of load on load of apples coming in"? Or is the sheet of ice simply a dizzying lens whose effect endures? If, in fact, the speaker was well on his way to sleep in the morning, does this lend a greater, more ominous weight to the long sleep "coming on" at the poem's end?

The overall tone of the poem might not support such a reading, however; nothing else about it is particularly ominous—and Frost can do ominous when he wants to. How we ultimately interpret the tone of the poem has much to do with how we interpret the harvest. Has it been a failure? Certainly there is a sense of incompleteness—"a barrel that I didn't fill." The speaker's inner resources give out before the outer resources are entirely collected. On the other hand, the poet speaks only of "two or three apples" remaining, and these only "may" be left over. Do we detect satisfaction, then? The speaker has done all that was within his power; what's left is the result of minor, inevitable human imperfection. Is this, then, a poem about the rare skill of knowing when to quit honorably? This interpretation seems reasonable.

Yet if the speaker maintains his honor, why will his sleep be troubled? There were "ten thousand thousand"—that is to say, countless—fruit to touch, and none could be fumbled or it was lost. Did the speaker fumble many? Did he leave more than he claims he did? Or are the troubled dreams a nightmare magnification and not a reflection of the real harvest?

Lines 28-29 are important: "I am overtired / Of the great harvest I myself desired." If there has been failure or too great a strain on the speaker, it is because the speaker has desired too great a harvest. He saw an impossible quantity of fruit as a possibility. Or he saw a merely incredible quantity of fruit as possibility and nearly achieved it (at the cost of physical and mental exhaustion).

### 6.4.2. Critical Appreciation of the Poem

This is a rhyming poem that follows no preordained rhyme scheme. "After Apple-Picking" is basically iambic, and mostly in pentameter, but line-length variants abound. Line 1, for example, is long by any standard. Line 32 is very short: one foot. The poem's shorter lines of di-, tri-, and tetrameter serve to syncopate and sharpen the steady, potentially droning rhythm of pentameter. They keep the reader on her toes, awake, while the speaker drifts off into oblivion.

When we read "After Apple-Picking" metaphorically, we may want to look at it as a poem about the effort of writing poetry. The cider-apple heap then makes a nice metaphor for saved and recycled bits of poetry, and the long sleep sounds like creative (permanent?) hibernation. This is one possible metaphoric substitution among many; it seems plausible enough (though nowise definitive or exclusive). However, our search for "ulteriority" may benefit from respecting, not replacing, the figure of the apples. Apple picking, in Western civilization, has its own built-in

metaphorical and allegorical universe, and we should especially remember this when we read a poet whose work frequently revisits Eden and the Fall (c.f. "Nothing Gold Can Stay," "Never Again Would Birds' Song Be the Same," "It is Almost the Year Two Thousand," "The Oven Bird"). When the poet speaks of "the great harvest I myself desired," consider also what apples represent in Genesis: knowledge and some great, punishable claim to godliness—creation and understanding, perhaps. This sends us scurrying back to lines 1and 2, where the apple-picking ladder sticks through the tree "Toward heaven still." What has this harvest been, then, with its infinite fruits too many for one person to touch? What happens when such apples strike the earth—are they really of no worth? And looked at in this new light, what does it mean to be "done with apple-picking now"?

All of these questions are enough to make one forswear metaphor and limit oneself to a strict diet of literalness. But that isn't nearly as much fun. (Source: Sparks Notes)

## 6.5. DEATH OF A HIRED MAN

MARY sat musing on the lamp-flame at the table
Waiting for Warren. When she heard his step,
She ran on tip-toe down the darkened passage
To meet him in the doorway with the news
And put him on his guard. "Silas is back."
She pushed him outward with her through the door
And shut it after her. "Be kind," she said.
She took the market things from Warren's arms
And set them on the porch, then drew him down
To sit beside her on the wooden steps.

"When was I ever anything but kind to him?
But I'll not have the fellow back," he said.
"I told him so last haying, didn't I?
'If he left then,' I said, 'that ended it.'
What good is he? Who else will harbour him
At his age for the little he can do?
What help he is there's no depending on.
Off he goes always when I need him most.
'He thinks he ought to earn a little pay,
Enough at least to buy tobacco with,
So he won't have to beg and be beholden.'
'All right,' I say, 'I can't afford to pay
Any fixed wages, though I wish I could.'
'Someone else can.' 'Then someone else will have to.'
I shouldn't mind his bettering himself
If that was what it was. You can be certain,
When he begins like that, there's someone at him
Trying to coax him off with pocket-money,—
In haying time, when any help is scarce.
In winter he comes back to us. I'm done."

"Sh! not so loud: he'll hear you," Mary said.

"I want him to: he'll have to soon or late."

"He's worn out. He's asleep beside the stove.
When I came up from Rowe's I found him here,
Huddled against the barn-door fast asleep,
A miserable sight, and frightening, too—
You needn't smile—I didn't recognise him—
I wasn't looking for him—and he's changed.
Wait till you see."

"Where did you say he'd been?"

"He didn't say. I dragged him to the house,
And gave him tea and tried to make him smoke.
I tried to make him talk about his travels.
Nothing would do: he just kept nodding off."

"What did he say? Did he say anything?"

"But little."

"Anything? Mary, confess
He said he'd come to ditch the meadow for me."

"Warren!"

"But did he? I just want to know."

"Of course he did. What would you have him say?
Surely you wouldn't grudge the poor old man
Some humble way to save his self-respect.
He added, if you really care to know,
He meant to clear the upper pasture, too.
That sounds like something you have heard before?
Warren, I wish you could have heard the way
He jumbled everything. I stopped to look
Two or three times—he made me feel so queer—
To see if he was talking in his sleep.
He ran on Harold Wilson—you remember—
The boy you had in haying four years since.
He's finished school, and teaching in his college.
Silas declares you'll have to get him back.
He says they two will make a team for work:
Between them they will lay this farm as smooth!
The way he mixed that in with other things.
He thinks young Wilson a likely lad, though daft
On education—you know how they fought
All through July under the blazing sun,
Silas up on the cart to build the load,
Harold along beside to pitch it on."

"Yes, I took care to keep well out of earshot."

"Well, those days trouble Silas like a dream.
You wouldn't think they would. How some things linger!
Harold's young college boy's assurance piqued him.
After so many years he still keeps finding
Good arguments he sees he might have used.
I sympathise. I know just how it feels
To think of the right thing to say too late.
Harold's associated in his mind with Latin.
He asked me what I thought of Harold's saying
He studied Latin like the violin
Because he liked it—that an argument!
He said he couldn't make the boy believe
He could find water with a hazel prong—
Which showed how much good school had ever done him.
He wanted to go over that. But most of all
He thinks if he could have another chance
To teach him how to build a load of hay——"

"I know, that's Silas' one accomplishment.
He bundles every forkful in its place,
And tags and numbers it for future reference,
So he can find and easily dislodge it
In the unloading. Silas does that well.
He takes it out in bunches like big birds' nests.
You never see him standing on the hay
He's trying to lift, straining to lift himself."

"He thinks if he could teach him that, he'd be
Some good perhaps to someone in the world.
He hates to see a boy the fool of books.
Poor Silas, so concerned for other folk,
And nothing to look backward to with pride,
And nothing to look forward to with hope,
So now and never any different."

Part of a moon was falling down the west,
Dragging the whole sky with it to the hills.
Its light poured softly in her lap. She saw
And spread her apron to it. She put out her hand
Among the harp-like morning-glory strings,
Taut with the dew from garden bed to eaves,
As if she played unheard the tenderness
That wrought on him beside her in the night.
"Warren," she said, "he has come home to die:
You needn't be afraid he'll leave you this time."

"Home," he mocked gently.

"Yes, what else but home?
It all depends on what you mean by home.
Of course he's nothing to us, any more
Than was the hound that came a stranger to us

Out of the woods, worn out upon the trail."

"Home is the place where, when you have to go there,
They have to take you in."

"I should have called it
Something you somehow haven't to deserve."

Warren leaned out and took a step or two,
Picked up a little stick, and brought it back
And broke it in his hand and tossed it by.
"Silas has better claim on us you think
Than on his brother? Thirteen little miles
As the road winds would bring him to his door.
Silas has walked that far no doubt to-day.
Why didn't he go there? His brother's rich,
A somebody—director in the bank."

"He never told us that."

"We know it though."

"I think his brother ought to help, of course.
I'll see to that if there is need. He ought of right
To take him in, and might be willing to—
He may be better than appearances.
But have some pity on Silas. Do you think
If he'd had any pride in claiming kin
Or anything he looked for from his brother,
He'd keep so still about him all this time?"

"I wonder what's between them."

"I can tell you.
Silas is what he is—we wouldn't mind him—
But just the kind that kinsfolk can't abide.
He never did a thing so very bad.
He don't know why he isn't quite as good
As anyone. He won't be made ashamed
To please his brother, worthless though he is."

"I can't think Si ever hurt anyone."

"No, but he hurt my heart the way he lay
And rolled his old head on that sharp-edged chair-back.
He wouldn't let me put him on the lounge.
You must go in and see what you can do.
I made the bed up for him there to-night.
You'll be surprised at him—how much he's broken.
His working days are done; I'm sure of it."

"I'd not be in a hurry to say that."

"I haven't been. Go, look, see for yourself.
But, Warren, please remember how it is:
He's come to help you ditch the meadow.
He has a plan. You mustn't laugh at him.
He may not speak of it, and then he may.
I'll sit and see if that small sailing cloud
Will hit or miss the moon."

It hit the moon.
Then there were three there, making a dim row,
The moon, the little silver cloud, and she.

Warren returned—too soon, it seemed to her,
Slipped to her side, caught up her hand and waited.

"Warren," she questioned.

"Dead," was all he answered.

### 6.5.1. Substance of the Poem

A farm wife, Mary pleads with her husband, Warren, to take back a former farmhand who has always disappointed him. The farmhand, Silas, is very ill, and Mary is convinced that he has returned to the farm to die. Warren has not seen Silas in his ill state and, still angry over the contract that Silas broke when them in the past, does not want to have Silas on his property. Mary's compassionate urging eventually convinces him, but when Warren goes to get Silas, he is already dead.

This poem contains many of the stereotypical characteristics of Frost's poetry, particularly the rural environment, the everyday struggle of the farm couple over their relationship to the farmhand, and the colloquial dialogue. The blank verse form makes the text extremely clear, and Frost even breaks up the stanzas by employing dialogue.

In the poem, Frost outlines the traditions of duty and hard work that he explores in many of his other poems. Silas returns to the farm so that he can fulfill his broken contract to Warren and die honorably, having fulfilled his duty to the family and to the community. Silas' return to the farm also signals the importance of the work that he performed on the farm as a way to give his life meaning and satisfaction. Silas does not have any children or close family to provide a sense of fulfillment in his last hours; only the sense of duty and the satisfaction of hard work can provide him with comfort.

Ironically, even after Silas' attempt to die in the companionship of Mary and Warren, the people whom he views as family more than any others, he ultimately dies alone. Moreover, he dies without ever fulfilling his contract to ditch the meadow and clear the upper pasture. For all his attempts to fulfill his duty, achieve satisfaction through hard work, and find a sense of family, Silas' efforts are unsuccessful. Even the way in which his death is introduced expresses its bleak isolation: Warren merely declares, "Dead."

The poem also creates a clear dichotomy between Mary and Warren, between Mary's compassionate willingness to help Silas and Warren's feelings of resentment over the

broken contract. Mary follows the model of Christian forgiveness that expects her to help Silas because he needs it, not because he deserves it. Warren, on the other hand, does not believe that they owe anything to Silas and feels that they are not bound to help him.

It is interesting to note that, of the two, only Mary actually sees Silas over the course of the poem. She finds him huddled against the barn and instantly recognizes the extent of his illness. As a result, she is automatically more willing to be compassionate toward him. Having not seen Silas in his current state, Warren takes the more rational view of the situation. Had Warren found Silas first, his treatment of the former farmhand would no doubt have been more compassionate.

"The Death of a Hired Man" is a typical poem by Frost in which an ordinary man and his wife turn into a philosophically significant debate. The wife represents love and sympathy, emotion and imagination, and evaluates 'human beings' not in terms of reason but emotion. The husband is a 'practical' modern man who regards and respects people in terms of their work, worth, contribution and so on. In other words, the husband represents reason, intellect, utilitarianism, practicality, rationality, and the like.

The 'hired' man of the title is an old laborer who roams and stays in one place for a few days and goes away without considering how and when he can be of the best 'use' to others, or even to himself. He has become old and almost unable to work. He has got a brother who is a director in the bank, but he probably prefers dignity to a well- to-do brother. He probably prefers a free and independent life most of all. He doesn't satisfy anyone he works for; and we never know whether he is satisfied, or even conscious, or not. He becomes an issue of debate between the couple of one of his employers.

He comes to this couple (Warren and Mary) once a year and stays for a time. Warren's complaint is that this old fellow goes away precisely when he is most needed; he comes in 'off season' and goes when the time arrives for work. But the old man doesn't seem to understand that, though he has been told it. But Mary-probably symbolizing motherhood, or even Christ's or humanity's mother –insists that the man must be loved and cared, for he is dying, and that no external reason is necessary to love and care for a man. These two people represent two poles of attitudes, two philosophies and two ways to look at fellow beings or even life. The old man, Silas, has come for the last time- he is exhausted and is dying. He cannot even speak to reply what the woman asks. The reader is stuck between the two attitudes of the couple.

### 6.5.2. Critical Appreciation of the Poem

The poem is set in an evening when the husband is due to arrive from work and "Mary sat musing". The old man, Silas, has arrived again and Mary is worried due to his extreme bad health. When she hears the footsteps of her husband, she runs down the passage to receive him and to tell him that the old man has arrived. She whispers in his ear, "Silas is back". She pushes him outward and shutting the door behind, lest the old man hears what her merciless husband says, requests him to "Be kind". This "Be Kind" is Mary's philosophy, for which no reason or justification is necessary. But her husband is himself: he replies with an almost irritated, "When was I ever anything (else) but kind to him". He means that he has always been kind to the man; but his idea of being 'kind' is obviously different from that of Mary. "But I'll not have the fellow back", he adds, because he had warned him not to leave the place the previous time. The man had left! "What good is he? Who else will harbor him at his

age for the little he can do?... Off he goes always when I need him most… I can't afford to pay". Warren is not to be convinced by what Mary says. What he objects to most about the reckless old man is that he is not responsible towards himself either. Why doesn't the stupid old fellow better himself, even if he doesn't care for others?

"Sh! Not so loud: he'll hear you". Mary is so sympathetic that she is worried about the man hearing her husband's cruel word and feeling insulted. But her husband says, "I want him to (hear)"! She says that the man is "worn out". When he arrived that afternoon, he looked a miserable sight'. Warren smiles to her this; Mary tells him not to! She didn't recognize him. She tried to talk to him, but he wasn't able to answer; "he just kept nodding off'. Warren laughs at the man's case by asking whether he said that he had come to make a ditch in his meadows. Mary speaks more strongly this time: "Surely you wouldn't grudge the poor old man/ Some humble way to save his self-respect… Warren…. he made me feel so queer –To see if he was talking in his sleep". Now she is swept away by emotion to recount several incidents when the poor old man impressed her by the way he worked and talked in the past. But it all sounds only funny to the heartless husband. It is not that the old man is bad at work; in fact as Mary remembers he has always been a skillful hard-working man. Besides, he is such an honest and simple man to the extent of hating young boys whom he calls "fools of books". Poor Silas is very concerned for the people and he has nothing to look forward with hope, or to look backward with pride. That is why he never takes life seriously. Warren picks up a stick of wood and broke into two; this suggests his violence in contrast to the tenderness of Mary.

The effect of sympathy begins to down in Warren's heart. Frost has dramatically created a natural setting in which outside atmosphere corresponds to the inside affair. The appearance of the moon signifies the generating of sympathy and love in Warren's mind. Marry is overwhelmed with pity for the poor man which is symbolically represented by the moonlight falling upon her lap immediately, the reader is caught-in an emotional tone of the poem as Mary declares that Silas has come home to die. Frost's essentially emotional expression blended with philosophy find its expression through Mary who defines 'home as the place where, when you have to go these, they will take you in'. This sentence is a crux of the whole poem. Instead of going to his rich brother at the time of problem and sickness, Silas has tracked back Warren's house.

Warren's heart has now melted and he admits 'I can't think ever hurts anyone.' Mary is so troubled to see the deteriorating condition of Silas' who is on the verge of collapse that she advices Warren to watch the dying man. When Warren returns, Mary asks, "Warren?" anxiously. Warren only replies in his typical heartless manner, "Dead". He is probably not yet touched! The significance of this sequence of dialogue and events is self-explanatory once the basic thematic tension is understood. Thematically "The Death of the Hired Man," which dramatizes the isolation of the individual and the difficulty of communication, is memorable for its poignant portrait of Mary's mercy overwhelming Warren's judgment, as she persuades her husband to let the hired man return home. The conflict between them ends as they finally come close to each other, thereby emphasizing that reconciliations are of central importance to Frost because they provide one of the few sources of sustenance in a stark world where God is inscrutable and not always benevolent. Despite his skepticism regarding society and government, Frost did not believe people could stand alone and thrive. Although they should maintain their individuality, people need each other. And they can live together successfully – but only if they are not completely unyielding and allow their individuality to be subsumed by love.

Source:http://www.bachelorandmaster.com/britishandamericanpoetry/the-death-of-the-hired-man.html

## 6.6. BIRCHES

When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay
As ice-storms do. Often you must have seen them
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
After a rain. They click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust—
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,
And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed
So low for long, they never right themselves:
You may see their trunks arching in the woods
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.
But I was going to say when Truth broke in
With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm
I should prefer to have some boy bend them
As he went out and in to fetch the cows—
Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,
Whose only play was what he found himself,
Summer or winter, and could play alone.
One by one he subdued his father's trees
By riding them down over and over again
Until he took the stiffness out of them,
And not one but hung limp, not one was left
For him to conquer. He learned all there was
To learn about not launching out too soon
And so not carrying the tree away
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise
To the top branches, climbing carefully
With the same pains you use to fill a cup
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.
So was I once myself a swinger of birches.
And so I dream of going back to be.
It's when I'm weary of considerations,
And life is too much like a pathless wood
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping

From a twig's having lashed across it open.
I'd like to get away from earth awhile
And then come back to it and begin over.
May no fate willfully misunderstand me
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:
I don't know where it's likely to go better.
I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
But dipped its top and set me down again.
That would be good both going and coming back.
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

**6.6.1. Substance of the Poem**

When the speaker sees bent birch trees, he likes to think that they are bent because boys have been "swinging" them. He knows that they are, in fact, bent by ice storms. Yet he prefers his vision of a boy climbing a tree carefully and then swinging at the tree's crest to the ground. He used to do this himself and dreams of going back to those days. He likens birch swinging to getting "away from the earth awhile" and then coming back.

The title is "Birches," but the subject is birch "swinging." And the theme of poem seems to be, more generally and more deeply, this motion of swinging. The force behind it comes from contrary pulls—truth and imagination, earth and heaven, concrete and spirit, control and abandon, flight and return. We have the earth below, we have the world of the treetops and above, and we have the motion between these two poles.

The whole upward thrust of the poem is toward imagination, escape, and transcendence—and away from heavy Truth with a capital T. The downward pull is back to earth. Likely everyone understands the desire "to get away from the earth awhile." The attraction of climbing trees is likewise universal. Who would not like to climb above the fray, to leave below the difficulties or drudgery of the everyday, particularly when one is "weary of considerations, / And life is too much like a pathless wood." One way to navigate a pathless wood is to climb a tree. But this act of climbing is not necessarily so pragmatically motivated: For the boy, it is a form of play; for the man, it is a transcendent escape. In either case, climbing birches seems synonymous with imagination and the imaginative act, a push toward the ethereal, and even the contemplation of death.

But the speaker does not leave it at that. He does not want his wish half- fulfilled—does not want to be left, so to speak, out on a limb. If climbing trees is a sort of push toward transcendence, then complete transcendence means never to come back down. But this speaker is not someone who puts much stock in the promise of an afterlife. He rejects the self-delusional extreme of imagination, and he reinforces his ties to the earth. He says, "Earth's the right place for love," however imperfect, though his "face burns" and "one eye is weeping." He must escape to keep his sanity; yet he must return to keep going. He wants to push "[t]oward heaven" to the limits of earthly possibility, but to go too far is to be lost. The upward motion requires a complement, a swing in the other direction to maintain a livable balance.

And that is why the birch tree is the perfect vehicle. As a tree, it is rooted in the ground; in climbing it, one has not completely severed ties to the earth. Moreover, as

the final leap back down takes skill, experience, and courage, it is not a mere retreat but a new trajectory. Thus, one's path up and down the birch is one that is "good both going and coming back." The "Truth" of the ice storm does not interfere for long; for the poet looks at bent trees and imagines another truth: nothing less than a recipe for how to live well.

When the narrator looks at the birch trees in the forest, he imagines that the arching bends in their branches are the result of a boy "swinging" on them. He realizes that the bends are actually caused by ice storms - the weight of the ice on the branches forces them to bend toward the ground - but he prefers his idea of the boy swinging on the branches, climbing up the tree trunks and swinging from side to side, from earth up to heaven. The narrator remembers when he used to swing on birches and wishes that he could return to those carefree days.

Source: http://www.sparknotes.com/poetry/frost/section8.rhtml

### 6.6.2. Critical Appreciation of the Poem

This is blank verse, with numerous variations on the prevailing iambic foot. A poem as richly textured as "Birches" yields no shortage of interpretations. The poem is whole and lovely at the literal level, but it invites the reader to look below the surface and build his or her own understanding. The important thing for the interpreter is to attune her reading to the elements of the poem that may suggest other meanings. One such crucial element is the aforementioned swinging motion between opposites. Notice the contrast between Truth and what the speaker prefers to imagine happened to the birch trees. But also note that Truth, as the speaker relates it, is highly figurative and imaginative: Ice storms are described in terms of the "inner dome of heaven," and bent trees as girls drying their hair in the sun. This sort of truth calls into question whether the speaker believes there is, in fact, a capital-T Truth.

The language of the poem—the vocabulary and rhythms—is very conversational and, in parts, gently humorous: "But I was going to say when Truth broke in / With all her matter of fact about the ice storm." But the folksiness does not come at the cost of accuracy or power; the description of the post-ice storm birch trees is vivid and evocative. Nor is this poem isolated, with its demotic vocabulary, from the pillars of poetic tradition. The "pathless wood" in line 44 enters into a dialogue with the whole body of Frost's work—a dialogue that goes back to the opening lines of Dante's Inferno. And compare line 13 with these well-known lines from Shelley's elegy for Keats, "Adonais": "Life, like a dome of many colour'd glass, / Stains the white radiance of Eternity, / Until death tramples it to fragments." In "Birches," the pieces of heaven shattered and sprinkled on the ground present another comparison between the imaginative and the concrete, a description of Truth that undermines itself by invoking an overthrown, now poetic scheme of celestial construction (heavenly spheres). Shelley's stanza continues: "Die, / If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek." Frost's speaker wants to climb toward heaven but then dip back down to earth—not to reach what he seeks but to seek and then swing back into the orbit of the world.

Source: http://www.sparknotes.com/poetry/frost/section8.rhtml

Originally, this poem was called "Swinging Birches," a title that perhaps provides a more accurate depiction of the subject. In writing this poem, Frost was inspired by his childhood experience with swinging on birches, which was a popular game for children in rural areas of New England during the time.

In the poem, the act of swinging on birches is presented as a way to escape the hard rationality or "Truth" of the adult world, if only for a moment. As the boy climbs up the tree, he is climbing toward "heaven" and a place where his imagination can be free. The narrator explains that climbing a birch is an opportunity to "get away from earth awhile / And then come back to it and begin over." A swinger is still grounded in the earth through the roots of the tree as he climbs, but he is able to reach beyond his normal life on the earth and reach for a higher plane of existence.

Frost highlights the narrator's regret that he can ow longer find this peace of mind from swinging on birches. Because he is an adult, he is unable to leave his responsibilities behind and climb toward heaven until he can start fresh on the earth. In fact, the narrator is not even able to enjoy the imagined view of a boy swinging in the birches. In the fourth line of the poem, he is forced to acknowledge the "Truth" of the birches: the bends are caused by winter storms, not by a boy swinging on them.

Significantly, the narrator's desire to escape from the rational world is inconclusive. He wants to escape as a boy climbing toward heaven, but he also wants to return to the earth: both "going and coming back." The freedom of imagination is appealing and wondrous, but the narrator still cannot avoid returning to "Truth" and his responsibilities on the ground; the escape is only a temporary one.

Source:http://www.gradesaver.com/the-poetry-of-robert-frost/study-guide/section8/

## 6.7. SUMMING UP

From the above analysis of the poems of Robert Frost, it is quite clear that he was genius par excellence. His poetry reflects a kind of delicate balance of subjectivity and objectivity. He picks the most common of the observations and lights them up with his unique philosophy. In the poems selected in this unit too, he works like a skilled craftsman and completely changes the very texture of apparently ordinary contexts. At the root of all lies a central call for universal brotherhood and inherent humanity. There is no doubt that he has been a torch bearer for all those human voices of rural men who otherwise could not have found the right platform. He touches at the very heart of modern common men like no other poet could do in America ever after.

**Self Assessment Questions**

1. How does the opinion of the speaker differ from the opinion of the neighbour in the poem "Mending Walls".
2. What is the significance of sleep in the poem "Apple Picking"?
3. What is the significance of the poem "Death of a Hired Man"?
4. What is the central idea of the poem "Birches"?

## 6.8. ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Refer to our discussion at 6.3.1, 6.3.2 and 6.3.3.
2. Refer to our discussion at 6.4.1. and 6.4.2.
3. Refer to our discussion at 6.5.1.
4. Refer to our discussion at 6.6.1.

## 6.9. REFERENCES

http://www.sparknotes.com/poetry/frost/section8.rhtml
http://www.gradesaver.com
http://voices.yahoo.com/analysis-summary-mending-7464786.html

## 6.10.TERMINAL AND QUESTIONS

1. Critically discuss the poem the Mending wall.
2. Bring out the mental frame of mind of the narrator in the poem After Apple Picking.
3. What is the central conflict in the poem Death of The Hired Man? Do you agree with it? Give reasons to support your answer.
4. How Birches is a nature poem? Give valid reasons to support the argument.

**UNIT 7 ERNEST HEMINGWAY**

***A FAREWELL TO ARMS*-I**

## 7.1. INTRODUCTION

In the realm of literature, Ernest Hemingway is one of the most famous of modern American writers. He had his affiliation with the writers of the Lost Generation. His works reflect a sense of alienation and revulsion from the horrors of war. He has depicted war as a great calamity and has portrayed the wounds, death and violence in his works. His characters are soldiers, sportsmen, killers, hunters, bloodied prize-fighters and matadors and his world of fiction swarms with perverts, drunkards and prostitutes. Hemingway has also experimented with the prose style and is a founder of a new simple technique which did not have its followers and imitators, because the standard set by him was too high to be achieved. In his liberty in writing he is one with Faulkner, e. e.cummings, John Dos Passos and other writers of the Lost Generation.

## 7.2. OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Identify some of the major events in Hemingway's life that have shaped his literary consciousness.
- Discuss Hemingway's place in the History of American literature.
- Undertake a critical analysis of Hemingway's style.
- Describe the autobiographical elements in Hemingway's works.
- Undertake an analysis of Hemingway's symbolism.
- Explain the uniqueness of Hemingway's art of storytelling

## 7.3. ERNEST HEMINGWAY: LIFE AND BACKGROUND

Born on 21st July 1898 in Oak Park, Illinois, Hemingway was the second child of his Parents. His father Clarence Edmonds Hemingway was a respected person in the town, who was fond of hunting and fishing. His mother, Grace Hall Hemingway, was a music teacher but had always wanted to be an opera singer. They had six children including two girls. Hemingway imbibed the traits from his parents and loved fishing and hunting and admired music.

As a boy he loved the manly pursuits. He participated in football, boxing, swimming and running. Once he broke his nose and injured one of his eyes badly. In his story The doctor and the Doctor's wife, he has drawn the portraits of his parents. The relationship between his father and mother was not harmonious which created a negative impression on the tender mind of the child. He neither liked to stay at home nor did he feel happy at the school, thus ran away from home twice. After being educated at the local high school, Hemingway rejected his father's idea of going to Oberlin College; instead he accepted the offer of working for the Kansas City Star, a renowned paper in the Middle West, at $15 a week. As a reporter he started to write prose and learnt the significance of objective writing.

When the United States joined the First World War in 1917 Hemingway attempted to sign up for the army but was rejected because of his injured eye. He therefore joined the Red Cross as an ambulance driver. As an ambulance driver for the Red Cross on the Italian front, Hemingway badly injured his leg in 1918. The wound caused him physical as well as psychological injury and consequently spent months in a hospital in Milan where he had to undergo twelve operations and about two hundred steel fragments were taken out of his body. He experienced war as a terrible thing which

left its deep impact on his mind. Hemingway recreates the terrors and the aftermaths of war and its traumatic shock in his creative works. In Now I Lay Me, he writes:

> I myself did not want to sleep because I had been living for a long time with the knowledge that if I ever shut my eyes in the dark and let myself go, my soul would go out of my body. I had been that way for a long time ever since, I had been blown up at night and felt it go out of me and go off and then come back. I tried never to think about it, but it had started to go since, in the nights, just at the moment of going off to sleep, and I could only by a very great effort.

While in hospital Hemingway met and fell in love with Agnes Von Kurowsky, a Red Cross nurse seven years his senior. She was the night nurse most of the time and her duties brought her frequently into his room. Agnes refused to permit the affair to progress beyond the kissing stage. By the time of his release and return to the United States in January 1919, Agnes and Hemingway had decided to marry within a few months in America. However, in March, she wrote that she had become engaged to an Italian officer. Biographer Jeffrey Meyers asserts that "Hemingway was devastated by Agnes' rejection, and he followed a pattern of abandoning a wife before she abandoned him in future relationships".

After the war Hemingway returned to the United States in 1919 and spent his time in fishing and reading and worked as a journalist in Chicago. He then became a foreign correspondent for the Toronto Star Weekly. While in Europe he associated with a group of radical American journalists that included Max Eastman and George Seldes. Eastman, the former editor of The Masses helped Hemingway get his work published in The Liberator and the New Masses. The American author, Gertrude Stein, who was based in Paris, also promoted Hemingway's work. He also met Ezra Pound, and was also familiar with James Joyce in Paris. In December 1920, Hemingway met Hadley Richardson whom he married on 3rd September 1921. He returned to Toronto in 1923 to have their first child (John Hemingway) in the month of October the same year. Hemingway, Hadley and their son (nicknamed Bumby) returned to Paris in January 1924 and he began to devote his time to his works of fiction.

Hemingway's first collection of stories, *In Our Time*, was published in 1925. The experiences narrated in it are autobiographical dealing with the life of Nick Adams who resembles other Hemingway heroes portrayed in *A Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. His novel, *The Torrents of Spring*, appeared the following year. It criticized Sherwood Anderson and the other writers. In July 1925 Hemingway began to write the draft of *The Sun Also Rises*. His marriage to Hadley deteriorated as he was working on the book for, in the spring of 1926, Hadley became aware of his affair with Pauline Pfeiffer, who came to Pamplona with them that July. Hadley asked him for a separation and in November she formally requested a divorce. They split their possessions and the couple was divorced in January 1927, and Hemingway married Pauline Pfeiffer in May.

*The Sun Also Rises* (1926), a novel about the aftermath of the First World War, which brought him to the attention of the literary critics, received good reviews, and is recognized as Hemingway's greatest work. It has the mood of despair, the characteristic trait of the writers of the Lost Generation. The book throws light on the post-war expatriate in Paris and deals with the life of Jake Barnes, a victim of the First World War who has been injured and incapacitated for normal sexual life and moves from hotel to hotel in search of love. There is a sense of disenchantment and the life is full of meaninglessness. Other books published during this period was a collection of short stories, *Men Without Women* (1927) and *A Farewell to Arms*

(1929), a novel based on his love affair with Agnes von Kurowsky and his experiences of working with the Red Cross. He also wrote a study of bullfighting, (1932), a collection of short-stories, *Winner Take Nothing* (1933) and an account of big-game hunting, *The Green Hills of Africa* (1935).

In the late spring of 1928, Hemingway and Pauline travelled to Kansas City, where Pauline gave birth to a son (Patrick) was born on 28th June. Pauline had a difficult delivery, which Hemingway fictionalized in *A Farewell to Arms*. After Patrick's birth, Hemingway and his family travelled to Wyoming, Massachusetts and New York. In the winter, he was in New York with Bumby, about to board a train to Florida, when Hemingway discovered that his father had committed suicide. Clarence Hemingway had been suffering from hypertension and diabetes. This painful experience is reflected in the pondering of Robert Jordan in For Whom the Bell Tolls. Hemingway realized how Hadley must have felt after her own father's suicide in 1903, and he began to have premonitions that he would end his life by his own hand. His third son, Gregory Hancock Hemingway, was born on November 12, 1931 in Kansas City.

In 1933, Hemingway and Pauline went on safari to East Africa which provided him new themes and scenes for Green Hills of Africa, as well as for the short stories "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" and "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber." During the travels Hemingway contracted amoebic dysentery that caused a prolapsed intestine, and he was evacuated by plane to Nairobi, an experience reflected in The Snows of Kilimanjaro.

Hemingway also came under the influence of the journalist, William Bolitho. He described him as "a strange-looking man with a white lantern-jawed face... that is supposed to haunt you if seen suddenly in a London fog". They met nearly every evening for dinner. It has been claimed that this "marked the beginning of Heminway's education in international politics." He did the same for Walter Duranty of the New York Times. Duranty later commented that Bolitho taught him "nearly all about the newspaper business that is worth knowing." He added that Bolitho "possessed to a remarkable degree... the gift of making a quick and accurate summary of facts and drawing there from the right, logical and inevitable conclusions."

When the Civil War broke out in Spain, he advocated international support for the Popular Front Government. In 1937 he travelled to Spain as a war correspondent, and reported on the war in the Madrid area. He spent most of his time with the International Brigades and also helped the Dutch film director JorisIvens make *The Spanish Earth.* He also produced the novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. His play The Fifth Column written in Hotel Florida in Madrid was not a success. The play depicts a conflict between Republicanism and Fascism. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* depicts the people, life, politics and government of Spain. It throws light on Robert Jordan's participation in the war on the side of the loyalists and his love-affair with Maria.

In 1940, after his divorce from Pauline, Hemingway married Martha Gellhorn, a writer. They toured China before settling in Cuba. Gellhorn had inspired him to write his most famous novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls,* which he started in March 1939 and finished in July 1940. It was published in the month of October the same year. The book became a Book-of-the-Month Club choice, sold half a million copies within months and was nominated for Pulitzer Prize.

Hemingway worked as a war correspondent during the Second World War. He volunteered his fishing boat and served with the U.S. Navy as a submarine spotter in the Caribbean. In 1944, he travelled through Europe with the Allies as a war correspondent and participated in the liberation of Paris. Hemingway had a thorough

knowledge of military campaigns and war strategies. He had experiences of the American and the Spanish Civil wars and the two World Wars. He planned to write a novel on war but abandoned the idea and produced his short novel Across the River and Into the Trees (1950), though it did not receive the usual critical acclaim.

In 1945 he divorced again and then married Mary Welsh, a correspondent for Time magazine, in 1946. They lived in Venice and then moved to Cuba where he wrote *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), a novel that won the Pulitzer Prize in 1953. It is a story of an old fisherman Santiago struggling and fighting to carry his catch. The theme has a symbolic meaning and it depicts a man's struggle with nature and his triumph over it. In 1954, Hemingway was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

In 1954, while travelling to Europe and Africa, Hemingway and his fourth wife, Mary, were in two successive plane crashes. In the accidents, he received multiple types of injuries giving him a variety of less serious health problems throughout his life. Alcoholism also had a profound effect on his life, elevating his blood pressure and cholesterol, and ultimately deepening his depression. The suffering he experienced due to injury, illness, love, and war undoubtedly inspired much of his writing. He attempted to kill himself many times. Several members of his family also committed suicide, including his father, two of his siblings, and his granddaughter, suggesting that mental illness ran in his bloodline. On July 2nd, 1961, two weeks before his 62 birthday, Hemingway, plagued with depression, paranoia, and alcoholism, shot himself.

**Self Assessment Questions I**

1. For which newspaperwas Hemingway a reporter?
2. For which of the following newspaper did Hemingway contribute his articles?

## 7.4. THE NOVELS AND SHORT STORIES OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY: AN INTRODUCTION

Hemingway began his literary career as a poet and writer of short stories. Like other American writers such as Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis and Willa Cather, Hemingway worked as a journalist before becoming a novelist. His first work was entitled 'Three Stories and Ten Poems'. He however, realized that poetry was not his domain. From the Greco-Turkish War he gained valuable writing experience that he translated to the writing of fiction. Some of the important works of Ernest Hemingway are as follows:

*In Our Time:In Our Time* is the first collection of short stories and vignettes written by Ernest Hemingway. It deals with war, bullfights and violent deaths. The Work invokes peace, and delineates murder, violence, misery, the suffering of the soldiers, and their tragedies.

*The Torrents Of Spring:*is abook whichdeals with Hemingway's art of parody, satire, wit and humour. In this book he presents modern man's disillusionment and frustration in the period after the First World War. The world was in doldrums and the society was broken from within. The two main characters Scripts O' Neil and Yogi Johnson depict the general atmosphere of the war-torn society of Hemingway times.

*The Sun Also Rises* is a 1926 novel written about a group of American and British expatriates who travel from Paris to the Festival of San Fermín in Pamplona to watch

the running of the bulls and the bullfights. It is a love story of the protagonist Jake Barnes—a man whose war wound has made him impotent—and the promiscuous divorcée Lady Brett Ashley. The characters of the novel are based on real people and the action is based on real events. In the novel, Hemingway presents his notion that the "Lost Generation", considered to have been decadent, dissolute and irretrievably damaged by World War I, was resilient and strong. According to Hemingway's biographer Jeffrey Meyers it is "recognized as Hemingway's greatest work" and his scholar Linda Wagner-Martin calls it his most important novel. The novel was published in the United States in October 1926 and since then it has been continuously in print.

*A Farewell To Arms* is a romantic tragedy translated into many languages. It was published in the year 1929. The novel opens with World War I raging all over Europe. A young American student, Fredrick Henry, studying architecture in Italy, offers his services to the Italian army. In Gorizia, he is wounded in the knee and is sent to recuperate in a hospital in Milan where he falls in love with an English nurse, Catherine Barkley. He returns to the front in Gorizia and is caught in the Italian retreat. In order to save his life, he deserts his post and goes away to a hospital in Milan to take Catherine and go some place where they can start a new life. They go to Switzerland but cannot live happily, for a fresh tragedy awaits them. Catherine becomes pregnant, can never have a normal delivery, and ultimately dies after a Caesarian operation. The hero of the novel is left alone disillusioned.

*Green Hills Of Africa*Green Hills of Africa is a travel book published in 1935. Hemingway depicted his experiences of his travel to Africa. It reveals a spirit of competition between Hemingway and one another hunter Karl. Hemingway recreates his personal experiences of hunting and justifies his act of shooting because all animals are to die sooner or later.

*Two African Stories*Hemingway's *Two African Stories* consists of two short stories based on his African experiences. The first story, 'Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber' describes Francis Macomber's courage and fear. The hero is a marksman and an athlete who breaks the code of hunting. He has injured a lion and does not wish to kill it. When the lion rages to attack he flies away betrays cowardice. His fear suddenly vanishes when he chases a buffalo.

Another story of the book 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro' depicts the life of an American writer Harry, whose creative genius is stifled by his marriage with a rich woman who adores and admires him. Ailing from gangrene in his leg, he is hospitalized in Nairobi. On his bed he recollects his past experiences with women and is conscious of the death symbolized in vultures moving around and hyena prowling nearby. The story has used the stream of consciousness technique.

*For Whom The Bell Tolls* The novel was first published in 1940. Its title is taken from a sermon by John Donne, "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent . . . And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." The novel depicts the life and politics of Spain.

*The Old Man And The Sea: The Old Man and the Sea* was published in 1953. The novel represents different themes and has different strata of meaning. Santiago, the ocean and the marlin, the sharks, the lions and voyage into the far out Gulf Stream all are symbolic. It has the Christian, literary, and the religious symbols. The novel is the result of a mature mind.

**Self Assessment Questions II**

1. Which is the first collection of short stories and vignettes written by Ernest Hemingway?
2. When was *A Farewell to Arms published*?
3. Which of Hemingway's book is written about the ceremony and traditions of Spanish bullfighting?
4. In which Hemingway classic do we find the protagonist Santiago?

## 7.5. THEMES OF HEMINGWAY'S NOVELS

The popularity of Hemingway's work to a great extent is based on the themes. The theme of love, war, wilderness, loss, violence, brutality, cynicism, courage, failure, disillusionment, alienation, isolation either from society or one's self are recurring and necessary themes in much of Hemingway's work. He has reflected the world, the contemporary problems caused by the outbreaks of war, the despair and defeatism of the age, the disintegration of the old values and the economic injustice. He got the subject matter and themes of his works from his own age and further from his own individual experiences. As he entered into the world of violence and brutality, he received many physical and psychological wounds and thus recreated the hardships of the external world in his works.

As you know that Hemingway himself was a great sportsman, he liked to portray soldiers, hunters, bullfighters, at times people whose courage and honesty are set against the brutal ways of modern society, and who in this confrontation lose hope and faith. Hemingway has not only given us various sensations of his heroes but has also portrayed their conduct. In this code there is honesty, courage, bravery and skill. All of his heroes follow the code and certain principles of morality.

You have noticed that Hemingway portrays war as disease like a destructive force that takes the direction and meaning from characters' lives and rendered a whole generation "lost." To cope with their losses, many of Hemingway's characters drink excessively. Alcoholism is a widespread motif and, like love, it has disease like and curative properties. Alcoholism played a similar part in Hemingway's life. Romance, like drinking, is a metaphorical illness and cure in his writings.

Hemingway's interest in the delineation of death is great. He has depicted violent death which he saw in the wars and the bullfights. He has also portrayed people who have been disabled by the war and also the homosexuals.

As you have read that Hemingway, troubled in love as well, was married to Hadley Richardson, Pauline Pfeiffer, Martha Gellhorn, and Mary Welsh, and had a number of flings and affairs. For Hemingway and his characters, love has wounding and palliative properties. Whether one considers turbulent love to be a disease itself or a manifestation of other problems, it certainly represents an alternative sort of illness in Hemingway's life and literature. Oscar Wilde once said, "Life imitates art far more than art imitates life." Whether one believes that Hemingway's life imitates his art or that his art imitates his life, undeniably his work is at least partially autobiographical. Injury, illness, and wounds figure prominently in much of Hemingway's life and fiction, often in similar forms.

