

# PONDICHERRY UNIVERSITY

*(A Central University)*

DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

## AMERICAN LITERATURE

*(Paper Code: MAEG1005)*



**MA (English) – I Year**

***DDE – WHERE INNOVATION IS A WAY OF LIFE***

# **PONDICHERY UNIVERSITY**

(A Central University)

## **DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

### **MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH**



**MA-English – First Year**

**Course Code:60**

**Paper Code: MAEG1005**

**AMERICAN LITERATURE**

## **American Literature**

### **Authors:**

Units I, III, IV & V

#### **Dr. P.K. Kalyani**

Professor

Dept. of English

M.S. University

Tirunelveli.

Unit II

#### **Dr. H. Kalpana**

Associate Professor

Dept. of English

Pondicherry University

Puducherry-605 014.

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## **Paper – V - AMERICAN LITERATURE**

### **Unit – I POETRY: DETAILED**

Emily Dickinson -I taste a liquor never brewed-- The soul selects her own society, Because  
I could not stop for Death, A Route of Evanescence.

Walt Whitman - When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed  
Robert Frost - West-Running Brook, Departmental  
Wallace Stevens - Sunday Morning  
Sylvia Plath - Daddy, The Applicant  
Adrienne Rich - Necessities of Life  
E.E.Cummings - My Sweet Old Etcetera  
Robinson Jeffers - Boats in a Fog

### **Unit – II POETRY : GENERAL READING**

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### **Unit – IV DRAMA**

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All selections of poetry are from Bradley, Beatty, Long and Perkins Eds The American Tradition in Literature (Shorter Edition in one volume) Fourth Edition

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## Unit - I

### EMILY DICKINSON

Emily Dickinson was born on December 10, 1830 in Amherst, in the Connecticut valley of Massachusetts. Her life was outwardly uneventful but inwardly dedicated to a secret and self-imposed assignment to the mission of writing a “letter to the World” that would express her concepts of life and death, of love and nature and as called by Henry James, of “the landscape of the soul”.

Emily’s father served as a leading lawyer of the village and also as the treasurer of Amherst College and member of the legislature and of congress. He dominated the household. Her mother lived in his shadow. Her brother Austin followed his father but lacked the formidable, self-righteousness of the old puritan. Her sister Lavinia remained as the watchdog and protector of her shy, sensitive and some times rebellious sister.

Emily settled down to the customary life of a New England village after two years at Amherst Academy and one at the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. Her interest in books was stimulated by the principal of Amherst Academy, Leonard Humphrey and a Law student in her father’s office, Benjamin F. Newton. The latter encouraged her to write. Unfortunately, both died young much to the disappointment of Emily. She started writing poetry when she was in her twenties. In 1858, she has written 52 poems, 356 in 1862 and 85 in 1865. Thereafter, she wrote an average of 20 poems every year.

Emily was also influenced by a Philadelphia clergyman, Charles Wadsworth in the early sixties. It is believed that his separation in 1860 resulted in the great output of 356 poems in 1862. She also tried to publish her poems in the same year. After that her interest in the outer world narrowed and she started living in recluse but for Judge Otis P, Lord of Salem, a widower in his late sixties, an old family friend. It is believed that she conceived a passionate love for him and even hoped for a marriage.

In her last years, Emily lived in complete recluse. She grew obsessed with death and become a legend in Amherst long before she died in 1886. Her poems were published in 1890 due to the untiring efforts of her sister Lavinia. Her place in Literature was recognized only in the twenties of the next century.

#### **I Taste a Liquor Never Brewed (1861)**

Emily Dickinson, drunk with the joy of living, expresses her transport to the new world in terms of a cosmic spree. She tastes the liquor that was never brewed in the “Vats upon the Rhine”. It is a mystical wine. Even the nature around her participates in her joy with the “Landlords” turning “the drunken Bee / out of the Fox glove’s door” in order to collect

honey and the “butterflies” renouncing their “drams”. She continues to drink till she lands in heaven to see the “Seraphs swing their snowy Hats”. She also sees the “saints” running to their windows “To see the little Tippler / Leaning against the Sun”, before she comes back to reality.

### **Because I could not stop For Death (1890)**

Emily Dickinson narrates the mystical experiences of her own death in this poem. The ability to find images, actions and personifications that would transfix death at the very point of striking is entirely unique to Emily Dickinson.

Death is personified as the gentle lover of the poetess in the poem. As the poetess “could not stop for Death”, death “kindly” stopped for her. He takes her in a carriage in solemn silence and the carriage in which they traveled has immortality as another occupant with them.

Death behaves as a perfect gentleman in the presence of his lady love. He seems to have only honourable intentions. He is not in a hurry to take his love away with him. Instead, the carriage moves slowly that the lady could see all the things that she passes through on the way. The gentleness and civility of death has made her put away her labour and leisure. In her enthusiasm to be one with death, the poetess silently watches everything around her. The life in the present world seems to be beautiful and enjoyable with everything in harmony with nature. But when death strikes, man is helpless and he must submit himself to the civility of death, as done by the poetess. Neither his labour, nor his leisure could save him from the inevitable thing in life called death.

Life slowly disappears behind the poetess like a receding landscape when she starts her journey with death. All the positive aspects like light, warmth, vitality and incessant motion gives way to its opposites like darkness, cold and static. In the beginning, the poetess believes like all men that her journey with death would take her towards immortality. However, in the end, she realizes that the end of her life moves towards the grave, like the life of any other human being.

In the beginning, Death seems to be a gallant lover to the poetess and Immortality, a protector of the two. She firmly believes that she is being escorted to an eternity or immortal life. But the poem ends abruptly with the suspicion of the poetess. The poem is an attempt of the poetess to imagine her own death. She knows that death is unavoidable and tries to trace out her responses to the inevitable experience. Interestingly, she is not able to identify her real feelings and attitudes towards her own death. The poem expresses the effect of death’s unexpected visit upon its victim. The mood changes from flustered

self pleasure and comfortable anticipation to gradual fear and doubt into a full anticipation to gradual fear and doubt into a full realization of death's deception and terrifying purposes.