## 7.6. HEMINGWAY'S STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

Hemingway has been regarded as the originator of a new style. From almost the beginning of his writing career, he employed a distinctive style which drew comment from many critics. The Iceberg Theory, also known as the theory of omission, is the

writing style of Hemingway. As a journalist, he developed his art of writing with simplicity and correctness by omitting superfluous and extraneous matter. He studied the naturalists Balzac, Flaubert, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Hudson, Henry James, James Joyce, and Joseph Conrad. He often talked the practice of writing with worthy correspondent like Lincoln Steffens, William Bird, Guy Hickok, Harold Stearns and many more, and learnt from all of them, but he did not follow blindly any particular writer. When he became a writer of short stories, he retained his simple and forceful style, focusing on surface elements without giving way to lengthy geographical and psychological description. His straightforward prose, his spare dialogue, and his predilection for understatement are particularly effective in his short stories. He developed a forceful prose style characterized by simple sentences and few adverbs or adjectives. We may say that his style is simple, direct and somewhat plain and his technique is uncomplicated, with simple grammar and easily accessible language. In his works we find, vivid dialogues and exact description of places and things. He is also considered a master of dialogue. The conversations between his characters demonstrate not only communication but also its limits. The majority of his early novels were narrated in the first person and enclosed within a single point of view. Only in his For Whom the Bell Tolls, we see several different narrative techniques like the use of internal monologues, objective descriptions, rapid shifts of point of view, and in general a looser structure than in his earlier works. In Death in the Afternoon Hemingway summarizes his theory as:

If a writer of prose knows enough of what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. A writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places in his writing.

One of the world's leading journalists, Lincoln Steffens, was especially impressed with Hemingway's writing. According to Justin Kaplan, the author of Lincoln Steffens: A Biography (1974): "Among the younger men Steffens saw in Paris, Ernest Hemingway appeared to him to have the surest future, the most buoyant confidence, and the best grounds for it." According to Steffens' partner, Ella Winter:

> Steffens loved anything new, original, or experimental, and he especially cherished young people. He was sending Hemingway's stories to American magazines, and they were coming back, but this did not alter his opinion."Steffens told anyone who would listen: "Someone will recognize that boy's genius and then they'll all rush to publish him." Hemingway also encouraged Winter to write: "It's hell. It takes it all out of you; it nearly kills you; but you can do it."

**Self Assessment Questions III**

1. Discuss that Hemingway's novels reflect his time.
2. Attempt a biographical sketch of Hemmingway's life.
3. Hemingway's heroes are autobiographical. Comment.

## 7.7.SUMMING UP

In this unit you have learned:

- The life and background of Hemingway
- Common characteristics of Hemingway's heroes
- About the style and technique of Hemingway
- Themes of Hemingway's novels
- About the socio-economic conditions of the age which formed the background of Hemingway's novels
- The autographical elements in Hemingway's novels.
- About the wounds and death in his works.
- Hemingway's place in the history of American Novels.

## 7.8.ANSWER TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

**I**

1. Kansas City Star
2. Toronto Star weekly

**II**

1. *In Our Times*
2. 1929
3. *The Sun Also Rises*
4. *The Old Man and the Sea*

**III**

1. Refer to the discussion given at 7.5
2. Wikipedia has a very detailed write up on Hemingway.
3. Refer to the discussion given at 7.5

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## 7.10. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Write a note on the life sketch of Ernest Hemingway.

2. What were the influences on Hemingway?
3. Critically analyze Hemingway's use of symbolism.
4. Discuss Hemingway's treatment of love in his works.
5. Briefly discuss Hemingway's art as a novelist.
6. Discuss how Hemingway's heroes possess endurance and valour.
7. Discuss woman's dominant role in the works of Hemingway.
8. Write a short note on the fictional technique of Ernest Hemingway.
9. Write a note on Hemingway's use of violence and death in his novels.
10. Briefly discuss the moral and emotional vacuity of the age depicted by Hemingway in his novels.

**UNIT 8 ERNEST HEMINGWAY**

***A FAREWELL TO ARMS* -II**

## 8.1. INTRODUCTION

*A Farewell to Arms*, a classical war novel is based on Hemingway's own experiences as a Red Cross ambulance driver in Italy in 1918. A Farewell to Arms, by Ernest Hemingway, is a typical love story. The background of World War-I adds to the tragedy of the love story. The war affects the emotions and values of each character. The love between Catherine and Frederick must outlast long separations, life-threatening war-time situations, and the uncertainty of each other's whereabouts or condition. This novel is a beautiful love story of two people who need each other in a period of upheaval.

Frederick Henry is an American who serves as a lieutenant in the Italian army to a group of ambulance drivers. Hemingway portrays Frederick as a lost man searching for order and value in his life. Frederick disagrees with the war he is fighting. It is too chaotic and immoral for him to rationalize its cause. He fights anyway, because the army puts some form of discipline in his life. At the start of the novel, Frederick drinks and travels from one house of prostitution to another and yet he is discontent because his life is very unsettled. He befriends a priest because he admires the fact that the priest lives his life by a set of values that give him an orderly lifestyle.

Further into the novel, Frederick becomes involved with Catherine Barkley. He slowly falls in love with her and, in his love for her, he finds commitment. Their relationship brings some order and value to his life. Compared to this new form of order in his life, Frederick sees the losing Italian army as total chaos and disorder where he had previously seen discipline and control. He can no longer remain a part of something that is so disorderly and so, he deserts the Italian army. Frederick's desertion from the Italian army is the turning point of the novel. This is the significance of the title, A Farewell to Arms. When Frederick puts aside his involvement in the war, he realizes that Catherine is the order and value in his life and that he does not need anything else to give meaning to his life.

At the conclusion of this novel, Frederick realizes that he cannot base his life on another person or thing because, ultimately, they will leave or disappoint him. He realizes that the order and values necessary to face the world must come from within.

Catherine Barkley is an English volunteer nurse who serves in Italy. She is considered very experienced when it comes to love and loss since she has already been confronted with the death of a loved one when her fiance was killed earlier in the war. The reader is not as well acquainted with Catherine's inner thoughts and feelings as we are with those of Frederick. The story is told through Frederick's eyes and the reader only meets Catherine through the dialogue between her and Frederick or through his personal interpretations of her actions. Catherine already possesses the knowledge that her own life cannot be dependent on another. She learned this lesson through the death of her fiance. Her love for Frederick is what her life revolves around, yet she knows not to rely on him to be the order in her life. Had she been dependent on Frederick for the order in her life, she would not have been able to allow him to participate in the war for fear of losing her own stability with his death.

The theme that Hemingway emphasizes throughout the novel is the search for order in a chaotic world. Hemingway conveys this through Frederick's own personal search during the chaos of World War I. Catherine has found strength within herself to lead her through life. This is what Frederick must come to realize. Through his involvement with Catherine, Frederick slowly finds his own inner strength. Frederick's affair with Catherine prompts him to leave his wild life of prostitutes and drink. He becomes aware of an element of stability in their affair and realizes that the

war that he was involved in was too chaotic, so he deserts the army. He and Catherine make a life for themselves totally isolated from everything and everyone else. Frederick believes that his life is now completely in order and that his values are in perspective, yet he still seems discontented. He continuously has to convince himself that he has "a fine life." He has not yet reached Catherine's level that enables her to be perfectly happy in their love and yet not dependent on it for all comfort and support. Frederick still has to find that within himself.

Until the conclusion of the novel, Frederick still relies on Catherine as the source of order in his life. With the end of their affair when Catherine dies giving birth to their stillborn love-child, Frederick realizes that he cannot depend on any one person, such as Catherine, or anything, such as religion, war, or frivolity, for order and discipline. Hemingway describes Frederick's enlightenment best in the final paragraph of the novel when Frederick sees Catherine's corpse for the first and last time. Frederick's reaction was that "it was like saying good-by to a statue." Frederick realizes that Catherine was only a symbol of the order and strength in his life. Strength to face life must come from within him and only he will be able to get himself through his own life. He will have to learn to depend on himself. Frederick realizes this and is able to get on with his life on his own. "After a while [he] went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain." He did not mourn or feel like his own life had ended with her death, rather he was able to continue on with his newfound inner strength and face his world alone.

The novel succeeds in getting Hemingway's message across. Frederick's realization causes the reader to reflect on his/her own life and on what institutions they depend on in their own lives.

## 8.2. OBJECTIVES

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

- Explain the uniqueness of Hemingway’s art of storytelling.
- Undertake an analysis of the rich symbolism in A Farewell to Arms.
- Explain the autobiographical elements in A Farewell to Arms.
- Describe the plot of the story.
- Discuss the elements of Christianity and morality in the novel A Farewell to Arms.
- Discuss the style of Hemingway in the novel.

## 8.3. THE AUTHOR AND THE TEXT

### 8.3.1. Ernest Hemingway

In the previous unit you have read in detail about Ernest Hemingway, the legendary figure of America. In that unit we also touched some of his novels including A Farewell to Arms. Now in this unit you will get a complete chapter wise summary of the novel and also the autobiographical elements depicted in it. The love-affair between Frederic and Barkley, the hero’s injury in the battle-field, his despair and frustration all are some of the characteristics of the author’s life. As you know that Hemingway himself had received the injury caused by the mortar shell fire at Fossalta and was hospitalized in Milan in late summer and autumn of 1918 where he fell in love with a nurse. In this novel Hemingway deals imaginatively with his own love affair that had taken place at the hospital in Milan.

### 8.3.2. A Farewell to Arms: A Summary

Hemingway has divided the novel into five books and forty one chapters as summarized below:

#### 8.3.2.1. Book One:Chapters1-12

The first chapter reflects World War I and the place is the Italo-Austrian front in the Alps. The story is in first person narrative and the narrator is Lieutenant Frederic Henry, an American volunteer in the Italian ambulance corps. In this chapter he only introduces us with the plains, the mountains, the troops passing by with heavy boots and huge guns, and the fighting in the mountains which is not going well. At the end he adds that at the start of the winter the permanent rain came with an epidemic of cholera and seven thousand died of it in the army.

In the next chapter we learn that the war brought many victories the following year. Now the narrator and his companions are staying in Gorizia while fighting is going on only a mile away, beyond the next mountain. We are introduced to some of the narrator's fellow officers. We also learn that there are two brothels in the down, one for the officers and the other for the troops. One snowy night at dinner, the captain mocks the unit's priest with remarks about his sexual practices, and the priest is embarrassed. The narrator is preparing to go on leave, and they all suggest various places where he should visit.

The spring has come; Lieutenant Henry returns back to Gorizia from his trip and finds that there are many more guns in the country around and some new hospitals staffed by many British men and women. His room-mate lieutenant Rinaldi informs him that the town now has beautiful girls, including the one he is fascinated by, Miss Catherine Barkley, an English nurse.Henry loans Rinaldi fifty lira so that he can impress Catherine. Rinaldi tells him that nothing important had happened during his absence, except for a few men suffering from frostbite, chilblains, jaundice, gonorrhoea, self-inflicted wounds, pneumonia, and other problems. At the mess that night, the priest seems disappointed and hurt, but ultimately understanding, that Henry did not visit his hometown Abruzzi. The captain again mocks the priest saying that the priest loves girls and wants Austria to win that war. To both charges, the priest takes everything in a cheerful manner. The major tells the captain to leave him alone and they all leave.

A battery of guns in the next garden wakes Henry the next morning. He inspects his ambulance unit and discovers that everything is fine. Back in the room, Rinaldi asks Henry to come with him to meet Catherine. They drink first, then meet Catherine in the British hospital's garden. Rinaldi talks to another nurse, Helen Ferguson. Talking to Miss Barkley Henry learns that the man she was engaged to has been killed in France the year before. She dwells at some length on this. Henry, who is struck by Catherine's beauty and her hair, is unable to explain to her why he has joined the Italian army as an ambulance driver. They discuss her fiancé and the war more. On the way home, Renaldi apparently remarks that Catherine prefers Henry to himself.

Lieutenant Henry drives to see a new road that, when finished, will allow a new offensive. He drives along a narrower road that is hit by three artillery shells, then goes to see Catherine in Gorizia. As she is on duty, he cannot see her and is told to return at night. After dinner, Henry visits the British hospital garden and finds Miss Ferguson and Miss Barkley off duty. Miss Ferguson leaves them alone. Catherine explains that she is a V.A.D. (Voluntary Aid Detachment). Mr. Henry tried to kiss her, but is rebuffed. Immediately the narrator offers his apologies to her she cooled down. He tries to kiss her again she permits, and then cries, and asks him to be good

to her. When he returns home, Rinaldi remarks that he seems to be making progress with Miss Barkley.

Lieutenant Henry is away for two days, attending his duty near the front. As soon as he returns to Gorizia, he visits Catherine at the hospital. He feels uncomfortable holding a pistol while waiting for her in the office. They go into the garden. She says he should have sent her a note to tell her he would be away, and she asks him if he loves her and he lies that he does. He kisses her twice and thinks she may be a little crazy, but he does not mind, for this is certainly better than going to the brothel with the officers. Catherine, seeming to be reading Henry's mind, calls what they are doing a "'rotten game,'" and says Henry plays it very well.

The next day Henry again goes up to the front to prepare for the offensive that is to start in two days. He has an encounter with a soldier who has a hernia (he calls it a "'rupture'") and does not want to rejoin his regiment. The soldier has been to America and speaks English. Henry tries to help him but does not succeed. On returning home, he tries to write a couple of letters before going to dinner. He does not think he will be killed in the war, as it seems to him as dangerous as war in the movies. He wishes Catherine were with him, and entertains an elaborate fantasy about making love to her in a Milan hotel room. At dinner he drinks too much and, by the time he goes to the hospital, Catherine has retired for the night. Henry feels lonely.

Henry rides up to the river with three other cars in preparation for a possible attack. He meets Catherine and tells her that he will be away until tomorrow for a meaningless "'show,'" and she gives him a St. Anthony medal (though she is not Catholic). In the car, Henry clasps the St. Anthony around his neck. The cars drive through the beautiful countryside to the river.

Henry's car parks at a dressing station near the river. In a short time, the bombardment starts. While Henry and his drivers are eating cold macaroni and cheese, artillery shells blast outside. A huge, hot blast comes through the dugout and one of the drivers is killed. When Henry gets up, he realizes that he has been wounded badly in the right leg and his kneecap is gone. The two surviving drivers carry Henry to the medical post. The medical captain reports that he may also have a skull fracture in addition to his major right knee and foot wounds. Henry is taken by stretcher to the English ambulance, and they drive off.

In the ward at the field hospital Rinaldi visits Henry and gives him a bottle of brandy. He tells him he will receive a silver medal for doing a heroic act. He says the mission was a success, but expresses his displeasure with the girls in town. He promises to send Catherine over, but he thinks Henry handles women the wrong way. They have a small fight, then make up and Rinaldi leaves.

The priest visits Henry and bringing him vermouth, some English newspapers and mosquito netting. They drink and discuss the war.

Henry describes how screens are put up around a bed if the inhabitant is going to die. He is to be sent to a better American hospital in Milan tomorrow. Rinaldi tells him Catherine is also going to the hospital in Milan. They leave Henry, who goes to sleep. At the end of this chapter and Book-1 Henry makes the unpleasant two-day train trip to Milan.

**Book 2, Chapters13-24**

Henry arrives at the American hospital in Milan to discover that he is the first patient. After some bureaucratic difficulty with an elderly nurse, he gets a room where two

American nurses, Miss Gage and Miss Walker look after him. Miss Van Campen, the superintendent also comes whom Henry immediately dislikes.

When Henry wakes in the morning, he rings for Miss Gage who informs him that Catherine has arrived and that she doesn't like her. Catherine comes in and Frederic realizes he is in love with her. They embrace and he implies he wants to have sex. She says they have to be careful in front of others. At the end of the chapter we learn that the doctor will come in the afternoon.

The doctor arrives and sends Frederic for an X-ray. Later, three doctors, whom he considers incompetent, look over the X-ray and remove the dressing on Henry's leg. They project it will take six months until they can operate on his knee. Henry insists that another doctor be consulted, and Dr. Valentini comes to see him telling that he will operate the next day.

Catherine sleeps with Henry at night. After the operation the next day he is too ill to be interested in her, although she is again on night duty. After that Henry and Catherine are together for several nights. Eventually Henry asks that she be given a few nights rest. Catherine returns to Henry after three days, and they enjoy a passionate reunion.

During the summer, Henry learns to walk on crutches, and he and Catherine enjoy their time together in Milan. Henry wants to get married, but Catherine thinks that if they do she will be forced to leave because of the formality imposed under Italian law. Furthermore, she says it makes no sense because "there isn't any me, I'm you. Don't make up a separate me".

The war takes a terrible toll on both sides, especially on the Western front. Henry and Catherine talk on his balcony. It rains and they go inside. Catherine admits she is afraid of the rain. She cries, and Henry comforts her while it rains.

Henry goes to the horse races with Catherine, Helen and her date, and an elderly man, Myers, and his wife. The bond between Henry and Catherine also deepens and they spend a pleasant summer far from fighting.

By September Henry learns that the war is going very badly and there is a possibility using German troops on the Italian front. As Henry's leg is nearly healed and he can walk without a limp, he receives official orders giving him three weeks' convalescent leave, after which he is to return to the front. Catherine gives him a piece of startling news that she is three months pregnant. They drink together and talk about their son being in the army. Their mood is calmed and they seem not to worry.

The next morning Henry is diagnosed with jaundice. Miss Van Campen, the superintendent of nurses finds empty liquor bottles in Henry's room and blames alcoholism for his condition because she thinks he got jaundice purposefully in order to avoid being sent back to the front. He indignantly denies this but he has to spend two weeks on bed and ultimately loses his leave.

It is the night that Henry is supposed to return to the front. Catherine walks with him through town in the early evening as his train to the front is at midnight. They enter a gun shop, where Henry buys a new pistol and several ammunition cartridges. It starts raining, and they take a carriage to a hotel. Catherine buys an expensive nightgown on the way. Henry order dinner and watches Catherine, who does not look happy. She tells him that she feels like a whore. He gets upset but soon Catherine's mood changes. They eat, make love and feel better. Henry asks Catherine how she will manage having the baby; she assures him that she will be fine and that she will have set up a nice home for Henry by the time he returns.

Henry and Catherine leave their hotel room and take a carriage to the railway station. They say goodbye to each other and Henry returns back to the front.

**Book-3, Chapter 25-32**

After returning to his old headquarters in Gorizia, Henry has a talk with the town major about the war. Then he talks to his room-mateRinaldi. He learns that the war is going badly and, neither the major nor Rinaldi has confidence of victory. At dinner Rinaldi half-heartedly picks on the priest, trying to animate the nearly deserted dining hall for Henry's sake.

It is misty outside. Henry takes the priest to his room. The priest is depressed at the way things are going. Henry feels depressed, and says this is why he tries not to think about the war.

Henry travels to the Bainsizza, and rejoins his old ambulance unit. That night, the rain comes down hard and the enemy begins a bombardment. In the morning, the Italians learn that the attacking forces include Germans, and they become very afraid. The next night, word arrives that the Italian line has been broken; the forces begin a large-scale retreat. The troops slowly move out. They reach Gorizia in two days. Henry sees girls from the soldiers' whorehouse being loaded into a truck. Bonello, a fellow driver, wants to go with them. Henry finds the villa and hospital empty. He finds a note telling him to take some cars to Pordenone. He and the others rest and eat before they continue the retreat.

Henry and the drivers join the retreating army in the rainy night. Bonello has picked up two sergeants of engineering, while Aymo, another driver, has two Italian girls with him. A third driver, Piani, also comes. Peasants have joined them overnight. Henry thinks they need to find a side road in case the Austrians attack. He sees one and tells his fellow drivers to turn off.

They get stuck in the mud ten miles north of Udine. The engineers don't want to help and leave. Henry orders them to stop but they won't. He shoots and wounds one of them. Bonello finishes the wounded one off. It takes some time to move the cars and Aymo's is by far the worst. It gets stuck deeper in the mud. They lose the two other cars in another field. Near the town, Henry gives the girls 20 lire and tell them to rejoin the people on the road. Their situation continues to get worse.

They come to a river and find that one of the bridges has blown up while the other two are intact. They cross it and Henry sees a German staff car, then German bicycle troops, cross another nearby bridge before disappearing up the road. Aymo soon spots a heavily armed bicycle troop. Fearing capture, Henry and the men decide to avoid the main road, which the retreat follows, and head for the smaller secondary roads. They start down an embankment and are shot at. A bullet hits Aymo and kills him almost instantly and Henry suspects that it is done by the Italian rear guard. They look for a place to hide until dark and come across an abandoned farmhouse. After a short rest they take off again.

Henry hangs on to his timber and is carried down the river in the swift current. After floating in the cold river water he climbs out, removes from his shirt the stars that identify him as an officer, and counts his money. He crosses the Venetian plain that day and jumps aboard a military train that evening. He freezes when a young soldier with a helmet that is too large for his head spots him, but the boy assumes that Henry belongs on the train and does nothing. Henry then hides in a car stocked with guns. While crawling under a huge canvas tarp, he cuts his head but not badly.

Henry is very tired, wet and hungry and he lies on the floor of the flat car thinking of Catherine. He tells himself that he will take her to some place away from the war.

**Book 4, Chapter 33-37**

Henry gets off the train in Milan and goes to a shop for some coffee. The owner asks him about the front and tells him that if he is in trouble he can stay with him but Henry refuses. Back at the hospital, the porter and his wife embrace him. He finds out that Catherine has gone to Stresa. He asks the porter to promise that he has never seen him, which the Porter willingly does. He then goes to see Simmons the singer and tells him he's in trouble. Simmons offers him his own clothing. Fred plans to go to Stresa and then to Switzerland. He leaves.

On reaching Stress, Henry goes to a hotel and asks about Catherine. He learns that she is at another hotel. Catherine and Helen Ferguson are having supper when Henry arrives at their hotel. Catherine is overjoyed while Helen becomes angry and berates Henry for making such a mess of her friend's life. When Henry and Catherine are alone they talk things over and decide that they must go to Switzerland.

For two days they find life at the hotel most beautiful. Henry goes fishing with Emilio. Emilio offers to lend Henry his boat at any time. He meets an old friend Count Greffi, a ninety-four-year-old nobleman whom Henry befriends on an earlier trip to Stresa. That evening, Henry plays billiards with the count.

Later that night, Emilio wakes Henry to inform him that the military police plan to arrest Henry in the morning. He suggests that Henry and Catherine must take off to Switzerland. He lets them take his row boat. In the middle of the night they get in the boat to row about 20 miles across the lake to Switzerland.

Frederic rows out. The weather is stormy, but the boat is light, so the rowing is not too bad, though sometimes it does get bad, they finally reach Switzerland. Having a nice breakfast in a Swiss village they are arrested. When they show their passports and make up a story about coming into Switzerland for winter sport, they are released. But the officers tell them that they have to check in at police stations wherever they go. Happy and excited that they have made it to Switzerland, they find a hotel, exhausted.

**Book-5, Chapter 38-41**

Henry and Catherine take room in a house above the village of Montreux. They are far from the war and they enjoy a mostly solitary life in the beautiful countryside, the town, and neighbouring villages. Henry wants to get married now, but Catherine does not want to do so while pregnant. Catherine is very content with him though she admits she was crazy when she first met Henry.

By January the country is covered in snow. They still go for walks, but Catherine gets tired easily. Catherine says that after the baby, "young Catherine," is born she will be new and Frederic might fall in love with her again. He says that he is already in love and asks if she wants to "ruin him." She says she does and he says he wants this, too.

In March, it starts raining and even the mountainside looks dismal as snow turned to slush. They decide to move to Lausanne where the hospital is located. In Lausanne, they go to a hotel. It is March, 1918, and the German offensive has started in France. Now they don't have any bad times and as the baby is closer to being born they feel the need to spend each moment together.

Around 3am one morning, Catherine goes into labour pain that hit every half-hour and they take a taxi to the hospital. Catherine has frequent contractions and she tells

Fred to go away and get some breakfast. On returning back to the hospital, he learns that Catherine is in the delivery room. The doctor gives her gas for the pain. At noon the doctor wants to take lunch so he shows Fred how to operate the gas. At two, Fred goes out to take lunch and when he returns, he finds that Catherine is fully intoxicated by the gas. She feels that now she is going to die. The doctor tells Fred to go away so that he can examine Catherine. Fred gets anxious for a while. The doctor tells him that there are two options: a forceps birth or caesarean. Fred prefers the caesarean because it is safer for mother and child. The doctors take her away on the stretcher to the operating room. A doctor comes out holding the baby. They tell Frederic it's a "magnificent" boy. Frederic doesn't feel happy for the baby because he is very upset and worried about Catherine. When he goes to see Catherine, he thinks she is dead but the doctor says she is all right. He learns that the baby didn't live because he was choked by the umbilical cord. After supper he finds out that Catherine has had a hemorrhage and it is very dangerous. She knows she is going to die, but tells him she isn't afraid. The doctor doesn't want them to talk, and he sends Frederic out of the room reassuring him that she isn't going to die. Catherine has repeated hemorrhages and is unconscious. Frederic stays at the hospital for a while until she dies. He makes the nurses leave the room so that he can say goodbye to Catherine. The doctor offers to take him to his hotel, but he refuses to go. Finally he goes back to his hotel in the rain. The book ends with:

"But after I got them to leave and shut the door and turned off the light it wasn't any good. It was like saying good-by to a statue. After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain."

**Self Assessment Questions I**

1. In which year was A Farewell to Arms published?
2. Who is the hero of the novel A Farewell to Arms?
3. What is the profession of Catherine Berkley?

## 8.4. ANALYSING THE STORY

### 8.4.1 Theme: What is it About?

*A Farewell to Arms* has the fusion of two themes of love and war. Both the themes have been successfully woven into one. Both of the themes run parallel into the novel. Hemingway seeks to convey through this novel an uncomplimentary view of war and a favourable view of love. The book is not an anti-war treatise exclusively, nor is it solely a love story. Henry finds war unromantic and rather than sacrificing his life for a cause he does not believe in, he deserts. His desertion of the army is the natural and logical consequence of his disillusion. Life is an endless struggle, the end of which is death and pain. The theme of the novel, as represented by the love story, is the quest for meaning and certitude in a world that seems to negate just those values. It is about love that goes unrewarded, but then everything in the world of the novel is without reward. The novel celebrates the value of effort in face of manifested defeat and the values of discipline and stoic endurance.

The novel is primarily a love story that chronicles the relationship between Frederic Henry and Catherine Barkley through courtship, consummation, reaffirmation and finally separation by Catherine's death. Throughout the story, the war serves as a

catalyst to their relationship not only creating the circumstances that bring them together emotionally but force their temporary separation as well. During the course of the story, Frederic's ideas about love are influenced not only by his growing feelings for Catherine, but also by his conversations with the priest and later with Count Greffi. The priest informs Frederic that the true nature of love, such as the priest has for God, is one in which you desire to serve the object of your affections and the Count qualifies that sentiment by advising Frederic that love for a woman is an act of devotion on par with religious feeling. These sentiments come to a head during the crises of Catherine's protracted labour when Frederic, who previously espoused no particular religious feeling, prays to God for her safety.

When we first meet Frederic he is an officer in the Italian army serving in the ambulance corps and the United States has not yet entered the war. Although the novel takes place during the First World War, its action is centred on the northern Italian-Austrian front which though horrific in its own right, was considerably less intense than the fighting in France between the French/British and the Germans. Catherine calls it a "silly front." Frederic admits to Catherine that he doesn't know why he joined the army and thinks that perhaps it was only because he was in the country and spoke the language. His first experience with combat is cut short when a shell wounds him before the attack even begins. Later, when he returns to the front after the Italian army has suffered several military reverses and great loss of life, he gleans the increased pessimism and defeatism running rampant through the troops. Typical of novels set in the First World War, Frederic becomes disillusioned, though unlike other stories from that era such as Erich Maria Remarque's All Quiet on the Western Front or Frederic Manning's The Middle Parts of Fortune, Hemingway's central character is not of the country for which he is fighting. Thus, when Frederic escapes the summary execution at the river and makes a "separate peace", his status as an American citizen aids him in shrugging off any lingering feelings of responsibility.

### 8.4.2. Death and Mortality

Death is constant in the story beginning with Passini's violent demise in the dugout and continuing through Aymo's death during the retreat. Both these deaths are from the war and are, in Frederic's estimation, random and unavoidable. Frederic cheats death twice in the story; first, when he survives his wounds and second, when he escapes the executioners. Whatever sense of empowerment this might have yielded, it is undermined when he learns the true nature of mortality when Catherine dies during childbirth. Catherine’s death is also parallel to the death of the soldiers in battle. Do You remember the famous scene when Frederic is transported in the ambulance, the wounded soldier above him has "haemorrhaged" and the blood drips on Frederic? Catherine too dies of "haemorrhage," though her wound comes from her battle with childbirth. Her death leads Frederic to conclude, as did Hemingway after his own experiences in the war, that each man owes life a death and that sooner or later we all must pay.

### 8.4.3. Sources of A Farewell to Arms

Hemingway based his narrative closely on the factual history of the war between the Italians and Austrians from 1915 to 1918. He based the novel partly on his experience as a Red Cross Ambulance driver in Italy in 1918. Frederic as a narrator in the novel shows the writer’s way of sharing his own experiences. He even observed the

geography of the region and recreated the weather reports for the period in his novel. In the previous unit you have read that Hemingway himself was wounded in the leg which he narrated in the words of Frederick in A Farewell to Arms. Hemingway was taken to a field Hospital in Milan where he fell in love with o ne of the nurses as he has shown in the novel.

### 8.4.4.Significance of the title

Now let's look at a few ways we can analyze the title using the word "arms." The word 'arms' has a dual meaning in the novel. It means the arms of a human being, and the weapons used in war by soldiers. Thus the word in the title suggest that farewell to arms concerns a separation or release either from the arms of the beloved or from weapons. Since the book spends much time describing the horrors of World War I, the title can be seen as a plea to the world to say "farewell" to wars and the weapons we use to fight them. Frederic leaves his post as ambulance driver for the Italian army during the retreat, and then flees with Catherine to Switzerland to avoid being arrested for desertion, the title can refer specifically to Frederic's "farewell" to the weapons of war when he decides to end his personal involvement with it. There is some irony at work here, because when Frederic says "farewell" to the Italian army, he also says hello to the lover's arms of Catherine. And when she dies, he must say farewell to those arms as well.

Looking at the parallel between Catherine and the soldier you have noticed that how much love exists between Frederic and the men he encounters in the war. In addition to saying farewell to Catherine's loving arms, Frederic says farewell to the loving arms of many of these men in the novel. Also, because the novel is written in the past tense as Frederic's memory of both World War I and of Catherine, the title can be a comment on the paradoxical way that Frederic is dealing with the trauma of both such experiences.

To deal with such intense pain and loss, he relives it through remembering it and telling it. By preserving the events in a narrated memory, he can try to say "farewell" to the arms of pain that bind him, and perhaps make things hurt a little bit less. He also honors the loving arms behind the pain by giving them a place in remembered history.

### 8.4.5. Images and symbols used in A Farewell to Arms

In this novel, Hemingway makes use of three major symbols: mountains, plains, and rain. The mountain is associated with home whereas the plains are just the opposite. Mountains are introduced in the first sentence of the first chapter and continue throughout the novel: they symbolize love, dignity, health, happiness, and the good life; they also represent worship or at least the consciousness of God. On the other hand, the low-lying plains serve as a symbol of indignity, suffering, disease, death, obscenity, war, and irreligious. The priest tells Henry that his homeland Abruzzi is a scenic place with mountains beyond it, with dry cold and snow, with polite and kindly people, with hospitality, and with natural beauty. Contrasted to it, is the low-lying officer's mess in the plains: obscenities, the priest-baiting captain, cheap cafes, prostitutes, drunkenness, and destruction. Henry's love affair begins as a rotten game of wartime seduction but soon it acquires the dimensions of honor and dignity. Therefore, the escaping lovers reach a small village and a villa nestled in snow

covered mountains. Catherine becomes the center of the mountain image herself. She signifies home, happiness, security, and comfort, just as the mountains do.

Rain in this novel is a recurrent symbol. In the very first chapter, there is a reference to the rains, which bring cholera that kills seven thousand people. Catherine is afraid of the rain because she sees herself dead in it and indeed it happens at the end. All the major disastrous events in the novel, such as the retreat, the parting of the lovers after Henry's recovery, and Catherine's pains of labor and her death, all are accompanied by the rain. It signifies misfortune, distress, and death.

## 8.5. ANALYSING THE CHARACTERS

### 8.5.1. Lt. Frederic Henry

The novel does not give much information about the past life of the hero. He is an American who came to Italy to study Architecture and speaks fluent Italian. The only information we get of his past is his story of watching dying ants in the woods. He is not a hero in the conventional sense of the term. He places no premium on values such as duty, honor, glory, and courage. He turns his back to the war, mainly because he feels that it did not concern him. Nor does he mind living off of his family, asking for money to provide him and Catherine a way through in Switzerland. He makes a separate peace for himself but is not totally convinced of it; he still feels like a truant schoolboy. During the war, however, he shows that he has the capacity to think on his feet and to make instant decisions.

### 8.5.2. Catherine Barkley

She is a British nurse serving in the British hospital at Gorizia. She is hit by the war even before she meets Henry. Her childhood fiancé was blown to pieces and she carried his riding crop as a remembrance. Perhaps that is the reason why she appears overwrought, excitable, and anxiety-ridden when we first meet her. She is, of course, wounded. Unlike her friend Miss Ferguson, she is not overtly religious. She meets Henry and loves him. For her, LOVE is religion, but its morals are not well defined. She is created by Hemingway as an "ideal woman": so devoted to her man that she will die in the process of doing anything that he wants. You have read that from the beginning of the novel, she understands the finality of death whereas Henry does not recognize it until the end. The manner she meets her death is magnificent. She considers her death imminent but does not lose her courage. In her own words, "I'm going to die, I hate it ……. I'm not afraid…….I'm not a bit afraid. It's just a dirty trick." The readers mourn on her death but she dies as she has lived with honesty and with courage and becomes a memorable character.

### 8.5.3 Minor Characters

Dr. Rinaldi is Henry's friend and roommate. A surgeon by profession he is keen to get his papers published in a journal. Fed up by war, he drinks and flirts with women to forget his sorrows. He loves the earthly pleasures of life and is not interested in serious love. He believes love to be a folly and takes women as a means for fulfilling men's sexual urge. Rinaldi is known for his comic nature. He always has a light mood and feels that only in this way one can forget one's sorrows and sufferings.

The priest has insignificant role in the novel. As he is misfit in the army, the army men tease him by inviting him to the brothels but he never minds it. His duty is to

console men in their last moments and perform rites. He hates the sexual love and respects those whose values are solidified.

**Self Assessment Questions II**

1. Comment on the structure of *A Farewell to Arms* bringing out the fusion of the themes of love and war.
2. Give a character sketch of Catherine Barkley.
3. *A Farewell to Arms* is a chapter from Hemingway's life. Discuss.
4. Critically analyze Hemingway's use of symbols in the novel.

## 8.6. SUMMING UP

In this unit you have learned about:

- Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*
- the themes and techniques of the novel
- the autobiographical elements Hemingway has put in the novel
- the symbolism and naturalism in the novel.
- the theme of love and war in the novel.

## 8.7. ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

**I**

1. 1929
2. Frederick Henry
3. Nurse

**II**

1. Refer to the section 8.4.1 and 8.4.4
2. Refer to the section 8.5.2 and summary of the novel.
3. Refer to the section 8.4.3 and for detail refer to the previous unit.
4. Refer to the section 8.4.5

## 8.8. REFERENCES

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## 8.9. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Examine the significance of the title *A Farewell to Arms*.
2. State the major themes in *A Farewell to Arms* and elaborate on them.
3. Describe the character of Frederic Henry.
4. Write a note on the character of Catherine Barkley.
5. Discuss the significance of various symbols used in this novel.

**UNIT 9 TONI MORRISON**

***THE BLUEST EYE*-I**

## 9.1. INTRODUCTION

In the history of African American literature, Toni Morrison's name comes first because of her contribution in this literature. She represents the real life of slaves who came to America. Most of her characters belong to black society. African Americans are citizens of the United States who have origins in any of the black populations of Africa. Toni Morrison is a Nobel Prize- and Pulitzer Prize-winning American novelist, editor and professor. She is the first African American writer to be honored with the award of Nobel Prize for literature in the year 1993, a token of acknowledgment for bringing marginalized culture to the mainstream of the dominant culture. Other black writers who have won the Nobel Prize are – Wole Soyinka, the playwright from Nigeria and Derek Walcott, the poet from West Indies but Morrison is the first African - American to receive such an honor.

## 9.2.OBJECTIVES

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

- Analyze the writing style of Morrison.
- Discuss Morrison's place in the history of African-American literature.
- Describe the real life incidents in Morrison's works.
- Discuss an introduction of Morrison's novels.

## 9.3. TONI MORRISON: LIFE AND BACKGROUND

Toni Morrison was born as Chloe Anthony Wofford on 18 February 1931 in the small town Lorain, Ohio, a place which remains present in many of her novels. Her birthplace reflected the effect of capitalism on the lives of people as it was an industrial town but as a conscious African- American writer, she is also one with the plight of color difference. Toni Morrison acquires a unique cultural inheritance of African-American society from her family and it is this positive feature that differentiates her work from the other writings of that time. Where on one hand her father was a 'racist', on the other hand her mother was a keen believer in the Bible and was optimist for the coming age where racism would lose its ground. Her father, who was a shipyard welder, had shocking experiences as a child in Georgia and he never trusted any White but this did not let him underestimate their status as Blacks. The self-courage to fight in adversities, a quality inherited from her mother, transformed Morrison to a self-dependent strong woman. The distinct views of her family on racism made Morrison extremely sensitive towards the troubles of human race under the evils of racism and capitalism. The deep knowledge of ancient folklores together with the melody of music helped Morrison to create a fascinating world full of sensitive Black people. Morrison credited her parents with instilling in her a love of reading, music, and folklore. Living in an integrated neighborhood, Morrison did not become fully aware of racial division until she was in her teenage.

Morrison's grandfather, Solomon Willis, was a carpenter and a violinist encouraging the children to sing about the history of Africa. Her grandmother, Ardelia Willis, is responsible for the transfer of myths and supernaturalism in the routine of Morrison. The seventeen years of her life that Morrison spent in Lorain before leaving for college studies created her interest in the lives of black people striving to frame their identity. Lorain was a small industrial town populated with immigrant Europeans, Mexicans and Southern blacks who lived next to each other. Chloe attended an

integrated school. In her first grade, she was the only Black student in her class and the only one who could read. The love for reading developed her interest in literature. Her early favorites were the Russian writers Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, French author Gustave Flaubert and English novelist Jane Austen. She studied four years of Latin before graduating with honors from Lorain High School in 1949.

The majority of courses offered at the Howard University did not include the Black history or culture. In fact, Morrison's suggestion of writing the term papers on the Black characters in Shakespeare was treated with ridicule. In 1957, Morrison returned to Howard University as a faculty member and married a Jamaican architect, Harold Morrison, who fathered her two sons, Harold and Slade. However, the marriage did not prove to be successful one and the couple separated after six years in 1964 when she was pregnant with her second son. She returned to Lorain to give birth to her child and finally settled in New York but her mother was worried about her settling alone at a foreign place.

## 9.4. MORRISON'S WRITING CAREER

Morrison began writing fiction as part of an informal group of poets and writers at Howard who met to discuss their work. She went to one meeting with a short story about a black girl who want to have blue eyes. She wrote it while raising two children and teaching at Howard. Morrison's journey as a literary figure bloomed from the Howard University where she received her Bachelor of Arts degree in English. Since many people could not pronounce her first name correctly, she changed it to Toni, a shortened version of her middle name. She joined a repertory company, the Howard University Players, with whom she made several tours of the South. She gained the firsthand knowledge of the life of the Blacks there, the life her parents had escaped by moving north. It is during these trips that she learned the intensity of love the Blacks had for South and the safety they connected in the Black neighborhood.

Her eighteen years stay as editor in Random House and her experience shaped her imagination for her succeeding fictions. At the age of thirty Morrison decided to rearrange her short story about a black girl who wishes for blue eyes. The theme impressed Alan Rancler, then the editor of Macmillan and he encouraged her to write a full-length novel on it that was later published by Holt under the title The Bluest Eye in 1970.

Morrison taught English at two branches of the State University of New York and at Rutgers University: New Brunswick Campus. In 1984, she was appointed to an Albert Schweitzer chair at the University at Albany, The State University of New York. From 1989 until her retirement in 2006, Morrison held the Robert F. Goheen Chair in the Humanities at Princeton University.

Though based in the Creative Writing Program at Princeton, Morrison did not regularly offer writing workshops to students after the late 1990s, a fact that earned her some criticism. Rather, she has conceived and developed the prestigious Princeton Atelier, a program that brings together talented students with critically acclaimed, world-famous artists. Together the students and the artists produce works of art that are presented to the public after a semester of collaboration. In her position at Princeton, Morrison used her insights to encourage not merely new and emerging writers, but artists working to develop new forms of art through interdisciplinary play and cooperation.

At its 1979 commencement ceremonies, Barnard College awarded her its highest honor, the Barnard Medal of Distinction. Oxford University awarded her an honorary Doctor of Letters degree in June 2005. In November 2006, Morrison visited the Louvre Museum in Paris as the second in its "Grand Invité" program to guest-curate a month-long series of events across the arts on the theme of "The Foreigner's Home." Inspired by her curatorship, Morrison returned to Princeton in Fall 2008 to lead a small seminar, also entitled "The Foreigner's Home."

In May 2010, Morrison appeared at PEN World Voices for a conversation with Marlene van Niekerk and Kwame Anthony Appiah about South African literature, and specifically, van Niekerk's novel, Agaat. In May 2011, Morrison received an Honorable Doctor of Letters Degree from Rutgers University during commencement. In March 2012, Morrison established a residency at Oberlin College. She is currently a member of the editorial board of The Nation magazine. She became the first black woman writer to hold a named chair at an Ivy League University. She was the eighth woman and the first black woman to do so setting new heights for African- American literature.

**Self Assessment Questions I**

1. Listing the more important facts about Morrison's life, write a short paragraph on Toni Morrison.

2. Define the points, which inspire Morrison to write her novels.

## 9.4. THE NOVELS AND SHORT FICTION OF MORRISON: AN INTRODUCTION

*The Bluest Eye:The Bluest Eye* is a 1970 novel by Toni Morrison. It is Morrison's first novel and was written while she was teaching at Howard University and raising her two sons on her own. The story is about a year in the life of a young black girl named Pecola who develops an inferiority complex due to her eye color and skin appearance. It is set in Lorain, Ohio, against the backdrop of America's Midwest during the years following the Great Depression. The point-of-view switches between the perspective of Claudia MacTeer as a child and an adult, and a third-person omniscient viewpoint. Because of the controversial nature of the book, which deals with racism, incest, and child molestation, there have been numerous attempts to ban it from schools and libraries.

The novel is alternately narrated in first-person by Claudia MacTeer and in third-person omniscient, focusing on various other characters. Nine-year-old Claudia and her 10-year-old sister, Frieda, live in Lorain, Ohio with their parents, who take two other people into their home: Mr. Henry, a tenant, and Pecola Breedlove, a temporary foster child whose house was burned down by her wildly unstable father, who is widely gossiped about in the community. Pecola is a quiet, passive young girl with a hard life, whose parents are constantly fighting, both verbally and physically. Pecola is continually being reminded of what an "ugly" girl she is, fueling her desires to be white with blue eyes.

One day, while Pecola is doing dishes, her intoxicated father rapes her. His motives are unclear, seemingly a combination of both love and hate. Her father flees after the second time he rapes Pecola, leaving her pregnant. Claudia and Frieda are the only two in the community that hope for Pecola's child to survive. Consequently, they give

up the money they had been saving to buy a bicycle, instead planting marigold seeds with the superstitious belief that if the flowers bloom,Pecola's baby will live. The marigolds never bloom, and Pecola's child, who is born prematurely, dies. Near the novel's end, a dialogue is presented between two sides of Pecola's own imagination, in which she indicates strangely positive feelings about her rape by her father. In this internal conversation, Pecola speaks as though her wish has been granted: she believes that she now has blue eyes. Claudia, as narrator a final time, describes the recent phenomenon of Pecola's insanity and suggests that her father (who has since died) may have shown Pecola the only love he could by raping her. Claudia lastly laments on her belief that the whole community, herself included, have used Pecola as a sort of scapegoat to make themselves feel prettier and happier.

The Bluest Eye was not an immediate success but Morrison continued to write and soon Sula was published in 1973 which was acknowledged and nominated for the National Book Award. The novel is about the definitions of good and evil revealing Black women friendship that breaks the stereotyping of Black women and presents her as an exile. It questions and examines the terms "good" and "evil," often demonstrating that the two often resemble one another. The novel addresses the confusing mysteries of human emotions and relationships, ultimately concluding that social conventions are inadequate as a foundation for living one's life. The novel tempts the reader to apply the diametrically opposed terms of “good and evil,” “right and wrong” to the characters and their actions, and yet simultaneously shows why it is necessary to resist such temptation.

While exploring the ways in which people try to make meaning of lives filled with conflicts over race, gender, and simple idiosyncratic points of views, Sula resists easy answers, demonstrating the ambiguity, beauty, and terror of life, in both its triumphs and horrors. At its center-a friendship between two women, a friendship whose intensity first sustains, then injures. Sula and Nel- both black, both smart, both poor, raised in a small Ohio town-meet when they are twelve, wishbone thin and dreaming of princes.

Through their girlhood years they share everything-perceptions, judgments, yearnings, secrets, even crime-until Sula gets out, out of the Bottom, the hilltop neighborhood where beneath the sporting life of the men hanging around the place in headrags and soft felt hats there hides a fierce resentment at failed crops, lost jobs, thieving insurance men. Sula leaps it and roams the cities of America for ten years. Then she returns to the town, to her friend. But Nel is a wife now, settled with her man and her three children. She accommodates to the Bottom, where she avoid the hand of God by getting in it, by staying upright, helping out at church suppers, asking after folks-where she deal with evil by surviving it.

As willing to feel pain as to give pain, she can never accommodate. Nel cannot understand her any more, and the others. Sula scares them. In clear, dark, resonant language, Toni Morrison brilliantly evokes not only a bond between two lives, but the harsh, loveless, ultimately mad world in which that bond is destroyed, the world of the Bottom and its people, through forty years, up to the time of their bewildered realization that even more than they feared Sula, their pariah, they needed her.

Song of Solomon: The publication of Song of Solomon in 1977 gave Morrison a national acceptance. She received the National Book’s Critic Circle Award for the book. It was a bestseller and won American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letter Award. Song of Solomon begins with one of the most arresting scenes in our century’s literature: a dreamlike tableau depicting a man poised on a roof, about to fly into the air, while cloth rose petals swirl above the snow-covered ground and, in the

astonished crowd below, one woman sings as another enters premature labor. The child born of that labor, Macon (Milkman) Dead, will eventually come to discover, through his complicated progress to maturity, the meaning of the drama that marked his birth. Toni Morrison"s novel is at once a romance of self-discovery, a retelling of the black experience in America that uncovers the unchallengeable poetry of that experience, and a family saga luminous in its depth, imaginative generosity, and universality. It is also a tribute to the ways in which, in the hands of a master, the ancient art of storytelling can be used to make the mysterious and invisible aspects of human life apparent, real, and firm to the touch.

Tar Baby: For her next novel Tar Baby (1981), she was the first African-American woman to appear on the cover of the March 30, 1981 issue of Newsweek magazine. The novel brings to notice the conflict and clashes of the White, Black and mixed culture. The separation between the male and female protagonists of the novel in the end asserts the unsustainable relation between the two cultures. While living in Albany, she started writing her first play, Dreaming Emmett. It was based on the true story of Emmett Till, a black teenager, fourteen years old, who was shot in the head and thrown into Tallahatchie River with seventy-pound cotton gin fan round his neck for allegedly whistling at a white woman.

Beloved:Morrison’s next novel Beloved appeared in 1987 and won several prestigious awards including the Pulitzer Prize for it in 1988. Beloved was inspired by the true story of a black American slave woman, Margaret Garner, who escaped with her husband Robert from a Kentucky plantation, and sought refuge in Ohio. When the slave masters overcame them, she killed her baby, in order to save the child from the slavery she had managed to escape. The book was turned into a movie starring Oprah Winfrey in 1998. In May 2006, The New York Book Review named Beloved the best American novel published in the previous twenty-five years. The novel marks the consciousness of Morrison on the evil of slave trade that flourished inspite of the legal ban. Beloved's main character, Sethe, kills her daughter and tries to kill her other three children when a group arrives in Ohio to return them to Sweet Home, the Kentucky plantation from which Sethe recently fled. A woman presumed to be her daughter, called Beloved, returns years later to haunt Sethe's home at 124 Bluestone Road, Cincinnati. The story opens with an introduction to the ghost.

## 9.6. THEMES AND TECHNIQUES OF MORRISON’S NOVELS

Morrison has always given importance to the social aspect of her works and her creative world is never separate from its real life counterpart. Her novels are known for their epic themes, vivid dialogue and richly detailed black characters. Her characters draw inspiration from the community of the Blacks where she actually belongs. Therefore, the tremendous change of the black community and its struggle has formed the basic theme of the novels of Toni Morrison. Morrison has won nearly every book prize possible. She has also been awarded honorary degrees. Morrison continued to explore the African-American experience in its many forms and periods in her work. Although her novels typically concentrate on black women, Morrison does not identify her works as feminist. Because of the experiences of slavery, most slaves repressed these memories in an attempt to forget the past. This repression and dissociation from the past causes a fragmentation of the self and a loss of identity. Slavery splits a person into a fragmented figure. The identity, consisting of painful memories and unspeakable past, denied and kept at bay, becomes a "self that is no

self." To heal and humanize, one must constitute it in a language, reorganize the painful events and retell the painful memories. Quest of survival, freedom, love and search for identity are the common themes in Morrison works. Her novels are rooted in the slave narrative based on the experiences of the Negroes in America.

## 9.7. HISTORY OF AFRICAN AMERICANS

Toni Morrison is an African American and the traumas faced by the Afro Americans are reflected in her novels. Before reading Tony Morrison, you should be aware of the background of African-American society; the living standard of Africans was reduced to subhuman and the Whites categorized them as subalterns. It took centuries for the Blacks to rebuild their unclear history of slavery. The Blacks suffered exploitation in every phase of life- economical, political, sociological, cultural, moral, ideological, physical, emotional, psychological etc. - and it developed a sense of inferiority amongst them. Awareness came in the form of political thinkers, socialist, teachers, writers, painters etc. and this marked the new age of freedom and equality in the lives of the Blacks.

The history of slavery that prevented the African- American from exercising their rights is approximately three centuries old. African- American is the term designated to the Black American groups in the United States, majority of them are the descendants of the captives from Africa brought to serve in United States from 1619 to 1865. The term is also broadly used for the immigrants from Caribbean as they share the similar past of slavery. It is recorded that the first African slaves were brought in 1619, when a Dutch ship sold nineteen Blacks as indentured servants to Englishmen in Virginia. Indentured servants were the type of servants usually on contract for three to seven years in exchange of their necessities like food, clothes, transportation etc. They served on the legalized contract and people from various places migrated to America in search of job. However, the indenture could not make them safe from the violence of their masters. A very small percentage of Blacks worked in American colonies but the favorable climate, more food to eat and, lighter workload attracted more and more slaves to America. Massachusetts was the colony to legalize slavery in 1641.

The indentured servants were not only Black but multiracial people who worked on the similar legal pattern. However, the English could not survive the harsh condition and more slaves were imported from Africa. The concept of race-based slavery did not start until 1700. The seeds of racism were sprouting in the soil of slavery. There was the beginning of race-based slavery where only Blacks were enslaved and assigned the unskilled tasks. The slave bred more slaves and the entire community of Blacks was humiliated on the racial ground. The shortage of labor and vast land for plantation built the concept of lifetime slaves who were owned like any other commodity. They could be sold, exchanged, or freed.

The Black woman was the dual victim of sexism and racism in America. The white owner physically and mentally abused them. The horror of slavery was more traumatic than death and therefore slaves like Margaret Garner, the inspiration behind the novel Beloved, preferred to kill her daughter than to serve the Whites. The status of women was reduced to a breeding animal that too in most pathetic conditions with most filthy tasks assigned. Black women had the darkest part of slavery where her babies were snatched from her breast and sold. Her sons were beaten and killed and the daughters raped before her eyes. The helplessness of being a female made them curse their present life. The exploitation did not bring them any sympathy instead; they were categorized as ‘loose’ women without virtues.

Where in an ideal situation a mother is supposed to fulfill the household duties of bringing up her children and taking care of the household activities like cooking, dishwashing, and maintaining the house, the husband is expected to work outside for the money. Nevertheless, in a Black family the deviation from the standard norms of a family caused one type of oppression. Under the slavery era, the females worked in the families of Whites as house cleaners neglecting their own children and for the rest of the time assisted their husbands in the fields, serving without pay. In short,the whites routinely exploited their private life. The exploitation of women on the economic, political and ideological grounds such as considering them as a breeder slave women shapes the works of many female writers.

In 1750's after the establishment of newly founded constitution of free America, there were agitation for the abolition of slavery and by the beginning decade of 1800, there were more than hundred thousand free Blacks in United States. However, the number of free slaves was more in the Northern states than South.

However, the majority of Blacks lived in poverty and those who succeeded to make some of their fortune suffered from racial segregation by the Whites. The Blacks were subjected to physical tortures and were not allowed to dwell near the Whites. This segregation led to the development of a separate community of Blacks where they started their own business for survival. With an increasing awareness on racial issues, the Blacks established their own communities, schools, churches, banks etc. However, the majority of African-American adopted Protestant religion but they created a unique form of Christianity that is the formation of Black churches. The freed slaves preferred to worship in churches, which were culturally and spiritually influenced by African traditions.

The American Civil War (1861-1865) brought the resistance of the Blacks in terms of protest, rallies etc. to the notice of the government. The Blacks adopted various methods to counter the racial discrimination they were facing at every step of their life. With mass protest all over the country, amendments were made in the U.S. Constitution to abolish slavery and grant U.S. citizenship to African - Americans. The Black males also received the right to vote in 1870's but incidents of racial assault did not end. In the first half of the twentieth century, over five million African migrated from the South to the Northern states in search of brighter prospects for life. This is known as the Great Migration (1910-1940) in the history of America. The New York City formed the learning center for many Black intellectual giving birth to the cultural movement called the Harlem Renaissance. The migration extended throughout the World War II and lasted until 1970's where cities like California, Los Angeles and Oakland were the target places due to the skilled job offers.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was established in 1909 but it had a long journey to go to protect the rights of non-whites in America. The Black faced segregation in jobs prospects. During the war, they had to mass protest under the leadership of A. Philip Randolph against the non-entry of Blacks in the wars. Later in 1954, the Blacks had to fight again for their rights to education in non- segregated schools. The turbulent history of African- American society is also reflected through the literary tradition. African-American literature has its roots hidden in the history of liberty of the Blacks.

African-American literature was launched in the second half of the eighteenth century, a sub genre of this literature began in the middle of the nineteenth century where to present the true reality of slavery, a number of former slaves such as Harriet Jacobs, and Frederick Douglass wrote slave narratives. Black Literature acquired its fame in the 1920's and this change is marked in the history as the Harlem

Renaissance. The literature was in its bloom between the World War I and World War II.

In the late twentieth century, African-American literature once again reached its heights. The department of Black studies emerged in various Universities around the country. Novels of both folk and urban life were written and accepted by the society. Women literature also established and Alice Walker, Gayl Jones, Toni Morrison, Terry McMillan, Margaret and Gloria Naylor are some of the prominent female literary figure of the time.

The term, 'negro' has also become outdated for the coming generations of Black Americans. Today the Blacks hold dignitary positions and with the Barack Obama as the forty-fourth Black President of America, the community definitely have soared the new heights of freedom.

**Self Assessment Questions II**

1. Discuss the background of African American society.
2. What are the themes on which the writer writes all most all her novels?
3. Make a list of all the novels written by Morrison. Discuss only one that you find most interesting.
4. Do you think that black literature owes a major share of Toni Morrison? Give points in support of your answer.

## 9.8. SUMMING UP

In this unit you have learned:

- about Toni Morrison as a great African American writer
- the problems of Blacks who came to America
- about the themes on which Morrison writes her stories
- about the use of dramatic art in the telling of a story
- her place in the history of African-American literature
- about real life incidents on which she writes her novels

## 9.9. ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

**I**

1. You will find the details in the discussion in 6.3.
2. Refer to the discussion no 6.3

**II**

1. Refer to the discussion no 6.7.
2. Refer to the discussion 6.6.
3. You will find the answer in discussion 6.5.
4. Refer to the discussion 6.3

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## 9.11. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Critically examine how we define and analyze Black Literature?
2. Discuss the various aspects of Toni Morrison's novels and show how her novels proved a mile stone in African-American literature?
3. Attempt a critical analysis of Morrison's writing career?
4. Discuss about the history of African-American?
5. Discuss that Morrison's novels reflect the history of slavery era.
6. Discuss the role of females in the works of Morrison.
7. Critically analyze the background of Black society in slavery era.

**UNIT 10 TONI MORRISON**

***THE BLUEST EYE -II***

## 10.1. INTRODUCTION

African American literature owes a lot to Toni Morrison for its establishment as a separate genre. This literature was previously written as slave narrative; autobiographical record of era of slavery. In the present unit Toni Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eye* is analyzed in the light of racial history. You have learnt about the biographical record of Toni Morrison in the previous unit. In the present unit her first novel The Bluest Eye will be analyzed in detail.

## 10.2. OBJECTIVES

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

- Give a biographical record of Toni Morrison.
- Analyze the impact of slavery and racism of African American culture.
- Critically analyze the novel *The Bluest Eye*.

## 10.3.THE AUTHOR AND THE TEXT

### 10.3.1. Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison Morrison was born as Chloe Anthony Wofford, second of the four children to her parents, on 18th February 1931 in the small town Lorain, Ohio, a place which makes the background for many of her novels. Her status as a novelist emerges from the historic background of her life. Her parents, George and Ramah Willis Wofford settled in Lorain to escape from the southern racism during the Great Depression. Lorain was a steel mill town that attracted blacks who had lost their lands in the south in other words the industries of the north seemed luring for the bright future prospects. Therefore, concept of race was overshadowed, to an extent, by the sense of class in Ohio where the Blacks from the south and Whites of north lived together under one umbrella. Lorain was a small industrial town populated with immigrant Europeans, Mexicans and Southern blacks who lived next to each other. Chloe attended an integrated school. In her first grade, she was the only black student in her class and the only one who could read.

The love for reading developed her interest in literature. Morrison journey as a literary figure bloomed from the Howard University where received her Bachelor of Arts degree in English. Since many people could not pronounce her first name correctly, she changed it to Toni, a shortened version of her middle name. She was married a Jamaican architect, Harold Morrison, who fathered her two sons, Harold and Slade. However, the marriage did not prove to be successful and the couple separated after six years in 1964 when she was pregnant with her second son. She returned to Lorain to give birth to her child and finally settled in New York.

In the year 1993 Toni Morrison became the first African American writer to be honored with the Nobel Prize for literature. Her novels, grounded in African American realities and concerns, offer a fresh perspective on the blacks' lives, their history and genealogy. She explores such complex social, political and philosophical concerns in her novels as black victimization, the emotional and social effects of racial and sexual oppression, and the difficulties African Americans face in trying to achieve a sense of identity in a society dominated by white cultural values.

Slavery, which gained its first foothold in the British colonies of North America in 1619 and stretched over a period of two centuries, was the most critical period in the

history of African Americans. The African slaves who came to America exchanged the temporary chaos and suffering of the Middle Passage for the confusion and hardship of life in a strange land. In the beginning, the African slaves were sold as indentured servants, but after the system of chattel slavery was established, the Negro slave became the lifetime property of his master. The slave system was inherently cruel and brutal.

The Bluest Eye (1970) contains a number of autobiographical elements. It is set in the town where Morrison grew up, and is told from the point of view of a nine-year-old, the age Morrison would have been the year the novel takes place (1941). In the novel's afterword, Morrison explains that the story developed out of a conversation she had had in elementary school with a little girl, who longed for blue eyes. She wants to make a statement about the damage that internalized racism can do to the most vulnerable member of a community—a young girl. The story is set in the community of a small, Midwestern town. Its characters are all black. The book was partly based on Morrison's story written for a writers' group in 1966, which she joined after her six years marriage with the Jamaican architect Harold Morrison broke up. Pecola Breedlove, the central character, prays each night for the blue-eyed beauty of Shirley Temple. She believes everything would be all right if only she had beautiful blue eyes. The narrator, Claudia MacTeer, tries to understand the destruction of Pecola. Until 1983, Morrison did not publish short stories. 'Recitatif', about cross-racial friendship, appeared first in ImamuAmiri and Amina Baraka'sConfirmation (1983), an anthology consisting of black women's writing.

## 10.3.1.1. THEMES AND PRACTICES IN MORRISON'S NOVELS

**Sense of Loss:** Morrison feels deeply the losses, which Afro-Americans experienced in their migration from the rural South to the urban North from 1930 to 1950. They lost their sense of community, their connection to their past, and their culture. The oral tradition of storytelling and folktales was no longer a source of strength. Another source of strength, their music, which healed them, was taken over by the white community; consequently, it no longer belongs to them exclusively.

**Roots, Community, and Identity**: To have roots is to have a shared history. The individual who does not belong to a community is generally lost. The individual who leaves and has internalized the village or community is much more likely to survive. In addition, a whole community--everyone--is needed to raise a child; one parent or two parents are inadequate to the task. The lack of roots and the disconnection from the community and the past cause individuals to become alienated; often her characters struggle unsuccessfully to identify, let alone fulfill an essential self.

**Ancestors**: Ancestors are necessary: they provide cultural information, they are a connection with the past, they protect, and they educate. The ancestors may be parents, grandparents, teachers, or elders in the community. In The Bluest Eye, M'Dear is the ancestor figure. Morrison believes that the presence of the ancestor is one of the characteristics of black writing.

**Good and Evil**: Morrison shows understanding of and, often, compassion, for characters who commit horrific deeds, like incest-rape or infanticide. This trait springs in large part from her attitude toward good and evil, which she distinguishes from the conventional or Western view of good and evil. It's because they're not terrified by evil, by difference. Evil is not an alien force; it's just a different force. She shifts the boundaries between what we ordinarily regard as good and what as evil, so that judgments become difficult. This reflects the complexity of making moral judgments in life. Her villains are not all evil, nor are her good people saints.

**10.3.2. The Bluest Eye : A Summary**

The story opens with a Nine-year-old Claudia and ten-year-old Frieda MacTeer who live in Lorain, Ohio, with their parents. It is the end of the Great Depression, and the girls' parents are more concerned with making ends meet than with lavishing attention upon their daughters, but there is an undercurrent of love and stability in their home. The MacTeers take in a boarder, Henry Washington, and a young girl named Pecola. Pecola's father has tried to burn down his family's house, and Claudia and Frieda feel sorry for her. Pecola loves Shirley Temple, believing that whiteness is beautiful and that she is ugly. The girls grow friendly and it is revealed that Pecola has deep sense of regret for herself because she is ashamed of being ugly

Pecola moves back in with her family, and her life is difficult. Her father drinks, her mother is distant, and the two of them often beat one another. Her brother, Sammy, who is practically silent in the entire novel, frequently runs away. Pecola believes that if she had blue eyes, she would be loved and her life would be transformed. She desires for Blue eyes to sustain through her dysfunctional family. She is always made to realize that she is ugly and therefore responsible for all the suffering of her family. Three major incidents reveal the attitude of the society towards Pecola. In the first incident she is teased by few school boys on account of her dark color and socially unaccepted habit of her father sleeping naked. In a similar kind of incident when Pecola walks to candy store to buy Mary Jane's candy, she feel that the shopkeeper feels disgusted to even touch her hand while taking the money. The second incident is Pecola encounter with a lady named Geraldine who is a black lady but accepts thoroughly the white culture by dressing well, inculcating good manners and breeding the same in her son Junior. She is wrongly blamed for killing a boy's cat with blue eyes and is called a "nasty little black bitch" by his mother.The final reason for the traumatic end of Pecola is the sexual abuse she suffers from her father. Pecola's rape by her own father is most disturbing incident of the novel. The final blow she receives from her father is responsible for her lunacy.

We learn that Pecola's parents have both had difficult lives. Pauline, her mother, has a lame foot and has always felt isolated. She loses herself in movies, which reaffirm her belief that she is ugly and that romantic love is reserved for the beautiful. She encourages her husband's violent behavior in order to reinforce her own role as a martyr. She feels most alive when she is at work, cleaning a white woman's home. She loves this home and despises her own. Cholly, Pecola's father, was abandoned by his parents and raised by his great aunt, who died when he was a young teenager. He was humiliated by two white men who found him having sex for the first time and made him continue while they watched. He ran away to find his father but was rebuffed by him. By the time he met Pauline, he was a wild and rootless man. He feels trapped in his marriage and has lost interest in life.

Cholly returns home one day and finds Pecola washing dishes. With mixed motives of tenderness and hatred that are fueled by guilt, he rapes her. When Pecola's mother finds her unconscious on the floor, she disbelieves Pecola's story and beats her. Pecola goes to Soaphead Church, a sham mystic, and asks him for blue eyes. Instead of helping her, he uses her to kill a dog he dislikes.

Claudia and Frieda find out that Pecola has been impregnated by her father, and unlike the rest of the neighborhood, they want the baby to live. They sacrifice the money they have been saving for a bicycle and plant marigold seeds. They believe that if the flowers live, so will Pecola's baby. The flowers refuse to bloom, and Pecola's baby dies when it is born prematurely. Cholly, who rapes Pecola a second

time and then runs away, dies in a workhouse. Pecola goes mad, believing that her cherished wish has been fulfilled and that she has the bluest eyes.

**Self Assessment Questions**

1. Listing the important facts about her life, write a short paragraph on Toni Morrison.
2. What obsession does Pecola has and why?
3. Comment on Cholly's molestation of his own daughter in the light of his racial past.

## 10.4. DIFFERENT THEMES OF THE NOVEL

**Whiteness as Symbol of Beauty:** *The Bluest Eye* provides an extended depiction of the ways in which internalized white beauty standards deform the lives of black girls and women. Implicit messages that whiteness is superior are everywhere, including the white baby doll given to Claudia, the idealization of Shirley Temple, the consensus that light-skinned Maureen is cuter than the other black girls, the idealization of white beauty in the movies, and Pauline Breedlove's preference for the little white girl she works for over her daughter. Adult women, having learned to hate the blackness of their own bodies, take this hatred out on their children—Mrs. Breedlove shares the conviction that Pecola is ugly, and lighter-skinned Geraldine curses Pecola's blackness.

**Concept of Perception:** Pecola's desire for blue eyes, while highly unrealistic, is based on one correct insight into her world: she believes that the cruelty she witnesses and experiences is connected to how she is seen. If she had beautiful blue eyes, Pecola imagines, people would not want to do ugly things in front of her or to her. The accuracy of this insight is affirmed by her experience of being teased by the boys—when Maureen comes to her rescue, it seems that they no longer want to behave badly under Maureen's attractive gaze. In a more basic sense, Pecola and her family are mistreated in part because they happen to have black skin. By wishing for blue eyes rather than lighter skin, Pecola indicates that she wishes to see things differently as much as she wishes to be seen differently. She can only receive this wish, in effect, by blinding herself. Pecola is then able to see herself as beautiful, but only at the cost of her ability to see accurately both herself and the world around her. The connection between how one is seen and what one sees has a uniquely tragic outcome for her.

**Sexual Initiation and Abuse:** To a large degree, *The Bluest Eye* is about both the pleasures and the perils of sexual initiation. Early in the novel, Pecola has her first menstrual period, and toward the novel's end she has her first sexual experience, which is violent. Frieda knows about and anticipates menstruating, and she is initiated into sexual experience when Henry Washington fondles her. We are told the story of Cholly's first sexual experience, which ends when two white men force him to finish having sex while they watch. The fact that all of these experiences are humiliating and hurtful indicates that sexual coming-of-age is fraught with peril, especially in an abusive environment.

In the novel, parents carry much of the blame for their children's often-traumatic sexual coming-of-age. The most blatant case is Cholly's rape of his own daughter,

Pecola, which is, in a sense, a repetition of the sexual humiliation Cholly experienced under the gaze of two racist whites. Frieda's experience is less painful than Pecola's because her parents immediately come to her rescue, playing the appropriate protector and underlining, by way of contrast, the extent of Cholly's crime against his daughter. However, Frieda is not given information that lets her understand what has happened to her. Instead, she lives with a vague fear of being "ruined" like the local prostitutes. The prevalence of sexual violence in the novel suggests that racism is not the only thing that distorts black girlhoods. There is also a pervasive assumption that women's bodies are available for abuse. The refusal on the part of parents to teach their girls about sexuality makes the girls' transition into sexual maturity difficult.

## 10.5. NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

**The Dick-and-Jane Narrative:** The novel opens with a narrative from a Dick-and-Jane reading primer, a narrative that is distorted when Morrison runs its sentences and then its words together. The gap between the idealized, sanitized, upper-middle-class world of Dick and Jane (who we assume to be white, though we are never told so) and the often dark and ugly world of the novel is emphasized by the chapter headings excerpted from the primer. But Morrison does not mean for us to think that the Dick-and-Jane world is better—in fact, it is largely because the black characters have internalized white Dick-and-Jane values that they are unhappy. In this way, the Dick and Jane narrative and the novel provide ironic commentary on each other.

**The Seasons and Nature:** The novel is divided into the four seasons, but it pointedly refuses to meet the expectations of these seasons. For example, spring, the traditional time of rebirth and renewal, reminds Claudia of being whipped with new switches, and it is the season when Pecola's is raped. Pecola's baby dies in autumn, the season of harvesting. Morrison uses natural cycles to underline the unnaturalness and misery of her characters' experiences. To some degree, she also questions the benevolence of nature, as when Claudia wonders whether "the earth itself might have been unyielding" to someone like Pecola.

**Whiteness and Color:** In the novel, whiteness is associated with beauty and cleanliness (particularly according to Geraldine and Mrs. Breedlove), but also with sterility. In contrast, color is associated with happiness, most clearly in the rainbow of yellow, green, and purple memories Pauline Breedlove sees when making love with Cholly. Morrison uses this imagery to emphasize the destructiveness of the black community's privileging of whiteness and to suggest that vibrant color, rather than the pure absence of color, is a stronger image of happiness and freedom.

**Eyes and Vision:** Pecola is obsessed with having blue eyes because she believes that this mark of conventional, white beauty will change the way that she is seen and therefore the way that she sees the world. There are continual references to other characters' eyes as well—for example, Mr. Yacobowski's hostility to Pecola resides in the blankness in his own eyes, as well as in his inability to see a black girl. This motif underlines the novel's repeated concern for the difference between how we see and how we are seen, and the difference between superficial sight and true insight.

**Dirtiness and Cleanliness:** The black characters in the novel who have internalized white, -middle-class values are obsessed with cleanliness. Geraldine and Mrs. Breedlove are excessively concerned with housecleaning—though Mrs. Breedlove

cleans only the house of her white employers, as if the Breedlove apartment is beyond her help. This fixation on cleanliness extends into the women's moral and emotional quests for purity, but the obsession with domestic and moral sanitation leads them to cruel coldness. In contrast, one mark of Claudia's strength of character is her pleasure in her own dirt, a pleasure that represents self-confidence and a correct understanding of the nature of happiness.

## 10.6. SYMBOLS

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts. Tony Morrrison makes use of a large number of symbols to express her deeply felt concerns as a writer. Let us now discuss some of the symbols used in the novel:

**The House:** The novel begins with a sentence from a Dick-and-Jane narrative: "Here is the house." Homes not only indicate socioeconomic status in this novel, but they also symbolize the emotional situations and values of the characters who inhabit them. The Breedlove -apartment is miserable and decrepit, suffering from Mrs. Breedlove's preference for her employer's home over her own and symbolizing the misery of the Breedlove family. The MacTeer house is drafty and dark, but it is carefully tended by Mrs. MacTeer and, according to Claudia, filled with love, symbolizing that family's comparative cohesion.

**Bluest Eye(s):** To Pecola, blue eyes symbolize the beauty and happiness that she associates with the white, middle-class world. They also come to symbolize her own blindness, for she gains blue eyes only at the cost of her sanity. The "bluest" eye could also mean the saddest eye. Furthermore, eye puns on I, in the sense that the novel's title uses the singular form of the noun (instead of The Bluest Eyes) to express many of the characters' sad isolation.

**The Marigolds:** Claudia and Frieda associate marigolds with the safety and well-being of Pecola's baby. Their ceremonial offering of money and the remaining unsold marigold seeds represents an honest sacrifice on their part. They believe that if the marigolds they have planted grow, thenPecola's baby will be all right. More generally, marigolds represent the constant renewal of nature. In Pecola's case, this cycle of renewal is perverted by her father's rape of her.

## 10.7. ANALYSING THE STORY

The novel begins with a series of sentences that seem to come from a children's reader. The sentences describe a house and the family that lives in the house—Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane. The brief narrative focuses on Jane. The pet cat will not play with Jane, and when Jane asks her mother to play, she laughs. When Jane asks her father to play, he smiles, and the dog runs away instead of playing with Jane. Then a friend comes to play with Jane. This sequence is repeated verbatim without punctuation, and then is repeated a third time without spaces between the words or punctuation.

The novel's prologue warns us that Cholly will do something unthinkable—impregnate his own eleven-year-old daughter. If this event were told from Claudia's or Pecola's point of view, it would likely remain a senseless act of violence, something impossible to understand. However, Morrison chooses to explain the rape from Cholly's point of view. Understanding how it was possible for Cholly to commit incest does not change our knowledge that he has caused tremendous suffering to his daughter but does change the nature of our horror. Cholly's violence is not frightening because it is senseless; it is frightening because it makes all too much sense, given the kind of life he has lived. Knowing Cholly's story may not change the horror of what he does, but it does make his action more bearable to us.

Morrison makes us sympathize with Cholly not only because he has suffered abandonment, sexual humiliation, and racism, but because there was once real beauty and joy in his life.

The white neighborhood in which Mrs. Breedlove, Pecola's mother works is beautiful and well kept, demonstrating the connection between race and class. The kitchen is spotless, with white porcelain and white woodwork. The little white girl is dressed in delicate pink and has yellow hair. In contrast, Pecola spills "blackish blueberries" all over the floor, underlining the connection between blackness and mess. Her mother reinforces this connection as well. Instead of worrying that her own daughter has been burned by the hot berries, she pushes Pecola down into the pie juice. She then comforts the little white girl and begins to clean the black stain off of her pink dress. She has renounced her own black family for the family of her white employer.

Unlike Claudia, Pecola does not undergo a process of first rejecting then accepting America's white beauty standards. Pecola adores Shirley Temple and loves playing with dolls. Her excessive and expensive milk-drinking from the Shirley Temple is part of her desire to internalize the values of white culture—a symbolic moment that foreshadows her desire to possess blue eyes.

### 10.7.1. Child Molestation: Rape of Pecola

Rape is one of the common assaults against the females that Morrison highlights in her novels. But Pecola's rape by her own father is different from the rest because it is not confined to mere physical assault. Pecola becomes a victim of psychological harassment making her state intensely sympathetic and unique. It is the most traumatic scene where the bonds between father and child are challenged on the grounds of ethnicity on one side and difficult surviving circumstances on the other. What distinguishes Pecola's rape from others is that the incident generates shame and not anger as its consequences. Pecola's submission and the tragic end symbolize the helplessness of black human race during the era of slavery.

Pecola is silenced throughout the novel and her response to the rape is described just by, ". . . a hollow suck of air in the back of her throat". The entire incident is justified on Cholly's account where, "The sequence of his emotions was revulsion, guilt, pity, then love". In fact the absence of Pecola's dialogues or revolt is a method of measuring the intensity of the trauma suffered by her on different scales by the readers and on similar grounds absence of the word 'lust' in association with Cholly gives the readers open space to judge the severity of his crime. The variance of

judgment or response takes the novel to the domains of psychology making The Bluest Eye extremely disturbing novel.

## 10.8. IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

**Pauline Breedlove:**

Pauline Breedlove always considered beauty as the only virtue for a woman. As a young girl, she had the biggest disappointment of her life when she had the deformity of her one foot. She felt pathetic about being crippled but soon after her marriage with Cholly Breedlove she also loses her front tooth adding an insult to the injury. The entire concept of her beauty was shattered and she felt neglected in her own ways. The loss of her tooth symbolizes the loss of self-respect too. The only solace she could find was theatres where she could live in the false vision of white society that existed only on stage. The final blow to her idea of acceptance was at the birth of Pecola who was uglier than what Pauline ever dreamt of. Pauline finds the stability and acceptance by working in the household of Fishers because they consider her ideal servant. This consideration makes her devotedly do her service in fact she risks her own family for the Fishers. For the Fisher daughter she was Polly but for her own daughter she was Mrs Breedlove and this explains her seclusion from her own family.

**Cholly Breedlove:**

Cholly Breedlove, a "no- count man",Pecola's father and her molester, too is the alienated character in the story. When he was four days old, his mother left him on a junk heap by the railroad and this explains the root cause for his sense of isolation. His Aunt Jimmy raised him but she always showed the favors she had done to save his life. His childhood is the quest to meet his actual father. The effect of racism is seen on the mind of Cholly where he compares God to a White. Another important incident that marks the turning point in the life of Cholly Breedlove is the sexual humiliation he faces when two white men while making love to Darlene catch him. They force him to continue while they watched. Cholly directed his hatred towards the weak that is Darlene instead of whites and hated her. The thought of Darlene being pregnant makes him run away in search of his missing father but is again unrecognized and rejected by him. Cholly Breedlove married life to Pauline turns miserable and, frequent fights in the house and drinking habit of Cholly deteriorated the family status and all four members were compelled to seek refuge in external world. While Cholly submitted to drinks, Pauline made herself acceptable in the Fisher's household, Sammy, the son, remained absent from the household and Pecola being submissive in nature redirected her anger within herself and caught in the internal conflicts finally loses her mental balance. The relationship between Cholly and Pauline is one of the major reasons for the traumatic end of their girl child. As a couple they fought violently with no consideration of their children presence cultivating fear and repression of feelings in the children.

**Claudia:**

She is the contrasting character to Pecola. Claudia explains that she has always hated Shirley Temple and the blonde, blue-eyed baby doll that she was given for Christmas. She is confused about why everyone else thinks such dolls are lovable, and she pulls apart her doll trying to discover where its "beauty" is located. Taking apart the doll to

the core, she discovers only a "mere metal roundness." The adults are outraged, but Claudia points out that they never asked her what she wanted for Christmas. She explains that her hatred of dolls turned into a hatred of little white girls and then into a false love of whiteness and cleanliness.

**Pecola:**

Born of the parents who are lost into their own world she has no emotional support from the so called home. As a child she faces the violent fights of her parents with pitched abuses and harsh beatings. The voice of Pecola is silenced in the entire novel except for few occasional dialogues concluding her submissive personality trait. Realizing herself as the ugliest creature on earth and people abhorring attitude against her, she internalizes her thoughts and speeches.

## 10.9. SUMMING UP

In this unit you have read in detail:

- the narrative techniques of Toni Morrison in *The Bluest Eye*
- the different themes of the novel.
- the themes and practices in Morrisons novel.
- the impact of slavery and racism of African American culture

## 10.10. ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Refer to section 10.3.1 and refer to unit 9 for a detailed study
2. Refer to section 10.3.2
3. Refer to section 10.3.2

## 10.11.REFERENCES

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## 10.12. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Identify the degenerative force in the story?
2. Justify Cholly Breedlove as a fatherly figure.
3. How are Blue Eyes associated with a sense of superiority for Pecola? Illustrate your answer from the text.
4. Critically examine the role of community in the novel.
5. Compare and contrast Pecola and Claudia's character.
6. Write a short note on Morrison's technique of storytelling.
7. Comment on the position of a female child in the racially set society.
8. Critically examine the main theme of The Bluest Eye.
9. Comment on the use of symbols in the novel.
10. Comment on the dysfunctional family of the Breedloves.

**UNIT 11 EUGENE O'NEILL**

***THE EMPEROR JONES* -I**

## 11.1. INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you are going to be familiar with life, character, persona and career of American Dramatist Eugene O'Neill and his contribution to the Development of American Drama. Why is Eugene O' Neill so important? Wouldn't you like to know about the man who is the only American playwright to have won the Nobel Prize for literature, and the only dramatist to have won four Pulitzer Prizes? He was the one who drastically changed the course of American Drama. He introduced new outlook to the American theatre with his consistent originality and experiments. I personally think that it is very significant to be on familiar terms with the man himself, his works, and his contribution to the growth of American Theatre in detail before going to his prescribed work *The Emperor Jones.* O'Neill drew material from his personal life in many of his plays. In such a way, his plays are inseparable from his life-history. We come across a number of autobiographical elements in his works; that's why; I've devoted the whole unit to the dramatist himself for better understanding.

## 11.2. OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to discuss following topics:

- Life, character, and personality of Eugene O'Neill
- A brief understanding of his works
- His contribution to the development of American Drama.
- Reasons of his popularity
- Major events and incidents which influenced Eugene O'Neill, the playwright
- Some literary terms for better understanding

## 11.3. LIFE OF EUGENE O'NEILL

The introduction should have aroused in you keen interest in Eugene O'Neill, who was "an extraordinarily attractive fellow." Let's have a look at the beautiful description of the man given by Robert M. Dowling(www.masonsroad.com/issue-3/drama-issue-3) in an interview:

"F. Scott Fitzgerald said that there are no second acts in American lives. By my count, O'Neill had four. Each had its own idiosyncratic characters, dramatic episodes, and mise en scene. Once when I asked a class of mine in my O'Neill seminar the play they felt most attached to, one student said that O'Neill's actual life was his finest play. In many ways, I couldn't agree more. And to my mind, it uncannily follows the dramatic structure, or narrative arc, of his greatest plays as well (of most great plays in fact): the exposition through his childhood, Irish-Catholic upbringing, and early years in New York and the merchant marine from the 1880s to the 1900s; the rising action, starting in the summer of 1916, when the Provincetown Players discover him, he proves his chops as a young playwright, and then swiftly becomes the Great O'Neill by the '20s'; the climax, for me, is when he suffers from a depressive episode in 1934 after his 'God Play' *Days Without End* was universally panned by the critics, and mental and physical chaos ensued; the falling action when he removes himself from the public eye after this episode, and, unbeknownst to anyone but a handful of friends and relations, writes his greatest plays (after receiving the Nobel Prize in 1936); and the denouement with the peculiar story of his final years and death in 1953. Then there was this Adonis- or, Lazarus-like occurrence that followed, now known as "the Eugene O'Neill Renaissance". This was in the mid-1950s and into the

'60s, when his reputation was reborn-the most astonishing resurrection in American literary history."

Eugene O'Neill (Eugene Gladstone O'Neill) had a very turbulent family life which immensely influenced his works. I can simply say that he drew on the tragic events of his dysfunctional family's life to produce some of the most powerful dramas of the American theater.

### 11.3.1. Born in a Hotel Room

The Irish American playwright Eugene O'Neill (Eugene Gladstone O'Neill) was born on 16th October 1888 in a Broadway hotel room at Forty-Third Street in New York City. His father James O'Neill who acted in 6,000 repetitions of the play *The Count of Monte Cristo* was one of America's most popular actors from 1880s until World War I (1914-1918). O'Neill's difficulties began almost from the time of his birth. Soon after the delivery, his mother, Ella O'Neill, became addicted to morphine. (Decades later, Eugene would dramatize her tragedy through the character Mary Tyrone in *Long Day's Journey into Night*.) Throughout Eugene's childhood, his stage-actor father, James O'Neill, toured in the lucrative but ultimately disappointing lead role in *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Eugene traveled with his father for his first seven years, an experience that would influence the future playwright's work. "As a boy, I saw so much of the old, ranting, artificial romantic stuff that I always had a sort of contempt for the theater," he would later recall.

### 11.3.2.School and Religion

Entering a strict Catholic boarding school, St. Aloysius Academy for Boys, in September 1895, O'Neill would rebel against the demands of school and religion. After learning as a teenager of his mother's drug addiction, O'Neill defied his father by refusing to go to church. His struggles with God and religion would later prove to be a frequent theme of his plays. He enrolled in Princeton University in September 1906 but was kicked out after his first year, owing to poor academics and heavy drinking. Aside from a course in playwriting that O'Neill later took at Harvard, he would have no other formal education.

### 11.3.3.At Sea

O'Neill married just before turning 21, but he did not settle down. In fact, soon after he wed Kathleen Jenkins against his father's wishes, he set sail for Honduras and then South America aboard a ship called the *Charles Racine*. His wife gave birth in May 1910 to a son, Eugene O'Neill Jr., whom his father did not see until the boy was 11. O'Neill preferred the simple life of sailors and the sea to family life, but heavy drinking drove him to despair. After returning to New York and living the life of a derelict, O'Neill in 1912 attempted suicide in his room at Jimmy-the-Priest's boarding house and saloon, which -- together with the Hell Hole -- would one day become the setting for his play *The Iceman Cometh*. That same year, he and Kathleen divorced, and he contracted tuberculosis. It was during his recovery at a sanatorium -- which he came to regard as his "rebirth" -- that he determined he would become a playwright. "I want to be an artist or nothing," he said.

### 11.3.4.Success as a Playwright

After Eugene O'Neill attended a playwriting course at Harvard in 1914, followed by a frustrating and mostly drunken year in New York's Greenwich Village attempting unsuccessfully to have his one-act plays produced, he joined an experimental theater group in Provincetown, Massachusetts, which produced his one-act sea play *Bound East for Cardiff*. The group formed the Playwrights' Theatre in Greenwich Village

and staged several O'Neill productions in the following years. During this period, O'Neill married his second wife, writer Agnes Boulton, in 1918, with whom he had two children, Shane and Oona. O'Neill's first full-length play, *Beyond the Horizon*, premiered on Broadway on February 3, 1920, at the Morosco Theater. The play, which features two brothers who love the same woman, won O'Neill the first of four Pulitzer Prizes in drama.

### 11.3.5.Family Losses

A week after *Beyond the Horizon* opened, James O'Neill suffered a stroke. Before he died in August 1920, he shared with his son Eugene the bitterness he felt over his lost potential as an actor. Two years later, O'Neill's mother died; the next year his brother, Jamie, an alcoholic, died at the age of 45. O'Neill would dramatize the lives of his family members in his plays, most vividly in *Long Day's Journey into Night*.

### 11.3.6.Fruitful Period

After the debut of his first play on Broadway, O'Neill wrote prolifically, completing 20 long plays and many shorter ones over a span of 23 years. These plays included *The Emperor Jones*, *The Hairy Ape*, *Desire Under the Elms*,*Mourning Becomes Electra*, and Pulitzer Prize-winners *Strange Interlude* and *Anna Christie*. He won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1936, the first -- and only -- American dramatist to win the honor. During this period, he also met the woman who would become his third wife, Carlotta Monterey, an actress who played a role in the Broadway production of his play *The Hairy Ape*. He left his wife Agnes in 1928 and set sail for Europe with Carlotta, whom he married the next year. They remained together in an often turbulent relationship until his death, with Carlotta providing O'Neill the protective environment he required to sustain his art.

### 11.3.7.More Tragedies

Haunted by his painful upbringing and embattled family life, O'Neill faced troubles with his own children that coincided with his physical deterioration. He completed three of his great tragedies, *The Iceman Cometh*, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, between 1939 and 1944, before a neuromuscular disorder increasingly impeded his ability to write. In 1943 he disowned his daughter Oona for marrying film star Charlie Chaplin, who was about her father's age. His son Shane was arrested for heroin possession in 1948 and estranged from his father, while his first-born child Eugene O'Neill Jr. committed suicide in 1950.