### **A Route of Evanescence (1891)**

The poem describes the flight of the humming-bird with its flash of colour and whirl of wings. It concentrates more on its disappearance rather than in its appearance. It records the simultaneous vanishing of the bird at every point. The bird seems to move "with a revolving wheel". The sound produced by the bird during its movement seems to be "A Resonance of Emerald" from the bright coloured throat that gives out a "blinding flash of cochineal", a jewel with multi coloured pigments.

The fast movement of the bird dispersed sound and light through the space. Throughout its flight, the bird dishevels the petals of the flowers and later the flowers must bob up to recover their position that was shattered by the flutter of the bird. The "easy Morning's Ride" of the bird seems to be "The Mail from Tunis" the bird has become an envoy of curious lands like Tunis, of tropic colours like the cochineal and of the oriental opulence like the emerald. This poem represents the view of Emily Dickinson that "All we secure of Beauty is its Evanescences".

### **The Soul Selects Her Own Society (1890)**

The poem gives expression to Emily's preference of her own small circle and closing the door on the general world. The poem seems to express an affair of the heart. The soul selects the society in which it can move freely and then shuts its door with a firm hand against all other things of the mortal world. The soul or the divine majority acts as a queen who remains unmoved by the Emperor "kneeling upon her mat". The soul has chosen the one from an ample nation and then closes the valves of her attention like a Stone. The one may refer to her lover whom the poetess permitted to meet her during her life in recluse.

However, a deep reading of the poem may reveal a different meaning. It refers to something more than love and friendship between two mortals. It reveals the spiritualization of the total self of the poetess. The soul does not choose another person. Instead, it dominates all the other aspects of the speaker's identity. The waiting chariots and the kneeling Emperor refer to the pomp and pageantry of life that the soul rejects. These pleasures of the mortal world can never influence a person whose soul is taken over by spirituality. The world has nothing to do with the soul whose prayers and services are done in the chapel of the mind or the soul. The soul and the divine being have joined together to form a divine society which does not allow any strangers into their company.



The poem is a fusion of the events that turned the life of the poetess like her withdrawal into solitude and dedication both to poetry and to the image of her beloved. Though the soul entered into a life of seclusion, it is not free from the tragic paradoxes of life. Its complete recluse of the soul leads to destitution and disappointment in both the ordinary and spiritual life of the poetess. Her isolated life made her vulnerable to disappointment. Though the soul seems to reside in complete tranquility, it continues to feel unsatisfied. The seeming superiority of the soul is liable to invasion as there is nothing to contemplate on after it begins to live in seclusion. God alone would be a suitable companion to the soul. He is the only King fit for the Queenly soul.

### **POETIC TECHNIQUE OF EMILY DICKINSON**

Emily Dickinson was deeply influenced by the mysticism of Blake and the mannerism of Emerson. She remains as a poet who is interested in the content and not in the finished phrasing. She starts writing poems as a vent for her feelings but soon it became the essence of her life. Her views on the nature of poetry can be determined through the comments scattered throughout her letters and poems. The emphasis of her poetry is on truth and on a complete account of life's experiences in order to illuminate the unknown areas of knowledge and beauty. Beauty is also given importance as it is also of a divine aspect as the truth. However, the concentration of the poet is more in her attempt to attempt man's inner soul. At the same time she also believes in the role of inspiration and emotional response in the making of the poetic experience. Her poems are known more for their metaphorical effects and brilliant phrases than for their total organization.

For Emily, the poetic process is similar to the extraction of perfume from flowers. It is achieved only under unbearable stress. Moreover, it is a slow organic process. The poetess is fascinated by words and the use of various meanings of the same word can be seen in her best poems. She also omits verbs, conjunctions and prepositions often in her attempt to be precise in her message. She also makes use of dashes instead of the traditional punctuation marks. The dashes often represent a metrical pause and more often they are used as commas, semi colons and periods. She also capitalizes nouns, adjectives, verbs and even adverbs. Though such usages make the poems look like shorthand notes, they add vibrancy to the poems.

Emily makes use of various images in her poems. Most of her imagery is drawn from nature. Domestic images from sewing, clothing, housekeeping, the kitchen and the garden can also be found in her poems. Critics trace the images to be influenced by

Shakespeare, Blake, Emerson and the Bible. However, Emily herself boasts to Higginson that she “never consciously touched the paint, mixed by other person”. She also makes use of orthodox religious terms like ‘ecstasy’, ‘grace’, and ‘justification’ etc. Her technical vocabulary is drawn from various fields like medicine, mathematics, grammar and law. She also makes use of various slang used in Amherst.

The rhymes in the poetry of Emily Dickinson are not exact. However, she explores the traditional set forms to find a suitable medium to express her thoughts. She does not abandon the rhyming devices, nor does she try her hands at the blank verse. But she experiments with changes in various set rhyme schemes to avoid monotony in her poetry. She selects various forms of rhyme and uses them at her own will. However, the balance between the form and the content of her poetry is not always harmonious in her poetry. When the subject matter becomes too intense, the unusual rhymes seem to be unnecessary and the meter becomes frequently monotonous.

## **THE MYSTICISM OF EMILY DICKINSON**

The term “Mysticism” is difficult to explain. It deals not with the self or nature but with god. Emily Dickinson has the power of the seer with an ironic intelligence and a great courage of the spirit. The very content of her imagination is the world. There is nothing artificial in her poetry. She mastered life by rejecting it and nature by adding herself to the sum of all things. She keeps herself close to reality with her sense of sight. She presents the picture of the creatures of this earth in their original sense. The lyrical notation in her poetry is closely in union with her mind. However, everything becomes evanescent in the course of her life. The disappearance is all of a sudden like the flight of a bird. Richard Chase says that she was a visionary to whom truth came with exclusive finality.

The aims of a true poet and a mystic remain the same. They have their minds at true creation. Poets narrate their experience with the Muses while the mystics describe their ecstatic union with the Divine Truth. The progress of the mystic towards illumination and the progress of the poet towards the full depth and richness of his insight are alike. Their perception of reality is clear. Emily Dickinson deals more with the “dark night of the soul” or its dejections when it is shut away from grace. Her poems are filled with her love for the beauty that she perceives in the world of time.

Emily Dickinson is neither fearful nor morbid of love. She could feel the presence of immortality behind death. Her poetry documents life’s fearful limitations. However, the

account of their suffering does not have traces of self pity. Eternity is brought into focus very often and the shifts changes from the manifold to the Divine One.

Emily is not orthodox in her religion. Her feelings run out of the bounds of the set dogmas of the religion. She does not conform herself to the dogmas of any religious sect. her attitude towards pain and sufferings are realistic. Her spiritual preoccupation is similar to that of the British romantic poets. Her inquisitive mind reinforces her vision into the heart and spirit of nature. Her poems are very much alive. Not only death but also life, love and the soul are her favourite subjects.

The progress of the writer as a person can be seen in the poetry of Emily. There is a gradual shift from her addiction to graveyardism to the harmony of nature in her poetry. Though is frightened by the anguish of her destiny, she holds on to describe her fright. Moreover, though she is driven to the verge of sanity, she manages to remain the observer and recorder of her own extremity. Nature is a haunted house for her and poetry, a house waiting to be haunted. Her inner self is similar to poetry which can be haunted.

Emily is equal to no one in her art. The power of a mystic remains with her and enables her to write every event and feelings in her life including that of her own death with precision. She also makes use of terrible symbols that fit to the event. Her experience with death is similar to one's experience with a natural disaster that engulfs its victims. When she emerges from the hands of suffering she remains more dead than alive.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. Imagery in the poetry of Emily Dickinson.
2. Mysticism in the poetry of Emily Dickinson.
3. Trace the concept of existentialism in the poetry of Emily Dickinson.
4. Discuss about the search for identity in the poetry of Emily Dickinson.
5. Spiritual nature of Dickinson's poetry.
6. Emily Dickinson's views on death.
7. Importance of the soul as expressed in the poetry of Emily Dickinson.
8. Emily Dickinson's concept of immortality.
9. Vision of Emily Dickinson.
10. Irony in the poems of Emily Dickinson.

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## WALT WHITMAN

Walt Whitman was born on May 31, 1819 in West Hills, Long Island as one of the nine children of Louisa Van Velsor and Walter. His parents were semi-literate. Two of his siblings were mentally unfit. His father earned a meager living at various works such as farming, labouring, carpentry and building. Walt was closer to his mother than to his father. The influence of his Quaker background can be seen in his poems.

Whitman spent his childhood in the farm on Long Island and on the streets of the neighbouring city of Brooklyn. The influence of both the places can be seen in his works. Though a dreamy and lazy youth, Whitman remained a bright boy. He found it impossible to remain in a place for a long time. He left his school at the age of eleven and took on a variety of jobs. From the age of seventeen to twenty, he worked as a rural schoolteacher, shifting from one school to another. His dreamy nature and the meagerness of his academic background made him unqualified for the job.

His genius and metaphysical inclinations made him move towards journalism and Whitman worked in various newspapers in and out of for six years from the age of twenty. At twenty seven, he became the editor of the Daily Eagle in Brooklyn. But he left the position in two years because of his support to the Free Social Party which was against slavery. His articles in the newspapers do not have any trace of the genius in Whitman.

Whitman enjoyed his life to the full while he was working as the editor of Daily Eagle. He was an ideal man of the town with a passion for the Italian opera. The music and the melodrama of the opera impressed his imagination and shaped his poetry. He got an opportunity to travel around the vast landscapes of America when he accepted a job with a newspaper in New Orleans. He returned to Brooklyn in four months and worked as a journalist for some time before his political inclinations made him to turn towards carpentry. His love for mankind made him compare himself to Christ in his poems in *Leaves of Grass*, which was published in 1855.

Whitman wrote three reviews on his own poetry which gives his evaluation of his own work. They also provide a self-portrait of the poet as he thought he appeared in his poetry. The second edition of the book with a large number of new poems and a review by Emerson was published in 1856. The third edition with new additions came out in 1860 and many editions followed. The new poems added in every edition shows that Whitman was working hard to establish identity.

Whitman's political interests declined with his absorption in poetry. However, it was renewed with the advent of the civil war and he started writing with a creative vision and vigour. The injury of his brother George in the civil war in 1862 made him visit Virginia which brought about a great change in his life. Moved by the plight of the wounded soldiers, he brought them material comforts like writing paper and pen along with his sympathy. The influences and experiences in the civil war made enough material for his collection of poems entitled, *Drum Taps*, published in 1895. *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd* was the emotional response of Whitman on the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

In 1865, Whitman was fired from his job for his obscene poetry but his friends helped him to get another job in the Attorney General's office. Moreover, they promoted his reputation by publishing articles in defense of him. However, the year 1873 marked the beginning of catastrophes in his life with the poet suffering a paralytic stroke and the death of his mother. He returned to his place of birth and finally settled in Camden, New Jersey. *Prayer of Columbus* marked his situation in that time. However, his loneliness was driven away by Anne Gilchrist, the widow of William Blake's biographer Alexander Gilchrist, and her children.

When he regained his physical vigour, he undertook a journey to the far west parts of the country. His later years saw the publication of a semi autobiographical volume titled, *Specimen Days* in 1882-83. *November Boughs* appeared in 1888. Whitman also shaped his masterpiece to its final form before his death in 1892. His biography was written by a Canadian psychologist, Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke and published in 1883.