### 11.3.8.Died in a Hotel Room

In 1953, his health failing, O'Neill lived his last days in a hotel room in Boston with Carlotta tending to him. He instructed her not to bring a priest to his funeral. "If there is a God and I meet Him," he told her, "we'll talk things over personally, man to man." He died on November 27, 1953, having left instructions with his publisher that *Long Day's Journey into Night* should not be published until 25 years after his death. Carlotta, however, took the play to another publisher, Yale University Press, which published it in 1956. It opened the same year on Broadway and was awarded a Pulitzer Prize.

## 11.4. WORKS OF EUGENE O'NEILL

The first seven years of Eugene O'Neill's life were spent travelling the country with his father. His father had given up his career as a Shakespearean actor to tour in a less

satisfying but highly profitable play mentioned above. Eugene O'Neill's violent reaction to everything conventional in the theatre may be attributed to his intimate association with this play. He saw his first Ibsen play *HeddaGabler* in 1907 and went back 09 more times. He later recalled this play to be an entire new world of the drama for him, which had given to him his first conception of a modern theatre where truth might live. In 1909, he went on gold-prospecting voyage to Honduras. No gold but got tropical fever. During the period that followed, he worked as a stage manager, an actor, a tramp, and a reporter. He also went on several other voyages as a sailor. It was here that he came in contact with the sailors, dock workers, ant the outcasts that would populate his plays, for the first time on the American stage. In 1911, he saw every play enacted by the Abbey theatre during its half-year tour of America and later commented on the contrast between "the old ranting, artificial, romantic stage stuff" and "the possibilities of naturalistic acting". The play that impressed him most was J.M.Synge's*Riders to the Sea*. In 1912, in a deep depression at age of 23, attempted to commit suicide but was saved by a friend. In the same year, because of tuberculosis, he was sent for five and half months to a sanatorium where he engrossed himself in the dramas of Hauptmann, Strindberg, Brieux, and Synge. Later in 1919, he wrote a play *The Straw* based on these experiences. In Sept, 1914, he began Prof. George Pierce Baker's two-term playwriting seminar at Harvard where he profited from practical advice such as starting the composing process with detailed scenarios.

It was 1916 when newly-formed "The Provincetown Players" produced his first enduring play *Bound East for Cardiff*. This play was very important from his point of view as it reflected the germ of the spirit, life attitude, etc. of his more important future work. It was recognized as one of the finest one act plays, innovative for the time, written by an American. In 1916, "The Provincetown Players" presented his three more plays-*Before Breakfast, Fog, and The Sniper*. In 1917, his plays *The Long Voyage Home* and *Ile* were stated in New York. The result was that the Sunday drama section of "New York Times" gave O'Neill his first public notice in "Who is Eugene O'Neill?" His domestic tragedy *Beyond the Horizon (1920)* brought for him his first Pulitzer Prize and established this young playwright as a powerful force in modern drama.

In 1920, his *The Emperor Jones* was received enthusiastically. Not only was it the first expressionistic play but also was the first play written by a white dramatist, presented by a whiter theatre company, and to have a black in the starring role. Next year, O'Neill's *Anna Christie* was another success which won for him his next Pulitzer Prize. Later, it was also performed in London. In 1922 came his highly distinctive and expressionistic play *The Hairy Ape: A Comedy of Ancient and Modern Life*. In the same year came his highly controversial play *All God's Chillun Got Wings*. This erupted controversy even before its presentation with conservative whites warned of possible race riots and blacks saying that the play could cause only harm. Even death threats came from terrorist organization "Ku Klux Klan" and anonymous bomb warnings as well. O'Neill asserted that it was not a 'race problem' play saying that its intention was confined to portraying the special lives of individual beings…and their tragic struggle for happiness. His naturalistic* tragedy *Desire Under the Elms (1924)*, even after successful run of 208 performances, was later banned in Boston and refused a license in England due to its alleged sexual component as immoral and obscene. But the notoriety only increased its audiences at other places. His complex experimental drama

*The Great God Brown (1926)* saw a good public response, to a total run of 278. Exuberant O'Neill emphasized that such public response to a mask drama, the main values of which are psychological, mystical, and abstract seems a more significant

proof of the deeply responsive possibilities in our public than anything that has happened in our modern theatre before or since. 1926 was the year when he was awarded an honorary degree of Doctor of Literature at Yale. At this occasion, it was declared that he was the only American dramatist who had produced a deep impression on European drama and European thought and that he had redeemed the American theatre from commonplaceness andtriviality.

In 1928 came *Marco Millions* followed by his huge, innovative drama *Strange Interlude*which was presented by the Theatre Guild. *Strange Interlude* had the run of 441 performances and fetched for him his third Pulitzer Prize. Full version of the play published later in the year sold over 1, 00,000 copies. It was taken up on the recommendation of Lawrence Langer, principal director of the theatre Guild who called it probably the bravest and most far-reaching dramatic experiment since Ibsen's plays asserting that it reflected more deep knowledge of the dark corners of the human mind than anything ever written before. His next play *Lazarus Laughed: A Play for an Imaginative Theatre* received mostly negative reviews. In 1929, his next presentation *Dynamo* produced by the Theatre Guild managed a run of only 50. The uniqueness of the play lay in its extravagant demonstration that Science could not replace theism as an outlet for man's religious instincts.

His *Mourning Becomes Electra: A Triology (1931)* was largely a naturalistic modernization of Aeschylus's *Oresteia*. The play was subject to the charge of outdated Freudianism because of the deep hidden relationships that O'Neill found in the *Oresteia* and focused on strongly: parents and children behave according to the Freudian Oedipus and Electra formulas, even to the extent of the brother proposing virtual marriage to his sister. O'Neill deplored the fact that the Greek trilogy let Electra escape the Furies' retribution and gave his modern Electra a tragic ending worthy of her character. Despite all these things, the play earned enthusiastic reviews and attained a run of 150 performances regardless of its inordinate length.

His only comedy *Ah, Wilderness! (1933)*staged by the Theatre Guild, enjoyed a run of 289 and reached to London stage too. O'Neill pointed out that the play's whole importance and reality had depended on its conveying a mood of memory in exactly the right illuminating blend of wistfulgrin and lump in the throat. His semi-expressionistic play *Days without End (1934)* was penned down heavily by the critics. O'Neill described it a modern miracle play. One critic even commented that almost everything that was simple, straight-forward and disarmingly poignant in the miracle plays of old becomes tedious…turgid and artificial in this faked preachment of our times.

The biggest achievement of the man came in 1936 when he was awarded the Nobel Prize. In his acceptance speech which was delivered for him in Stockholm (Sweden) since he was too sick to travel there, he expressed his debt to "that greatest genius of all modern dramatists, your August Strindberg…It was reading his plays, when I first started to write back in the winter of 1913-14, that, above all else, first gave me the vision of what modern drama could be, and first inspired me with the urge to write for the theatre myself". Later he speculated that *Mourning Becomes Electra* was probably the crucial reason why he was chosen for the award, but noted that he had gained more personal gratification from writing *The Great God Brown*.

He finished writing *The Iceman Cometh* in 1940. This play was staged later in 1946. As has already been mentioned that his family life had been extremely miserable, turbulent that reflected in his deeply autobiographical play *Long Day's Journey (1941)* which he wrote for the purpose of coming to terms with the members of his family. His wife later said that it was a most strange experience to watch that man

being tortured every day by his own writing. He would come out of his study at the end of the day gaunt and sometimes weeping.

He finished revising his one-act play Hughie in 1942 which could not be staged in America until 1964. In 1943, he finished writing *A Moon for the Misbegotten*. He was unable to write due to an extreme preoccupation with the war (2nd World War: 1939-1945), an increasingly severe tremor in his hands, and an inability to compose satisfactorily on the typewriter orby dictation. As a result, *A Moon for the Misbegotten* proved to be thelast playwritten by O'Neill. In 1945 Eric Bentley's seminal study of modern drama *ThePlaywright as Thinker* got published stirring big controversy over its contentions that art and commodity had become direct antagonists, and that, in America at least the theatre was dead. He severely criticized O'Neill by saying that his tragic dramas of the thirties were tragedies transported to the intense insane. At this time, O'Neill was passing through his all time low. In the same year, O'Neill deposited a copy of his autobiographical play *Long Day's Journey into Night* with Ramdom House with the provision that it must not be opened until 25 years after his death, at which time it could be published; however, it could never be performed. In 1946, his naturalistic tragedy *The Iceman Cometh* eventually saw the stage and managed a run of 136 performances despite alleged flaws in presentation and what some critics perceived as inordinate length and repetitiveness in the script. The event represented a switch from obscurity to centre of controversy for O'Neill, who had not been in the public eye since winning the NobelPrize in 1936.

## 11.5. PRODUCTIONS AFTER O'NEILL'S DEATH

As you already know that Eugene O'Neill died on 27nd November 1953 and he died of a disease resembling Parkinson's, complicated by pneumonia, at the age of 65. Her wife Carlotta was at her husband's side when he died in a Boston hotel room. As he was dying, he whispered his last words: "I knew it, I knew it. Born in a hotel room and died in a hotel room."

In 1956,*Long Day's Journey into Night* got published and instantly became bestseller. Though he had insisted to his publisher that *Long Day's Journey into Night* should not be published until 25 years after his death, Carlotta took the play to another publisher less than 18 months after O'Neill died. The play was produced in 1956 on Broadway, giving theatergoers, students, and the general public its first acquaintance with the dramatic work which came to be widely considered the greatest American Play, and winning O'Neill a posthumous 4thPulitzer Prize and cementing his legacy as a greatest American playwright.

In the same year, the revival of O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* became super-hit, attaining a run of 565 performances, and contributing greatly toward restoring his high reputation. In 1957, O'Neill's last written play *A Moon for the Misbegotten* was finally produced but drew mixed reviews. In 1958, his *A Touch of the Poet*, completed in the early spring of 1936, was eventually staged and hailed as a magnificent discovery. His one-act play Hughie and More Stately Mansions were also produced in 1964 and 1967 respectively.

## 11.6. EUGENE O'NEILL AS A DRAMATIST

### 11.6.1. Importance of O'Neill

Eugene O'Neill is credited to have introduced psychological and social realism to the American Stage. He was the one who created serious American Drama, and who belonged to the Expressionistic* (*Please see Glossary) School of Drama. He was

among the earliest to use American vernacular (lingo, colloquial speech), and to focus on characters marginalized by Society. That's why; he is often called the dramatist of protest. You would understand the importance of Eugene O'Neill, when you will come across this fact that before the advent of the man, American theatre consisted of melodrama* and farce* only. Until O'Neill's arrival on the scene, American Theatrical production was largely made up of European imports and inconsequential native productions. O'Neill changed the course of American Drama with such strikingly innovative and remarkable works as *Desire Under the Elms, Mourning Becomes Electra, The Iceman Cometh,* and his highly autobiographical *Long Day's Journey into Night*. He also produced many other outstanding and powerful plays including *The Emperor Jone*s which will be described in detail in the next unit.He was the first American Playwright to take drama seriously as an aesthetic and intellectual form. So seriously that he can never be accused of any kind of giddiness at all. Moreover, it is generally believed that there would have been no Arthur Miller, or Tennessee Williams, let alone David Mamet or Sam Sheppard, the great American dramatists.

### 11.6.2.O'Neill Transformed the American Drama and Changed it Drastically

Nobel Prize recipient Sinclair Lewis (Nathan,1964, p.283) gives whole credit to O'Neill for transforming the American Drama for the better. At the Nobel Prize Ceremony in 1932, he requested Swedish Academy to give Nobel Prize to more deserving writer by saying, "And had you chosen Eugene O'Neill, who has alone nothing much in the American Drama save to transform it utterly in ten or twelve years from a false world of neat and competent trickery into a world of splendor, fear, and greatness you would have been reminded that he had done something far worse than scoffing, that he had seen life as something not to be neatly arranged in a study, but as terrifying, magnificent and often quite horrible, a thing akin to a tornado, an earthquake or a devastating fire."

George Jean Nathan (Nathan,1964, p. 285) reacted on the comments of Sinclair Lewis, "It would be pleasant to believe that the great change (that has come in the American Drama) for the better had been of slow, steady, and relentless growth, that it had come as a result of gradually sweeping revolution, and that O'Neill was simply the man who grabbed the flag from the hands of the forces that step by step had paved the way for him and then accompanied him shoulder to shoulder on the valiant march. But pleasant though it may be, it would not be true. For the truth of the matter is just what Sinclair Lewis announced it to the Swedes, that O'Neill alone and single-handed waded through the dismal swamplands of American Drama, bleak, squashy, and oozing sticky zoo, and alone and singlehanded bore out of them the water lily that no American had found there before him…But I do argue with Sinclair Lewis that to O'Neill alone must go the credit for transforming the American drama, at least into a world at length wholesomely free from fear and, thus freed, possibly on way to splendor and greatness…"

### 11.6.3. O'Neill: The Great Experimenter

After going through a brief survey of O'Neill's works, you must have known that he kept experimenting with a various kinds of dramatic forms, modes, and techniques. He never stuck to a single form or style even after success; he kept changing and experimenting with the new ones throughout his dramatic career. First of all, he perfected himself in one act plays before he became successful in longer plays. Success of failure, O Neill saw the facts of life with zero sentimentality, no shaping up of his material keeping in mind the box-office results, or supposed feelings of the public. He had been experimentalist right from the first decade of his career. George

P. Baker (1964, p.245)writes, "…O'Neill becomes an experimentalist in form-a symbolist even at times-not in order to experiment in form, not as a follower of any vogue of the moment, but because, as any of the great dramatists have come to feel, not what can be easily illustrated in action, but what can at best be only suggested, hinted, symbolized, is ultimately the most discerning, the most honest picturing of the complicated mingling in human emotions of heredity, environment, a multiplicity of causes large and small. *The Hairy Ape* only does on a larger scale and in a slightly different way what *The Emperor Jones* had done-studies relentlessly a suffering mind and finds visualized, emotional expression for what is discovered. It is the masks, so slightly used here, as symbols, though effectively, which prepare the way for *The Great God Brown*. What proves that O'Neill's experimentation with forms is not for its own sake but for definite artistic ends…" O'Neill seems to suggest that there is nothing predetermined about form. He seems to say again and again (Baker, 1964, p. 246), "The end is all. This is the way I see these people, the way in which I sense their emotional conduct. This way I must write this play to get the effects I desire. If the public accepts my work, good: if not, I have at least been honest with myself."

He is also credited to bring naturalistic art prevail on the American Stage. He was the first American dramatist to bring the different characters of small occupations, irrespective of their race, cultural background on to the stage. He frequently made the use of colloquial language as per characters' requirements. *The Emperor Jones* is the perfect example where he made a black the chief protagonist. It was for the first time for the white dramatist to do so for the American stage. Inspired by Strindberg, he introduced expressionistic technique in *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape*, needless to write-first time on the American Stage. He made it sure that the treatment of any scene should by no means be naturalistic. He split the protagonist of *Days without End* into two different characters who were required to be played by two different actors. He experimented with Masks to successful effect in *Strange Interlude*, and *The Great God Brown*. His vision of life was essentially tragic. He wrote the tragedies of the common man and of modern life. Leon Edel (1959, p. 1175) writes in *Masters of American Literature*, "From the first O'Neill showed himself to be a restless explorer of stage effect. The use of recurrent sound (the beating of tom-toms in The Emperor Jones); the introduction of masks, a in the classic Greek plays, adapted to modern use; the attempt to bring 'stream of consciousness'* into the theatre by reviving monologue, soliloquy and aside; the use of simultaneous action, as first attempted by the Europeans (by removing, for instance, the façade of a house and showing what is going on in several rooms at the same time): the 'stylization' of certain scenes…O'Neill, with great boldness, used whatever theatrical technique or device could serve him best to render his subject. At a time when theatrical producers stressed old-time rigidities and brevity, in order to squeeze a play between supper and suburban train, O'Neill wrote longer and longer plays. He asked his audiences to squeeze their suppers between the opening action of the play and its later portion. To the surprise of commercial producers, O'Neill's audiences willingly accepted these changes and flocked to see him. As for the time-worn speech taboos, O'Neill utterly defied them. What he lacked in poetry he made up in profanity. He never hesitated to use uncouth language if that was the way a character was supposed to speak; and the anomaly is, as we have noted, that when he achieved realistic utterance, he was at his most poetic."

### 11.6.4. O'Neill's Art of Plot Construction

Most of the plays of O'Neill are tragedies full of violence, murder, death, suicide. His many characters seem to be of abnormal behavior and behave in an insane way. This was the reason, as has already been mentioned earlier, on the part of Eric Bentley to

severely criticize O'Neill by saying that his tragic dramas of the thirties were tragedies transported to the intense insane. Barret Clark (1947, p. 126) observed, "Of the thirty five O'Neill's plays I have seen or read, there are only five in which there is no murder, death, suicide, or insanity. In the others I find a total of six suicides and one unsuccessful attempt, ten important murders (not counting incidental episodes referred to in the text), nineteen deaths, nearly all due to violence, and six cases of insanity". He further writes, "Even in the less violent incidents of the plot, O'Neill exaggerates his effects with all the melodramatic vigor at his command. In the handling of dramatic situations and of the reversals of fortune which befall the characters, he shows all the delicacy and subtlety of a circus achievement. He uses dramatic irony, that delicate rapier, as a shillelagh with which to cudgel his characters. He toys with them as a boy play with a fly whose wings he has torn off, an O'Neill character has only to express a desire for something in order to get just the opposite before the end of the act."

### 11.6.5. O'Neill's Tragedies are the Result of the Human Sufferings he Experienced

O'Neill's tragic vision reflects in his most of the plays. He tried to look every individual in relation to his or her respective social environment. He looks at the individuals in a social order, suffering, famished, disheartened, saddened and driven to disaster by the forces of a system which cares nothing for the general benefit of society. His tragedies are tragedies with difference. He does not follow Aristotelian norms. He presents the tragedy of modern man living in modern era. His tragic heroes belong to the everyday walks of the life. They don't have Aristotelian hamartia* or tragic flaw. Most of his protagonists are the victims of the social environment. Raymond Williams (1966, p. 116) quotes O'Neill, "The Tragedy of man is perhaps the only significant thing about him. What I am after is to get an audience leaving the theatre with an exultant feeling from seeing somebody on stage facing life, fighting against the eternal odds, not conquering, but perhaps inevitably being conquered. The individual life is made significant just by the struggle."

You should have known by this time that his own family life was a big motivation behind his tragic vision. Hooti and Maleki (2008, pp.9-10) write, "O'Neill's own harrowing experiences in life had endowed him with a tragic hallucination, very close to that of the Greek dramatist. Tragedy was to him the very texture and rhythm of life. O'Neil found that his tragic sense of life could not be expressed through the cheap more passionate and intense form of expression. Like, Eliot, he turned to the Greeks. He shared the Greek view of the human being as the helpless and tortured victim of the formidable forces of Fate. O'Neill found modern equivalents for the Fates and the Furies in conflict between man and God or man and nature dramatized in Greek tragedy into struggle within the suffering individual. Only such a struggle could form the theme of great tragedy, tragedy in the classic sense of the term. O'Neill's attempt was to deal with the relation between man and God, the Greek gods being substituted in the modern context by the unconscious. The modern dramatist's duty, according to O'Neill is 'to dig at the root of the sickness of today (Nathan, 1964, p.287), the sickness being diagnosed by him as the consequence of 'the death satisfactory new one'. Out of the tragic predicament of man, he strove to create a sense of dignity of the human being and an awareness of the meaning of life."Cargill (1962, p.2) commented, "The plays of O'Neill, it seems touch something fundamental in those who expose themselves to their effect. They reach down to frightening depths; they step on private, social, religious, philosophical, aesthetic toes; they either evoke immoderate anger."

## 11.6.6. NOTE OF MELODRAMA IN O'NEILL'S PLAYS

Homer E. Woodbridge (1964, p. 313) observed, "…O'Neill began as a writer of naturalistic melodrama, that he soon developed a talent for characterization and the evocation of atmosphere, and in two or three plays shook himself free of the shackles of melodrama; that in *Ile*, the most characteristic of his early plays, his fondness for obsession led him to a kind of symbolism, and coalesced with his love of striking stage effects to create a new variety of melodrama. In his later work the element of naturalism tends to diminish, though it never quite disappears (except, perhaps, in Lazarus Laughed); the element of symbolism tends to increase, though very irregularly; and the element of melodrama remains approximately constant, though it appears in various forms. On the whole, though the symbolism greatly heightens the imaginative appeal of some of his plays, it is more often a curse than a blessing, and it is disastrous when it gets out of control. In most of the stronger and finer plays-*The Emperor Jones, Anna Christie, Strange Interlude, Mourning becomes Electra-it is subordinated and used chiefly to create overtones; in some of the weakest or most questionable-The Fountain, the Great God Brown, Dynamo, Lazarus Laughed-it* becomes dominant, and, sometimes in alliance with melodrama, wrecks the play. It is powerfully used in The Hairy Ape through most of the piece; but when near the end it takes control, reality, and emotional appeal fade away"

### 11.6.7.O'Neill's Amalgamation of Naturalism, Symbolism and Expressionism

John Gassner (1964, p.326) has beautifully pointed out, "Nevertheless, he was not a 'naturalist', and he struck out, in fact, against the belief that mere transcriptions of life were the province of art. He fused naturalistic detail with symbolist mood, suggestiveness, and symbol. And taking his cue from his admired Strindberg, he resorted to the 'expressionist' dramatic style of distortion of action, speech, and scene, as in the weird cavalry of his *The Emperor Jones* through jungle and in the Fifth Avenue scene of The Hairy Ape. Tireless in his search for theatrical means of projecting the inner life and the metaphysical idea, he used interior monologue-speech on different levels of consciousness-in Strange Interlude, and he experimented with masks as a method of dramatization-with partial success in The Great God Brown and with virtually none in Lazarus Laughed. He even employed monologue in one highly effective scene of so realistic a comedy as Ah, Wilderness!;and he split the protagonist of *Days Without End* into two characters who had to be played by two actors. This constant, if not indeed always satisfactory, experimentation, is actually another important feature of O'Neill's work. It was his role to open all the stops of theatre-art in America, and we have reason to be grateful to him.

### 11.6.8. O'Neill's Greatness as a Social Critic

Very important characteristics of O'Neill early sea and important plays like *The Emperor Jones (1922),* and *The Hairy Ape (1922),* etc. is the pressure of the social reality of the times impinging on the dramatic world. O'Neill presents very powerful images of the miserable plight of the underdog in the new industrial order-the hapless industrial worker, sailor, and the farmer. He also presented the plight of the Negro in the condition of complete racial inequality. His dramas are the result of his deep understanding of the contemporary human live, both in situational and psychological context. O'Neill always saw man with the point of view of his social environment; that's why he constantly criticized the very structure of contemporary American society. He treats man against a rich background of social forces. He very bitterly criticized the social order in the industrial and psychological backdrop in many of his plays like *Anna Cristie, Strange Interlude, The Hairy Ape, All God Chillun Got*

*Wings*, etc. be He felt a sense of belonging to be very vital and human part of a social order but eventually got disappointed realizing that he counts nothing as an individual in this very social order.

Alienation, isolation, and the search for identity are hallmarks of his many plays. Monika Gupta (2008, pp. vi-vii) writes, "Man suffers and his life becomes a tale of isolation, loneliness, and estrangement, ending with the cessation of his earthly life neither because of the hostility of Fate as in the Greek tragedy, nor of Hamartia* in his character. Instead, he suffers from the sense of alienation because of his loss of faith in some supernatural power of traditional religions, a faith which the Greeks had, and which Christianity supplied in the Middle Ages, but which has been eroded by science and materialism today. The old religions have not been replaced by the new ones. Hence, man's soul is sick because of too much materialism, and he suffers from inner emptiness on account of his lack of some sustaining faith. He feels orphaned, lonely and at bay. His agony arises from a feeling or 'insecurity' a feeling of 'not-belonging', and he is confused and bewildered from within and fromwithout." He was very disillusioned with the social inequality prevailing in the American society. The American Negro was technically free but economically and psychologically he was still in bondage. He put forth this problem in *All God's Chillun Got Wings*. In *Marco Millions*, he presented the social concept of western business deal. This play is a satire on the modern businessman.

He thought that discriminative social environment was responsible for human suffering. He was of the view that the world is without intelligent social organization. His world was full of Cruelty, self-centeredness, self-indulgence, unawareness, and hatred. He criticized the social order and environment and society itself ruthlessly but provided no solution for making it better place to live.

### 11.6.9. O'Neill: Great Poet Dramatist

O'Neill was of the view that his subject matter would remain unfulfilled unless he becomes poet-dramatist. His creative obligation and attitude towards life could find expression only through doing so. In his letter to Arthur Hobson Quinn (ed. Cargill, 1964, p.125) he expressed his desire in these words: "But where I feel myself most neglected is just where I set most store by myself-as a bit of poet, who has labored with the spoken word to evolve original rhythms of beauty, where beauty apparently isn't-Jones, Ape, God's Chillun, Desire, etc.-and to see the transfiguring nobility of tragedy, in as near the Greek sense as one can grasp it, in seemingly the most ignoble, debased life." John Gassner's (1964, p. 328) description of this piece should be sufficient to understand him as a poet Dramatist: "O'Neill's one ambition was that he should be considered as a poet dramatist. This was an artistic necessity for him, if we take into consideration his matter as well as his point of view. But so long as he wrote about common life-of sailors and farmers and social outcasts-he managed his language surely, often with strong effect, sometimes with poetic overtones appropriate to his subject. When he set out to be deliberately poetic, he failed-sometimes embarrassingly. When he turned to middle-class or upper-class society, he missed fire in those parts of his plays in which he tried to generalize a feeling or an idea. Yet it may be conceded that even the he could achieve a poetic effect of low degree through the full rhythms of his sentences, if not through cadences and imagery. Poetry is sufficiently present, for example, in *Ah, Wilderness!*; and there is considerable measure of it in Desire Under the Elms, one of his best plays. He got his 'poetry', as other modern playwrights have done, not from verbal beauty but from the breadth and reach of his imagination, mood, or feeling, and especially, from his theatrical sense. If he was felicitous in creating verbal poetry, he often called a

'poetry of the theatre'-a few examples of which are, the tom-toms in *The Emperor Jones*, the firemen's forecastle and the Fifth Avenue nightmares of *The Hairy Ape*, the mask and transformations of *The Great God Brown*, the evocation of the farmhouse and land in *Desire Under the Elms*, and the Greek colonnade, the chanty refrain, and Electra-Lavinia's tragic closing of the doors upon herself in *Mourning Becomes Electra*."

### 11.6.10. O'Neill's Limitations

He has his shortcomings and limitations too. The first and foremost shortcoming of his plays is the lack of the sense of humor. The use of humor would have saved him from many melodramatic extravagances. He appears to be more satirical than humorous. His limitation is his grasp on his characters is not certain. There are very few characters like Emperor Jones, Lavinia, Nat Miller, Chris, we remember as individuals. He also lacks the power of creating cheerful unforgettable phrases. There are very few lines in his plays which became memorable with the people.Homer E. Woodbridge (1964, p.310) observed, "What critics usually call O'Neill's expressionism is really his use of symbolism to project the inner life-the 'behind-life' as he calls it-of his characters, and convey it to his audience." He further writes, "It is obvious that two of the three basic elements in O'Neill's work are antagonistic to the third. Melodrama and symbolism are both hostile to naturalism; melodrama because it tends to sacrifice all kinds of truth to life to stage effects; symbolism because it often sacrifices the illusion of reality to the projection of an idea. Many of the inconsistencies and weakness of O'Neill's plays are accounted for by these fundamental antagonisms among the elements out of which they are created. He succeeds at times by sheer imaginative force in blending these hostile materials, but the blend is never quite perfect. There are always cracks and flaws."

### 11.6.11. Conclusion

But his some shortcomings and drawbacks don't stop him being regarded as the greatest American dramatist and one of the greatest figures of the 20th century theatre of the world. He was an earnest and conscientious writer, who gained recognition and fame as a serious playwright by virtue of his extraordinary social awareness. The Nobel Prize for literature, 04 Pulitzer prizes, and many more honours and awards should be the sufficient proof of his significance. He inspired many dramatists to have belief in their talents. More important thing was that he became motivational force for the new dramatists. George Jean Nathan's (1964, p. 285) comment would be suffice to sum up: "With O'Neill's acceptance and success in the theatre, American playwrights suddenly took courage and proceeded, as best as in their fashion they could, to set themselves to a species of drama far removed from that to which they had been devoting their efforts. The newer and younger writers, led by O'Neill, threw off the shackles at once and tried to write honestly, faithfully, and truthfully."

## 11.7. SUMMARY

You should have learnt by now how important place Eugene O'Neill holds not only in America, but in the literature of the world. He is credited to have introduced psychological and social realism to the American stage, is the one who created serious American Drama introducing expressionism for the first time. He was the earliest to use American vernacular and focused on characters marginalized by Society. Further, you've gone through some of his really important works to know that he kept experimenting with new techniques, various subject matters, forms, and style. Then, you came across a general estimate as a Dramatist.

**Self Assessment Questions**

1. Which dramatist was born and died in a hotel?

2. In which year did O'Neill win the Nobel Prize?

## 11.9. ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Eugene O'Neill

2. 1935

## 11.10. REFERENCES

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## 11.11. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. How did the personal life affect Eugene O'Neill as a dramatist?

2. How significant Eugene O'Neill proved to be for American Drama?

3. Give a general estimate of Eugene O'Neill as a dramatist.

**UNIT 12 EUGENE O'NEILLL**

***THE EMPEROR JONES*-II**

## 12.1. INTRODUCTON

*The Emperor Jones* is one of the finest plays of Eugene O'Neill. This one act play consists of eight small scenes. This play left a very deep impact on the American Drama. This play is named after the chief protagonist Brutus Jones. This unit is going to make you acquainted with the story, characters, and critical aspects of *The Emperor Jones*.

## 12.2.OBJECTIVE

After going through this unit, you should be able to discuss the following topics

- Origin, Story, and Characters in the Play
- Scene-wise analysis of the Play
- Critical aspects of *The Emperor Jones*
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## 12.3. *THE EMPEROR JONES*

### 12.3.1. Introductory Note

The Emperor Jones is a one act play with eight scenes that focuses primarily on a single character Brutus Jones, formerly a Pullman porter for an American railroad, who is now the self-proclaimed emperor of a small Caribbean island-nation. There is one more major character Henry Smithers, A Cockney trader. The rest of the characters are minor including Lem, an old native woman, etc. When first produced in 1920, this well-knit play created history. This was the first expressionistic play on American stage. The grand success of the play fetched great fame for Eugene O'Neill and secured his permanent place in the history of American drama. Although it is generally not considered his best play, this play is very significant for a number of reasons. Apart from being O'Neill's first venture into experimental theatre, this play was also the first by any white man to feature African-American in the lead role. But the most striking quality of the play lies in its dreamlike sequences featuring 08 scenes, particularly from Scene II to Scene VII, built entirely around monologues.

### 12.3.2. Origin of the Play

***The Emperor Jones*** established O'Neill as a regular dramatist. This play is unanimously regarded as one of his best plays. It presents the tragic story of the American Negro. O'Neill has told the story of the play's origin in an interview printed in the New York World of Nov. 9, 1924 (Clark, 1947, PP. 71-72): "The idea of *The Emperor Jones* came from an old circus man I knew. This man told me a story current in Hayti concerning the late President Sam. This was to the effect that Sam had said they'd never get him with a lead bullet; that he would get himself first with a silver one…This notion about the silver bullet struck me, and I made a note of the story. About six months later I got the idea of the woods, but I couldn't see how it could be done on the stage, and I passed it up again. A year elapsed. One day I was reading of the religious feasts in the Congo and the uses to which the drum is put there: how it starts at a normal pulse and is slowly intensified until the heart beat of everyone present corresponds to the frenzied beat of the drum. There was an idea and an experiment. How would this sort of thing work on an audience in a theatre? The

effect of the tropical forest on the human imagination was honestly come by. It was the result of my own experience while prospecting for gold in Spanish Honduras."

### 12.3.3. Outline story of the Play

The Emperor Jones is the story of an American Negro Brutus Jones in eight brief scenes. He, the chief protagonist of the play, is a former Pullman porter in a railroad company in New York City, America. Through the conversation of Jones and Smithers we come to know that he was sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment for killing a black man named Jeff in card game but succeeded in making escape from the prison by killing the white warden. He escapes to a small island of the West Indies where he proclaims himself to be the Emperor exploiting the superstitious nature of the native people. He has declared himself to be the emperor not for power or glory but only for accumulating the wealth of the island. He has amassed huge amount of the wealth in a foreign bank, by overtaxing and using the criminal ways to rob the natives. Once a native chieftain, Lem, tried to kill him by firing at him but somehow he survived. He took the opportunity to spread the rumour that he had a charmed life and that he could be killed only by a silver bullet, and never by a lead one. He succeeded in putting this notion about his invincibility into the minds of the ignorant and superstitious natives and felt safe to lead a peaceful life. In the first scene, Smithers informs him that his subjects are in revolt against him, and that all his courtiers, ministers and attendants have already abandoned him and gone to the hills beyond. At first he doesn't believe him but knowing the imminent arrest by his subjects, he decides to run away at that very moment. It is the time of afternoon when he decides so. By the times of nightfall, he reaches at the place from where the Great Forest begins. He is very tired and hungry. Just at that time the beating of tom-tom starts and gets louder and quicker with the passing of each and every scene. Here he sees the figures of FormlessFears creeping out of the forest.He is filled with the feeling of the fear. He doesn't want to make use of his revolver because the sound of fire might disclose his location to the revolted natives. He runs away and enters into the forest. Here he comes one after another hallucinations pertaining to his past life criminal activities. Here he sees the figure of black Negro Jeff whom he had killed at the dice. Being terrified, he fires at Jeff. The figure disappears. He runs away in great horror, but forgets his way and takes a wrong path. Throughout the night he comes across other hallucinations as well. He sees Negro prisoners and their guard whom he had killed. Then, he sees the Auctioneer and at the Planter. He finds himself on a slave ship working with other slaves. He sees two rows of seated figures. He finds himself in Congo and comes across a sacrificial altar. The figure of Congo Witch Doctor, a Crocodile-God appears. Each time he fires but to no avail. Eventually he fires at Crocodile God with his last remaining bullet 'Silver Bullet'. No he is finished with the bullets. No more bullets at all. Then, comes the tragic end of Jones in the last scene. The native chieftain Lem along with a small group of soldiers, and Smithers appear searching for Jones. Soldiers are sent into the forest to search for Jones. They find and kill him by firing silver bullet which they had prepared out of 'money'. Here comes the end of the self-proclaimed emperor Jones. Smithers observes that Jones died in the height of style. His exact words are 'silver bullets! Gawd blimey, but yer died in the 'eighth o' style" (Eugene O' Neill, 2005, p. 36). He also regards Jones, the murdered one, to be better than his murderers.

### 12.3.4. Scene-Wise Summary of the Play

As of now you should have learnt a lot about *The Emperor Jones*. Now for your better understanding of the play, I've summarized all the eight scenes. For scene-wise summary, I've made the use of the original text of *The Emperor Jones*. All the

quotations used in this scene-wise summary have been taken from this original text published by Dover Publications, Inc., Mineola, New York in 2005. Kindly see the reference and bibliography for detail.

**12.3.4.1. Scene I**

The first scene of the play *The Emperor Jones* is very important. It introduces two major characters of the play-The Emperor Jones and Smithers. This scene also tells about the emperor Jones' past and throws light on his future plans. In this scene, we come to know that Jones' subjects are holding the meeting to revolt against the emperor. The scene opens in the audience chamber of the Emperor-'a spacious, high-ceilinged room with bare, white-washed walls' (Scene I, 2005, p. 3). When the curtain rises, a native negro woman, a minor character, is introduced. She is 'very old, dressed in cheap calico, bare-footed,, a red bandana handkerchief covering all but a few stray wisps of white hair'. Just when she begins to glide noiselessly toward the doorway in the rear; at this moment, Smithers, a cockney trader, a white man, appears beneath the portico. He is 'a tall, stoop-shouldered man about forty. His bald head, perched on a long neck with an enormous Adam's apple, looks like an egg. The tropics have tanned his naturally pasty face with its small, sharp features to a sickly yellow, and native run has painted his pointed nose to a starling red. His little, washy-blue eyes are red-rimmed and dart about him like a ferret's. His expression is one of unscrupulous meanness, cowardly and dangerous. He is dressed in a worn riding suit of dirty white drill, puttees, spurs, and wears a white cork helmet. A cartridge belt with an automatic revolver is around his waist. He carries a riding whip in his hand'. He grabs the old Negro woman firmly. She struggles to escape silently. Then, the conversation between the two ensues. He comes to know through this conversation that this is sleeping time of the emperor Jones after lunch. She also makes him acquainted with the meeting of the Negros being held on the hills. In an instance, he knows that the revolt is going to take place against the Emperor. He internally becomes very happy to come across this information as he is old acquaintance of Jones and has the feeling of jealousy for his rise. He tries to rouse the emperor from his sleep by loud whistles. In the meantime, the woman runs away from there. Smithers threaten her to shoot if she doesn't stop, but finally gives up the idea to stop her.

Just at that point of time Jones enters on the scene from the right. It has already been described that he was formerly a Pullman porter for an American railroad who is now the self-proclaimed emperor of a small Caribbean island-nation. He is 'a tall, powerfully-built, full-blooded Negro of middle age. His features are typically negroid, yet there is something decidedly distinctive about his face-an underlying strength of will, a hardy, self-reliant confidence in himself that inspires respect. His eyes are alive with a keen, cunning intelligence. In manner he is shrewd, suspicious, and evasive. He wears a light blue uniform coat, sprayed with brass buttons, heavy gold chevrons on his shoulders, gold braid on the collar, cuffs, etc. His pants are bright red with a light blue stripe down the side. Patent-leather laced boots with brass spurs and a belt with a long-barreled, pearl-handed revolver in a holster complete his makeup. Yet there is not altogether ridiculous about his grandeur. He has a way of carrying it off.' He is very irritated because of this disturbance and shouts loudly as to who dared to whistle and wake him up. Smithers come forward to tell him about what is happening on his back. He informs him about the absence of his subordinates. But Jones takes it casually and doesn't give any importance to their absence. Actually, Jones doesn't like Smithers as a person. He is well aware of his past crooked activities. Smithers tries to defend himself by saying that it was he who tried to settle

him on this territory. Jones refutes his defense by saying that it was simply the case of one crook helping another crook. Both of these two accuse each other for being prisoners. Jones proudly says in what way he amassed the wealth from the ignorant and superstitious native people and deposited and invested it in some foreign bank. He also informs Smithers that he has not become emperor for power or glory but only for the sake of earning money. He also chuckles at making rules, regulations, and laws to stop malpractices in trading. Smither feels in what way this man is exploiting his subjects but Jones is of the view that his big stealing is both safe and good. When Smithers say that he has always been lucky, Jones replies that it is not luck but the successful bluffing of a clever man. We also come to know the way in which Jones survived the fire shot by Lem, the native chieftain. Lem missed the fired even at so short a range. He made the ample use of this incidence to spread the rumour in the superstitious natives that he cannot be killed by the lead bullet. It's only silver bullet which can do so. We also come to know that his revolver is loaded with five lead bullets and the sixth and last one is the silver bullet. It's very important to know that all these bullets will be used by run-away Jones, even silver bullet, in next six scenes in his failed efforts to defend himself. Jones is very confident that he would be able to get away very easily whenever he comes across such type of the situation. Smithers reminds him of getting away from the jail in the America. Jones tells that it was all talk on his part to impress the people. Jones gets annoyed at the doubts expressed by Smithers. He tells Smithers the complete story of his activities in the life in the America. Then, Smithers informs him about the revolt of his subjects. Jones rings a bell for his attendants but no one is available. He is very much terrified to come across such situation but doesn't let expression come on his face. He makes Smithers informed about his leaving the job of emperor. He decides to run-away and looks for the horses but to no avail. Even horses are not available for him. It's late afternoon, three-thirty to be precise, and he is too confident that he would make his way. Smithers is distrustful about his escape but Jones is very confident. Here, for the first time, the beating of tom-tom, the symbol of revolt, begins to be heard which shakes Jones deep within but he succeeds to control his emotions and still manages to behave in dignified manner. Jones enquires about the drum, Jones tells him about the heathen religious services. Smithers also tell him that revolting natives are preparing a 'strong charm' against his rumoured silver bullet. Jones, though very uneasy at heart, still manages to appear dignified. Jones tells Smithers to take anything at his will from the palace and walks out of the front door. Smithers looks after Jones with a puzzled admiration: ''E's got 'is bloomin' nerve with 'im, s'elp me!'

**12.3.4.2. Scene I**

From this scene onward to the seventh scenes are dramatic monologues. In these scenes, O'Neill has effectively used the Negro dialect. Now, the emperor Jones is a run-away one. The time of the scene is Nightfall. O'Neill describes the scene: 'The end of the plain where the Great Forest begins. The foreground is sandy, level ground dotted by a few stones and clumps of stunted bushes covering close against the earth to escape the buffeting of the trade wind. In the rear the forest is a wall of darkness dividing the world. Only when the eye becomes accustomed to the gloom can the outlines of separate trunks of the nearest trees he made out, enormous pillars of deeper blackness. A somber monotone of wind lost in the leaves moans in the air. Yet this sound serves but to intensify the impression of the forest's relentless immobility, to form a background throwing into relief its brooding, implacable silence.' He also describes Jones: 'Jones enters from the left, walking rapidly. He stops as he nears the edge of the forest, looks around him quickly, peering into the dark as if searching for some familiar landmark. Then, apparently satisfied that he is where he ought to be, he

throws himself on the ground, dog-tired'. The darkness of the forest frightens him. He recalls the words of Smithers about the blackness of the forest. He is not only very tired but hungry too. He tries to find out the food which he buried under the white stone. Failing which, he starts to become anxious. As he turns his back on the forest, little Formless Fears creep out of its darkness. These Little Formless Fears are 'black, shapeless, only their glittering little eyes can be seen. If they have any describable form at all it is that of a grub worm about the size of a creeping child. They move noiselessly, but with deliberate, painful effort, striving to raise themselves on end, failing and sinking prone again' (Scene II, p.16) Then, he stares up at the tops of trees but he fails to recognize the trees which he had known earlier. This horrifies him. In an angry tone he shouts, 'Woods, is you tryin' to put something' ovah on me?'(Scene II, p.17) These little formless Fears laugh at him insultingly. Terrified, he yells 'What's dat? Who'sdar? What is you? Git away from me befo' I shoots you up! You don't…' (Scene II, p. 17). He fires at them but to no avail. The formless creatures disappear in the forest. The sound of the shot has broken the silence of the dark forest. He listens the far off, quickened beating of tom-tom. The sound of the shot gives him confidence. He utters, 'Dey're gone. Dat shot fix 'em. Dey was only little animals-little wild pigs, I reckon.' (Scene II, p. 17) He realizes his mistake of firing the shot because it might show his presence at that place. Then he first hesitatingly, starts to go into the deep forest. Eventually, he plunges boldly into the forest.