### **WHEN LILACS LAST IN THE DOORYARD BLOOM'D**

The poem, first published in 1865 in the *Drum Taps* is a long elegy in sixteen sections with all the essential parts of the conventional form of elegy like the expression of grief in the beginning, then a procession of the mourners that makes the grief universal, and finally the consolation for the death of the beloved one. The elegy mourns the death of Abraham Lincoln, the president of America who waged a civil war for the freedom of the Negro slaves and saved the country from disintegration. The poet admired the great leader for his courage, honesty, sympathy and determination. He was shocked at his assassination in

April 1865, immediately after the end of the civil war, and his grief over the death of his beloved leader takes the form of this elegy.

The first two sections of the poem express the grief of the poet and also introduce the basic symbols of the elegy. Lincoln was assassinated in the spring season when the lilacs bloomed in the dooryard. The great star or the sun droops in the west to hide himself because of his grief over the loss of the great leader. The spring season, the blooming lilacs and the setting sun form a trinity which would remind the poet of his loss for years to come. The use of the symbols of the lilacs, spring and the setting sun increases the grief of the poet.

Lincoln was the great star who enjoyed a steady leadership in the sky of American politics. His time in power ended with his death and was sent to the heaven like the setting sun. The tragic loss of the country is represented by the dark evening sky surrounded with harsh clouds. The poet feels sorry for the powerful star that has fallen west. He looks at the night that was made darker and tearful because of the loss of the great star. He calls at the cruel hands that had made him powerless to prevent the great misfortune and feels sorry for his own soul that remains helpless at that time. He also addresses the harsh cloud of grief surrounding the country and expresses his grief.

The symbol of the lilac is further intensified in the next section when the poet notices the lilacs standing tall in the bush with heart shaped leaves in the backyard of an old farm house. The pointed blossom sent out a strong perfume that he loves. Every leaf in the bush seemed to be a miracle and he plucked a sprig of lilac with a flower from the bush in the dooryard of a farm house. He wanted to offer the flower to his departed hero.

At that time, the poet hears the hermit thrush singing to itself in solemn solitude. It is a shy bird that remains far away from the settlements and withdrawn to itself. It sings "death's outlet song of life" out of its bleeding throat. The poet sympathizes with the bird which he considers to be his dear brother who was united with him by the silent sympathy in the hour of deep sorrow. Both the poet and the bird would die if they are not allowed to sing, as the song becomes an outlet for their emotions.

The concentration of the poet then shifts suddenly to the procession of mourners who assemble on the streets to bid farewell to the dead leader. The coffin passes slowly through the crowded cities and grassy meadows. The procession went on during day and night throughout the country which was clouded by sorrow on the death of the great leader. Flags were lowered and all the people of the nation were dressed in black. The people wailed and mourned when the coffin passed through and bells were tolled in a

thousand churches across the country. The whole nation was in mourning and the grief of the poet gets universalized. When the coffin of his dead hero crossed him, the poet placed the sprig of lilacs on it in order to honour his beloved hero.

The poet feels that his offerings of the lilacs and his song are not just for the death of his beloved hero alone but it is a celebration of death in general. He feels that he had offered flowers to the coffin of all the people who are dead so far. He also chants the song in praise of the sane and sacred death that gives relief from all sufferings. He wants to glorify death with bouquets of roses and sprigs of lilacs. Death becomes sacred because it ends all the suffering of people in the worldly life. Not only mourning, but also death is universalized in this poem.

The poet then realizes how the drooping sun and the gloomy nature around him tried to foretell the misfortune that is about to befall the nation. When the nature looked gloomy and dull, the soul of the poet sank with it. However, he realized the message of nature only when it was too late and nobody was able to prevent terrible death of the great leader. He hears the song of the hermit thrush again. He wants to go to his dear brother and share his sorrow with him. But he was prevented by the sinking star. He knows that the bird could explain the real meaning of death and the realization of its power could give him consolation but his overflowing grief over the death of his beloved hero prevented him from being consoled very easily. The conflict between grief and consolation in the mind of the poet is expressed in this section.

The poet finds that he does not know how to sing for the loved one who lays dead. He is also unable to decide the type of song and the decorative language that he could use in his song for his hero who is dead. He is also confused about the kind of perfume that he could use on the grave of his beloved hero. Finally, he decides that the sea winds blowing from the east and the west along with the breath of his song would be the suitable perfume for the loved one's grave. He continues to narrate the kinds of pictures that he would use to decorate the burial house of his beloved hero. He would use the pictures of spring, of farms and homes, of sunlight, of fresh sweet herbage, of rivers and hills, of cities bustling with life, etc. for this purpose.

The poet returns to the hermit thrush after realizing that the unnatural death has made Lincoln a central figure in the whole country and that he would live forever in the hearts of his people. The bird seems to express his own emotions. Listening to the song of the bird gives him a sort of consolation and so the poet asks the bird to continue its song. Though the poet hears the song of the bird clearly, he cannot respond to it as he was held

back by the lilacs and the sinking star. The grief of the poet remained powerful and the truth about death has not dawned on him yet.

The tension between the grief of the poet and the consolation that he needs is resolved when he understands that death is the end of everything in this earth. The realization gave him the necessary calm after the storm of overflowing grief. The whole nation was enveloped by a dark cloud of sorrow following the death of Lincoln. The cloud was dispersed when the poet learns to see death everywhere around him. His insight into the true nature of death made him realize that everyone must die. Nobody can escape death. After his realization of the power of death over mankind on earth, the song of the bird seems to charm him. The voice of the bird seems to welcome death with boundless joy. The universal necessity of death is expressed in the section in which the poet eagerly waits for his own death with courage and tranquil state of mind.

The poet then tells about the insight into the realm of death which he acquired through the song of the bird. He rises above his personal grief over the death of his beloved hero and remembers the thousands of people who died in the civil war. Death and destruction has ruled over the land and myriads had perished in the war. He also realizes the tragedy of human life that those who die are fully at rest while those who survive are destined to suffer the loss of their near and dear ones.

The poem ends with a note of serenity, reconciliation and acceptance of the power of death. He would remember the sweetest and the wisest soul of his friend forever. He would also remember the song of the hermit thrush that helped him to reconcile with reality. The main symbols and images used earlier are repeated in order to make a cycle of the symbols used. The end ritualistically chants the poet's release from the power of the emotions and his reconciliation with the tragic nature of human life.

## **FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED WHITMAN'S POETRY**

Walt Whitman was influenced by many persons and incidents in his life which gets reflected in his poetry. Of them, the influence of his parents seems to be greater. His father's radical democratic ideas and his mother's Quakerism influenced him right from his childhood days. These influences contributed to the making of the poet of democracy and Whitman is celebrated as the national poet of America with his *Leaves of Grass* considered to be the "Bible of Democracy".



The influence of the Long Island where he was born can also be traced in his poetry. The farmland, with its natural scenery, carts and promenades and the long seashore, influenced the poet when he was a child. Moreover, the scenes and sights from the crowded city of Brooklyn where he spent his childhood mingled with the natural background of the farmland. The paradox of the influences of the city and the country, the nature and the artificiality, the solitude and the crowds can be seen in his poetry. The music of both is natural world and of the city can be found in his poems. Though it is difficult to determine the amount of the influence of his early experiences, they are the dominant features of his poetry.

As a child, Whitman was influenced by the great Homer and Shakespeare on whom he based his ambition. His works resemble the great classics, epics and the bible. The preaching of the bible and the style of the classical masters has a lasting impression on his poems. The Italian opera and the mystic transcendental philosophy of India also contributed to the making of Whitman as a great poet of America. His poetry fulfils the dream of Emerson that a poem should embody the spirit of the country. *Leaves of Grass* is the epic of modern America.

Mysticism also forms a characteristic feature of Whitman's poetry. Moreover, his sex poems suggest an intimate love affair. Altogether, the poetry of Whitman is a complex creation. The source of inspiration lies within his soul which cannot be explained by any critics.

## **EXPRESSION OF DEMOCRACY IN WHITMAN'S POETRY**

The spirit of democracy in America is expressed in the poetry of Walt Whitman. It is similar to the epics of Homer and Virgil that express the spirit of ancient Greece and Rome. His *Leaves of Grass* is considered to be the "Bible of Democracy" and his support to democracy has made him the representative poet of America.

Whitman believed in the inherent dignity, equality and brotherhood of all men. The key note of his poetry is his faith in democracy. He treated all men as equal and all professions as equally honourable. He gives importance to individuality and his pictures of individual men and women are vivid and precise. The pictures are short and pass on quickly allowing other such poems to follow. Almost every race and all professions of the age find expression in the poetry of Whitman.

Whitman celebrates the average American in his poems. Though he sings about himself in the longest poem in his *Leaves of Grass*, it is a representation of all the

Americans of the age. Only the common nature that one could find in all men is glorified in his poems. He is capable of making his own person as impersonal. Any individual character represented in the poetry of Whitman is a fusion of several characters. He felt that he could celebrate all that are celebrated by other poets by celebrating what is natural in himself. He even presents his hero as omni-sexual in order to make it a composite democratic individual without differentiating between male and female. The “I” in his poetry represents an ideal American.

Whitman celebrates the common humanity in his poems. He identifies himself with the common people. His poems express great sympathy and brotherhood towards all his fellow beings. He also has a feeling of kinship with all living creatures that paved the way for pantheistic democracy. The motif of the grass is set right from the title of his book itself. He has a great regard for grass and makes it a democratic symbol in nature.

The democratic nature of Whitman is ideal, universal and also spiritual. However, his faith on the superiority of America over all nations runs through his poetry and America is the true hero of his poetry. He also believes that the soul is capable of achieving greatness but it is possible only in a democratic country. Moreover, the society could improve positively only in a democracy. Also, individuality is given importance only in a democracy. All these ideas of Whitman find expression in his *Leaves of Grass* and make it the “Voice of Democracy”.

#### QUESTIONS:

1. Explain the symbols in the elegy, *When Lilacs Last in the dooryard Bloom'd*.
2. Analyze the style of Walt Whitman.
3. Characteristics features of Whitman’s poetry.
4. Whitman is a poet of the common man. Discuss.
5. Explain the feature of an elegy with reference to the prescribed poem.

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## **ROBERT FROST**

### **LIFE AND WORKS**

Robert Greaves wrote that Robert Frost has won the title of a master poet not by turning his back either on ancient European tradition, or by imitating its successes but by developing it in a way that at last matches the American climate and the American language. He had received the Pulitzer Prize four times in 1924, 1931, 1937 and in 1943. He was also honoured with a score of honorary degrees including degrees both from Oxford and Cambridge universities and a numerous other prizes, distinctions, fellowships and special appointments.

Robert Frost was born may 26, 1874 in San Francisco, California. His ancestry was of New England and he returned to New England at the age of ten when his father died. His grandfather gave him the necessary financial support and he joined the Dartmouth College for a few weeks. His independent spirit rebelled against his dependence for support and the regime of college support. He took up a variety of jobs like being a bobbin boy in a mill, worker in a shoe factory, reporter for a newspaper, farmer, and country schoolteacher etc. he married in 1895, attended Harvard university in 1897 and 1898 and then settled in life with farming. He also found time to write poems in between his work at the field.