**12.3.4.3. Scene III**

Now it's Nine O' clock of the night, in the forest. 'The moon has just risen. Its beams, drifting through the canopy of leaves, make a barely perceptible, suffused, eerie glow. A dense low wall of underbrush and creepers is in the nearer foreground, fencing in a small triangular clearing. Beyond this is the massed blackness of the forest like an encompassing barrier. A path is dimly discerned leading down to the clearing from left, rear, and winding away from it again toward the right. As the scene opens nothing can be distinctly made out. Except for the beating of the tom-tom, which is a trifle louder and quicker than in the previous scene, there is silence, broken every few seconds by a queer, clicking sound.' (Scene III, p.19). Jones sees the vision of the Negro Jeff-'Then gradually the figure of the Negro, JEFF, can be discerned crouching on his haunches at the rear of the triangle. He is middle-aged, thin, brown in color, is dressed in a Pullman porter's uniform, cap, etc. He is throwing a pair of dice on the ground before him, picking them up, shaking them, casting them out with regular, rigid, mechanical movements of an automaton. The heavy, plodding footsteps of someone approaching along the trail from the left are heard and Jones' voice, pitched in a slightly higher key and strained in a cheering effort to overcome its own tremors.' (Scene III, p. 19). Jeff is an image of Jones himself as a Pullman porter. Jeff's color is very important. He is neither black nor white, rather, blend of the two-brown. Now, Jones's condition is deteriorating. His face is scratched due to the shrubs of the forest and his emperoruniform is also torn. He begins to whistle but suddenly stops because his whistling might send the signal of his whereabouts to his enemies. The beating of tom-tom makes him aware that his enemies are approaching nearer and nearer. He takes a step forward, then stops-worriedly. 'What's dat odder queer clickety sound I heah? Dere it is! Sound close! Sound like-sound like-Fo' God sake, sound like some nigger was shootin' crap!' He is very frightened. He quickly moves forward but stands motionless seeing Jeff. 'Who dat? Who dat? Is dat you, Jeff?' He is frightend because he had killed Jeff. He takes his revolver in frenzy and says, 'Nigger, I kills you dead once. Has I got to kill you again? You take it den.' He fires his second bullet to kill Jeff again. When the smoke clears away, Jeff has disappeared. Jones stands shaking but with a certain reassurance he says, 'He's gone,

anyway. Ha'nt or no, ha'nt, dat shot fix him.' The beating of far-off tom-tom is getting louder and more rapid. He feels that the firing might show his presencethere. Suddenly, forgetting his path, he plunges into the deeper forest. The scene comes to end here.

### 12.3.4.4. Scene IV

Now it's Eleven O'clock of the night in the forest. 'A wide dirt road runs diagonally from right; front, to left, rear. Rising sheer on both sides the forest walls it in. the moon is now up. Under its light the road glimmers ghastly and unreal. It is as if the forest had stood aside momentarily to let the road pass through and accomplish its veiled purpose. This done, the forest will fold in upon itself again and the road will be no more.' The condition of Jones is getting worse. 'Jones stumbles in from the forest on the right. His uniform is ragged and torn. He looks about him with numbed surprise when he sees the road, his eyes blinking in the bright moonlight. He flops down exhaustedly and pants heavily for a while.' He is very angry with his condition- 'I'm meltin' wid heat! Runnin' an'runnin'! Damn dis heah coat! Like a strait-jacket!' He thinks that he has left his enemies behind but is also dismayed at the fact that the beating of tom-tom is getting louder and nearer. He is terrified at the very thought of being caught and killed by the niggers. But he consoles himself by recollecting the saying of the parson of the Baptist Church* *(See the Glossary)* that niggers cannot harm a Christian. He regards himself to be Christian rather than nigger. He thinks himself to be civilized, unlike of the niggers. He prays to the almighty to save him from ghostly illusions. He hopes to reach to the coast by the morning. Then, he comes across another illusion. He sees a small gang of Negroes. 'They are dressed in striped convict suits, their heads are shaven, one leg drags limpingly, shacked to a heavy ball and chain. Some carry picks, the others shovels. They are followed by a white man dressed in the uniform of a prison guard. A Winchester rifle is slung across his shoulders and he carries a heavy whip. At a signal from the Guard, they stop on the road opposite where Jones is sitting. Jones, who has been staring up at the sky, unmindful of their noiseless approach, suddenly looks, down and sees them. His eyes pop out, he tries to get to his feet and fly, but sinks back, too numbed by fright to move.' The prison guard cracks his whip noiselessly and the convicts start working on the road. Then, the prison guard points sternly at Jones with his whip, motions him to take his place among the other shovelers. He obeys hypnotically. He feels that the guard is deliberately insulting him. As the gurard turns his back, annoyed Jones tries to crash the white guard's skull through showel. But he finds himself empty-handed. He cries despairingly-'What's my shovel? Gimme my shovel till I splits his damn head!' Appealing to his imaginative fellow convicts, he says, 'Gimme a shovel, one o'you, fo' Gode's sake!' Being very baffled, terrified, and raged, he pulls out his revolver and shouts, 'I kills you, you white devil, if it's de last thing I evah does! Ghost or debil, I kill you again!' He fires point blank at the white guard's back. All the figures disappear in the dark forest. Jones leaps away in mad flight. The beating of tom-tom, though still far-off, is increasing as far as the volume of the sound and rapidity is concerned.

### 12.3.4.5. Scene V

The time is passing. The night is getting darker. In this scene Jones is carried back to the infamous history of America when black people were bought and sold like cattle, and when slave-trading was widespread. It's one O' clock now in the forest. Jones 'forces his way in through the forest on the left. He looks wildly about the clearing with hunted, fearful glances. He slinks cautiously to the stump in the center and sits down in a tense position, ready for instant flight. Then he holds his head in his hands

and rocks back and forth, moaning to himself miserably.' He is remorseful for what wrong he did in the past. 'I knows I done wrong, I knows it! When I cotches Jeff cheatin' wid loaded dice my anger overcomes me and I kills him dead! Lawd, I done wrong! When dat guard hits me wid de whip, my anger overcomes me, and I kills him dead. Lawd, I done wrong!' He prays to the God to keep all the apparitions away from him. He also does not want to hear the beating of tom-tom because that also appears to be haunted. He says that he is not afraid of real man but these bizarre apparitions. Then, he pulls off his shoes and becomes very mournful at his miserable condition. He still regards himself emperor and says that how low the emperor has fallen. Just when he is sitting dejectedly, a crowd of figures silently enter the clearing from all sides. 'All are dressed in Southern costumes of the period of the fifties of the last century. There are middle-aged men who are evidently well-to-do planters. There is one spruce, authoritative individual-the Auctioneer. There is a crowd of curious spectators, chiefly young belles and dandies who have come to the slave-market for diversion. All exchange courtly greetings in dumb show and chat silently together…Finally, a batch of slaves are led in from the left by an attendant-three men of different ages, two women, one with a baby in her arms, nursing. They are placed to the left of the stump, beside Jones.' In his hallucination, Jones sees himself being prepared for the auction. The auctioneer puts his hands on the shoulders of Jones and appeals to the planters to see for themselves. He praises Jones' muscles, shoulders, etc. for auctioning and asks the planters to start bidding. The planters raise their fingers and start bidding. All of them appear to be taking great interest in Jones and possess him. Jones is wearing a mystic look at this time. He says, 'What you all doin', white folks? What's all dis? What you all lookin' at me fo'? What you doin' wid me, anyhow?' He is full of hatred and fear. He takes his revolver as the auctioneer knocks him down to one of the planters. Glaring from Auctioneer to the planters, he says, 'And you sells me? And you buys me? I shows you I'se a free nigger, damn yo' souls!' He fires rapidly and simultaneously at both of these people. Only blackness remains and silence broken by Jones as he rushes off, crying with fear-and by the quickened, ever louder beat of the tom-tom.

#### 12.3.4.6. Scene VI

It's three o' Clock. This is comparatively smaller scene. Now he is in a cleared space in the forest. He has completely lost control over his rational faculty. He feels that he has already been sold as a galley slave. His pants have been completely torn away. He is panting with exhaustion. Two rows of seated figures make gradual appearance from behind Jones. 'They are sitting in crumpled, despairing attitudes, hunched, and facing one another with their backs touching the forest walls as if they were shackled to them. All are Negros, naked save for loin cloths. At first they are silent and motionless. Then they begin to sway slowly forward toward each other and back again in unison, as if they were laxly letting themselves follow the long roll of a ship at sea.' Jones has lost his wits and doesn't know what to do. A slow melancholy murmur rises among the figures. Jones starts, looks up, sees the figures, and throws himself down again to shut out the sight. He is immensely terrified. As the chorus of the figures lift, he rises to a sitting posture similar to others, swaying back and forth. He is desperately sorrowful. All of a sudden the lights fade out, the other voices stop, and utter darkness is there. Jones gets up and starts running desperately. The tom-tom beats louder, quicker, with a more insistent, triumphant rhythm.

#### 12.3.4.7. Scene VII

It's five O' clock in the forest. This is the last scene in dramatic monologue. Jones's consciousness is completely paralyzed. He moves strangely from one place to another

like a sleepwalker as if in a hypnotic trance. 'He looks around at the tree, the rough stone altar, the moonlit surface of the river beyond, and passes his head with a vague gesture of puzzled bewilderment.' Then, he kneels before the altar in devotional posture. Suddenly he realizes his condition, 'What-what is I doin'? What is-dis place?...Oh, Gorry, I'seskeered in dis place! I'seskeered! Oh, Lawd, pertect dis sinner!' His face is hidden, and his shoulders are heaving with sobs of hysterical fright. Just at that moment, the figure of the Congo Witch-doctor appears. This Congo Witch-doctor is 'wizened and old, naked except for the fur of some small animal tied about his waist, its bushy tail hanging down in front. His body is stained all over a bright red. Antelope horns are on each side of his head, branching upward. In one hand he carries a bone rattle, in the other a charm stick with a bunch of white cockatoo feathers tried to the end. A great number of glass beads and bone ornaments are about his neck, ears, wrists, and ankles.' Then, many ritualistic exercises ensue. For the appeasement of the forces of evil, the sacrifice is to be made. The Witch-doctor points with his wand to the sacred tree, to the river beyond, to the altar; and finally to Jones with a ferocious command. Jones understands the meaning of this command. Now, it's he who must offer himself for sacrifice. He beats his forehead abjectly to the ground, moaning hysterically. 'Mercy, oh Lawd! Mercy! Mercy on dis po' sinner.' The Witch-doctor springs to the river bank and by stretching his hands, calls to some god within its depths. A huge head of a crocodile appears over the bank and its eyes, glittering greenly, fasten upon Jones. He stares into them fascinated. Jones keeps moaning, 'Mercy, Lawd! Mercy!' Jones cries out in a fierce manner. Immediately, there comes the thought to him to make the use of his last bullet-'De silver bullet! You don't git me yit!' He fires at the green eyes. The head of the crocodile sinks back behind the river bank, The Witch-doctor disappears. Jones lies with his face to the ground, trembling with terror. The beating of the tom-tom breaks the silence. Now he is left with no bullet at all. After wasting five lead bullets, he has wasted his 'silver bullet' too.

**12.3.4.8. Scene VIII**

The night is over. It's dawn. The scene is laid at the dividing line of forest and plain. The tom-tom is on the very spot and very loud. The beats of it are constantly vibrating. Lem, the native chieftain appears on the stage, followed by a small squad of his soldiers, and by the Smithers, the cockney trader. Lem is 'a heavy set, ape-faced old savage of the extreme African type, dressed only in a loin cloth. A revolver and cartridge belt are about his waist. His soldiers are in different degrees of rag-concealed nakedness. All wear broad palm-leaf hats. Each one carries a rifle.' Smithers showsLem and his soldiers the spot from where Jones entered the forest. The soldiers are sitting in semi-circle there. Smithers advises them to get up and hunt for Jones. Lem is pretty sure that he would catch Jones. He makes a quick signal with his hand and with immediate compliance; the soldiers enter into the forest, each one entering it at different point. Soon the reports of several shots come from the forest, followed by savage, triumphant yells. The beating of tom-tom suddenly stops. Lem informs Smithers that they have caught Jones and he is dead. To Smithers' query as to how he knew about the death of Jones, Lem replies that because Jones could not be killed by a lead bullet, they moulded silver bullets and he must have been killed by one of them. His exact words, 'My mensdey got 'um silver bullets. Dey kill him shore…Lead bullet no kill him. He got um strong charm. I cook um money, make um silver bullet, make um strong charm, too.' The soldiers carry the dead body of Jones. Lem examines the dead body of Jones with immense fulfillment. Smithers says with a grin, 'Silver bullets! Gawd blimey, but yer died in the 'eight o' style, any'ow'.

Smithers regards Jones to be better than his murderers, 'Stupid a 'ogs, the lot of 'em! Blarsted niggers!'

## 12.4 THE EMPEROR JONES: A CRITICAL STUDY

### 12.4.1. The Emperor Jones as an Expressionistic Play

Eugene O'Neill is credited to bring expressionism to the American stage through his various plays like *The Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape, All God's Chillun Got Wings,* and *Welded.* Actually, the technique of expressionism was very successfully used by Strindberg in his dramas. O'Neill was very influenced by the modern dramatic techniques used by Strindberg. He publically acknowledged Strindberg's contribution to his own evolution as a dramatist. O'Neill in 'Strindberg and our Theatre' (ed. Cargill et al, 1964, p. 109) writes, 'Strindberg knew and suffered with our struggle years before many of us were born. He expressed it by intensifying the method of his time and by foreshadowing both in content and form the methods to come. All that is enduring in what we loosely call "Expressionism"-all that is artistically valid and sound theatre…'

But, it's very essential to know expressionism before going to *The Emperor Jones*. Expressionism in drama was a movement that began in Germany in 1910 and flourished until around 1924. In *The Reader's Encyclopedia of World dramas* (ed. Gassner and Quinn), we find that one of the main concerns of the expressionist dramatist was man's inner struggle to achieve his spiritual transformation into what he is. The same thing happens with Brutus Jones. There is constant inner struggle in the mind of the Emperor Jones. He recollects his past criminal activities and even the infamous American history of slave trading of Negros.

In expressionist play, visionary or dream-like scenes frequently present the process against a background of actuality which is often distorted to the point of grotesqueness. During the course of the play, the Emperor Jones comes across various visions of the past-Jeff, white guard, Little Formless Fears, Congo Witch-doctor, and green-eyed Crocodile, Negro slaves. Throughout the scenes, he is remorseful of his past criminal activities. He is also very fearful of being auctioned as a slave.

The language of the expressionist drama is frequently very un-theatrical, consisting as it does of long, lyric monologues so intensely subjective in feeling as to seem almost incomprehensible. Often the expressionist dramatist uses a elliptical, telegram like style in which sentence structure is compressed, oftena disconnected, machine-gun style abounding in stichomythic phrases, but always there is the identifying characteristic of intense feeling. In *The Emperor Jones*, O'Neill makes the use of American dialect. The primacy of language over plot and action in the expressionist drama has had the further effect of removing all psychological verisimilitude from the plays.

Only the author-hero, in this case the Emperor Jones, is psychologically delineated. The other figures are usually puppet-like emanations of the protagonist's self-centered mind. Consequently, we find that the subsidiary characters in the expressionist drama are always types, virtually impersonal and frequently grotesque. So is the case with *The Emperor Jones*. In this play, O'Neill's primary focus is on

Jones. Other characters are subsidiary and background figures. Smithers serve as a foil to the Emperor. Besides the real characters like A Negro old woman and Lem, a native chieftain, other characters are merely illusions from his past planned to externalize the psychological horrors of the emperor and his breakup and deterioration under the impact of fear.

Expressionism is similar to naturalism in that both had a common concern with social reform. It is related to neo-romanticism in that both valued language above plot and character. Several of Strindberg's later dramas, most notably *A Dream Boy*, are completely expressionist in technique and in philosophy. By and large it may be said that although American playwrights have used expressionism, they have used it only as an auxiliary technique.

We find O'Neill's take on expressionism in 'O'Neill Talks about His Plays' (ed. Cargill et al, 1964, p. 111): '…But the newest thing now in playwriting is the opposite of the character play. It is the expressionist play. For expressionism denies the value of characterization. As I understand it, expressionism tries to minimize everything on the stage that stands between the author and the audience. Their theory, as far as I can make it out, is that the character gets interested in the kind of man he is and what he does instead of the idea. But plenty of people will probably damn me for saying this, because everyone has a different idea of expressionism and mine is just what I have acquired through reading about it. I personally do not believe that an idea can be readily put over to an audience except through characters…I do not believe that the character gets between the author's idea and the audience. The real contribution of the expressionist has been in the dynamic qualities of his plays. They express something in modern life better than did the old plays.'

In *The Emperor Jones, O'Neill has made extensive use of symbols. Brutus Jones himself is the symbol* of illogicality and wildness in every man, his 'silver bullet' is the symbol of his pride and it also stands for worldly wealth and greed for money. The dark and thick forest symbolizes the inner darkness and uncertainty of Jones. His strong urge to escape from the forest is his strong urge to escape from his own self, from the memories of his past criminal activities, from the past history of racial regression. He has also made the use of interior monologue from scene 2 to 7 which take place in the forest at the time of night. It's through these monologues; we have the opportunity to come across inner struggle in the mind of Jones. His remorseful soul constantly prays to God for mercy and protection. For making the audience and readers acquainted with the past criminal tricks of Jones, O'Neill has realist dialogues in scene I and scene VIII. Actually, realism has always been the basis of his expressionism. Scenes II to VII are expressionist in nature. Each fantasy scene is marked by Jones firing a bullet at different illusions. Quinn in *A History of the American Drama: from the Civil War to the Present Day* (1936, pp.180-81) writes, 'It is a fine thing for an art when a creative master shatters conventions and thereby makes for freedom. O'Neill went back to a freer form, he defied the ordinary rules of technique, but he did not violate the fundamental laws of drama. He kept the unity of time; he violated the unity of place; but he substituted a higher unit-that of impression. The Emperor Jones is a drama of human fear; the emotion of terror is a binding force that fuses scenes into unforgettable picture of a human soul fighting against his own evil deeds, the cruel fate of his forefathers, and the ignorance of centuries. Variety, too, is secured by the varying shades in the intensity of terror, and the originality of the whole conception of the play. The Emperor Jones made O'Neill's position secure.'

**12.4. 2. The Use of Dramatic Monologues in *The Emperor Jones***

Dramatic Monologue is basically one of the techniques used in Poetry. The Victorian poets Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning made effective use of dramatic monologue in their respective poems. But O'Neill has effectively used this technique in *The Emperor Jones*. It is *'Dramatic'* because it expresses the feeling of the character, here Jones, not of the dramatist. Monologue is made of two separate words-*'Mono'* meaning *'One'* and *'Logos'* meaning *'Speech'*. Hence, a *'Monologue'* is the speech delivered by one individual. B. Prasad (1999, pp. 130-31) defines dramatic monologue, 'It is cast in the form of a speech addressed to a silent listener. Its aim is character study or 'psycho-analysis' without the other dramatic adjuncts of incident and dialogue. The person who speaks is made to reveal himself and the motives that impelled him at some crisis in the life or throughout its course. He may speak in self-justification or in a mood of detached self-explanation, contented, resigned, impenitent, or remorseful. What the author is intent on showing us in the inner man'.

Except the first and the last scene, O'Neill has employed dramatic monologues to reveal what turbulent period Jones is passing through. This is simply psychological study of the mind of Jones. Through these monologues, we come across Jones' psychological abnormalities such as hallucinations and fear complex. Throughout these scenes, he sees different visions, illusions representing his cultural background, his past criminal misdeeds, and racial past. Once surrounded by the bizarre and wicked darkness of the forest, he is in utter grip of terror. We can better understand these monologues going through all these scenes.

CamilloPellizzi (ed. Cargill et al, 1964, p. 354) writes, 'The hero is a sort of negro tyrant who is seen, in the first act, enthroned in his palace; he is petulant and solemn, a mixture of the cruel and the grotesque. His enemies force him to leave the palace and flee into the jungle. In the six successive scenes we see him alone in the forest, a prey to ancient, atavistic fears. "They are", says a critic, "six progressive stages of his rising terror. They are expressionistic rather than realistic, each one a vision his brain conjures up as terror more and more overwhelms him, each one a vision going farther back into his racial past, to the slave market, the slave ship, and then the black superstition of the African jungle." (W.P. Eaton, The Drama in English, p. 334) All through these six scenes there is nothing but Jones' monologue, his rising madness, which, before these apparitions, these silent groups, pervades the scene. In the distance is heard the uninterrupted beat of tom-tom of his enemies. At the end Jones comes out of the jungle at the same place where he went in and here his enemies await him and kill him.' Barret H. Clark (1947, p.71) views this play 'as pure theatre'. He further writes that this play 'is one of the best of all the O'Neill plays, though most of it is only a dramatic monologue. It is a kind of unfolding, in reverse order, of the tragically epic of the American Negro.'

Scene II to Scene VII are out and out dramatic monologues. For having better understanding in what way O'Neill made the effective use of this device and in what way they revealed the inner struggle of Jones, please go through scene-wise summary of the play.

To sum up by quoting Kenneth Maggowan (ed. Cargil et al, 1964, p. 450), 'Lost in the jungle, with the pursuing tom-tom beating his blood in mad rhythms through his mind, Brutus Jones broke into a monologue that seemed to the spectator natural and inevitable. He talked of his terrors. He told of his past in vivid, terrible visions. Soon

we were ready to go back through his min into the terrors of his black people, back into racial memories ofslave ship and Congo voodoo.'

### 12.4.3. Dramatic Importance of the tom-tom in *The EmperorJones*

O'Neill gave very importance to sound effects. He incorporated sound effects as integral parts of his plays. This play is no exception in this regard. He used the sound effect of the beating of tom-tom which gave a new dimension to the play. Just when Jones is in talks with Smithers, the beating of tom-tom begins to be heard from the distant hills. The following description has been taken from the original text 'The Emperor Jones' publish by Dover, New York.

'[From the distant hills comes the faint, steady thump of a tom-tom, low and vibrating. It starts at a rate exactly corresponding to normal pulse beat-72 to the minute-and continues at a gradually accelerating rate from this point uninterruptedly to the very end of the Play.]

[Jones starts at the sound. A strange look of apprehension creeps into his face for a moment as he listens. Then he aks, with an attempt to regain his most casual manner] What' dat drum beatin' fo'?

Smihters: [With a mean grin] For you. That means the bleedin' ceremony'as started. I've 'eard it before and I knows.

Jones: Cer'mony? What cer'mony?

Smithers: The blacks is 'oldin' a bloody meetin', 'avin' a war dance, gettin' their courage worked up b'fore they starts after you.

Jones: Let dem! Dey'llsho' need it!'

It's afternoon when the beating starts and it continues till the dawn of the next morning of the last scene. Knowing that the beating symbolizes the revolts of his subjects, he runs away from the palace and enters into the great forest. At the start, the beating is at normal rate, but keeps increasing in louder and rapider sound corresponding to the deteriorating condition of Jones.

In Scene II, the silence is broken 'by the far off quickened throb of tom-tom.

In Scene III, it terrifies Jones. 'The beat of the far off tom-becomes perceptibly louder and more rapid.

In Scene IV, '…as Jones leaps away in mad flight and the throbbing of the tom-tom, still far distant, but increased in volume of sound and rapidity of beat.'

In Scene V, 'Only blackness remains and silence broken by Jones as he rushes off, crying with fear-and by the quickened, ever louder beat of the tom-tom.'

In Scene VI, 'Jones can be heard scrambling to his feet and running off...The tom-tom beats louder, quicker, with a more insistent, triumphant pulsation.'

In Scene VII, 'Jones lies with his face to the ground, his arms outstretched, whimpering with fear as the throb of the tom-tom fills the silence about him with a somber pulsation, a baffled but revengeful power.'

In Scene VIII, when Jones is eventually dead, 'the beating of tom-tomabruptly ceases.'

Woodbridge (ed. Cargil et al, 1964, p. 312) comments that the beating of tom-tom gives poetic dimension to the play, he writes, 'In the distant chanting of the Negros on shore Mr. O'Neill uses effectively a device similar to the beating of tom-tom in *The Emperor Jones.* The play gives the impression of a dramatic poem in rough prose; it is a striking instance of O'Neill's occasional imaginative and poetic use of coarse and ugly speech.' CamilloPellizzi (ed. Cargil et al, 1964, p. 354) writes about the beating of tom-tom, 'Some would call them stage devices to excite the nerves of the audience. In reality they are symbolical elements dramatized; they represent, in both cases, a brooding Fate, predestination…we may observe the form it assumes with an American of Irish and Catholic origin: whether O'Neill is dealing with ancestral terrors latent in the soul. As with Jones, or with a strange, cruel nature, as in all his sea dramas, man's destiny, here, always depends on a terrible, unequal struggle between man and a created reality from which he is sharply distinguished.' Taylor (1956, pp. 380-81) writes, 'O'Neill skillfully employs the symbolic devices of expressionism. The beat of tom-tom, heard in the first scene and gradually accelerating thereafter, intensifies the atmosphere of savage, superstitious terror. The progress of Jones' fear is symbolized in such scenes as those of the little formless fear, the convict gang, and the slave ship; its climax appears in that masterly evocation of jungle savagery, the scene of the Congo witch-doctor. Both in intent and in execution, *The Emperor Jones* is strikingly original; and it is tremendously effective on the stage. That it is a profound, significant study of humanity is less certain.'The beating of tom-tom certainly enhanced the effectiveness of the drama on the stage. The tom-tom effect certainly contributed to the expressionistic appeal of the play. The throb of the tom-tom proves to be the most effective device used in the play to objectify the innerterrors of Jones.

### 12.4.4. Analysis of the Character of Brutus Jones

As the title suggests, there are only two major characters-Brutus Jones, self-proclaimed emperor and Smithers, a cockney white trader. Besides these two major characters, there are minor characters like Negro woman, and Lem, a native chieftain along with his soldiers, etc. But here we will focus only on the central figure.

The story of *The Emperor Jones* revolves round the chief protagonist Brutus Jones, a former Pullman porter in a railroad company in New York City, America. When the play opens, he is self-proclaimed emperor of a small Caribbean island-nation.

He is 'a tall, powerfully-built, full-blooded Negro of middle age. His features are typically Negroid, yet there is something decidedly distinctive about his face-an underlying strength of will, a hardy, self-reliant confidence in himself that inspires respect. His eyes are alive with a keen, cunning intelligence. In manner he is shrewd, suspicious, evasive. He wears a light blue uniform coat, sprayed with brass buttons, heavy gold chevrons on his shoulders, gold braid on the collar, cuffs, etc. His pants are bright red with a light blue stripe down the side. Patent-leather laced boots with brass spurs, and a belt with a long-barreled, pearl-handed revolver in a holster complete his makeup. Yet there is not altogether ridiculous about his grandeur. He has a way of carrying it off.'

Through the conversation of Jones and Smithers we come to know that he was sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment for killing a black man named Jeff in card

game but succeeded in making escape from the prison by killing the white warden. He escapes to a small island of the West Indies where he proclaims himself to be the Emperor exploiting the superstitious nature of the native people.

He has declared himself to be the emperor not for power or glory but only for accumulating the wealth of the island. He has amassed huge amount of the wealth in a foreign bank, by overtaxing and using the criminal ways to rob the natives. Once a native chieftain, Lem, tried to kill him by firing at him but somehow he survived. Being extremely shrewd and crafty, he took the opportunity to spread the rumour that he had a charmed life and that he could be killed only by a silver bullet, and never by a lead one. He succeeded in putting this notion about his invincibility into the minds of the ignorant and superstitious natives and felt safe to lead a peaceful life. In the first scene, Smithers informs him that his subjects are in revolt against him, and that all his courtiers, ministers and attendants have already abandoned him and gone to the hills beyond. At first he doesn't believe him but knowing the imminent arrest by his subjects, he decides to run away at that very moment.

He is both an arrogant and a terrified Negro. He is very arrogant, ostentatious, self-possessed emperor, disdainful of the servility and superstitious nature of his own race. Although he himself is a Negro, but he doesn't feel to be belonging to his own race. He looks down very scornfully at his own group of people. But when he comes across very tight corner, he sees the illusions of slave auctioneering of the Negros, Negro convicts, etc. and becomes very much terrified. He appears to be much disorientated and frightened Negro in the adverse situation.

His pride proves to be the real cause of his downfall. He is very proud and confident of the rumor he has spread among his subjects that he is invincible and can be killed only by a particular silver bullet. Remaining superstitious, his subjects kill him by silver bullets that they had prepared out of 'money' or by melting down silver coins.

Not only he is a shrewd man, but very practical too. His complete attitude is utilitarian. He even takes religion for granted. He has been a member of the Baptist Church, not because of his faith in it, but just because of this fact that the church promised him to protect from the ghosts and apparitions.

We find in http://worldlitoneline.net/July-05/emperor.PDF, *The Emperor Jones*, though structurally simple and homogeneous, has a complex character, which is suggestive of a number of themes and ideas. Critics and scholars have interpreted and its disastrous consequence. Some see a deeper meaning that O'Neill was convinced that the real cultural roots of the Negro lay in Africa from where he had gone, leaving the primeval jungle across the Atlantic, to be sold as a slave in the United States of America. Jones, though never a slave, has within himself a racial memory and his story is and enactment of the Negro story in reverse. He is introduced at the height of power that he has grabbed for himself through unscrupulous exploitation of the ignorant natives but he regresses from a series of hallucinations of his primitive state, triggered by terror in the tropical forest. O'Neill probably makes his hero symbolic of something more universal, the primitive forces that lurk beneath the civilized human being. This view is also expressed by some regarding it as a study in atavism*, that is, a gradual regression and disintegration of the central figure and his return to his primitive state.' Travis Bogard in 'Contour in Time, (p.142) feels that divorced of its theatrical life and superficial social concerns, it is theological melodrama where the dark crocodile god whose creature he rightfully is, he rejects under the Christian influence, takes vengeance on him.

## 12.5. SUMMARY

In this unit we have discussed the text of *The Emperor Jones* in detail. By now, you should have learnt the importance of this play which immensely contributed to the growth of American Drama. You should have also learnt outline story, and origin of the play. Further, you should have gone through scene-wise detail summary of the play to get better understanding of the play. Furthermore, critical analysis of *The Emperor Jones* must have contributed to your critical aptitude.

**Self Assessment Questions**

1. In which scene does Brutus Jones make his first appearance?

2.Who tells Smithers about the revolt of The Emperor Jones's subjects?

3.Who says, 'Dey kill him shore…Lead bullet no kill him. He got um strong charm. I cook um money, make um silver bullet, make um strong charm, too'?

## 12.6. ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. First

2. A Negro Woman

3. The prison guard

## 12.7. REFERENCES

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http://worldlitoneline.net/July-05/emperor.PDF

## 12.8. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. What is expressionism? Describe The Emperor Jones as an expressionist play?
2. What is dramatic monologue? How effectively has O'Neill made the use of it in *The Emperor Jones*?
3. Draw a character sketch of Brutus Jones.
4. Describe the dramatic importance of the tom-tom in The Emperor Jones.

**UNIT 13 ARTHUR MILLER**

***DEATH OF A SALESMAN*-I**

## 13.1. INTRODUCTION

Arthur Asher Miller (1915-2005) was the American Playwright who was best known for his play *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and his short-lived marriage with famous Hollywood Actress Marilyn Monroe. Arthur Miller began his dramatic career after the Second World War. He tasted his first success with *All My Sons* in 1947. This prolific writer is credited to have written many hard-hitting plays, movie scripts, short stories, short stories and several critical essays and articles. In this unit, you are going to be made familiar with the life, character, persona and career of American Dramatist Arthur Miller and his contribution to the Development of American Drama.

## 13.2. OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to discuss following topics:

- Life, character, and personality of Arthur Miller
- Major events and incidents which influenced Arthur Miller as a playwright
- A brief understanding of Arthur Miller's works
- Miller's contribution to the Development of American Drama.

## 13.3. ARTHUR MILLER: A BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT

Arthur Miller was born in on October 17, 1915 in Harlem, New York City; the family moved shortly afterwards to a six-storey building between Lenox and Fifth Avenues. His father, Isidore Miller, was an illiterate Jewish immigrant from Poland. His successful ladies-wear manufacturing shop was ruined in the depression. Augusta Barnett, Miller's mother, was born in New York, but her father came from the same Polish town as the Millers.

The sudden change in fortune had a strong influence on Miller. "This desire to move on, to metamorphose – or perhaps it is a talent for being contemporary – was given me as life's inevitable and rightful condition," he wrote in *Timebends: A Life* (1987). The family moved to a small frame house in Brooklyn, which is said to the model for the Brooklyn home in *Death of a Salesman*. Miller spent his boyhood playing football and baseball, reading adventure stories, and appearing generally as a nonintellectual. "If I had any ideology at all it was what I had learnt from Hearst newspapers," he once said. After graduating from a high school in 1932, Miller worked in automobile parts warehouse to earn money for college. Having read Dostoevsky's novel The Brothers Karamazov Miller decided to become a writer. To study journalism he entered the University of Michigan in 1934, where he won awards for playwriting – one of the other awarded playwrights was Tennessee Williams.

After graduating in English in 1938, Miller returned to New York. There he joined the Federal Theatre Project, and wrote scripts for radio programs, such as Columbia Workshop (CBS) and Cavalcade of America (NBC). Because of a football injury, he was exempt from draft. In 1940 Miller married a Catholic girl, Mary Slattery, his college sweetheart, with whom he had two children. Miller's first play to appear on Broadway was *The Man Who Had All the Luck* (1944). It closed after four performances. Three years later produced *All My Sons* was about a factory owner who sells faulty aircraft parts during World War II. It won the New York Drama Critics Circle award and two Tony Awards. In 1944 Miller toured Army camps to collect

background material for the screenplay “The Story of G.I. Joe” (1945). Miller's first novel, *Focus*(1945), was about anti-Semitism.

Miller's plays often depict how families are destroyed by false values. Especially his earliest efforts show his admiration for the classical Greek dramatists. "When I began to write," He said in an interview, "one assumed inevitably that one was in the mainstream that began with Aeschylus and went through about twenty-five hundred years of playwriting." (From The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller, ed. by Christopher Bigsby, 1997)

*Death of a Salesman*(1949) brought Miller international fame, and become one of the major achievements of modern American theatre.

In 1949, Miller was named an "Outstanding Father of the Year", which manifested his success as a famous writer. But the wheel of fortune was going down. In the 1950s Miller was subjected to a scrutiny by a committee of the United States Congress investigating Communist influence in the arts. The FBI read his play *The Hook*, about a militant union organizer, and he was denied a passport to attend the Brussels premiere of his play *The Crucible* (1953). *The Crucible*, which received Antoinette Perry Award, was an allegory for the McCarthy era and mass hysteria. Although its first Broadway production flopped, it became one of Miller's most-produced plays.

Elia Kazan, with whom Miller had shared an artistic vision and for a period a girlfriend, the motion-picture actress Marilyn Monroe, named in 1952 eight former reds, who had been in the Communist Party with him. Kazan virtually became a pariah overnight; Miller remained a hero of the Left. Two short plays under the collective title A View from the Bridge were successfully produced in 1955. The drama, dealing with incestuous love, jealousy and betrayal, was also an answer to Kazan's film On the Waterfront (1954), in which the director justified his naming names.

In 1956 Miller was awarded honorary degree at the University of Michigan but also called before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Miller admitted that he had attended certain meetings, but denied that he was a Communist. He had attended among others four or five writers’ meetings sponsored by the Communist Party in 1947, supported a Peace Conference at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York, and signed many appeals and protests. "Marilyn's fiancé admits aiding reds," wrote the press. Refusing to offer other people's names, who had associated with leftist or suspected Communist groups, Miller was cited for contempt of Congress, but the ruling was reversed by the courts in 1958.

Miller – "the man who had all the luck" – married Marilyn Monroe in 1956; they divorced in 1961. At that time Marilyn was beyond saving. She died in 1962.

In the late 1950s Miller wrote nothing for the theatre. His screenplay “Misfits” was written with a role for his wife. The film was directed by John Huston, starring Montgomery Clift, Clark Gable, and Marilyn Monroe. Marilyn was always late getting to the set and used heavily drugs. The marriage was already breaking, and Miller was feeling lonely. John Huston wrote in his book of memoir, *An Open Book*, (1980):

> One evening I was about to drive away from the location – miles out in the desert – when I saw Arthur standing alone. Marilyn and her friends hadn't offered him a ride back; they'd just left him. If I hadn't happened to see him,

> he would have been stranded out there. My sympathies were more and more with him.

Later Miller said that there "should have been more long shots to remind us constantly how isolated there people were, physically and morally." Miller's last play, *Finishing the Picture*, produced in 2004, depicted the making of "Misfits*"*.

Miller was politically active throughout his life. In 1965 he was elected president of P.E.N., the international literary organization. At the 1968 Democratic Party Convention he was a delegate for Eugene McCarthy. In 1964 Miller returned to stage after a nine-year absence with the play "After the Fall", a strongly autobiographical work, which dealt with the questions of guilt and innocence. The play also united Kazan and Miller, but their close friendship was over, destroyed by the blacklist. Many critics consider that Maggie, the self-destructive central character, was modeled on Monroe, though Miller denied this. A year after his divorce, Miller married the Austrian photographer IngeMorath (1923-2002), whom he had met during the filming of "Misfits". Miller co-operated with her on two books about China and Russia. After IngeMorath died, Miller plannd to marry Agnes Barley, a 34-year-old artist. In 1985 Miller went to Turkey with the playwright Harold Pinter. Their journey was arranged by PEN in conjunction with the Helsinki Watch Committee. One of their guides in Istanbul was OrhanPamuk.

In the 1990s Miller wrote such plays as *The Ride Down Mount Morgan* (prod. 1991) and *The Last Yankee* (prod. 1993), but in an interview he stated that

> It happens to be a very bad historical moment for playwriting, because the theater is getting more and more difficult to find actors for, since television pays so much and the movies even more than that. If you're young, you'll probably be writing about young people, and that's easier -- you can find young actors -- but you can't readily find mature actors.

('We're probably in an Art That Is -- Not Dying', The New York Times, January 17, 1993) In 2002 Miller was honored with Spain's prestigious Principe de Asturias Prize for Literature, making him the first U.S. recipient of the award.

Miller died of heart failure at home in Roxbury, Connecticut, on February 10, 2005.

## 13.4. ARTHUR MILLAR'S VIEWS ON DRAMA

The plays of Arthur Miller can be regarded as a part of a constant realistic tradition that began with the course of theatre activity in the United States of America in the period between two world wars-the First World War (1914-1918) and the Second World War (1939-1945). He has been the most outspoken American writers of the last century. His personal life experiences greatly influenced his works and helped in creating his own vision towards drama. The great depression of the thirties which ruined his family business, Eugene O'Neill, Ibsen, Chekhov, Expressionism, Naturalistic Drama, Freudian psychology, Contemporary American Drama, Greek and British Drama, Socialism, Communalism, Dostoevsky's Brother Karamazov influenced his attitude towards drama.

What kind of the theatre did he want? He writes in Collected Plays,

> I am not calling for more ideology…I am simply asking for a theatre in which an adult who wants to live can find plays that will heighten his

> awareness of what living in our time involves. I am tired of a theatre of sensation, that's all. I am tired of seeing man as merely a bundle of nerves.

At another occasion he wrote,

> Watching a play is not like lying on a psychiatrist's couch or sitting alone in front of the television. In the theatre you can sense the reaction of your fellow citizens along with your own reactions. You may learn something about yourself, but sharing it with others brings a certain relief-the feeling that you are not alone. You're part of the human race. I think that's what theater is about and why it will never be finished.

He himself says about his approach to writing the plays,

> My approach to playwriting and the drama itself is organic; and to make this gratingly evident at once it is necessary to separate drama from what we think of today as literature. A drama ought not to be looked at first and foremost from literary perspectives merely because it uses words, verbal rhythm, and poetic image. These can be its most memorable parts, it is true, but they are not its inevitable accompaniments.

Elsewhere, he explains,

> A Play, I think, ought to make sense of common-sense people. I know it is to have been rejected by them, even fairly so, but the only challenge worth the effort is the widest one and the tallest one, which is the people themselves. It is their innate relationship, which are the people themselves. It is the barrier to excess in experiment and the exploitation of the bizarre, even as it is the proper aim of drama to break down the limits of conventional unawareness and acceptance of outmoded and banal forms.
>
> By whatever means it is complicated, the prime business of a play is to arouse the passions of its audience so that by the rout of passion may be opened up new relationships between a man and men, the between men and man…The ultimate justification for a genuine new form is the new and heightened consciousness it creates and makes possible-a consciousness of causation in the light of known but hitherto inexplicable effects.
>
> Not only in the drama, but in sociology, psychology, psychiatry, and religion, the past half century created an almost overwhelming documentation of man as a nearly passive creation of environment and family created psychological drives. If only from the dramatic point of view, this dictum cannot be accepted as final and 'realistic' and more than man's ultimate position can be accepted as his efficient use by state or corporate apparatus. It is no more 'real', however, for drama to 'liberate' itself from this vice by the route of romance and the spectacle of free will and a new heroic formula that it is 'real' now to represent man's defeat as the ultimate implication of an overwhelming determinism. Realism, heightened or conventional, is neither more nor less an artifice, a species of poetic symbolization, than any other form. It is merely more familiar in this age.

## 13.5. MILLER'S CONCEPT OF TRAGEDY

Arthur Miller Constantly tried to formulate modern definition of tragedy which could be acceptable universally. In his plays, Miller seems to be concerned mainly with the

social problems and injustices which leave a great impact on the lives of the characters. He was of the view that the social and political emphasis in no way negates the high seriousness of the play or diminishes tragic quality. Miller was of the view that society is inside of man and man is inside society, and one cannot even create a truthfully drawn psychological entity on the stage until one understand his social relations and their power to make him what he is and to prevent him from being what he is not. He remarks somewhere that tragedy must call everything in question; from this kind of questioning man learns something. Hence the onslaught on social conditions in post-Ibsen drama and the optimistic premise underlying the tragedy.

Modern tragedies cannot be judged according to the Aristotelian definition of Tragedy. According to Aristotle, tragic Hero should belong to noble and aristocratic family. Miller also accepts the importance of hero's stature but in a different way. In an interview he said, "the question of rank is significant…only as it reflects the question of the social application of the hero's career" standing of the central character is not dependent upon his rank provided that his career engages the issue. "…the survival of the race, the relationship of man to God-the question in short whose answers define humanity and the right way to live so that the world is a home, instead of a battle ground."

Stephen Barker writes, "How different is Aristotle's definition of tragedy when it appears this way, '[A] tragedy, then, is the illusion of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself' (1449b), or 'Tragedy is essentially an illusion not of persons but of action and life' (1450b). Tragedy, in this revised view, is not the agent and result of the correspondence of planes of existence but a sign of their disintegration-not the representation of and external reification into per formative illusion. As Miller points out, "The Greeks could probe the very heavenly origin of their ways and return to confirm the rightness of laws, and the job could face God in anger, demanding his right, and end in submission. But for a moment everything is in suspension, nothing is accepted.' All culture is threatened, and in the moment of this crisis 'this stretching and tearing apart of the cosmos,' the tragic vision is born. What is 'in suspension', for Miller as for the Greeks, is man's ability rightly and fully to 'secure his rightful place in the world', to lay claim to 'his whole due as a personality', through 'the indestructible will of man to achieve his humanity'. For Miller, the tragic vision provides man and humanity with the tear through which to glimpse him and himself him and itself. The tragic vision thus presents 'a crisis and a shock', 'an expression of man only in an extreme situation."Barker further writes, "Miller sees all as deriving from…sense of loss, as showing 'man's deprivation of once-extant state of bliss unjustly shattered-a bliss, a state of equilibrium, which the hero (and his audience) is attempting to reconstruct or to recreate with new, latter-day life materials.' It is as though we 'once had an identity, a being, somewhere in the past, which in the present has lost its completeness, its definiteness'."

According to Aristotle, the main objective of tragedy is to arouse the emotions of pity and fear. Miller has different view in this regards. He says, "Pity is accidental and ephemeral, the human concern with another's mishaps. A child is run over by a truck, and we have compassion for the stricken mother; but when a man is fully aware-recognizes alternatives and acts-choosing to suffer, if need be, for noble ends, he hits his will against superior forces, and in his collapse there is the terror of fallen nobility"

In Aristotle's view, the tragic flaw (hamartia) is a lack of insight within the character that results in some catastrophic action. But in Miller's view, the hamartia often exists more strongly in the society than the hero, who becomes the victim of external circumstances. M.W. Steinberg writes, "…Miller views the human situation as the product forces beyond the control of the individual, and the tragedy inherent in the situation as a consequence of the individual's total war against a system that degrades. So, then, 'the function of tragedy is to reveal the truth concerning our society which frustrates and denies man his right to personal dignity, and the enlightenment of tragedy is the discovery of the moral law that supports this right'."

## 13.6. ARTHUR MILLER AS A DRMATIST

Although Arthur Miller wrote a novel and some short stories, he is primarily regarded a playwright. His plays can be regarded to be a part of a continuing realistic tradition that began with the surge of theatre activity in America between the two world wars. Here we are going to discuss Miller as a dramatist along with some of the chief characteristics of his plays.

### 13.6.1. Miller's Views on Theatre

First of all, let's have a look at how he envisioned his theatre, "I am simply asking for a theatre in which an adult who wants to live can find plays that will heighten his awareness of what living in our time involves. I am tired of a theatre of sensation, that's all. I am tired of seeing man as merely a bundle of nerves. That way lies pathology, and we have pretty much arrived." He further explains that he asks of a play, first, the dramatic question, and second, the human question-what is its ultimate relevancy to the survival of the race.

### 13.6.2. Miller's Primary Concern

Miller centered his emphasis upon a single subject, "The struggle of the individual attempting to gain his rightful position in his society and his family." His plays dealt with man's relationship with society and family. His plays can be regarded as commentaries on the contemporary American Society. Terry Otten writes, "For Miller, 'there are certain duties and social fears that can create a tragic event', specifically when the dialectic develops 'between the individual and his social obligations, his social self'. Miller has described Greek tragedies as 'social documents, not little piddling private conversations' written by 'a man confronting his society'. The differences that emerge in modern tragedy when realistically described social forces usurp the role of the gods transfigure tragedy profoundly-but not unrecognizably. Miller has called what emerges 'the tragedy of displacement', in which 'the tragic dimension' surfaces in the protagonist's struggle for a lost 'personal identity' displaced by 'the social mask'."

### 13.6.3. Miller's Social Concern

Elsewhere Miller writes, "The social drama in this generation must do more than analyze and arraign the social network of relationships. It must delve into the nature of man as he exists to discover what his needs are, so that those needs may be amplified and exteriorized in terms of social concepts. Thus, the new social dramatist, if he is to do his work, must be an even deeper psychologist than those in the past and he must be conscious at least of the futility of isolating the psychological life of man

lest he fall always short of tragedy and return and again to the pathetic swampland where the waters are old tears and not the generative seas which new kinds of life arise."

### 13.6.4. Miller's Main Dramatic Techniques

Miller made use of different dramatic techniques and he gives the description of these techniques in his introduction to the Collected Plays. Here, he describes three stylistic modes prevalent in the modern drama-the realistic, the expressionistic, and the rhetorical. He writes, "I have stood squarely in conventional realism…I have no vested interest in any one form-as the variety of forms I have used attests-but there is one element in Ibsen's method which I do not think ought to be overlooked, let alone dismissed as it so often is nowadays. If his plays, and his method, do nothing else they reveal the evolutionary quality of life. One is constantly aware, in watching his plays, of process, change, development." He takes the themes of his plays from real images. His characters are real. Basically, his plays can be categorized under realistic, but in many ways, they are naturalistic and expressionistic as well. His plays can be called a mixture of the realistic, the naturalistic, and the expressionistic.

### 13.6.5. Miller's Theatricality

There is a description regarding the theatricality of Arthur Miller in A Comparison between Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller, "Miller relied on theatrical communication for the success of his plays-'the lessons of a play, its meaning and theme, had to spread out like a contagion if they were to be aesthetic, in which case few would be aware they were even infected'. The power,

Miller's play, *Death of a Salesman* derives is no less from its theatrical production than from the power of the literary text. If the peculiar dramatic structure of the play constituted its thematic force, its presentation on the stage, through the evolution of scenic images, and theatricalizing the expressionistic time and space constituted a substantial process of the writing of the play itself. Miller had only a minimal text and the play took final shape through the creative collaboration of Miller the playwright, director, Elia Kazan and the designer, Joe Mielziner and the actor, Lee J. Cob. 'A play waiting for a directorial solution.' This was how *Death of a Salesman* presented itself to the director, Elia Kazan. The point, absolutely, is not the dramatic incompleteness of the play in the hands of Miller but simply an illustration of the fact that Miller's dramatic achievement lay in making the play emerge through its own theatrical primacy. The sheer theatrical ingenuity of *Death of a Salesman* could be seen its failure to succeed as a film. Miller writes, '…(*Death of a Salesman*) failed as a motion picture…(because) the dramatic tension of Willy's memories was destroyed by transferring him, literally, to the locales he had only imagined in the play…The horror is lost-and drama becomes narrative-when the context actually becomes his imagined world…The setting on stage was never shifted…Indeed, his terror springs from his never-lost awareness of time and place…The movie's tendency is always to wipe out what has gone before, and it is thus in constant danger of transforming the dramatic into narrative.' …Through his theatrical triumph, in Death of a Salesman, Miller asserted, not only in his time but for the decades to come, the relevance of theatrical art in an age of mass media and also the indispensability of theatrical art in contemporary times to dramatize the complexity of the human mind."

Emami writes, "What Miller asks for is a theatre of 'heightened consciousnesses. He speaks of two passions in man, the 'passion to feel' and the 'passion to know'. He

believes that we need, and can have, more of the latter in his plays. Miller believes that drama must 'help us to know more and not merely to spend our feelings' (Corrigan, 1969, p.61). Elsewhere he says 'the end of the drama is the creation of a higher consciousness and not merely a subjective attack upon the audience's nerves and feelings' (Williams, 1971, p. 274)".

### 13.6.6. Miller's Art of Characterization

His characters are real. They are drawn from contemporary American society. Their difficulties, problems, attitude towards life, anxieties are real. His central characters enter into meaningful social relationships. We find different kinds of the characters in his plays-rebellious sons, betrayed fathers, oppressed workers, mistreated citizens, etc. Most of his main characters belong to the business family. We have a fearful personal manager, an unscrupulous industrialist, a frustrated salesman, dehumanized laborers, displaced cowboy, etc. in his different plays. Apart from business world, he has also drawn various characters from law. His characters are mostly materialists, lacking spirituality. Self-justification is very important for his characters. Robert W. Corrigan writes on the type and function of Miller's Protagonist, "A Miller protagonist belongs to a strange breed. In every instance, he is unimaginative, inarticulate…and physically nondescript, if not downright, unattractive. His roles as husband and father (or father-surrogate) are of paramount importance to him, and yet he fails miserably in both. He wants to love and be loved, but he is incapable of either giving or receiving love. As he is haunted by aspirations toward a joy in life that his humdrum spirit is quite unable to realize. Yet, in spite of all these negative characteristics, Miller's protagonists do engage our imagination and win our sympathies. I think this ambiguity stems from the fact that his own attitude towards his creations is so contradictory."

### 13.6.7. Themes in Miller's Plays

R. Williams comments on the themes of Miller's plays, "He has restored active social criticism to the drama, and has written on such contemporary themes as the social accountability of business, the forms of the success-ethic, intolerance and thought control, the nature of modern work-relations. Yet he has written 'about' these in such a way as to distinguish his work quite clearly from the ordinary sociological problem-play, for at his best he has seen these problems as living issue, and his most successful characters are not merely 'aspects of the way of life, but individuals who are ends and values in themselves." There are mainly three themes in his Death of a Salesman-Denial, Contradiction, and order versus disorder.

### 13.6.8. Miller's Plot-Construction

His plots are not conventional. They are compactly-woven. His plots are carefully built. He kept revising his plays time and again until he satisfied. The result was that his plots lack in spontaneity. He took care of unities of time, place at the cost of the unity of action. He preferred Idea to events. There is no comic relief in his plays. That's why, they lack in humour. Leonard Moss writes, "Miller's (Plot) construction is never formless; his metaphors are sometimes obvious and sometimes subtle. His dialogue swings between extremes of brilliance and insipidity. Colloquial speech may be heard in an amazing variety of accents-Irish, Swedish, German, Sicilian, Slavic, Barbados, Yiddish, Puritan, Brooklyn, Southwestern, and Midwestern…Whether in historical, religious, or foreign dialect, Miller's dialogue is the most touching when it works by implication." Miller favoured a logical structure, an organic whole in his

plays, insisting on the organic necessity. He wrote, "That a play, and that the speech is heightened and intensified by imagery does not set it to one side of realism necessarily. The underlying poem of a play I take to be the organic necessity of its parts. I find in the arbitrary not poetry but indulgence."

**Self Assessment Questions**

1. With which book did Miller, in 1947, taste his first success?
2. Name the book for which Miller was awardedthe Pulitzer Prize.

## 13.7. ANSWER TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. *All My Sons*
2. *Death of a Salesman*

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## 13.10. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. How did the personal life of Arthur Miller affect his life as a dramatist?
2. Describe Arthur Miller's views on Drama.
3. Describe Arthur Miller's concept of Tragedy
4. Give a general estimate of Arthur Miller as a Dramatist.

**UNIT 14 ARTHUR MILLER**

***DEATH OF A SALESMAN*-II**

## 14.1. INTRODUCTON

*Death of a Salesman* is the best play ever-written by Arthur Miller. This play is regarded to be one of the finest plays written and produced in the 20th century. It consists of two acts followed by requiem. This play left a very deep impact on the American Drama. As the title itself suggests, the chief protagonist of this play Willy Loman is Salesman by profession. This unit is going to make you familiar with the story, characters, and some critical aspects pertaining to *Death of a Salesman.*

## 14.2. OBJECTIVE

After going through this unit, you should be able to discuss the following topics:

- Origin, Story, and Characters in the Play
- Act-wise analysis of the Play
- Critical aspects of Death of a Salesman

## 14.3. DEATH OF A SALESMAN

### 14.3.1. Introductory Note

*Death of a Salesman*was written in 1949 and was fetched for Miller Pulitzer Prize in the same year. Since then, this play has remained a classic in real sense. The play premiered on Broadway in February 1949, running for 742 performances, and has been revived on Broadway four times, winning three Tony Awards for Best Revival. This plays' sub title is Certain Private Conversations in Two Acts and a Requiem This play is widely considered as a 20th century masterpiece. The Play is based on Willy Loman, an ageing and failed salesman who is at the last stage of his career. Willy's family includes Linda, his wife and Biff & Happy, his sons. The play's rational appeal lies in Miller's denial to depict his characters as two-dimensional, his denial to involve himself in a one-sided polemic attack on capitalism. Even critics cannot be in agreement as to whether Death of a Salesman is to be categorized as social criticism, a tragedy, or simply a psychological study. Of necessity, each person will have to draw his or her own individual conclusions. The fact that performances of *Death of a Salesman* have met with acclamation all over the world testifies to its universality: the play's conflicts and themes appear not to be exceptionally American.

**14.3.2. Characters in the Play**The play has a substantial number of characters, both major and minor, who are discussed as follows:

#### 14.3.2.1.Major Characters

**Willy Loman**: Once a popular salesman who has now lost not only his popularity and sales but his mind as well. He is past sixty years of age. He is an insecure, traveling salesman. Willy believes wholeheartedly in the American Dream of easy success and wealth, but he never achieves it.

**Biff Loman:**He is the thirty four year old son of Willy who has been searching for himself while working on farms in the west to the dismay of his father. Biff represents Willy's defenseless, poetic, tragic side. He finally fails to resolve his life with Willy's expectations of him.

**Happy Loman:**The younger brother of Biff who tries in all he can to please his father and attempts to continue his father's dream after he dies. Happy has lived in Biff's shadow all of his life, but he compensates by nurturing his relentless sex drive

and professional ambition. Happy represents Willy's sense of self-importance, ambition, and blind servitude to societal expectations.

**Linda Loman:**The wife of Willy who tries to protect Willy's feelings and can't make herself confront him if it means hurting his feelings. She is most often jovial; she has developed an iron repression of her exceptions to Willy's behaviour-she more than loves her husbandMildred Dummock as Linda Loman in the original Broadway production of Death of a Salesman, 1949, image from www.westonplayhouse.com

**14.3.2.1. Minor Characters**

**Bernard:**He is Charley's son and a significant and equally successful lawyer. Although Willy used to mock Bernard for studying hard, Bernard always loved Willy's sons very much and regarded Biff as a hero. Bernard's success is difficult for Willy to accept because his own sons' lives do not measure up. A bookish friend of Biff and Happy who urges Biff to study in high school but to no avail, however, he himself makes it as a prominent lawyer and goes to argue a case to the Supreme Court at the end of the play.

**Charley:**Bernard's father who is fairly successful and offers Willy a job which Willy refuses on the basis of pride. He is Willy's neighbor. He is a successful businessman. Willy is jealous of Charley's success. Charley gives Willy money to pay his bills, and Willy reveals at one point of the time, choking back tears, that Charley is his only friend.

**Ben:**Willy's wealthy older brother. Ben has recently died and appears only in Willy's "daydreams." Willy regards Ben as a symbol of the success that he so badly longs for himself and his sons.

**The Woman:**Willy's mistress when Happy and Biff were in high school. The Woman's interest and appreciation increase Willy's delicate ego. When Biff catches Willy in his hotel room with The Woman, he loses faith in his father, and his dream of passing math and going to college dies.

**Howard Wagner:** He is Willy's boss. Howard received the company from his father, whom Willy regarded as "a masterful man" and "a prince." Though much younger than Willy, Howard treats Willy with condescension and eventually fires him, despite Willy's offended assertions that he named Howard at his birth.

**Stanley:**A waiter at Frank's Chop House. He is friend of Happy and they banter about and ogle Miss Forsythe together before Biff and Willy arrive at the restaurant.

**Miss Forsythe and Letta:**Two young women whom Happy and Biff meet at Frank's Chop House. It seems likely that Miss Forsythe and Letta are prostitutes.

**Jenny:** Charley's secretary.

**14.3.3. Setting of the Play**

**Willy's House:**A small house in New York surrounded by different apartments.

**Restaurant:**The restaurant where Stanley works, is the place where the Lomans were supposed to have dinner at the end of the play but unfortunately it never happens.

**The Hotel**: The hotel where Willy stays while in New England for his business trips. This is the place where Biff catches his father having extra-marital affair with other woman.

The action takes place in Willy Loman's house and yard and in various places he visits in the New York and Boston of today.

### 14.3.4. Plot Summary of Death of a Salesman

#### 14.3.4.1. Act One

*Death of a Salesman* begins in the evening. Willy Loman, a salesman in his 60s, returns home from a failed business trip. He explains to his wife, Linda, that he was too distracted to drive, and therefore headed home in defeat. Willy's thirty-something sons, Happy and Biff, are staying in their old rooms. Happy works as an assistant to the assistant buyer at a retail store, but he dreams of bigger things. Biff was once a high school football star, but he could never embrace Willy's concept of success. So he has just been drifting from one manual labor job to the next.

Downstairs, Willy talks to himself. He hallucinates; he visualizes happier times from his past. During one of the memories, he recalls an encounter with his long lost older brother, Ben. An adventurous entrepreneur, Ben declares: "When I walked into the jungle, I was seventeen. When I walked out I was twenty one. And by God, I was rich." Needless to say, Willy is envious of his brother's achievements.

Later, when Biff confronts his mother about Willy's unstable behavior, Linda explains that Willy has been secretly (and perhaps subconsciously) attempting suicide. Act one ends with the brothers cheering up their father by promising to meet with a "big shot" business man, Bill Oliver. They plan to pitch a marketing idea - a concept that fills Willy with hope for the future.

#### 14.3.4.2. Act Two

Willy Loman asks his boss, thirty six year old Howard Wagner, for 40 dollars a week. (Recently, Willy has not been making zero dollars on his commission-only salary). Somewhat gently (or, depending on the actor's interpretation, perhaps disrespectfully), Howard fires him.

Willy tells his troubles to his neighbor and friendly rival, Charley. Out of sympathy, he offers Willy a job, but the salesman turns Charley down. Despite this, he still "borrows" money from Charley - and has been doing so for quite some time.

Meanwhile, Happy and Biff meet at a restaurant, waiting to treat their dad to a steak dinner. Unfortunately, Biff has bad news. Not only did he fail to meet with Bill Oliver, but Biff swiped the man's fountain pen. Apparently, Biff has become a kleptomaniac as a way of rebelling against the cold, corporate world.

Willy doesn't want to hear Biff's bad news. His memory drifts back to a tumultuous day: When Biff was a teenager, he discovered that his father was having an affair. Ever since that day, there has been a rift between father and son. Willy wants to find a way for his son to stop hating him. (And he's been considering killing himself just so Biff could do something great with the insurance money.)

At home, Biff and Willy shout, shove, and argue. Finally, Biff bursts into tears and kisses his father. Willy is deeply touched, realizing that his son still loves him. Yet, after everyone goes to bed, Willy speeds away in the family car. The playwright explains that the "music crashes down in a frenzy of sound" symbolizing the car crash and Willy's successful suicide.

#### 14.3.4.1. The Requiem

This short scene in Death of a Salesman takes place at Willy Loman's grave. Linda wonders why more people didn't attend his funeral. Biff decides that his father had the wrong dream. Happy is still intent on pursuing Willy's quest: "He had a good dream. It's the only dream you can have - to come out number-one man."

Linda sits by the ground and laments the loss of her husband. She says: "Why did you do it? I search and search and search, and I can't understand it, Willy. I made the last payment on the house today, today, dear. And they'll be nobody home."

Biff helps her to her feet, and they leave the grave of Willy Loman.

### 14.3.5 Act-wise Detailed Summary of the Play with Analysis

After going through plot summary, you would have learnt the outline story of the play. Now, here is the Act/Scene-wise detailed summary of the play.

#### 14.3.5.1. Act I

Opening Scene to Willy's first daydream

**Summary**

The play begins on a Monday evening at the Loman family home in Brooklyn. After some light changes on stage and ambient flute music (the first instance of a motif connected to Willy Loman's faint memory of his father, who was once a flute-maker and salesman), Willy, a sixty-three-year-old traveling salesman, returns home early from a trip, apparently exhausted. His wife, Linda, gets out of bed to greet him. She asks if he had an automobile accident, since he once drove off a bridge into a river. Irritated, he replies that nothing happened. Willy explains that he kept falling into a trance while driving—he reveals later that he almost hit a boy. Linda urges him to ask his employer, Howard Wagner, for a non-traveling job in New York City. Willy's two adult sons, Biff and Happy, are visiting. Before he left that morning, Willy criticized Biff for working at manual labor on farms and horse ranches in the West. The argument that ensued was left unresolved. Willy says that his thirty-four-year-old son is a lazy bum. Shortly thereafter, he declares that Biff is anything but lazy. Willy's habit of contradicting himself becomes quickly apparent in his conversation with Linda.

Willy's loud rambling wakes his sons. They speculate that he had another accident. Linda returns to bed while Willy goes to the kitchen to get something to eat. Happy and Biff reminisce about the good old days when they were young. Although Happy, thirty-two, is younger than Biff, he is more confident and more successful. Biff seems worn, apprehensive, and confused. Happy is worried about Willy's habit of talking to himself. Most of the time, Happy observes, Willy talks to the absent Biff about his disappointment in Biff's unsteadiness. Biff hopped from job to job after high school and is concerned that he has "waste[d] his life." He is disappointed in himself and in the disparity between his life and the notions of value and success with which Willy indoctrinated him as a boy. Happy has a steady job in New York, but the rat race does not satisfy him. He and Biff fantasize briefly about going out west together. However, Happy still longs to become an important executive. He sleeps with the girlfriends and fiancées of his superiors and often takes bribes in an attempt to climb the corporate ladder from his position as an assistant to the assistant buyer in a department store.

Biff plans to ask Bill Oliver, an old employer, for a loan to buy a ranch. He remembers that Oliver thought highly of him and offered to help him anytime. He wonders if Oliver still thinks that he stole a carton of basketballs while he was working at his store. Happy encourages his brother, commenting that Biff is "well liked"—a sure predictor of success in the Loman household. The boys are disgusted to hear Willy talking to himself downstairs. They try to go to sleep.

**Analysis**

It is important to note that much of the play's action takes place in Willy's home. In the past, the Brooklyn neighborhood in which the Lomans live was nicely removed from the bustle of New York City. There was space within the neighborhood for expansion and for a garden. When Willy and Linda purchased it, it represented the ultimate expression of Willy's hopes for the future. Now, however, the house is hemmed in by apartment buildings on all sides, and sunlight barely reaches their yard. Their abode has come to represent the reduction of Willy's hopes, even though, ironically, his mortgage payments are almost complete. Just as the house is besieged by apartment buildings, Willy's ego is besieged by doubts and mounting evidence that he will never experience the fame and fortune promised by the American Dream.

Willy's reality profoundly conflicts with his hopes. Throughout his life, he has constructed elaborate fantasies to deny the mounting evidence of his failure to fulfill his desires and expectations. By the time the play opens, Willy suffers from crippling self-delusion. His consciousness is so fractured that he cannot even maintain a consistent fantasy. In one moment, he calls Biff a lazy bum. In the next, he says that Biff is anything but lazy. His later assessment of the family car is similarly contradictory—one moment he calls it a piece of trash, the next "the finest car ever built." Labeling Biff a lazy bum allows Willy to deflect Linda's criticism of his harangue against Biff's lack of material success, ambition, and focus. Denying Biff's laziness enables Willy to hold onto the hope that Biff will someday, in some capacity, fulfill his expectations of him. Willy changes his interpretation of reality according to his psychological needs at the moment. He is likewise able to re-imagine decisive moments in his past in his later daydreams. Ironically, he asks Linda angrily why he is "always being contradicted," when it is usually he who contradicts himself from moment to moment.

The opening pages of the play introduce the strangely affected and stilted tone of the dialogue, which transcends the 1950S idiom of nonspecific pet names (an engendered "pal" or "kid" for adult and child alike) and dated metaphors, vocabulary, and slang. Some critics cite the driving, emphatic, repetitive diction ("Maybe it's your glasses. You never went for your new glasses"; "I'm the New England man. I'm vital in New England") and persistent vexed questioning ("Why do you get American when I like Swiss?" "How can they whip cheese?") as a particularly Jewish-American idiom, but the stylization of the speech serves a much more immediate end than stereotype or bigotry. Miller intended the singsong melodies of his often miserable and conflicted characters to parallel the complex struggle of a family with a skewed version of the American Dream trying to support itself. The dialogue's crooked, blunt lyricism of stuttering diction occasionally rises even to the level of the grotesque and inarticulate, as do the characters themselves. Miller himself claims in his autobiography that the characters in Death of a Salesman speak in a stylized manner "to lift the experience into emergency speech of an unabashedly open kind rather than to proceed by the crabbed dramatic hints and pretexts of the 'natural.' "

Willy is lost in his memories. Suddenly, the memories of his sons' childhood come alive. Young Biff and Happy wash and wax their father's car after he has just returned from a sales trip. Biff informs Willy that he "borrowed" a football from the locker room to practice. Willy laughs knowingly. Happy tries to get his father's attention, but Willy's preference for Biff is obvious. Willy whispers that he will soon open a bigger business than his successful neighbor Uncle Charley because Charley is not as "well liked" as he is. Charley's son, Bernard, arrives to beg Biff to study math with him. Biff is close to failing math, which would prevent him from graduating. Willy orders Biff to study. Biff distracts him by showing him that he printed the insignia of the University of Virginia on his sneakers, impressing Willy. Bernard

states that the sneakers do not mean Biff will graduate. After Bernard leaves, Willy asks if Bernard is liked. The boys reply that he is liked but not "well liked." Willy tells them that Bernard may make good grades, but Happy and Biff will be more successful in business because they are "well liked."

The Woman is Willy's mistress and a secretary for one of his buyers. In Willy's daydream, they sit in a hotel room. She tells him that she picked him because he is so funny and sweet. Willy loves the praise. She thanks Willy for giving her stockings and promises to put him right through to the buyers when she sees him next. The Woman fades into the darkness as Willy returns to his conversation with Linda in the present. He notices Linda mending stockings and angrily demands that she throw them out—he is too proud to let his wife wear an old pair (Biff later discovers that Willy has been buying new stockings for The Woman instead of for Linda). Bernard returns to the Loman house to beg Biff to study math. Willy orders him to give Biff the answers. Bernard replies that he cannot do so during a state exam. Bernard insists that Biff return the football. Linda comments that some mothers fear that Biff is "too rough" with their daughters. Willy, enraged by the unglamorous truth of his son's behavior, plunges into a state of distraction and shouts at them to shut up. Bernard leaves the house, and Linda leaves the room, holding back tears.

The memory fades. Willy laments to himself and Happy that he did not go to Alaska with his brother, Ben, who acquired a fortune at the age of twenty-one upon discovering an African diamond mine. Charley, having heard the shouts, visits to check on Willy. They play cards. Charley, concerned about Willy, offers him a job, but Willy is insulted by the offer. He asks Charley if he saw the ceiling he put in his living room, but he becomes surly when Charley expresses interest, insisting that Charley's lack of skill with tools proves his lack of masculinity. Ben appears on the stage in a semi-daydream. He cuts a dignified, utterly confident figure. Willy tells Charley that Ben's wife wrote from Africa to tell them Ben had died. He alternates between conversing with Charley and his dead brother. Willy gets angry when Charley wins a hand, so Charley takes his cards and leaves. He is disturbed that Willy is so disoriented that he talks to a dead brother as if he were present. Willy immerses himself in the memory of a visit from his brother. Ben and Willy's father abandoned the family when Willy was three or four years old and Ben was seventeen. Ben left home to look for their father in Alaska but never found him. At Willy's request, Ben tells young Biff and Happy about their grandfather. Among an assortment of other jobs, Willy and Ben's father made flutes and sold them as a traveling salesman before following a gold rush to Alaska. Ben proceeds to wrestle the young Biff to the ground in a demonstration of unbridled machismo, wielding his umbrella threateningly over Biff's eye. Willy begs Ben to stay longer, but Ben hurries to catch his train.

**Analysis**

Just as the product that Willy sells is never specified, so too does The Woman, with whom Willy commits adultery, remain nameless. Miller offers no description of her looks or character because such details are irrelevant; The Woman merely represents Willy's discontent in life. Indeed, she is more a symbol than an actual human being: she regards herself as a means for Willy to get to the buyers more efficiently, and Willy uses her as a tool to feel well liked. Biff sees her as a sign that Willy and his ambitions are not as great as Willy claims.

Willy's compulsive need to be "well liked" contributes to his descent into self-delusion. Whereas Linda loves Willy despite his considerable imperfections, Willy's mistress, on the other hand, merely likes him. She buys his sales pitch, which boosts his ego, but does not care for him deeply the way Linda does. Linda regards Willy's

job merely as a source of income; she draws a clear line between Willy as a salesman and Willy as her husband. Willy is unable to do so and thus fails to accept the love that Linda and his sons offer him.

Willy was first abandoned by his father and later by his older brother, Ben. Willy's father was a salesman as well, but he actually produced what he sold and was successful, according to Ben, at least. Ben presents their father as both an independent thinker and a masculine man skilled with his hands. In a sense, Willy's father, not Willy himself, represents the male ideal to Biff, a pioneer spirit and rugged individualist. Unlike his father, Willy does not attain personal satisfaction from the things that he sells because they are not the products of his personal efforts—what he sells is himself, and he is severely damaged and psychically ruptured. His professional persona is the only thing that he has produced himself. In a roundabout manner, Willy seeks approval from his professional contacts by trying to be "well liked"—a coping strategy to deal with his abandonment by the two most important male figures in his life.

Willy's efforts to create the perfect family of the American Dream seem to constitute an attempt to rebuild the pieces of the broken family of his childhood. One can interpret his decision to become a salesman as the manifestation of his desperate desire to be the good father and provider that his own salesman father failed to be. Willy despairs about leaving his sons nothing in the form of a material inheritance, acutely aware that his own father abandoned him and left him with nothing.

Willy's obsession with being well liked seems to be rooted in his reaction to his father's and brother's abandoning of him—he takes their rejection of him as a sign of their not liking him enough. Willy's memory of Ben's visit to his home is saturated with fears of abandonment and a need for approval. When Ben declares that he must leave soon in order to catch his train, Willy desperately tries to find some way to make him stay a little longer. He proudly shows his sons to Ben, practically begging for a word of approval. Additionally, he pleads with Ben to tell Biff and Happy about their grandfather, as he realizes that he has no significant family history to give to his sons as an inheritance; the ability to pass such a chronicle on to one's offspring is an important part of the American Dream that Willy so highly esteems.

From Ben's departure through the closing scene

**Summary**

Willy's shouts wake Linda and Biff, who find Willy outside in his slippers. Biff asks Linda how long he has been talking to himself, and Happy joins them outside. Linda explains that Willy's mental unbalance results from his having lost his salary (he now works only on commission). Linda knows that Willy borrows fifty dollars a week from Charley and pretends it is his salary. Linda claims that Biff and Happy are ungrateful. She calls Happy a "philandering bum." Angry and guilt-ridden, Biff offers to stay home and get a job to help with expenses. Linda says that he cannot fight with Willy all the time. She explains that all of his automobile accidents are actually failed suicide attempts. She adds that she found a rubber hose behind the fuse box and a new nipple on the water heater's gas pipe—a sign that Willy attempted to asphyxiate himself. Willy overhears Biff, Happy, and Linda arguing about him. When Biff jokes with his father to snap him out of his trance, Willy misunderstands and thinks that Biff is calling him crazy. They argue, and Willy maintains that he is a "big shot" in the sales world.

Happy mentions that Biff plans to ask Bill Oliver for a business loan. Willy brightens immediately. Happy outlines a publicity campaign to sell sporting goods; the business

proposal, which revolves around the brothers using their natural physical abilities to lead publicity displays of sporting events, is thenceforth referred to as the "Florida idea." Everyone loves the idea of Happy and Biff going into business together. Willy begins offering dubious and somewhat unhelpful advice for Biff's loan interview. One moment, he tells Biff not to crack any jokes; the next, he tells him to lighten things up with a couple of funny stories. Linda tries to offer support, but Willy tells her several times to be quiet. He orders Biff not to pick up anything that falls off Oliver's desk because doing so is an office boy's job. Before they fall asleep, Linda again begs Willy to ask his boss for a non-traveling job. Biff removes the rubber hose from behind the fuse box before he retires to bed.

**Analysis**

One reason for Willy's reluctance to criticize Biff for his youthful thefts and his careless attitude toward his classes seems to be that he fears doing damage to Biff's ego. Thus, he offers endless praise, hoping that Biff will fulfill the promise of that praise in his adulthood. It is also likely that Willy refuses to criticize the young Biff because he fears that, if he does so, Biff will not like him. This disapproval represents the ultimate personal and professional (the two spheres are conflated in Willy's mind) insult and failure. Because Willy's consciousness is split between despair and hope, it is probable that both considerations are behind Willy's decision not to criticize Biff's youthful indiscretions. In any case, his relationship with Biff is fraught, on Willy's side, with the childhood emotional trauma of abandonment and, on Biff's side, with the struggle between fulfilling societal expectations and personal expectations.

The myth of the American Dream has its strongest pull on the individuals who do not enjoy the happiness and prosperity that it promises. Willy pursues the fruits of that dream as a panacea for the disappointments and the hurts of his own youth. He is a true believer in the myth that any "well liked" young man possessing a certain degree of physical faculty and "personal attractiveness" can achieve the Dream if he journeys forth in the world with a can-do attitude of confidence. The men who should have offered him the affirmation that he needed to build a healthy concept of self-worth—his father and Ben—left him. Therefore, Willy tries to measure his self-worth by the standards of an American myth that hardly corresponds to reality, while ignoring the more important foundations of family love, unconditional support, and the freedom of choice inherent to the American Dream. Unfortunately, Willy has a corrupted interpretation of the American Dream that clashes with that set forth by the country's founding fathers; he is preoccupied with the material facets of American success and national identity.

In his obsession with being "well liked," Willy ignores the love that his family can offer him. Linda is far more realistic and grounded than Willy, and she is satisfied with what he can give her. She sees through his facade and still loves and accepts the man behind the facade. She likewise loves her adult sons, and she recognizes their bluster as transparent as well. She knows in her heart that Biff is irresponsible and that Happy is a "philandering bum," but she loves them without always having to like or condone their behavior. The emotional core of the family, Linda demands their full cooperation in dealing with Willy's mental decline. If Willy were content finally to relinquish the gnarled and grotesquely caricatured American tragic myth that he has fed with his fear, insecurity, and profound anxiety and that has possessed his soul, he could be more content. Instead, he continues to chase the fame and fortune that outruns him. He has built his concept of himself not on human relationships that fulfill human needs but on the unrealistic myth of the American hero. That myth has preyed on his all-too-common male weaknesses, until the fantasy that he has

constructed about his life becomes intolerable to Biff. Willy's diseased mind is almost ready to explode by the end of Act I. The false hope offered by the "Florida idea" is a placebo, and the empty confidence it instills in Willy makes his final fall all the more crushing.

### 14.3.5.2. Act II

**Opening scene through scene in Howard's office**

**Summary**

When Willy awakes the next morning, Biff and Happy have already left, Biff to see Bill Oliver and Happy to mull over the "Florida idea" and go to work. Willy, in high spirits with the prospect of the "Florida idea," mentions that he would like to get some seeds and plant a small garden in the yard. Linda, pleased with her husband's hopeful mood, points out that there is not enough sun. Willy replies that they will have to get a house in the country. Linda reminds Willy to ask his boss, Howard, for a non-traveling job as well as an advance to pay the insurance premium. They have one last payment on both the refrigerator and the house, and they have just finished paying for the car. Linda informs Willy that Biff and Happy want to take him to dinner at Frank's Chop House at six o'clock. As Willy departs, moved and excited by his sons' dinner invitation, he notices a stocking that Linda is mending and, guilt-ridden with the latent memory of his adultery with The Woman, admonishes her to throw the stocking away.

Willy timidly enters Howard's office. Howard is playing with a wire recorder he has just purchased for dictation. He plays the recorded voices of his family: his cloyingly enthusiastic children (a whistling daughter and a son who recites the state capitals in alphabetical order) and his shy wife. As Willy tries to express admiration, Howard repeatedly shushes him. Willy asks for a non-traveling job at $65 a week. Howard replies that there is no opening available. He looks for his lighter. Willy finds it and hands it to him, unconsciously ignoring, in his nervous and pathetically humble distraction, his own advice never to handle or tend to objects in a superior's office, since that is the responsibility of "office boys." Willy keeps lowering his salary request, explaining his financial situation in unusually candid detail, but Howard remains resistant. Howard keeps calling him "kid" and assumes a condescending tone despite his younger age and Willy's reminders that he helped Howard's father name him.

Desperate, Willy tries to relate an anecdote about Dave Singleman, an eighty-four-year-old salesman who phoned his buyers and made his sales without ever leaving his hotel room. After he died the noble "death of a salesman" that eludes Willy, hundreds of salesmen and buyers attended his funeral. Willy reveals that his acquaintance with this venerable paragon of salesmanship convinced him to become a salesman himself rather than join his brother, Ben, on his newly purchased plot of timberland in Alaska. Singleman's dignified success and graceful, respected position as an older man deluded Willy into believing that "selling was the greatest career a man could want" because of its limitless potential and its honorable nature. Willy laments the loss of friendship and personality in the business, and he complains that no one knows him anymore. An uninterested Howard leaves the office to attend to other people, and he returns when Willy begins shouting frantically after accidentally switching on the wire recorder. Eventually, Willy becomes so distraught that Howard informs him that he does not want Willy to represent his company anymore. Howard essentially fires Willy, with the vague implication of reemployment after a period of "rest." He suggests that Willy turn to his sons (who he understandably assumes are successful

given Willy's loud bragging) for financial support, but Willy is horrified at the thought of depending on his children and reversing the expected familial roles. He is far too proud to admit defeat, and Howard must insist repeatedly on the cessation of Willy's employment before it sinks in.

**Analysis**

Biff's decision to seek a business loan raises Willy's spirits, and the way in which Willy expresses his optimism is quite revealing. The first thing Willy thinks about is planting a garden in his yard; he then muses to Linda that they should buy a house in the country, so that he could build guesthouses for Biff and Happy when they have families of their own. These hopeful plans seem to illustrate how ill-suited Willy is to his profession, as it stifles his natural inclinations. Indeed, the competitive, hyper-capitalist world of sales seems no more appropriate for Willy than for Biff. Willy seems happiest when he dreams of building things with his own hands, and when his instincts in this direction surface, he seems whole again, able to see a glimmer of truth in himself and his abilities.

Willy's wistful fantasy of living in the forests of Alaska strengthens the implication that he chose the wrong profession. He does not seem to like living in an urban setting. However, his fascination with the frontier is also intimately connected to his obsession with the American Dream. In nineteenth-century America, the concept of the intrepid explorer entering the unknown, uncharted wilderness and striking gold was deeply imbedded in the national consciousness. With the postwar surge of consumerism in America, this "wilderness" became the bustling market of consumer goods, and the capitalist replaced the pioneer as the American hero. These new intrepid explorers plunged into the jungle of business transactions in order to find a niche to exploit. Ben, whose success involved a literal jungle in Africa, represents one version of the frontier narrative. Dave Singleman represents another. Willy chose to follow Singleman's path, convinced that it was the modern version and future of the American Dream of success through hard work.

While Willy's dissatisfaction with his life seems due in part to choosing a profession that conflicts with his interests, it seems also due in part to comparing all aspects, professional and private alike, of his own life to those of a mythic standard. He fails to realize that Ben's wealth is the result of a blind stroke of luck rather than a long-deserved reward for hard work and personal merit. Similarly, Willy misses the tragic aspect of Singleman's story of success—that Singleman was still working at the age of eighty-four and died on the job. Mourning for him was limited to the sphere of salesmen and train passengers who happened to be there at his death—the ephemeral world of transience, travel, and money, as opposed to the meaningful realm of loved ones.

Willy's humiliating interview with Howard sheds some light on his advice for Biff's interview with Oliver. This advice clearly has its roots in Willy's relationship with his boss. Despite being much younger than Willy, Howard patronizes Willy by repeatedly calling him "kid." Willy proves entirely subservient to Howard, as evidenced by the fact that he picks up Howard's lighter and hands it to him, unable to follow his own advice about such office boy jobs.

Willy's repeated reminders to Howard that he helped his father name Howard illustrate his psychological reliance on outmoded and insubstantial concepts of chivalry and nobility. Like his emphasis on being "well liked," Willy's harping upon the honor of bestowing Howard's name—one can draw a parallel between this naming and the sanctity and dignity of medieval concepts of christening and the

dubbing of knights—is anachronistically incompatible with the reality of the modern business world.

Willy seems to transfer his familial anxieties to his professional life. His brother and father did not like him enough to stay, so he endeavors to be "well liked" in his profession. He heard the story of Dave Singleman's success and exaggerated it to heroic, mythical proportions. Hundreds of people attended Singleman's funeral—obviously, he was a man who was "well liked." Dave Singleman's story hooked Willy as the key to emotional and psychological fulfillment. However, the inappropriateness of Willy's ideals reveals itself in his lament about the loss of friendship and camaraderie in his profession. Willy fantasizes about such things, and he used to tell his sons about all of his friends in various cities; as Willy's hard experience evidences, however, such camaraderie belongs only to the realm of his delusion.

Willy's daydream involving Ben through Willy's conversation with Charley in his office

**Summary**

After Howard leaves, Willy immerses himself in memories of a visit from Ben. Ben asks Willy to go to Alaska and manage a tract of timberland he has purchased. Linda, slightly afraid of Ben, says that Willy already has a nice job. Ben departs as Willy tries desperately to gain a word of approval from him, comparing the intangible success of the honorable Dave Singleman to the concrete possibilities of timber. Bernard arrives to accompany the Lomans to the big football game at Ebbets Field. He begs Biff to allow him to carry his helmet. Happy snaps and insists on carrying it. Biff generously allows Bernard to carry his shoulder pads. Charley ambles over to tease Willy a little about the immature importance he is placing on the football game, and Willy grows furious.

In the present, the grown-up Bernard is sitting in his father's reception room when his father's secretary, Jenny, enters to beg him to deal with Willy. Outside, Willy, still immersed in his memory, argues with an invisible Charley from the past about Biff's football game. Bernard converses with Willy and mentions that he has a case to argue in Washington, D.C. Willy replies that Biff is working on a very big deal in town. Willy breaks down and asks Bernard why Biff's life seemed to end after his big football game. Bernard mentions that Biff failed math but was determined to go to summer school and pass. He adds that Biff went to see Willy in Boston, but after he came back, he burned his sneakers with the University of Virginia's insignia. Attempting a candid conversation with the wounded Willy, Bernard asks him what happened in Boston that changed Biff's intentions and drained his motivation. Willy becomes angry and resentful and demands to know if Bernard blames him for Biff's failure. Charley exits his office to say goodbye to Bernard. He mentions that Bernard is arguing a case before the Supreme Court. Willy, simultaneously jealous and proud of Bernard, is astounded that Bernard did not mention it.

In his office, Charley counts out fifty dollars. With difficulty, Willy asks for over a hundred this time to pay his insurance fees. After a moment, Charley states that he has offered Willy a non-traveling job with a weekly salary of fifty dollars and scolds Willy for insulting him. Willy refuses the job again, insisting that he already has one, despite Charley's reminder that Willy earns no money at his job. Broken, he admits that Howard fired him. Outraged and incredulous, he again mentions that he chose Howard's name when he was born. Charley replies that Willy cannot sell that sort of thing. Willy retorts that he has always thought the key to success was being well

liked. Exasperated, Charley asks who liked J. P. Morgan. He angrily gives Willy the money for his insurance. Willy shuffles out of the office in tears.

**Analysis**

Willy's conversation with Bernard revives Willy's attempt to understand why Biff never made a material success of his life despite his bright and promising youth. He wants to understand why the "well liked" teenage football player became an insecure man unable to hold a steady job. He assumes there is some secret to success that is not readily apparent. If he were not wearing the rose-colored glasses of the myth of the American Dream, he would see that Charley and his son are successful because of lifelong hard work and not because of the illusions of social popularity and physical appearances.

Biff's failure in math is symbolic of his failure to live up to his father's calculated plan for him. Willy believes so blindly in his interpretation of the American Dream that he has constructed a veritable formula by which he expects Biff to achieve success. The unshakeable strength of Willy's belief in this blueprint for success is evidenced later when he attempts to plant the vegetable seeds. Reading the instructions on the seed packets, Willy mutters, as he measures out the garden plot, "carrots . . . quarter-inch apart. Rows . . . one-foot rows." He has applied the same regimented approach to the cultivation of his sons. Biff struggles with this formula in the same way that he struggles with the formulas in his textbook.