Farming did not help Frost to support his family with four children. So he began teaching at the Pinkerton Academy and later at the New Hampshire state Normal School. He continued to work as a teacher with occasional intervals. He sold his farm in 1912 and went to England with his family. There he met many English and American poets including Ezra Pound which marked the beginning of his career. *A Boy's Will* was published in 1913. He returned to America in 1914. The publication of *North of Boston* in 1914 made him a popular poet in America. All his poems are gathered in *Complete Poems*, published in 1949. He died in 1963.

### **DEPARTMENTAL**

Frost wonders at the organizational power of the ants in his poem, *Departmental*. The ants act without hurry or emotions. When a member of their community dies, they will not surround around the dead and waste their time. They always concentrate on their own work. They never worry about any other matter except what is expected from them. They are controlled by some rules which cannot be understood by the humans.

Once, the author saw an ant on the tablecloth running into a dormant moth. The moth is many times the size of the ant. But the ant did not show any surprise. It's business is not with such moths. So he did not mind the moth and went on its way to carry out his duty. However, the poet feels that the ant that encountered the moth on its way is sure to communicate the message with the members of the enquiry squad of their hive. The mission of the enquiry squad is to find out God and the nature of time and space. They seem to be the intellectually advanced members in the group.

“Curious race” is the compliment the author extends towards the ants. When an ant happens to cross the place where one of its companions is found dead, it seems as if it does not give a moment's concern for its dead friend. However, it is sure to pass on the information to its other companions and the message finally reaches the authorities among them. They also speak in praise of the dead ant. They want to pay due respects for the dead. But there are members appointed specially for the purpose. It is the duty of the Janizary to bury the dead ant of the commissary.

When the message reaches the queen she orders Janizary to bring home the selfless Jerry who has died to his people. Then he would be laid in state on a sepal. A petal of flower would serve as the shroud and the ichors of nettle would be used to embalm him. The word of the queen would be obeyed immediately. A solemn mortician appears on the scene as soon as he gets the orders of the queen. He seizes the dead in the middle after taking formal position with his feelers calmly atwiddle. Heaving the dead high in the air, he carries it out of the scene. Throughout the process, no one else would stand there and stare at during the proceedings. It is not the affair of anybody else than the mortician to meddle with the work of carrying out the last rite of the dead ant. Their action can be called ungentle but it is completely departmental.

The poem expresses the observation of the poet on the life of the ants and the way in which they carry out their works. He gives a human touch to the happenings but at the same time, he contrasts the organized behaviour of the ants with the social behaviour of the human beings. When a member of the community falls dead, his near and dear ones would surround the dead and they have many rituals to follow before burying the dead. Only a few does the work while the others stand around and stare at the happenings in silence.

The world of the ants is different to the world of the human beings. They have a good organized system for various works. They go on with their works and do not meddle with the works of other people. They would not mind any other things that cross their way.

In short, the poet feels happy that the entire human race is kind and sympathetic towards their fellow beings. He also wonders at the organizational power of the meaner organisms like the ant. It is great pity that man is losing his humane nature and behaving like the meaner organisms that have no emotional attitude towards their fellow beings.

### **WEST RUNNING BROOK**

The poem starts with the enquiry of a confused woman who had lost track of the direction in which they are moving. She asks her husband where north is. He shows her the direction and tells her that the brook is running west. She calls the brook as the West- running Brook and wonders what the brook does by running west while all the other country brooks run east in order to reach the ocean. The brook seems to be different and chooses a different way that is entirely opposite to other brooks of its kind. It trusts that it can go by contraries as the woman had did by deciding to go with the man who was standing by her side at that time.

The man had also done something different from other men by moving on with the woman in search of an identity in his life. They cannot understand what they are. Both are confused and cannot decide whether they are young or new. In reality they look young and are new to the place. However, they feel a sense of belonging with the brook which had chosen a different path like them.

The young couple knew that they are “something” of importance. The woman was highly impressed by the boldness of the brook and says that they are not two but three. The man and the woman are married to each other and they both will be married to the brook. She also expresses her desire to set up their home on the other side of the brook and build a bridge across it. The bridge would make her and her husband closer than they were before. Their love would be strengthened by the brook and its confidence in itself. They can throw their arms over the brook and lay asleep beside it without any fear or worries about the future.

The woman feels that the brook has heard her voice and is waves to her as a move to hail her thoughts. She considers the waves to be calling her after accepting her views of a life with nature. When she says this to her husband, he feels that it is not so. He cannot understand the feelings of the woman who enjoys even the silly things in life. He says that it is only a natural happening that happens throughout the ages. It is the normal behaviour of the brook to produce waves in course of its movement towards its destination.

The man has not yet attained self realization and so he was not able to understand the spirit of the brook. However, the intuitive power of the woman was able to understand the universal spirit that is found in all the objects of nature. Though she was confused a little by the words of her husband, she sticks on to her intuition and replies that the brook was waving to her if not to her husband. She also thinks that the brook is conveying some secret message to her. It is similar to the annunciation of the birth of a divine child to Mary by Gabriel.

The husband's attitude towards the brook is metaphysical. He decides to leave his wife to her fancies and not to interfere as he cannot understand her feelings towards the brook. However, she insisted on listening to his views on the brook. So, he explains the paradox in the motion of the brook. It appears to be static but it is always in motion. It shows that life undergoes continuous changes though it looks to be normal and without any change. The brook is running contrary to the normal path in an attempt to reach its beginning. It tries to fill in its emptiness by searching for its identity. Instead of moving towards the end as done by all other brooks, the West-running Brook moves backwards in search of its origin.

The feeling of emptiness and the desire to seek one's roots is not peculiar to the brook alone. It is also found among most of the modern human beings. The feeling of emptiness flows over the entire human race. It flows with people but separates them for a panic moment when it flows between two people. Everything in life including time, strength, tone light, life and love are insubstantial. Life on this earth leads to nothingness. This sense of nothingness leads to despair in life. However, death and the feeling of nothingness cannot be resisted. Death is so powerful that it encounters nothing on its way. Nothing is so powerful to stand in between death and its victims.