Charley tries to bring Willy down to earth by explaining that Willy's fantasies about the way the business world functions conflict with the reality of a consumer economy. Charley refuses to relate to Willy through blustering fantasy; instead, he makes a point of being frank. He states that the bottom line of business is selling and buying, not being liked. Ironically, Charley is the only person to offer Willy a business opportunity on the strength of a personal bond; Howard, in contrast, fires Willy despite the strong friendship that Willy shared with Howard's father. However, the relationship between Willy and Charley is shaped by an ongoing competition between their respective families, at least from Willy's point of view. Willy's rejection of Charley's job offer stems partly from jealousy of Charley's success. Additionally, Willy knows that Charley does not like him much—his offer of a job thus fails to conform to Willy's idealistic notions about business relationships. Willy chooses to reject a well-paying, secure job rather than let go of the myth of the American business world and its ever-receding possibilities for success and redemption.

For Willy, the American Dream has become a kind of Holy Grail—his childish longing for acceptance and material proof of success in an attempt to align his life with a mythic standard has assumed the dimensions of a religious crusade. He places his faith in the elusive American Dream because he seeks salvation, and he blindly expects to achieve material, emotional, and even spiritual satisfaction through "personal attractiveness" and being "well liked." Willy forces Biff and Happy into the framework of this mythic quest for secular salvation—he even calls them "Adonis" and "Hercules," envisioning them as legendary figures whose greatness has destined them to succeed in according to the American Dream.

**The scene in Frank's Chop House**

**Summary**

Happy banters with the waiter, Stanley. Happy is flirting with a pretty girl named Miss Forsythe when Biff arrives to join him. After she responds to his pick-up line by

claiming that she is, in fact, a cover girl, Happy tells her that he is a successful champagne salesman and that Biff is a famous football player. Judging from Happy's repeated comments on her moral character and his description of her as "on call," Miss Forsythe is probably a prostitute. Happy invites her to join them. She exits to make a phone call to cancel her previous plans and to invite a girlfriend to join them. Biff explains to Happy that he waited six hours to see Oliver, only to have Oliver not even remember him. Biff asks where he got the idea that he was a salesman for Oliver. He had actually been only a lowly shipping clerk, but somehow Willy's exaggerations and lies had transformed him into a salesman in the Loman family's collective memory. After Oliver and the secretary left, Biff recounts, he ran into Oliver's office and stole his fountain pen.

Happy advises Biff to tell Willy that Oliver is thinking over his business proposition, claiming that eventually the whole situation will fade away from their father's memory. When Willy arrives, he reveals that he has been fired and states that he wants some good news to tell Linda. Despite this pressure, Biff attempts to tell the truth. Disoriented, Willy shouts that Biff cannot blame everything on him because Biff is the one who failed math after all. Confused at his father's crazed emphasis on his high school math failure, Biff steels himself to forge ahead with the truth, but the situation reaches crisis proportions when Willy absolutely refuses to listen to Biff's story. In a frenzy as the perilous truth closes in on him, Willy enters a semi-daydream state, reliving Biff's discovery of him and The Woman in their Boston hotel room. A desperate Biff backs down and begins to lie to assuage his frantic father. Miss Forsythe returns with her friend, Letta. Willy, insulted at Biff's "spite," furiously lashes out at his son's attempts to explain himself and the impossibility of returning to Oliver. Willy wanders into the restroom, talking to himself, and an embarrassed Happy informs the women that he is not, in fact, their father. Biff angrily tells Happy to help Willy, accusing him of not caring about their father. He hurries out of the restaurant in a vortex of guilt and anguish. Happy frantically asks Stanley for the bill; when the waiter doesn't respond immediately, Happy rushes after Biff, pushing Miss Forsythe and Letta along in front of him and leaving Willy babbling alone in the restroom.

**Analysis**

Willy's encounters with Howard, Bernard, and Charley constitute serious blows to the fantasy through which he views his life; his constructed reality is falling apart. Biff has also experienced a moment of truth, but he regards his epiphany as a liberating experience from a lifetime of stifling and distorting lies. He wishes to leave behind the facade of the Loman family tradition so that he and his father can begin to relate to one another honestly. Willy, on the other hand, wants his sons to aid him in rebuilding the elaborate fantasies that deny his reality as a defeated man. Willy drives Biff to produce a falsely positive report of his interview with Oliver, and Happy is all too willing to comply. When Biff fails to produce the expected glowing report, Happy, who has not had the same revelation as Biff, chimes in with false information about the interview.

Willy's greatest fear is realized during his ill-fated dinner with Biff and Happy. In his moment of weakness and defeat, he asks for their help in rebuilding his shattered concept of his life; he is not very likable, and he is well aware of it. Biff and Happy's neglect of him fits into a pattern of abandonment. Like Willy's father, then Ben, then Howard, Biff and Happy erode Willy's fantasy world. The scene in Frank's Chop House is pivotal to Willy's unraveling and to Biff's disillusionment. Biff's epiphany in Oliver's office regarding Willy's exaggeration of Biff's position at Oliver's store

puts him on a quest to break through the thick cloud of lies surrounding his father at any cost. Just as Willy refuses to hear what he doesn't want to accept, Biff refuses to subject himself further to his father's delusions.

Willy's pseudo-religious quest for success is founded on a complex, multilayered delusion, and Biff believes that for his father to die well (in the medieval, Christian sense of the word—much of the play smacks of the anachronistic absurdity of the medieval values of chivalry and blind faith), he must break through the heavy sediment of lies to the truth of his personal degradation. Both Willy and Biff are conscious of the disparity between Dave Singleman's mythic "death of a salesman" and the pathetic nature of Willy's impending death. Willy clings to the hope that the "death of a salesman" is necessarily noble by the very nature of the profession, whereas Biff understands that behind the veneer of the American Dream's empty promises lies a devastatingly lonely death diametrically opposed to the one that Singleman represents and that the Dream itself posits. Happy and Linda wish to allow Willy to die covered by the diminishing comfort of his delusions, but Biff feels a moral responsibility to try to reveal the truth.

**Boston hotel room daydream through Willy's departure from Frank's Chop House**

**Summary**

Upon his sons' departure from Frank's Chop House, Willy is immersed in the memory of the teenage Biff's visit to see him in Boston. In his daydream it is night and he is in a hotel room with his mistress, while in the present he is presumably still in the restroom of Frank's Chop House. Biff is outside knocking on the hotel room door, after telephoning the room repeatedly with no result. The Woman, who is dressing, pesters Willy to answer the door. She flirtatiously describes how he has "ruined" her, and she offers to send him straight through to the buyers whom she represents the next time he visits Boston on business. Willy, who is clearly nervous about his surprise visitor, finally consents to her appeals to answer the door. He orders her to stay in the bathroom and be quiet, believing it may be a nosy hotel clerk investigating their affair.

Willy answers the door, and Biff reports that he failed math. He asks Willy to persuade the teacher, Mr. Birnbaum, to pass him. Willy tries to get Biff out of the room quickly with promises of a malted drink and a rapid trip home to talk to the math teacher. When Biff mockingly imitates his teacher's lisp, The Woman laughs from the bathroom. She exits the bathroom, wearing only a negligee, and Willy pushes her out into the hallway. He tries to pass her off as a buyer staying in the room next door who needed to shower in Willy's bathroom because her room was being painted. Biff sits on his suitcase, crying silently, not buying his father's lies. Willy promises to talk to the math teacher, but Biff tells him to forget it because no one will listen to a phony liar. He resolves not to make up the math test and not to attend college, effectively negating his contracted role in Willy's inflated version of the American Dream. He deals the most serious blow by accusing Willy of giving Linda's stockings away to his mistress. Biff leaves, with Willy kneeling and yelling after him.

Stanley pulls Willy out of his daydream. Willy is on his knees in the restaurant ordering the teenage Biff to come back. Stanley explains his sons' absence, and Willy attempts to tip him, but Stanley stealthily slips the dollar bill back into Willy's coat as he turns. Willy asks him to direct him to a seed store, and he rushes out, frantically

explaining that he must plant immediately, as he does not "have a thing in the ground."

Nothing's planted. I don't have a thing in the ground.

**Analysis**

Willy settles on Biff's discovery of his adultery as the reason for Biff's failure to fulfill Willy's ambitions for him. Before he discovers the affair, Biff believes in Willy's meticulously constructed persona. Afterward, he calls Willy out as a "phony little fake." He sees beneath Willy's facade and rejects the man behind it; to be exposed in this way as a charlatan is the salesman's worst nightmare. Assuming a characteristically simplistic cause-and-effect relationship, Willy decides that Biff's failure to succeed is a direct result of the disillusionment that he experiences as a result of Willy's infidelity. Despising Willy for his affair, Biff must also have come to despise Willy's ambitions for him.

In this reckoning, Willy again conflates the personal with the professional. His understanding of the American Dream as constituting professional success and material gain precludes the idea that one can derive happiness without these things. Ironically, in Willy's daydream this desired tangible proof of success is acquired by means of the immaterial and ephemeral concepts of "personal attractiveness" and being "well liked." Willy believes that Biff, no longer able to respect him as a father or a person, automatically gave up all hopes for achieving the American Dream, since he could not separate Willy's expectations of him from his damaged emotional state. In a sense, Willy is right this time—Biff's knowledge of Willy's adultery tarnishes the package deal of the total Dream, and Biff rejects the flawed product that Willy is so desperately trying to sell him.

Willy's earlier preoccupation with the state of Linda's stockings and her mending them foreshadows the exposure and fall that the Boston incident represents. Until the climactic scene in the restaurant, when Biff first attempts to dispel the myths and lies sinking the Loman household, the only subconscious trace of Willy's adultery is his insistence that Linda throw her old stockings out. The stockings' power as a symbol of his betrayal overcomes Willy when Biff's assault on his increasingly delicate shield of lies forces him to confront his guilt about his affair with The Woman. When Biff, the incarnation of Willy's ambition, rejects the delusion that Willy offers, Willy's faith in the American Dream, which he vested in his son, begins to dissolve as well.

Willy's delirious interest in a seed shop reveals his insecurity about his legacy. Poor and now unemployed, Willy has no means to pass anything on to his sons. Indeed, he has just given Stanley a dollar in a feeble attempt to prove to himself, by being able to give, that he does indeed possess something. The act of giving also requires someone to whom to give, and Stanley becomes, momentarily, a surrogate son to Willy, since Biff and Happy have abandoned him. Similarly, in desperately seeking to grow vegetables, Willy desires tangible proof of the value of his labor, and hence, life. Additionally, the successful growth of vegetables would redeem Willy's failure to cultivate Biff properly. In declaring "Nothing's planted. I don't have a thing in the ground," Willy acknowledges that Biff has broken free from the roots of the long-standing Loman delusion. Finally, Willy's use of gardening as a metaphor for success and failure indicates that he subconsciously acknowledges that, given his natural inclinations toward working with his hands and creating, going into sales was a poor career choice.

**The boys' confrontation with Linda, Biff's final confrontation with Willy, and Willy's decision to take a late-night drive**

**Summary**

Biff and Happy return home later that night with a bouquet of roses for Linda. She knocks the roses to the ground and shouts at them to pack and never come back. Happy claims that Willy had a great time at dinner. Linda calls her sons a variety of names and accuses them of abandoning their sick father in a restaurant bathroom. Happy, incredulous and defensive, denies everything, but Biff accepts the judgment and wholeheartedly endorses his own degradation and status as "scum of the earth." After searching the house for Willy, Biff hears him outside, and Linda explains that he is maniacally planting a garden regardless of the darkness. Outside, Willy discusses a guaranteed $20,000 proposition with Ben. Ben warns that the insurance company might not honor the policy. Willy retorts that since he has always paid the premium, the company cannot refuse. He says that Biff will realize how important he is once he sees the number of people who attend his funeral. Ben warns that Biff will call him a coward and hate him. Willy is, of course, contemplating suicide, which would allow his family to cash in on his life insurance policy.

Why am I trying to become what I don't want to be . . .

Biff tells Willy that he is leaving for good and that he will not keep in touch. Biff wants Willy to forget him. Willy curses his son and declares that Biff is throwing his life away and blaming his failures on him out of spite. Biff confronts Willy with the rubber hose. Biff states that he has stolen himself out of every job since high school and that during the three-month period when he was completely out of touch with his family he was, in fact, in prison for stealing a suit. He reproaches Willy for having filled him with so much hot air about how important he, Biff, was that he was unable to take orders from anyone. Further, he accuses the family of never telling the truth "for ten minutes in this house." He exposes Happy's exaggeration of his position—Happy is not the assistant buyer, as he claims, but rather one of two assistants to the assistant buyer—and he says that he does not want to do anything but work in the open air. Biff is determined to know who he is and for his father to know likewise who he is. He urges Willy to accept their own commonness—they are both "a dime a dozen," not destined for leadership or worthy of prizes. Crying and exhausted, Biff trudges upstairs to bed. Suddenly happy, Willy mutters that Biff must like him because he cried, and his own delusions of his son's success are restored in light of this meager proof. Linda and Happy tell him that Biff has always loved him, and even Happy seems genuinely moved by the encounter. Everyone retires to bed, except Willy. He urges Linda to sleep and promises that he will join her soon. Willy converses with Ben, predicting that Biff will go far with $20,000 in his pocket. Suddenly, Willy realizes he is alone; Ben has disappeared. Linda calls from upstairs for him to come to bed, but he does not. Happy and Biff listen. They hear the car start and speed away.

**Analysis**

Willy's final confrontation with Biff exposes the essential gridlock of their relationship. Biff wants Willy to forget him as a useless bum. Once Willy finally lets go of him, Biff can be free to be himself and lead his life without having to carry the weight of his father's dreams. But Willy cannot let go of the myth around which he has built his life. He has no hopes of achieving the American Dream himself, so he has transferred his hopes to Biff. Fulfilling Biff's request would involve discarding his dreams and ambitions forever and admitting that he has long believed in the

American Dream for naught. Each man is struggling with the other in a desperate battle for his own identity.

During the confrontation, Biff makes no attempt to blame anyone for the course that his life has taken. He doesn't even mention the affair with The Woman, which Willy imagines as the sole reason for his son's lack of material success. After so many years, Biff doesn't consider his disillusionment a function of either Willy's adultery or the inherent foolishness of Willy's ambitions. Ironically, Biff blames Willy's fantastic success in selling him on the American Dream of easy success as the reason for his failure to hold a steady job. Biff's faith in Willy's dreams is the real reason that he could not advance in the business world. He could not start from the bottom and work his way up because he believed that success would magically descend upon him at any moment, regardless of his own efforts or ambitions.

Willy's happy reaction to Biff's frustrated tears demonstrates that Willy has again missed an opportunity to take refuge in the love of his family. He responds to Biff's tears as material evidence that Biff "likes" him. Linda corrects him with the words "loves you." Willy's failure to recognize the anguished love offered to him by his family is crucial to the climax of his tortured day. Because Willy has long conflated successful salesmanship with being well liked, one can even argue that Willy's imagining that Biff likes him boosts his confidence in his ability to sell and thus perversely enables his final sale—his life.

In Willy's mind, his imminent suicide takes on epic proportions. Not only does it validate his salesmanship, as argued above, but it also renders him a martyr, since he believes that the insurance money from his sacrifice will allow Biff to fulfill the American Dream. Additionally, Ben's final mantra of "The jungle is dark, but full of diamonds" turns Willy's suicide into a metaphorical moral struggle. Suicide, for Willy, constitutes both a final ambition to realize the Dream and the ultimate selfless act of giving to his sons. According to Ben, the noble death that Willy seeks is "not like an appointment at all" but like a "diamond . . . rough and hard to the touch." In the absence of any true self-knowledge, Willy is able, at least, to achieve a tangible result with his suicide. In this way, Willy does experience a sort of revelation: he understands that the product he sells is himself and that his final sale is his own life. Through the imaginary advice of Ben, Willy ultimately believes his earlier assertion to Charley that "after all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive."

**14.3.5.3. Requiem**

**Summary**

He's a man way out there in the blue . . . A salesman is got to dream, boy.

To Linda's considerable chagrin and bewilderment, Willy's family, Charley, and Bernard are the only mourners who attend Willy's funeral. She wonders where all his supposed business friends are and how he could have killed himself when they were so close to paying off all of their bills. Biff recalls that Willy seemed happier working on the house than he did as a salesman. He states that Willy had all the wrong dreams and that he didn't know who he was in the way that Biff now knows who he is. Charley replies that a salesman has to dream or he is lost, and he explains the salesman's undaunted optimism in the face of certain defeat as a function of his irrepressible dreams of selling himself. Happy becomes increasingly angry at Biff's observations. He resolves to stay in the city and carry out his father's dream by becoming a top businessman, convinced he can still "beat this racket." Linda requests some privacy. She reports to Willy that she made the last payment on the house. She

apologizes for her inability to cry, since it seems as if Willy is just "on another trip." She begins to sob, repeating, "We're free. . . ." Biff helps her up and all exit. The flute music is heard and the high-rise apartments surrounding the Loman house come into focus.

**Analysis**

Charley's speech about the nature of the salesman's dreams is one of the most memorable passages in the play. His words serve as a kind of respectful eulogy that removes blame from Willy as an individual by explaining the grueling expectations and absurd demands of his profession. The odd, anachronistic, spiritual formality of his remarks ("Nobody dast blame this man") echo the religious quality of Willy's quest to sell himself. One can argue that, to a certain extent, Willy Loman is the postwar American equivalent of the medieval crusader, battling desperately for the survival of his own besieged faith.

Charley solemnly observes that a salesman's life is a constant upward struggle to sell him—he supports his dreams on the ephemeral power of his own image, on "a smile and a shoeshine." He suggests that the salesman's condition is an aggravated enlargement of a discreet facet of the general human condition. Just as Willy is blind to the totality of the American Dream, concentrating on the aspects related to material success, so is the salesman, in general, lacking, blinded to the total human experience by his conflation of the professional and the personal. Like Charley says, "No man only needs a little salary"—no man can sustain himself on money and materiality without an emotional or spiritual life to provide meaning.

When the salesman's advertising self-image fails to inspire smiles from customers, he is "finished" psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually. According to Charley, "a salesman is got to dream." The curious and lyrical slang substitution of "is" for "has" indicates a destined necessity for the salesman—not only must the salesman follow the imperative of his dreams during his life, but Miller suggests that he is literally begotten with the sole purpose of dreaming.

In many ways, Willy has done everything that the myth of the American Dream outlines as the key path to success. He acquired a home and the range of modern appliances. He raised a family and journeyed forth into the business world full of hope and ambition. Nevertheless, Willy has failed to receive the fruits that the American Dream promises. His primary problem is that he continues to believe in the myth rather than restructuring his conception of his life and his identity to meet more realistic standards. The values that the myth espouses are not designed to assuage human insecurities and doubts; rather, the myth unrealistically ignores the existence of such weaknesses. Willy bought the sales pitch that America uses to advertise itself, and the price of his faith is death.

Linda's initial feeling that Willy is just "on another trip" suggests that Willy's hope for Biff to succeed with the insurance money will not be fulfilled. To an extent, Linda's comparison debases Willy's death, stripping it of any possibility of the dignity that Willy imagined. It seems inevitable that the trip toward meaningful death that Willy now takes will end just as fruitlessly as the trip from which he has just returned as the play opens. Indeed, the recurrence of the haunting flute music, symbolic of Willy's futile pursuit of the American Dream, and the final visual imprint of the overwhelming apartment buildings reinforce the fact that Willy dies as deluded as he lived.

## 14.4. DEATH OF A SALESMAN: A CRITICAL STUDY

### 14.4.1. Style of the Play

The play is mostly told from the point of view of the protagonist, Willy, and the previous parts of Willy's life are revealed in the analeptic, sometimes during a present day scene. It does this by having a scene begin in the present time, and adding characters onto the stage that only Willy can see and hear, representing characters and conversations from other times and places.

Many dramatic techniques are also used to represent these time shifts. For example, leaves often appear around the current setting (representing the leaves of the two elm trees which were situated next to the house, prior to the development of the apartment blocks). Biff and Happy are dressed in high school football sweaters and are accompanied with the "gay music of the boys". The characters will also be allowed to pass through the walls that are impassable in the present, as told in Miller's stage directions in the opening of ACT 1:

Whenever the action is in the present the actors observe the imaginary wall-lines, entering the house only through its door at the left. But in the scenes of the past these boundaries are broken and characters enter or leave a room by stepping 'through' a wall onto the fore-stage.

However some of these time shifts/imaginings occur when there are present characters onstage; one example of this is during a conversation between Willy and his neighbor Charley. During the conversation, Willy's brother Ben comes on stage and begins talking to Willy while Charley speaks to Willy. When Willy begins talking to his brother, the other characters do not understand to whom he is talking, and some of them even begin to suspect that he has "lost it". However, at times it breaks away from Willy's point of view and focuses on the other characters: Linda, Biff, and Happy. During these parts of the play, the time and place stay constant without any abrupt flashbacks that usually happen while the play takes Willy's point of view.

The play's structure resembles a stream of consciousness account: Willy drifts between his living room, downstage, to the apron and flashbacks of an idyllic past, and also to fantasized conversations with Ben. When we are in the present the characters abide by the rules of the set, entering only through the stage door to the left; however, when we visit Willy's "past" these rules are removed, with characters openly moving through walls. Whereas the term "flashback" as a form of cinematography for these scenes is often heard, Miller himself rather speaks of "mobile concurrences". In fact, flashbacks would show an objective image of the past. Miller's mobile concurrences, however, rather show highly subjective memories. Furthermore, as Willy's mental state deteriorates, the boundaries between past and present are destroyed, and the two start to exist in parallel. Stockings - They symbolize Willy’s infidelity and his lack of caring for his own wife since his gives his wife’s stocking to “The Woman.”

The style and devices Miller uses enhances Willy’s mental state. By using flashback and reveries, he allows the audience to get into the mind of Willy Loman and brings us into a sense of pity for him. Miller also uses a lot of motifs and repeated ideas through the play to give the viewers an idea of what Willy and his situation is all about. Personal attractiveness is an oft repeated motif. It shows that Willy believes that personal attractiveness makes one successful, but his belief is shot down by the success of Charley and Bernard who, in his mind, are not personally attractive. Other motifs are debt which sadly the Lomans escape after Willy dies, stealing which Willy condones, even encourages, the boxed-in feeling of Willy, the idea that Willy’s life is

passing him by, expressed in the quote, "The woods are burning," and Ben's success and the qualities that brought about his success.

### 14.4.2. Motifs in the Play

Motifs are elements like dialogue, symbols, situation, etc. that keep reappearing throughout the play.

**Stockings:**They symbolize Willy's infidelity and his lack of caring for his own wife since his gives his wife's stocking to "The Woman." Adrian Page writes that the stockings mended by Linda are given to his lover by Willy. It acquires a symbolic significance. They imply more than mere garments, and they begin to acquire the double meaning of self-indulgence or household drudgery. Biff is particularly moved by the fact that Willy gives his mother's stockings to his lover. Stockings were, at the time, highly prized and difficult to obtain, hence they represent a genuine concern for a woman.

**Tape Recorder:**This symbolizes the success Willy dreams he could have had and wishes he had. It also symbolizes his pride as he tells Howard that he will get one while there is no way he can afford it. Adrian Page is of the view that Tape Recorder gives a hint what is going on in Will's mind. He accidently sets the tape in motion. In its shrieking, unpleasant tones of a child recounting meaningless phrases, we may see how aweful it is for Willy to have to live with an accurate account of the past such as this. This is a vivid expression of his unconscious desire to repress the accurate facts.

Many more motifs have been described in the study notes of Royal Lyceum Theatre which are as follows:

**The Jungle/Woods:**The woods or the jungle are a symbol of life, especially the risks of life. Uncle Ben is not afraid to take risks in life. He literally walked into the jungle to achieve his dreams–he took control of his life. Willy is more fearful and is losing control of his life. He tells the boys that "the woods are burning" when he loses his job. But Ben tells Willy that "the jungle is dark" but that he must walk in to it–he is telling him he should take control by committing suicide.

**Diamonds:**Diamonds are a symbol of success. Ben finds diamonds in the jungle and gives Willy a diamond watch fob. Willy has to pawn the watch fob to pay for a course for Biff–he is trying to pass the "success" on to Biff. He tries to do this again by committing suicide and leaving money to Biff; he must "fetch a diamond". Willy has a vision of the success Biff can achieve with the insurance money–"I see it like a diamond, shining in the dark, hard and rough, that I can pick up and touch in my hand".

**The Garden**: The garden is a repeated motif that works as a symbol of Willy's desire to create a good life for his family. Willy's garden used to grow well before the apartment blocks were built. But now 'The grass don't grow anymore, you can't raise a carrot in the backyard.' Willy is trying to 'grow' something for his family i.e. he wants to become a success and support them. He used to be on his way to achieving that but he has ultimately failed. At the end of the play, one of his last acts in life is his futile attempt at planting seeds. Willy never achieves success in life, and he also never plants his garden.

**Falling / Down:**The words fall, falling and down and the movements they suggest re-appear again and again and emphasize the fall of Willy and his family. Willy is described as 'beaten down' and he 'lies back, exhausted'. Willy also 'falls' into bed with the woman and she shouts at him to 'get up, get up'. When Biff leaves him in the hotel, Willy is on his knees. Biff is also going down – when he steals the pen from

Oliver's office he runs down 11 flights of stairs. Finally, when Willy has fallen down to his death, Linda lays flowers down at his grave.

**Stealing:**Biff and Happy both steal. Happy steals fiancées and Biff steals a football, basketballs, lumber and cement, a suit, a fountain pen and many other things not mentioned. Their stealing can be seen to represent the way their true identities have been stolen by lying and the pursuit of an unachievable dream.

**Brand Names:**The use of brand names helps to heighten the realism of the play– Chevrolet, Simonize, Hastings, and Studebaker. However, these "status symbols" also represent the material success that Willy strives for and how it is ultimately empty. He is as proud of the Chevvy as "the greatest car ever built" but when it goes wrong he says "they ought to prohibit the manufacturer of that car". He is duped by advertising into thinking that owning these things equates with success.

### 14.4.3. Influences on Miller While Writing the Play

Before taking a closer look at the drama′s structure and form, we first should focus on the different influences that made Arthur Miller expose his drama in that special way. Heike Barkawitz has described the influences on Miller which resulted in *Death of a Salesman*.

When Arthur Miller began reading plays in college, Greek tragedies, such as those by Aristotle, Sophocles and Euripides, made a profound impression on him. He highly appreciated the Greek drama′s "magnificent form and symmetry". So Miller took up this classic construction in his drama Death of a Salesman as well. He once confessed, "That form has never left me; I suppose it just got burned in."

Referring to our introduction, some other similarities can be found. Firstly, we can find the in-evitable movement towards the death of the protagonist or the central character Willy Loman. Secondly, the tragedy consists of one single story without subplots which directly refers to Aristotle′s theory of the unity of action. Furthermore the unity of time is also respected; Death of a Salesman takes place within the course of about twenty-four hours.

The unity of place is not strictly paid attention to. The setting varies from the Lomans` house to Charley′s office, from Ebbet′s Football Field to a hotel in Boston, and several other locations as well. But the most important location is Willy Loman′s inner mind.

More important for an understanding of the form of Death of a Salesman is a certain familiarity with German expressionism (1910-1925). The essential aspect of expressionism was the depiction of the character′s inner life. Expressionism used symbols to evoke the un-seen and the unconscious. So expressionist plays were objective and impersonal in their approach. Miller took up this form, for example by means of the flashbacks, but he made the play more humane and personal as far as the characterization of Willy Loman is concerned. Miller once pointed out that his drama "desired the audience to forget it was in a theatre". This use of objective symbols (not only flashbacks but also music or colours) tries to expose Willy Loman`s characterization in a very subjective way, because the reader or the spectator gets the insight of Willy Loman′s inner life and his own, subjective point of view. The audience is not aware of the fact that it witnesses a very interesting technique.

The incidents from the past that Willy recalls in the presence are an "expression" (compare with "expressionism") of what is going on in Willy′s mind. This expression of internal action lets the reader or the audience experience Willy′s process of thought. An observer in the pre-sent would simply see Willy talking to himself but

would not be able to understand the external action without having been informed about the origin of Willy′s problems that are rooted in the past.

**14.4.4. Themes of the Play***Death of a Salesman* discusses a number of themes. Some of the prominent themes of the play are those of Denial, contradiction and order versus disorder, reality and illusion, the American dream, family, nature and physical pursuits. Let us now discuss these themes one by one.

**Denial, Contradiction, and Order versus Disorder**

*Death of a Salesman* addresses loss of identity and a man's inability to accept change within him and society. The play is a montage of memories, dreams, confrontation, and arguments, all of which make the last 24 hours of Willy Loman's life. The three major themes within the play are denial, contradiction, and order versus disorder. Each member of the Loman family is living in denial or perpetuating a cycle of denial for others. For example, Willy does not accept the fact that he is a mediocre salesman. Instead, Willy strives for his version of the American Dream-success and notoriety. The second major theme of the play is contradiction. Throughout the play, Willy's behaviour is riddled with inconsistencies. In fact, only thing consistent about Willy is his inconsistencies. Third major theme-order versus disorder results from Willy's constant retreats into the past. He spends more and more time in the past as a means of reestablishing order in his life. All three themes work together to create a dreamlike atmosphere in which the audience watches a man's identity and mental stability slip away.

**Reality and Illusion**

The gap between reality and illusion is blurred in the play -- in the structure, in Willy's mind and in the minds of the other characters. Willy is a dreamer and dreams of a success that it is not possible for him to achieve. He constantly exaggerates his success: ('I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in the year of 1928') and is totally unrealistic about what Biff will be able to achieve too. Willy's inability to face the truth of his situation, that he is merely 'a dime a dozen', rubs off on his sons. Happy exaggerates how successful he is and Biff only realizes in Oliver's office that he has been lying to himself for years about his position in the company: "I realized what a ridiculous lie my whole life has been. We've been talking in a dream for fifteen years. I was a shipping clerk." Biff is the only one who realizes how this blurring of reality has destroyed them all. His aim becomes to make Willy and the family face the truth which they have been avoiding, the truth of who they are: "The man don't know who we are!...We never told the truth for ten minutes in this house." This blurring of reality and illusion is carried through into the structure.

**The American Dream**

The American Dream is the capitalist belief that if you work hard enough you can be a success in America. However, the success that the dream aspires to is based on money and power. In Willy's mind it is also linked with being "well-liked". Biff realizes that being true to oneself is a more important success. Howard's treatment of Willy shows how destructive the pursuit of this dream can be. He lays Willy off when he can no longer generate money for the company which enrages Willy: "You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away – a man is not a piece of fruit. "Willy's adherence to the dream means that he buys status symbols on credit that he cannot afford to keep the payments up on. It is ironic then that Willy's funeral is on the day that the last mortgage payment is made.

**Family**

In the play, each generation has a responsibility to the other that they cannot fulfill. Biff and Happy are shaped by Willy's sins. In Happy's case, he is destined to perpetuate Willy's values and strive for material success, where Biff has been destroyed totally by Willy's betrayal of the family through the affair and the fact that Willy never discouraged him from stealing. On the other hand, Biff and Happy have the opportunity to save Willy by becoming "successful" in his eyes and supporting him and Linda in their old age. However they are not able to do this because of the way they have been raised. Biff is attempting to break this cycle of destruction in the family.

**Nature and Physical Pursuits**

In the play, the alternative to the corruption of urban capitalism is physical or natural pursuits. Biff talks about working with horses or cattle on ranches as his calling. Happy knows he can 'outbox, outrun and out-lift anybody in that store' and Willy 'was a happy man with a batch of cement'. The 'Loman Brothers' would sell sporting goods and Willy should have gone to the wilds of Alaska. The suggestion is that the true nature of all three of these men would be in physical pursuits and in a rural setting. However, Willy's dependence on 'the dream', means they cannot follow their true calling.

### 14.4.5. Death of a Salesman as a Tragedy

There is much discussion of whether *Death of a Salesman* can be considered a tragedy. 'Tragedy' as a form was defined by the Greek playwright Aristotle in 330 BCE. He defined a tragic character as being: A person of noble stature who has a fatal flaw (often arrogance or over-confidence) that leads to his or her downfall. The suffering is not wholly deserved and through that suffering, the character gains some self-awareness that turns his or her defeat into a sort of triumph. The play should not leave the audience feeling depressed but rather with a sense of compassion and awe. If we go by this definition, Willy fulfils most of the qualifications- except that he is not a man of high status. Miller answered this criticism by saying that: "I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were… If rank or nobility of character was indispensable, then it would follow that the problems of those with rank were the particular problems of tragedy". Arthur Miller, Tragedy and the Common Man, New York Times 27 Feb 1949 Certainly, the play follows much of the structure of a tragedy as Willy is inexorably drawn to his destruction by his inability to see the truth (his 'fatal flaw').

Arthur Miller wrote that the corner grocer could be as tragic as the president of the United States if he "engages the issue of, for instance the survival of the race, the relationships of man to God-the questions, in short, whose answers define humanity and the right way to live".

The play was hailed as a moving tragedy. The New York Herald Tribune described it as a 'soaring tragedy', with moments where Willy displays a 'touching grandeur'. The New York World Telegram saw the play as a drama where Willy's fate is 'a destruction whose roots are entirely in his own soul'.

Willy Loman had many faults and his mistakes were clearly visible but the actor Lee Cobb gave new height to the character of Willy. Neil Carson writes, "Lee Cobb particularly, a huge rumpled man with a deep, rich voice, endowed the character of Willy with a dignity beyond his station in life. It was Cobb's ability to lift his performances on to the high plane of tragic acting, to create a character that was

exhausted without being weak, misguided rather than insane, that contributed so largely to the impact of the New York production"

Dennis Welland writes: "Tragedy implies values." Critics have accused Willy of having no great values. He does not believe in any faith or achieve any great work except paying off the mortgage. Arthur Miller responded by arguing that Willy does have ideals: "Had Willy been unaware of his separation from values that endure he would have died contentedly while polishing his car…But he was agonized by his awareness of being in a false position, so constantly haunted by the hollowness of all he had placed his fain in…"

### 14.4.6. Character of Willy Loman

Wade Bradford writes that Death of a Salesman is a non-linear play. It interweaves the protagonist Willy Loman's present (the late 1940s) with his memories of a happier past. Because of Willy's frail mind, the old salesman sometimes doesn't know if he is living in the realm of today or yesterday. Playwright Arthur Miller wants to portray Willy Loman as the Common Man. This notion contrasts much of Greek theater which sought to tell tragic stories of "great" men. Miller gives us a tragedy about a so-called average man. Instead of Greek Gods bestowing a cruel fate upon the protagonist, Willy Loman makes several terrible mistakes that result in a meager, pathetic life.

**Willy Loman's Childhood**

Throughout Death of a Salesman, details about Willy Loman's infancy and adolesence are not fully divulged. However, during the "memory scene" between Willy and his brother Ben, the audience learns a few bits of information. Willy Loman was born in the late 1870s. (We learn that he is 63 in Act One). His nomadic father and family roamed across the country in a wagon. According to Ben, their father was a great inventor, but he doesn't specify what sort of gadgets he created, with the exception of his hand-crafted flutes. Willy remembers being a toddler, sitting around a fire and listening to his father play the flute. It is one of his only memories about his father.

Willy's dad left the family when Willy was three years old. Ben, who seems at least fifteen years older than Willy, departed in search of their father. Instead of heading north for Alaska, Ben accidentally went south and found himself in Africa at the age of seventeen. He made a fortune by the age of twenty one.

Willy never hears from his father again. When he is much older, Ben visits him twice -- in between travel destinations. According to Willy, his mother died "a long time ago," probably sometime after Willy matures into adulthood. Did the lack of a father negatively affect Willy's character?

Willy is desperate for his brother Ben to extend his visit. He wants to make certain that his boys are being raised correctly. Aside from being unsure about his parental abilities, Willy is self-conscious about how others perceive him. (He once punched a man for calling him a "walrus"). It could be argued that Willy's character flaws stem from parental abandonment.

**Willy Loman: A Poor Role Model**

Sometime during Willy's early adulthood, he meets and marries Linda. They live in Brooklyn and raise two sons, Biff and Happy. As a father, Willy Loman offers his sons terrible advice. For example, this is what the old salesman tells teenage Biff about women:

**Willy:** Just wanna be careful with those girls, Biff, that's all. Don't make any promises. No promises of any kind. Because a girl, y'know, they always believe what you tell 'em.

This attitude is adopted all too well by his sons. During her son's teen years, Linda notes that Biff is "too rough with the girls." Happy grows up to become a womanizer who sleeps with women who are engaged to his managers. Several times during the play, Happy promises that he is going to get married -- but it is a flimsy lie that no one takes seriously.

Willy also condones Biff's theivery. Biff, who eventually develops a compulsion to steal things, swipes a football from his coach's locker room. Instead of disciplining his son about the theft, he laughs about the incident and says, "Coach'll probably congratulate you on your initiative!" Above all things, Willy Loman believes that popularity and charisma will outdo hard work and innovation.

**Willy Loman's Affair**

Willy's actions are worse than his words. Throughout the play, Willy mentions his lonely life on the road. To alleviate his loneliness, he has an affair with a woman that works at one of his client's offices. While Willy and the nameless woman rendezvous in a Boston hotel, Biff pays his father a surprise visit. Once Biff realizes that his father is a "phony little fake," Willy's son becomes ashamed and distant. His father is no longer his hero. After his role model falls from grace, Biff starts to drift from one job to the next, stealing petty things to rebel against authority figures.

**Willy's Friends and Neighbors**

Willy Loman belittles his industrious and intelligent neighbors, Charley and his son Bernard. Willy mocks both individuals when Biff is a high school football star, but after Biff becomes a jaded drifter, he turns to his neighbors for help. Charley lends Willy fifty dollars a week, sometimes more, in order to help Willy pay the bills. However, whenever Charley offers Willy a decent job, Willy becomes insulted. He is too proud to accept a job from his rival and friend. It would be an admission of defeat.

Charley might be a surly old man, but Miller has imbued this character with a great deal of pity and compassion. In every scene, we can see that Charley hopes to gently steer Willy onto a less self-destructive path. He tells Willy that it is sometimes best to let go of disappointment. He tries to praise Willy's accomplishments (especially in regards to putting up the ceiling). He doesn't boast or brag about his successful son Bernard. Sensing that Willy is contemplating suicide, Charley tells him, "Nobody's worth nothin' dead." (Perhaps Charley's double-negative confused the salesman!)

In their last scene together, Willy confesses: "Charley, you're the only friend I got. Isn't that a remarkable thing." When Willy ultimately commits suicide, it makes the audience wonder why he could not embrace the friendship that he knew existed. Too much guilt?Too much self-loathing?Too much pride?Too much mental instabiliity?Too much of a coldhearted business world? The motivation of Willy's final action is open to interpretation.

**Willy Loman’s American Dream**

To the protagonist of Death of a Salesman, the American Dream is the ability to become prosperous by mere charisma. Willy believes that personality, not hard work and innovation, is the key to success. Time and again, he wants to make sure his boys

are well-liked and popular. For example, when his son Biff confesses to making fun of his math teacher's lisp, Willy is more concerned with how Biff's classmates react:

BIFF: I crossed my eyes and talked with a lithp.

WILLY: (Laughing.) You did? The kids like it?

BIFF: They nearly died laughing!

Of course, Willy's version of the American Dream never pans out. Despite his son's popularity in high school, Biff grows up to be a drifter and a ranch-hand. Willy's own career falters as his sales ability flat-lines. When he tries to use "personality" to ask his boss for a raise, he gets fired instead.

**Miller's Views on the Character of Willy Loman**

"…To me the tragedy of Willy Loman is that he gave his life, or sold it, in order to justify the waste of it. It is the tragedy of a man who did believe that he alone was not meeting the qualifications laid down for mankind by those clean-shaven frontiersmen who inhabit the peaks of broadcasting and advertising offices. From those forests of canned goods high up near the sky, he heard the thundering command to succeed as it ricocheted down the newspaper-lined canyons of his city, heard not a human voice, but a wind of a voice to which no human can reply in kind, except to stare into the mirror at a failure."

"Willy is foolish and even ridiculous sometimes. He tells the most transparent lies, exaggerates mercilessly, and so on. But I really want you to see that his impulses are not foolish at all. He cannot bear reality, and since he can't do much to change it, he keeps changing his ideas of it."

**Conclusion**

Despite his desperate searching through his past, Willy does not achieve the self-realization or self-knowledge typical of the tragic hero. The quasi-resolution that his suicide offers him represents only a partial discovery of the truth. While he achieves a professional understanding of himself and the fundamental nature of the sales profession, Willy fails to realize his personal failure and betrayal of his soul and family through the meticulously constructed artifice of his life. He cannot grasp the true personal, emotional, spiritual understanding of himself as a literal "loman" or "low man." Willy is too driven by his own "willy"-ness or perverse "willfulness" to recognize the slanted reality that his desperate mind has forged. Still, many critics, focusing on Willy's entrenchment in a quagmire of lies, delusions, and self-deceptions, ignore the significant accomplishment of his partial self-realization. Willy's failure to recognize the anguished love offered to him by his family is crucial to the climax of his torturous day, and the play presents this incapacity as the real tragedy. Despite this failure, Willy makes the most extreme sacrifice in his attempt to leave an inheritance that will allow Biff to fulfill the American Dream. Ben's final mantra—"The jungle is dark, but full of diamonds"—turns Willy's suicide into a metaphorical moral struggle, a final skewed ambition to realize his full commercial and material capacity. His final act, according to Ben, is "not like an appointment at all" but like a "diamond . . . rough and hard to the touch." In the absence of any real degree of self-knowledge or truth, Willy is able to achieve a tangible result. In some respect, Willy does experience a sort of revelation, as he finally comes to understand that the product he sells is himself. Through the imaginary advice of Ben, Willy ends up fully believing his earlier assertion to Charley that "after all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive."

## 14.5. SUMMARY

In this unit we have discussed the text of *Death of a Salesman* in detail. By now, you should have learnt the importance of this play which immensely contributed to the growth of American Drama. You should have also learnt outline story Further, you should have gone through Act -wise detail summary of the play to get better understanding of the play. Furthermore, critical analysis of Death of a Salesman, in which we discussed Style, Motifs, Themes, characterization, etc. must have contributed to your critical aptitude.

**Self Assessment Questions**

1. Who is the salesman of Death of a Salesman?

2. Who has Willy been borrowing money from?

3.Who discovers that Willy has been buying new stockings for The Woman instead of for Linda?

## 14.6. ANSWER TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Willy

2. Charley

3. Biff

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## 14.9. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the character of Willy Loman.
2. Comment on the various themes of *Death of a Salesman*.
3. Discuss the Motifs in *Death of a Salesman*.
4. Describe *Death of a Salesman* as a Tragedy.
5. What is Willy's Dream? What is he searching for throughout the play? Why doesn't he find it?
6. Why is Willy annoyed at Biff? How does he describe Biff? What does this tell us about Willy?
7. Why did Biff go to Boston? What does he discover when he sees the woman? Why is it that Biff never went to summer school? Why can't he believe in his father?
8. What were the influences on Miller which resulted in the classic Death of a Salesman?

**UNIT 15 RALPH WALDO EMERSON *'The Over Soul'***

## 15.1. INTRODUCTION

This unit shall briefly discuss the life of Ralph Waldo Emerson. It will also trace the development of Emerson as a poet and an essayist, focusing on his major works. You will also come to know about his philosophical and religious inclination. Emerson was a man who devoted much of his life to studying the highest thoughts of other eras and culture.

## 15.2. OBJECTIVES

In this unit you will be able to

- Acquaint with the life and major works of Ralph Waldo Emerson
- Get a glimpse of his poetic style
- Find many features in his writings
- Able to understand the essay *Over Soul*

## 15.3.RALPH WALDO EMERSON

### 15.3.1. Life and Works

Ralph Waldo Emerson was born on May 25,1803 in Boston, Massachusetts. His ancestors had been settled in America for seven generations, dating back to one of the early emigrants from old to New England. Emerson descended of a long line of clergymen.His father was a pastor of the first Church. Emerson's family was always faced with want and scarcity, sometimes utter poverty. His father died when he was only eight, leaving thewidowed mother with the responsibility of bringing up five sons including Emerson. Anyhow, his mother and his aunt managed to give the children proper education. The early life of Emerson thus passed in great difficulties.

### 15.3.2. Early Education and Career

With a view to provide education, the Emerson, family moved to Concord in 1814. The children were sent to get education in keeping with the vocation that characterized their ancestry. Emerson was sent to Boston Latin School and thereafter to Harvard College from where he graduated in 1817. Thereafter he planned to join the Divinity School but due to poverty he had to face many obstacles. However, he managed his affairs by teaching for some time at a girls` School established by his brother, William. He entered the Divinity School in 1825 and was licensed for the Ministry in 1826. However, ill health sent him southward to recuperate. Family circumstances and the state of his health as well as financial necessities further delayed his career. In 1829, he became the associate pastor to Henry Ware in the Second Church of Boston. In 1832, however, after only three years, he resigned from the position, because he could not in good conscience conduct religious rituals to which he himself felt uncommitted. He was successful as a Unitarian Minister,but he was often subjected to doubts and misunderstanding.

Emerson married in 1829,but his wife died in 1831. It was a great shock to Emerson. So after his resignation from the pastorate and with a sense of personal loss at the death of his wife, he travelled to Europe and stayed there for a year.

Returning to the United States, Emerson began to lecture regularly on the lyceum circuit, to spread his ideas as well as to make a living. He settled in Concord, Massachusetts, in 1835, where he became intimate friends with other writers like

Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, Bronson Alcott, and Margaret Fuller. It was here that the movement known as transcendentalism gathered around his ideas, took shape; and it was here also, at Emerson's home and elsewhere, that meeting of the transcendental Club were to be held during the seven or eight year following 1836 – a group, known among its own members as the symposium or the Hedge Club, that met together occasionally and informally to discuss philosophy, theology and literature.

In order to understand the rich complexity of Emerson's genius, which brings one closest "to the whole of the American spirit", it is essential, to first assess the nature and extent of various influences that shaped his general outlook on life. He was, for instance trained in the school of adversity and he thanked his Providence for giving him an insight into the tragic aspects of human life. Emerson was brought up amidst poverty, lacked the basic comforts of life, with the future holding out only bleak prospects.

Although Emerson always distrusted intellect, formal education and blind submission to dogma, he never undervalued the significance of book, if they were read and assimilated in a critical frame of mind. Books, indeed, constitute one of the important formative influences on Emerson's mind. In his essay "The American School" he acknowledges his indebtedness to books. "The next great influence into the spirit of the scholar is the mind of the past-in whatever form-Books are the best type of the influence of the past, and perhaps we shall get at the truth-learn the amount of this influence more conveniently by considering their values alone." But the use of books, he further suggests, is not without its possible dangers if we suspend our free-thinking and allow them to cripple our mental faculties. "Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst."

Indeed, if there were any single book that influenced him most it was the Bible. The Bible shaped his style, formed his mental attitude and made him perceive all human endeavour in a proper perspective. Citations from the Bible, direct and oblique, are strewn all over his writings.

But as pointed earlier, he did not subscribe to any fundamental interpretation of the Bible.

**15.3.3.Essays**

Emerson himself was to become involved in the publication of the transcendentalist quarterly magazine, The Dial, in 1840, assuming the post of editor in 1842, but it was in his lectures and essays that his creed of self- help and self-emancipation was most fully developed and most widely disseminated. Many volumes of essays and poems were to be published by him during the course of his life. They include Essays(1841), Essays: second series (1844), poem (1847), Representative Men (1850), English Tratis (1856), The conduct of life (1860), May-Day and Other pieces (a second collection of poems [1867])and Society and Solitude (1870). The core of his beliefs, and of the transcendentalist creed, can, however, be found in a half dozen pieces: 'The American Scholar' (1837), 'Divinity School Address', 'Self-Reliance', 'The Over-Soul', 'The Poet'(1844) – and, above all Nature.

**15.3.4. Poems**

The first volume of poems appeared in 1847, followed much later by May-Day and Other pieces, 1876. Santayana, in Essays in Literary Criticism, said that Emerson was a man "whose religion was all poetry, a poet whose only pleasure was thought…. His inmost impersonal spirit ranged abroad over the fields of history and nature, gathering

what ideas it might, and singing its little snatches of inspired songs." Among his more important poems are: The Sphinx, The Rhodora, Each and All, The Problem, The

Visit, The Humble-Bee, The Snow-Storm, Concord Hymn, Mithridates, Humatreya, Mima, Threnody, Woodnotes, Ode to Beauty, Brahma, Days, Grace, Merlin,Bacchus, Give All to Love, Terminus.

Emerson was a great literary figure of his time. During his lifetime, he made every effort to express his views through the medium of his literary works, particularly his lectures and essays. These lectures many of which are of the nature of essays form the major bulk of his literary output. To his credit goes a bulk of literary output. His long life was full of literary, philosophical and mystical activities. The ten years formulated his basic ideas and wrote many of his essays for which he is so known today. In the beginning he become a controversial figure on account of his opposing views about 'authority', but soon he established his reputation in the country as a sound thinker, orator and author.

Emerson, "the sage of concord" is also known as the father of American transcendentalism. He is the founder of the 'transcendental Club' in Concord. His famous prose-poem Nature is considered as 'the Bible of transcendentalism'. He is the most at the centre f the 'New England Renaissance'. His work Nature is considered "the Bible of the early transcendentalists.

Emerson was the first great American who read the Hindu scriptures and was profoundly influenced by Hindu philosophy. The Vedas, The Institutes of Manu, The Puranas and Upanishads were all read by him, and the influence on him of Hindu Vedanticphilosophy is best seen in his poetry. He regarded the Vedas as sublime, "sublime as heat and light and breathless ocean". "The Vedas for him were books of all knowledge, the repositories of knowledge and wisdom. His belief in the transmigration of the soul, his belief in fate, and in the essential unity of Atma(Man) and Brahma, and in Maya and Karama, all show the influence of Hindu philosophy. It is an all-pervasive influence whichcolours all his writings, but more particularly his poetry.

The word 'transcendentalism' has been interpreted in various ways. "To transcend' means 'to go beyond'. Philosophically, it is defined as "The recognition in man of the capacity of knowing truth intuitively, or of attaining knowledge transcending the reach of the senses." Hence in general terms a transcendentalist is one who believes in the world beyond this world and in the world above that of the senses.' The divine cannot be known and comprehended by reason of enquiry or rational analysis, but I can be felt and experienced by the spirit through intuition. Emerson refers to the divine as 'Over - Soul'. Words worth called it the 'Soul of the entire world'. This external world, in the opinion of the transcendentalist, is but the raiment of outer – covering of the divine. Man can know the divine and ultimately become one with it through the agency of Nature which speaks to the soul and not to the reasoning faculty.

### 15.3.5. General Characteristics

It is hard to systematize the thinking of one who confessed that he had no system, or even to understand a philosopher who ignored the fundamental aim of all philosophies which is, in a word, to obtain a consistent, unifying world-view that shall explain man in his relation to the infinite, to humanity, and to the world of nature. One must not be too confident, therefore of explaining Emerson; and a general

criticism should be prefaced by the statement that any summary may unwittingly do injustice to his philosophy by emphasizing one doctrine which is plainly at variance with another. For Emerson was not a logical thinker, like Edwards, and took no care to make his teaching consistent.

Emerson's philosophy rests too much on ecstasy and impulse, and too little on reason and will it glorifies the individual but ignores society that is, man in his relation to others, moment without considering the wisdom and experience of the past. We are to read it, therefore, as Emerson read his favourite books selecting the choice morsels and neglecting the rest as of little consequence. In one matter only he is always consistent, and that is the authority and the loveliness of the moral law. Upon this subject he is the most inspiring and energizing of all our literary masters.

It is idle to analyze Emerson's style if we think of style as meaning order and arrangement; for his method of writing-by stringing together selections from his note-books-made it impossible that his works should have any continuity of thought or unity of expression. But if we think of style simply as manner, a the reflection of personality, and then consider Emerson's most characteristic paragraphs, which suggest stars, flowers and glimmering crystals, then there is no style to compare with his in out literature. As Higginson says, our criticism is shamed into silence by finding frequent passages "so majestic in thought and rhythm, of a quality so rare and delicious, as to form a permanent addition to the highest literature of the human race."

There is another element in Emerson's style, its eloquence which is generally attributed to his public speaking, but which seems to be an expression of his own deepest nature or, it may be, f a tendency inherited from his ministerial ancestors. Whatever the cause, Emerson is always striving after eloquence of expression not to convince his hearers-such a personal motive would never occur to him but simply because it is in his blood, because eloquence seems to him, as to Indian, Man's natural expression, his unconscious reflection of the harmony of the universe. "There are days which occur in this climate", he begins, and though his subject be the old, threadbare matter of the weather, Webster and clay were never more eloquent over mighty problems of state. Again, in a lecture on Behaviour, he mentions the human eye; it has nothing to do with his subject, but it inspires him and he cannot restrain himself. The passage that follows is of such beauty and eloquence that the best poets and orators have hardly rivaled it.

If we examine Emerson's claim to greatness and permanence, it will be found to rest on three solid foundations. First, he treats of elemental things, of nature, love, friendship, heroism, self-reliance, in which all men are forever interested. Second, he treats these themes in an independent way, speaking straight from his own convictions, and always appealing to the nobility of our human nature. Third his words seem as vital now as when they first came from his lips; his readers, his fame and his inspiring influence increase with the passing years. Best of all, this fame remains unchanged in quality and behind it stands a man in whom criticism finds nothing to pardon or regret.

## 15.4. 'THE OVER SOUL'

Over-Soul was first published in Emerson's Essays: First Series, 1841. Emerson prefixed two mottoes to it which at once indicate the central theme of the essay. We learn from these mottoes that the essay is concerned with the nature of the over-soul, with its communion with the human soul through intuition and inspiration and with the essential unity of all objects and phenomena. Emerson laid down the plan of his

work in one of his journals, and the plan shows that the essay is a manifesto of Emerson's transcendentalism. It contains ideas which the essayist repeated, developed and elaborated in all his subsequent writings. It is also to be noted that at every step the essay reveals the influence of India philosophy and mysticism. The essays show that Emerson accepted the indestructibility of energy, the Theory of the transmigration f the soul, the reality of the one Deity and the oneness of the Over-Soul. He said: "The raptures of prayer and ecstasy. Of devotion, lose all beings in one Being." This finds its highest expression in the religious writings of the East, and chiefly in the Indian Scriptures, in the Vedas, the *Bhagavad Geeta* and the *Vishnu-Purana*. Hence the essay on the "Over-Soul" is his most Indian essay. Like a Hindu *Vedantee*, He says: The simplest person, who in his integrity worships God, becomes God; yet forever and ever the influx of this better and Universal Self is new and unsearchable. It inspires awe and astonishment." This Hindu thought has been emphasized by Emerson in essay after essay.

**15.4.1. The Critical Assessment**

This is one of the greatest essays of Emerson. It centers round the doctrine of self-trust. History and biography tell man what he can do. The great classics do inspire him; but they should not be allowed to restrict his activity since their real values lie in enabling man to know himself. As the Upanishads declare, by knowing the self, man knows all; and Emerson asserted that by knowing himself man knows all men. This led Emerson to assert that the soul of God is within the soul of everyone. When one looks inward, he finds the Universal Soul.

About this essay Emerson wrote in his journal: "Then I discovered the secret of the world; that all things subsist, and do not die, but only retire a little from sight and afterwards return again." He did not reject the idea of eternal flux. He accepted the indestructibility of energy, the transmigration of the soul, the reality of the new Deity, and the oneness of the Over-Soul. He said: "the raptures of prayer and ecstasy f devotion lose all beings in one being." This tendency finds its highest expression in the religious writings of the East, and chiefly in the Indian Scriptures, in Vedas, the Bhagavada Gita and the Vishnu Purana. Hence the essay on the "Ever- soul" is the most and Indian essay, he wrote. Like the Hindu Vedantee, he said: 'The simplest person, who in his integrity worships God, becomes God; yet forever and ever the influx of this better and Universal Self in new and unsearchable. It inspires awe and astonishment." This principle has been emphasized by Emerson in essay after essay.

The Over-Soul is beauty, love, wisdom, and power. It is imminent throughout Nature. Emerson appears to have arrived at an awareness of this through his own experiences of spiritual conflict and illumination. In this essay Emerson defines the "immense intelligence" of truth and justice. This "intelligence" divine light," mystic's "fire," and the psychological "energy". It is a vast, spiritual existence. It is omnipresent, immanent, and benevolent. The human mind has an intuitive apprehension of this Over-soul.

At the outset Emerson explains the beneficent usages of the soul in normal life: "We grant that human life is mean, but how did we find out that it was mean?" An intuitive standard is established to distinguish the good from the bad. This intuition comes from the soul. So he proceeds to offer a description of the Over-soul: "within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal one… We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul." "When it breathes through (man's) intellect, it is genius;

when it breathes through his will, it is virtue; when it ploughs through his affection, it is love." Everything of value inhuman life is an embodiment of the Over-soul. Faith in the Over-soul gives man the wide scope, and it makes every moment significant: "Man will come to see that the world is the perennial miracle which the soul worked, and be less astonished at particular wonders he will learn that there is mo profane history; that all history's sacred, that the universe is represented in an atom, in a moment of time."

The main theme of the essay is the nature of the Over-Soul, but there are also certain secondary ideas which illuminate the main theme. The Over-Soul constitutes the essence of all, and the soul in communion with the Over-Soul perceived and reveals truth. This is a religious experience and it expresses itself in ecstasy. When we speak of a mystic's trance or the rapture of a mystic, we refer to the mingling of the individual soul with the universal soul or the Over-Soul. This mingling represents the highest progress that the soul can make. The progress of the soul is not to be measured by the law of arithmetic but according to its own law. The soul's advances are made not by gradation or stages such as can be represented by motion in a straight line, but rather by an upward rising like the transformation of the egg into the worm and the worm into the fly.

The essay is a manifesto of Emerson's transcendentalism. It conveys mystical and profound truths and hence it is difficult to understand. Repeated readings are necessary, but such painstaking is fruitful and rewarding. It has come out of the soul of the essayist, and so goes straight to the soul of the readers, inspires them and contributes to a better understanding of spiritual truths. The style, as usual, is terse, epigrammatic and highly figurative and quotable. There are a number of references and allusions which are further stumbling blocks in the way of the average reader.

**15.4.2. Annotations**

**The convulsions of George Fox and his Quakers** – George Fox was a great believer in the "inner light" and he waged war against the religion of mere formality. His followers are known as Quakers because he made them quake of tremble before the Lord. The "convulsions" of George Fox were the spiritual states in which his body shook as a result of his coming face to face with God, as he believed.

**The illumination of Swedenborg**-Swedenborg was a great Swedish religious leader and scientist, and the founder of what was called the "New Chruch" According to him man can place himself in direct communion with the world of spirits. The "illumination" of Swedenborg refers to his spiritual perception by means of which he felt the presence of God. ("Ecstasy", "trances", "Convulsions", "illumination"-all these words describe spiritual of mysticl states in which the human soul comes face to face with the Over-Soul".

**Moravian**– the Moravians are a Christian set dating back to the 5$^{th}$ century. Their position is strongly evangelical.

**Quietist**– followers of Quietism. Quietism is a religious theory according to which man should seek perfection by remaining purely passive under the working of the Divine Grace.

**New Jerusalem Church** – Church of Swedenborg's followers.

**Maugr** – in spite of.

**The great distinction… the evidence of third persons**- the mysticism of George Herbert (1593-1633) is contrasted with the worldly wisdom of Alexander Pope

(1688-1744). The practical wisdom of john Locke (1632-1704), the Utilitarianism of William Paley (1743-1805), the rationalism of Sir James Mackintosh (1765-1832) and the materialism of the Scottish Philosopher Duglas Stewart (1753-1823) stand sharply contrasted with Spinoza's pantheism, Kant's idealism and Coleridge's transcendentalism.

**Genius is religious**– a genius is spiritual. He has divine inspiration. He is inspired by the Over-Soul.

**One blood**– one spiritual energy.

**"Go into his closet and shut the door"**– words of Christ on the Bible. Calvin – John Calvin ( 1509 – 1564) was a great religious reformer. The chief characteristic of his theological system it that is assigns all salvation to the sovereign action and persistent operation of Divine grace.

**I the imperfect …. Perfect**– from the Upanishadic statement, "that thou Art". The 'that' is the Over – Soul or Absolute which is perfect. The 'thou' is the imperfect individual soul.

### 15.4.3. Related Literary Terms

**Transcendentalism**- A New England Movement which flourished from c. 1835 to 1860. It had its roots in romanticism and in post-Kantian idealism by which Coleridge was influenced. It had a considerable influence on American art and literature. Basically religious, it emphasized the role and importance of the individual conscience, and the value of intuition in matters of moral guidance and inspiration. The actual term was coined by opponents of the movement, but accepted by its members (e.g. Ralph Waldo Emerson, I803-82, one of the leaders, published The Transcendentalism in I 84 I).the group were also social reformers. Some of the members, besides Emerson, were famous and included Bronson Alcott, Henry David Thoreau and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

**Calvinism**: The doctrines of reformer and theologian John Calvin (1509-1564). Calvinism stressed original sin and the necessity of divine grace for salvation . According to Calvinistic teachings, human nature was corrupted by Adam's fall, so that every human being is born with a totally depraved nature. Man can be saved only by God's grace, but each person is predestined for eternal salvation or condemnation. Although neither Milton nor Bunyan was a full-fledged Calvinist, paradise Lost was intended to justify the Calvinist theology, and The pilgrim's progress reflects the effects the upon human personality of the religion based upon Calvinism. Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter is a protest against the effects of the Calvinistic system.

**Theory of the fall and recovery of man:** Emerson not only transferred the locus of power in religion from outside man (the church, tradition) to within him (the God within), thus completing the progression from Calvinism, through Unitarianism, to Transcendentalism, but also shifted his consideration of religious problems from the traditional language of religion to the new language of moral philosophy. So his treatment of the salvation of man is not expressed in the usual language (sin, depravity, good works, saving grace, regeneration, and Christ's redemption).but rather in philosophical language, derived from Coleridge, Kant, and Plotinus.

**Immanence:**the idea of the God within. The philosophical idea of ethical ascent treated in the last section leads us inevitably to the religious questions Emerson felt deeply about is it right, he wrote, to "regard our-selves so much in a historical light as

we do, putting Time between God and us... [is it not better] to account every moment of the existence of the Universe as a new creation, and all as a revelation proceeding each moment from the divinity to the mind of the observer?" Emerson wished for salvation, but not one within a church which still held the doctrines of the sovereignty of God, original sin, predestination, election, and revelation through the Bible.

**Reason and Understanding:** In "the Transcendentalist" (1842) Emerson attempts a definition of Transcendentalism, identifying it as "Idealism as it appears in 1842." He proceeds to distinguish Materialists (who begin in their thinking from the evidence of the senses and who rely on the Understanding alone) from Idealists (who begin with the fact of human consciousness, perceiving that the evidence of the senses is not final, and who rely on the Reason). Later he attempts to explain why this Idealism is further called Transcendental: its source is Kant:

> who replied to the skeptical philosophy of Locke, which insisted that there was nothing in the intellect which was not previously in the experience of the senses, but showing that there was a very important class of ideas or imperative forms, which did not come by experience, but through which experience was acquired; That these were intuitions of the mind itself; and he denominated them Transcendental forms…

Emerson, having searched for a philosophical distinction which would allow him the existence of ideas whose origin was not from sensation, rested on these intuitions obtained by the faculty of Reason.

Locke's basic idea is that there is nothing in the intellect which is not first in the senses, Theodore parker, one of Emerson's contemporaries, describes this: "The senses are the windows which let in all the light I have; the senses afford a sensation.

**Emanation:** The 1836epigraph to Nature was "' Nature is but an image or imitation of wisdom, the last thing of the soul; nature being a thing which doth only do, but not know.' Plotinus." The root meaning of emanate is to flow out, and Plotinus used the metaphor of emanation to explain the creation and nature of the world. As Copleston states the idea, "World issues from God or proceeds from God by necessity, there being a principle of necessity that the less perfect should issue from the more perfect.

In Plotinus's thought, the series of emanations from the one may be shown in a schematic way:

> The One, God
> (multiplicity) Thought or Mind, Nous – all Ideas exist in Nous (Beauty)
> Soul, World – Soul
> Matter, world of nature, material world

Since Plotinus saw the emanation process as radiation of light (Coplestone,231),this emanation gradually grows dim until it comes to total darkness; matter itself, is seen as the privation of light.

## 15.6.SUMMING UP

In this unit you have learnt

- About Emerson`s various qualities as a poet and essayist.
- His philosophical thoughts.
- Many literary terms related to the Essay

It is great pleasure to inform you about the life history of Emerson, the great essayist, poet and philosopher of America. The definition of Transcendentalism has been given, so that you can understand his views clearly. You must have read about his other works which have been given in the beginning of this unit. All the related literary terms have been explained for your convenience. you have also realized Emerson`s inclination towards Hindu philosophy. The meaning of difficult words have been given so that you can understand the easily.

**Self Assessment Questions**

1. Where was R.W. Emerson?
2. Emerson's father died when he was?
3. During his early years Emerson's family was?
4. The Second Church of Boston made Emerson.
5. Where did Emerson pass the last period of his life?
6. Which was Emerson's first book?
7. When was Nature published?
8. Who is Over-Soul?

## 15.7.ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Boston
2. Eight
3. Facing adverse circumstances.
4. A Unitarian Minister.
5. Concord.
6. Nature
7. 1836.
8. God

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## 15.10.TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. What do you understand by Transcendentalism? Explain with reference to the essays of Emerson you have read.

2. Discus briefly Emerson's conception of a poet.

3. What according to Emerson is the relation between humanity and divinity? Discuss with reference to his essay, The Over – Soul.

4. Write short notes on

   (a) The nature of Genius,
   (b) Revelation and
   (c) Insight, as developed in the essay "The Over – Soul

5. Trace the development thought in the essay Over – Soul.

6. Bring out the distinctive qualities of Emerson as an essayist.

**UNIT 16 HENRY DAVID THOREAU**

**'CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE'**

## 16.1. INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit you have read about a great American philosopher, thinker, theorist, naturalist, scientist and writer who believed in innovative ideas and principles. Now you will read about another great scholar of America who not only believed on these things but also on its practical application. He was different from Emerson in this aspect. Thoreau's commitment was different. He devoted himself in testing of principles in practice and turning ideas into action. For more than his teacher, Thoreau wanted to know how it felt to live and see truly: to experience that knowledge in the body, the senses, as well as understand it in the mind. He also wanted the reader to go with him on what he called his excursions into nature, and into himself. He does not simply instruct, as Emerson does, he makes us share the experience; while we read his books, vicariously, imaginatively, we join his life.

## 16.2. OBJECTIVES

In this unit you will be able to

- Acquaint with the life and major works of Henry David Thoreau
- get a glimpse of his prose style
- Find many features in his writings
- Able to understand the essay `Civil Disobedience'

## 16.3. TRANSCENDENTALISM

Thoreau felt strongly the reality of spiritual forces and experience. He saw the whole realm of the spirit present everywhere and available to him by intuition, and this insight was not less actual because it was intuitive. Further, this realm of the spirit was for Thoreau identical with the highest forces or qualities man could know (perhaps even identified with God). Because of this conviction of 'the realm of the spirit' and of his power of intuition, Thoreau could build up a strong philosophy of the self, while remaining conscious of its flaws and shortcomings; but knowing that he contained within himself all that mattered most.

Hence Thoreau's transcendentalism involved an attitude toward nature (and writing on nature) which could be summed up, as Emerson did in his 'Nature':

Words are signs of natural facts.

Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts.

Nature is the symbol of spirit.

Thoreau sought throughout his life to live a meaningful life- a life in which he could understand his own nature, his relationship with other men and his relationship with nature and with the universe.

Thoreau was a member of the Transcendental Club which was formed in 1836. Though there are many varieties of transcendentalism as there are transcendentalists, we can direst some principles Thoreau's transcendentalism differs considerably from that of Emerson. He dissociated himself from the Church in order to pursue his religious quest with freedom. Without bothering himself about the signs and symbols,

revealed by nature, he plunged into the depth of nature. At every step in his life he showed commendable self-reliance, and he never had doubts on this score. He did not preach transcendentalism, for he loved it and discovered intensely religious, and his religious quest is the most important aspect of his transcendentalism. He held to the concept of the immanence of God in nature and in man. He wrote in his journal, "The fact is I am a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a natural philosopher to boot." He was interested less in the facts than in the truths hind them, less in the material or physical world than in the spiritual world. Nature is the visible garment of that spiritual world. He found the richness and value of experience, for he sought experience on the highest planed of human consciousness. The unique nature of man, he says, is so to control the instinct as to lead a supernatural life.

Thoreau wants the individual to understand the nature and purpose of life, the meaning and value of all creation. In this cosmic contact, man discovers that is primary duty is to his own self; and this also must keep up his body healthy, for the body is the means. Thoreau wants man, "to live deliberately, to front only the essential fact of life", and to see whether he can learn anything from nature.

Thoreau explores new meanings in words and challenges in grained habits of thinking with higher alternatives. His paradoxes create doubts in the mind of the readers about crucial matters. A standard device used by Thoreau is the mock heroic. He employs this device in passages such as the battle of ants. In Walden his diction is concrete, being free from abstractness, abstruseness and flatness.

## 16.4.HENRY DAVID THOREAU

### 16.4.1. Life and Works

Henry David Thoreau was born on July 12, 1817. His father John Thoreau was a store-keeper at Chelmsford, and having lost everything he settled at concord and later at Boston. There was a pond in Concord, Walden Pond, which the young Henry saw when he was five. He writes:

> Twenty-Three years since when he was five years old. I was brought from Boston to this Pond, away in the country, which was then but another name for the extended world for me – one of the most ancient scenes stamped on the tablet of my memory, the oriental Asiatic Valley of my world. Whence so many traces and inventions have gone in recent times. That sweet solitude, my spirit seemed so early to require that I might have room to entertain my thronging quests, and that speaking silence that my ears may distinguish the significant sounds.

Thoreau's ancestors were captains and merchants belonging to the Channel island of Jersey. His grandfather kept a store in Boston. His mother came from a family of Tories. "His parents;" says Brooks Atkinson, "were people of independent mind, probity and vigour of spirit, and they were capable of hard work." Henry was sent to Harvard College in 1833, because his parents believed in the culture of the mind, and because they wanted him to join one of the established professions. After four years he left the college without any hopes or regrets. The benefit he derived came only from the library of the college. Reading books and making notes from them started here: and this helped him in later years.

In 1837, Thoreau came to Concord and worked a teacher in the Public Grammar School. He had to give up this job because of his unwillingness to flog any student. He told Rev. Orestes Brownson : "I would make education a pleasant thing both to the teacher and scholar. This discipline which we allow to be the end of life should not be one thing in the school-room and another in the street. We should seek to be fellow-students with the pupils."

Having lost the job, Thoreau joined his father's business of making pencils. Here he worked hard and manufactured the best pencil which could compete with any. In 1838, Henry and his brother opened a school, an ideal school. Teachers and students moved more intimately. Thoreau was kind and frank in treating the students. Henry gave up the school in 1841 after the death of his brother. During this period the two brothers fell in love with Ellen Sewall. Her father, a Unitarian, opposed any marriage with the Thoreaus.

Emerson and Thoreau came closer. Thoreau lived in the home of Emerson and took charge of all practical affairs. Here he was introduced to Manu Smriti, Hitopadesa, Vishnu Purana, Bhagavad Gita and other great works. These works powerfully influenced the life and thought of Thoreau.

Thoreau built a hut by the Walden Pond on July 4, 1845. Ellery Channing wrote to him in the spring of 1845: "It seems to me you are the same old sixpence you used to be, rather rusty but a genuine piece. I see nothing for you in this earth but that field which I once christened 'Briars'; go out upon that, build yourself a hut and there begin the process of devouring yourself alive." Borrowing an axe from Alcott in March he started constructing a hut. Only on July 4, he moved into it and lived there for nearly two years. Here he wrote his first work entitled A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers. The experiment in living a secluded life near Walden Pond brought his career to a fruition. As it is said : "he went to Walden because he wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and to see if he could not learn what it had to teach, so that when he came to die, he would not discover that he had not lived." Here he sought self-realization.

During this period he came to town for getting his shoes repaired. He was arrested for not paying the taxes. One of his aunts paid the amount and he was released the next morning. This experience led to his most famous essay on "Civil Disobedience".

He left the hut without any reason. As he said: "I had several more lives to live and could not spare any more for that one." He "supported himself by surveying, pencil-making and other homely crafts." He began giving an account of his experiences at Walden Pond, and this finally appeared in 1854 under the title Walden.

Then began a period of lecturing. He spoke about Captain John Brown. His essays include "Life Without Principles," "Slavery in Massachusetts," and "Cape Cod." By 1860, his health began to fail. He was helped by his sister Sophia in collecting all his writings. Having never quarreled with God and hoping to get into a fairer world, he passed away on May 6, 1862.

### 16.4.2. Formative Influences

Thoreau was influenced by a number of great writers. The influence of Jefferson and Tom Paine is as much evident as that of Shakespeare. But he greatest influences that moulded his mind, heart, and soul came from India. These are the Bhagavad Gita, Vishnu Purana, Manu Smriti and Hitopadesa. Later he came under the influence of the Rig Veda, the Upanishads and other texts.

Thoreau derived the ideal of disinterested action from The Gita. The principle of non-attachment to the result was dear to him. Another is the concept of maya; and referring to this he written: "we think that is which appears to be." This idea of the world being a dream appears frequently in Walden. Thoreau accepts the doctrine of Karma and therefore the idea of rebirth. In his letter to Harrison Blake we read: " As the stars looked at me when I was a shepherd in Assyria, they look to me now a New Englander." According to Thoreau, the idea of transmigration is "unavoidable," for it is "an instinct of the race."

Thoreau was well read in Greek texts, and he had a thorough knowledge of Christian and Hebrew texts. Yet he writes: "the religion and philosophy of the Hebrew are those of a wilder and ruder tribe, wanting the civility and intellectual refinements and subtlety of the Hindus." It is again from the Hindu religious texts that Thoreau derived the principles of simplicity and austerity.

### 16.4.3. Nature

Thoreau held that one lives the good life by being alive to the beauties of nature. He sought "to be as pure and innocent as the flowers in the field." He considered it to be his duty to know everything about nature through his own observations and experiences. He complaints of the people, America would not long retain her rank among the nations. For eighteen hundred years, though perchance I have no right to say it, the New Testament has been written; yet where is the legislator who has wisdom and practical talent enough to avail himself of light which it sheds on the science of legislation?

## 16.5.CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

### 16.5.1. Sources

Thoreau was arrested and imprisoned in Concord for one night in 1946 for nonpayment of his poll tax. This act of defiance was a protest against slavery and against the Mexican war, which Thoreau and other abolitionists regarded as a means to expand the slave territory. Individual resistance to the state has a long historical foreground, reaching back Sophocles' play Antigome through many episodes of religious dissent against authority, to Thoreau's friend Bronson Alcott's arrest in 1843 who also refused to pay his poll tax. This essay was written in that night which Thoreau passed in jail.

Thoreau's essay with the title Resistance to Civil Government was first published in Elizabeth Peabody's Aesthetic Papers in 1849. With the title "Civil Disobedience" it appeared in Thoreau's A Yankee in Canada with Anti-slavery and Reform Papers, in 1866, four years after his death.

From Walden Pond, Thoreau came to Concord to get his shoe repaired in 1845. He was arrested there for nonpayment of tax and he was lodged in a prison cell for the night. One of his aunts paid the tax and he was released the next morning. The single night's experience in the jail gave rise to a document which set India on the path of freedom, and which today inspires the Blacks to fight for their equality with the American Whites. The document has ethical and spiritual values as well. Thoreau's essay 'Civil Disobedience' examines the relation of the individual to the state, and it incidentally offers an exposition of the nature of the individual and that of the state.

According to Thoreau, "that government is best which governs the least." Logically that 'which governs not at all.' The government is an abstract entity and it has no place in the actual scheme of things. Thus the members of a corporation may have a conscience; but the corporation as such does not have a conscience. Similarly the government does not have a conscience. Then government can be said to exist without having their basis in any principle. Thoreau considers the individual to be more important than the state. Thoreau's concept of Civil Disobedience is based on the dictates of conscience. The individual becomes strong because of his conscience.

### 16.5.2. Summary

Thoreau accepts the statement, "that government is best which governs least" Carried to its logical conclusion it means, "That government is best which governs not at all." A single individual becomes more powerful than the government because he can control it. Then the government imposes itself on men. The few who control it, then pursue their own advantages. The majority is allowed to rule because it is physically the strongest. A government ruled by the party in majority, does not mean it is based on justice. It is not majority, but conscience which should decide what is right. A corporation has no conscience. But a corporation of conscientious men is a corporation with a conscience.' As matters stand today, the selfless man is not all valued. If the government encourages slavery, it cannot be treated as our own government. Thoreau further points out, "therefore that is needed is action based on principles. One must perceive and do what is right, change things and relations. Many persons want that the government should stay because they want their prosperity and families to be protected. If one refuses to pay the tax, the government will take away his property and harass his family. M.K. Gandhi was influenced by the essay, "you have given me a teacher in Thoreau who furnished me through his essay 'On the Duty of Civil Disobedience' scientific confirmation of what I was doing in South Africa."

### 16.5.3. Critical Assessment

Thoreau accepts the statement, "that government is best which governs least." Carried to its logical conclusion it means "that government is best which governs not at all." Government is only an expedient, though it turns out to be inexpedience. Even "The standing army is only an arm of the standing government." Though government is a mode chosen by the people to express the general will, it can be misused and perverted even before the people realize what is happening.

A single individual becomes more powerful than the government because he can control it. Then the government imposes itself on men. The few, who control it, pursue their own advantages. The government has not been able to keep the people out of the wars; it does not settle any problem, and it does not educate the people. Instead of following principles, it follows expediency. We need a better government. "Let every man make known what kind of government would command his respect, and that will be one step toward obtaining it!"

The majority is allowed to rule because it is physically the strongest. A government ruled by the party in majority does not mean that it is based on justice. It is not the majority, but conscience which should decide what is right. The majority can decide only on those questions where expediency prevails. That is, we should first be men, and then only citizens. Instead of cultivating a respect for the law, we should cultivate a respect for what is right. The citizen should not resign his conscience to the legislator. That is, one should be first an individual and then a citizen.

A corporation has no conscience. But "a corporation of conscientious men is a corporation with a conscience." Law never makes a man just. Because of the respect for law many become the agents of injustice. Thus people become the agent of unscrupulous men who are in power; and men become machines. "There is no free exercise whatever of the judgment or of the moral sense; but hey put themselves on a level with wood and earth and stones." Such wooden men cannot command any respect; and yet they are said to be good citizens. Others serve the state with their heads and they make no distinction between good and evil. The few who are real men "serve the state with their conscience also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part, and they are commonly treated as enemies by it."

As matters stand today the selfless man is not at all valued. If a government encourages slavery, it cannot be treated as our own government. We have a right "to refuse allegiance to, and to resist, the government, when its tyranny or its inefficiency is great and unendurable."

Thoreau further says,

> Government is conditioned by expediency, not by principles. But these are cases to which the rule of expediency does not apply. If I have unjustly wrested a plank from a drowning man, I must restore it to him though I drown myself." Hence Thoreau asks his country to abolish slavery and to stop the war with Mexico. But the people in Massachusetts are interested more in commerce and agriculture than in humanity. There are many who are opposed to slavery and to the war; and yet "they do nothing in earnest and with effect." "Even voting for the right is doing nothing dor it." One has to assert his own freedom by his vote. But "under the name of order and civil government, we are all made at last to pay homage to and support our own meanness.

What it needed is action based on principles. One must perceive and do what is right, change things and relations. This separates the diabolical element from the divine in man. When there are unjust laws, what should a man do? He cannot obey them. He cannot get them amended easily. The governments always "crucify Christ, and excommunicate Copernicus and Luther, and pronounce Washington and Franklin rebels." If the law makes man an agent of injustice, the law must be broken. "What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn."

One cannot do everything, but something can be achieved. If we send a petition to the government and if the government does not pay any attention to it, what should we do? There is no way provided by the constitution. Hence all those who ask for the abolition of slavery, should withdraw their support to the government. It is enough if God is on our side, even if we are not in a numerical majority. "Any man more right than his neighbors constitutes a majority of one already."

We face the government in the person of the collector of taxes. We have to deal with him for he has willingly become the agent of the government. If we refuse to pay the taxes, we will be put in jail; and this itself is more valuable because it marks the beginning of a great struggle to realize what is right. "Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison." Thus the free man goes to the jail and the slaves remain outside. If a thousand men refuse to pay their taxes, it will not mean violence. But by paying taxes one would be helping the government to wage bloody wars. If the tax-collector is honest, he should resign his office. "When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his

office, then the revolution is accomplished." There might then be bloodshed. But "is there not a sort of bloodshed when the conscience is wounded? Through this wound a man's real manhood and immortality flow out, and he bleeds to an everlasting death."

The persons who assert the purest right are most dangerous to a corrupt state. Such persons do not accumulate property. The State renders little or no service to them. If one lives without the use of money, the State would hesitate to demand money. The rich one, however, is sold to the institution which makes him rich. If one has more money, he has less virtue, for "money comes between a man and his objects and obtains them for him." The rich man should try to carry out the schemes he planned when he was poor.

Many persons want the government to stay because they want their property and families to be protected. If one refuses to pay the tax, the government will take away his property and harass his family. But when one is resolved to pursue what is right, it is not worth the while to accumulate property. He must live within himself, and depend upon himself always tucked up and ready for start, and not have many affairs. As Confucius said,"If a state is governed by the principles of reason, poverty and misery are subjects of shame; if a state is not governed by the principles of reason, riches and honours are the subject of shame."

Thoreau does not want to be treated as a member of an incorporated society, if he had not voluntarily joined it. For six years he did not pay the poll-tax, and he had to be in jail for one night because of this. The government imprisoned him, but his soul was free. That is, the State foolishly identifies an individual with his flesh and blood and bones only. Hence the prison-walls appeared to represent "a great waste of stone and mortar." The state actually helped hi meditate without any diversions. It failed to reason the real Thoreau, and so it wanted to punish his body. Thus Thoreau lost even the respect for the State that he had, and he pitied it. The State thus never confronts a man's intellectual or moral sense, but only his body and sense. The State has no superior wit or honesty. It has only can force me who obey a higher law than I." The members of the government force us to become like themselves. But one must be allowed to live in the light of his own nature. "If a plant cannot live according to its nature, it dies; and so a man."

Thoreau has been a good neighbor, even if he were called a bad subject. He has been trying to educate his fellow-countrymen. He refuses allegiance to the State which perpetuates injustice. When others pay the tax which you refuse to pay, they allow their private feeling to interfere with the public good.

Our legislators must learn "the corporative value of free-trade and of freedom, of union, and of rectitude, to a nation." The scriptures have been in circulation for many centuries. But no legislator "has wisdom and practical talent enough to avail himself of the light" which they shed "on the science of legislation."

The State must be just to all men, and it must "treat the individual with respect as a neighbor." If should "not think it inconsistent with its own repose if a few were to live aloof from it, not meddling with it, nor embraced by it, who fulfilled all the duties of neighbors and fellow-men. A state which bore this kind of fruit, and suffered it to drop off as fast as it ripened, would prepare the way for a still more perfect and glorious state, which also I have imagined, but not yet anywhere seen."

Society is assumed to be conspiring against individuals. In order to maintain the integrity of the soul, one must withdraw in spirit or body, or in both. This essay is a testament of spiritual withdrawal and of the value of the individual.

In his 1942 appeal to his American friends Gandhi wrote: "You have given me a teacher in Thoreau, who furnished me, through his essay on the 'Duty of Civil Disobedience' scientific confirmation of what I was doing in South Africa."

Thoreau's essay asks the individual to realize his responsibility, and then alone he must pledge himself independently of others. He "must be true to his pledge even unto death, no matter what others do." Even if one is imprisoned, he is spiritually free and he is superior to those who jail him.

The central convictions of Thoreau are found in this essay. These are:

1. There is a 'higher law' which is superior to the law of the land. This is the law of the conscience, the law of 'inner voice' or the law of the 'over soul'.
2. When there is a conflict between the law of the land and this higher law, one must obey the higher law and violate the law of the land.
3. By violating the law of land one must be prepared to accept all the consequences including going to a jail.
4. By going to jail, one forces the people of good will to realize the need to get the evil law repealed.

The style in this essay is allusive. There are many allusions and references to varied works. "Thoreau wrote the only really first rate prose ever written by an American." As a stylist he belongs to "the great stream of American Tradition," the tradition of "the mythic and non-realist writers." It is the tradition that "dealt in images that were symbols of an inner world." Nature comes to "symbolize human life," and it becomes "fable and myth for man's inward experience." As Matthieseu noted, Thoreau's real"power lies precisely in his recreation of basic myth, in his role as the protagonist in a great cyclic ritual drama." This has led him to employ figurative speech. We have metaphors: "after the first blush of sin comes its indifference." "The State met me in behalf of the Church;" "their friendship was for summer weather only;" "I cannot expect, like Orpheus, to change the nature of the rocks and trees and beasts.'

One of his devices is a root use of words. His deep interest in language and etymology made him use this device to such an extent that it results in a freshness which sometimes is shocking, and at times bordering on a pun. Thus a 'wild' man is a 'willed' man, and our 'fields are 'felled' woods. Professors of philosophy are not philosophers but people who 'profess' it. There are analogies, puns, and carping statements. All the figurative devices are employed with great tact. Antithesis, contrast, understatement and exaggeration figure prominently. Personification, synecdoche, metonymy and such other figures are not excluded in the handling of language.

### 16.5.4. Annotations

**Army**: Note Thoreau's pun on Arm and Army.

**Mexican war**: The war between Mexico and the United states (1846-48) involved the issues of slavery and the annexation of Texas. Thoreau believed that the war with Mexico was aimed at building an empire, thereby extending slavery.

**Odd fellow**: Member of the independent order of odd fellows. It was a secret fraternal society for mutual financial help and social enjoyment.

**Gregariousness**: sociability.

**Self-reliance**: reference to Emerson's essay of that name.

**Their quota**: their money or taxes.

**Massachusetts**: Thoreau has a brilliant essay on "slaver in Massachusetts."

**The Indian**: Thoreau protested against the ruthless treatment of American Indians.

**Lyceum**: private educational institution. The lyceum movement organized a series of lectures in many towns from 1830 to the civil war. Thoreau was for a tome curator of the Concord Lyceum.

**Higher law**: conscience, the voice of God within.

**The light which it shed**; Thoreau pleads for a constitution based on a set of spiritual principles and values.

**The right of man**: a reference to Tom Paine's Rights of Man.

**I have imagined**: he imagined on the basis of the picture given by Manu in his Laws.

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## 16.7.TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. What are Thoreau's opinions about solitude?
2. Write a short note on Thoreau's opinion on Nature.
3. What is Transcendentalism?
4. What is Thoreau's contribution to American thought?
5. Write a short mote on the critical estimate of Civil Disobedience.
6. Write a short note on the style of Civil Disobedience.