The brook is running backwards as if it is moving on with a sense of regret that is sacred. Its regret is sacred as it mourns over the lost eternity in earthly life. The waves have their own ebb and fall, similar to the life of man. Life is a mixture of rises and falls. Every life on this earth is dependant on each other for various things. The life man runs down with respect to the passage of time. The brook runs down with the human life that is going up. The brook is sent up by the sun that runs down. And there is some unknown force that sends the sun up. This unknown force lies beyond the grasp of human intellect. The backward motion of every life towards its source makes man realize himself. Realizing oneself is the tribute of the current of life to its source. We are from nature and we form a part of nature.

Every life on this earth seems to move forward to an unknown destination. However, do not move towards a new source. Instead, they all move towards their own origin. The desire of the lovers to stay stable and healthy and to resist death is expressed in the woman's acceptance of the man's views in the end. The man also accepts the intuition of the woman. The different points of view of both the woman and the man get mingled similar to that of life becoming one with death.

## **STYLE OF FROST**

The poems of Robert Frost have an insight into New England life and the complexities of life. The facts of life become metaphors and symbols in his poems. He looks deep into the value of life and its experiences. The characters and incidents in his poems stand as the representative of humans and their experiences in their life. His poems are sensitive and modern. His poetry is characterized by the underlying integrity of language, emotion and form. He uses a casual tone with ordinary language. However, his language turns philosophical in the middle before becoming casual again in the end. His poems move from delight to wisdom.

Frost belongs to the war-torn period which made man conscious of death. He cares for the spiritual values and the idea of death figures often in his poems. He treats ordinary themes in the most unexpected way. The sight of the ant moving away from the dormant moth makes the poet wonder at the organizational power of the ant race. The brook that runs west in defiance of the power of nature makes him think about death and self-realization. However, the poems end in perfect harmony with the subject they deal with. The man and the woman who had different views on the movement of the brook in the beginning accept the ideas of each other in the end. This shows the harmony in life that result from their reliance on their self. Though their experience with the brook is strange, it is memorable. It also makes the day memorable.

Similarly, in Departmental, the casual incidence of an ant encountering a moth on its way and moving without caring much for the new creature makes the poet analyze the organizational power of the curious race of the ants. The poem narrates the serious behaviour of the ants when a member of their community dies and ends with the appreciation of the way in which they organize important matters like death.

The poems of Frost also have a dramatic quality in them. The readers can feel the thought taking birth, and growing gradually till it reaches its climax. The language becomes heavy with thought as the poem moves on. It makes use of symbols and

metaphor. The brook that runs in the direction opposite to the direction of other brooks stands as a symbol for men who search for their roots. They regret for having moved away from their sources and undertake a journey that would take them to their origin.

The language that moves from the casual tone to the philosophical before returning to the former adds beauty and gives meaning to the poetry of Robert Frost. The underlying theme of death and the search for an identity makes the poems more philosophical. Though the poems seem to be simple at the first look, they are overloaded with metaphorical meanings and semantically significant thoughts which appeals to the intellect. They give pleasure in the beginning and wisdom in the end.

### **QUESTIONS:**

1. What does the brook signify in the poem, *West-running Brook*?
2. Analyze the language of Frost.
3. Concept of life and death as expressed in the poem, *West-running Brook*.
4. How does the poem *Departmental* glorify the organizational power of the ants?
5. Compare and contrast the organizational power of the ants with that of the human.



## WALLACE STEVENS

The personal life of Wallace Stevens is not much known. His life was comparatively an easy one without any notable events. He worked as a lawyer in an insurance company and was able to maintain his job till the end of his life. Moreover, poetry was his avocation and he was able to keep his profession and avocation apart.

Born in Reading, Pennsylvania in 1879, Wallace Stevens studied at the Harvard University but left it without a degree. In the university, he met a great modern philosopher, George Santayana who encouraged him to write poetry. He then attended the New York Law School in 1901 and was admitted to the bar in 1904 when he joined the legal department of the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company. He became the vice president of the company in 1934 and held the post till his death in 1955.

Stevens married Elsie V. Kachel in 1909 and got a daughter in 1924. Though he had started writing poetry when he was a student, his first collection of poems, *Harmonium* was published only when he was forty four years old. The next thirteen years did not see any publication from the author. However, his critics differentiate his career as a poet into four phases: the Juvenilia from 1879 to 1916, the Harmonium years from 1916 to 1930, the Revaluation period from 1930 to 1945 and the Mellowed poems of 1945 to 1955. The poems written in the first phase shows the poet's great regard for his house, parents, and his Dutch heritage. The second stage is marked by wit and youthfulness. The third phase shows a complacent art despite the social and political turmoil of the age. The last phase contains discursive verse written in plain speech. His genius was recognized when he was alive. He received the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award in 1955.

### **CHARACTERISIC FEATURES OF THE POETRY OF STEVENS**

The poetry of Stevens is characterized by its originality and brilliance. Gaudiness of vocabulary, delight in sensuous experience, intellectual quality, modernist inquiry into the nature of reality and into the nature of imagination, perception, and description, obscurity and complexity are regarded as the general characters of the poetry of Stevens.

Stevens impressed his readers with his originality and heterodox ideas along with his archaic and gaudy diction that makes much use of alliteration and rhythm. He also makes use of archaic, rare and invented words. His gaudiness gave not only tone but substance to his poems. He makes use of the gaudy diction to cover up reality. His language makes his poems ambiguous. He skillfully plays with sound and sense that

makes a rare combination in his poems. They do not have any connection with each other, but they cannot stand alone. He uses the gaudy diction to express an experience which cannot be expressed in plain language.

The poetry of Stevens shows a great delight in the sensuous pleasures of the world. He did not believe in heaven after death. For him, the earth with all its variety is a heaven in itself. He considered the static heaven where the spring does not change and the ripe fruits does not fall as a boring place to live in. he was against the idea of sacrificing the present comforts and pleasures for the sake of a static heaven after our death. He finds pleasure in his own existence. His poems do not express the suffering of the world as sufferings. Sorrows are necessary to make happiness enjoyable. His poems express his enjoyment of being in this world and he sing about his happiness in full throated ease like the nightingale of Keats. He does not encourage the idea of wasting all Sundays by remembering the sacrifice of Christ and waiting for salvation.

Like most of the modern poets, Stevens did not believe in religious institutions. He felt that the religious beliefs and the philosophical systems of the modern world have lost their relevance. They prevent man from understanding reality. Therefore he asks his readers to forget about the heaven above him and to enjoy the various pleasures offered by the earthly life. The Christian lady in *Sunday Morning* is perfectly happy and comfortable with the pleasures of the earth till she remembers the sacrifice of Christ. He feels guilty of not going to church for prayers. This thought prevents her from enjoying the pleasure and comforts that she enjoyed moments before. Stevens advises her to discard all thoughts and religious feelings that make her uncomfortable.

Stevens is also hard against the philosophical systems that emphasize on abstract ideas and ignore concrete realities. He felt that changes, mortality and evil are parts of life. They have to be accepted as they make life meaningful. A static life of pleasures would be dull and difficult to live. Death makes man realize the bitter-sweetness of human life. It makes life worth living. The reality that death has no alternative must be accepted.

Stevens also makes use of satire to criticize falsehood in and evils in the society. Parody of traditional styles and modes of expression can also be found in his poetry. His imagination is based on reality. However, his ideas are abstract. His poetry also has traces of influences of the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century and the intellectual poets of the twentieth century.

The poetry of Stevens also shows a variety of moods which shift from light-hearted, ironical, plain and gaudy with respect to the themes. He has even written simple

poems without making much use of the figurative language, while most of his poems are obscure and ambiguous.

In short, style of Stevens has originality that makes him stand out as an original poet and thinker. His poems are decorated with his own perceptions of reality which make them interesting.

## **JUSTIFICATION OF THE TITLE: SUNDAY MORNING**

The poem rejects the traditional heaven and supports the idea of a heaven on the earth. It also rejects all customs and practices of the religion. It is a plea for the discarding of all illusions especially those provided by the religion. The title *Sunday Morning* refers to the first day of the week, Sunday that is reserved for prayers in the church. It also refers to a pleasant sunny day or sun-day, a day dedicated to the worship of a secular sun-god that gives light and energy to all things on earth. Stevens projects the Sun not as a god but as a god might be. Therefore the title stands for the morning of a bright sunny day and the first day of the week that glorifies the power of the sun.

## **SUNDAY MORNING**

The poem pleads for discarding all the illusions provided by religion. It juxtaposes the idea of a heavenly paradise with the paradise on earth.

A rich Christian lady, while enjoying her breakfast and the bright sunny atmosphere around her on a pleasant Sunday morning feels guilty for not going to church for prayers. The atmosphere suddenly becomes gloomy and takes her to Palestine when Jesus Christ sacrificed himself on the cross for the salvation of man. The thought of the ancient catastrophe disturbs her present comfort and pleasure when her mind recoils suddenly. She feels that there is no necessity to submit herself to the dead and refuse her present comfort.

The lady finds that the divinity that the religion teaches comes only in shadow and dreams while the reality gives her a variety of pleasure and comforts in this world. Therefore, divinity must be inside the mind and not far away from this world as is thought to be. She then decides to concentrate only in the present and accept all the joys and grieving of the earthly life without waiting for salvation in the other world after death.

The ancient Greeks considered Jove as the supreme god. However, his inhuman nature and tyrannical behaviour made the people reject him and accept a more human and

friendly god in Christ in course of time. Now the time has come for a similar rejection of Christ. Her inner self now urges her to discard all the traditional religious thoughts and enjoy the present life in the world.

The lady or the protagonist of the poem accepts that the physical world is more real than the static heaven above the earth. However, she cannot ignore the idea of the everlasting happiness in heaven after her death. The poem then narrates that the changes in the earth makes this life enjoyable. It also pictures heaven as a boring duplicate of the life on earth. It is a place where spring never changes and the ripe fruit never falls. A place where there is no change at all would be a boring one to live in. It is death that gives a meaning and adds beauty to our life on the earth. Mortality therefore becomes a gift to mankind.

The poem then introduces the concept of a paradise on earth. It has the sun that gives light and energy to all things on earth, as its centre. The sun is not portrayed as a god but as a god might be. The poem also praises the virtues of the earthly paradise. Finally, the poem rejects Christ and religious fiction completely. The tomb of Christ symbolizes nothing of importance as considered by the Christians throughout the world. It is only the grave of Christ who was crucified. The poem urges the readers to accept and enjoy the grief and joy amidst changes in life. It totally rejects the idea of any paradise above earth and life after death. Life on this earth with all its changes is more real than any static and imaginary heaven.

#### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Describe the concept of Stevens on life and death.
2. Satire in the poetry of Stevens.
3. Discuss the theme of "Sunday Morning".
4. Differentiate imagination from reality as expressed in the poetry of Stevens.
5. The conflict between the traditional ideas and modern concepts as seen in "Sunday Morning".

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## E. E. CUMMINGS

### LIFE AND WORKS

E.E. Cummings, who is best known for his unorthodox use of capitalisation and punctuation is born on October 14, 1894 in Cambridge, Massachusetts to Edward and Rebecca Haswell Clarke Cummings. He later gained popularity as a poet, painter, essayist and playwright. Cummings controlled both the look and the content of his poems using the typographic innovations. He had published more than 900 poems, two novels, and a number of essays, drawings, sketches and paintings. His poetry is considered to be one of the pre-eminent voices of the twentieth century.

Cummings got his B.A degree in 1915 and a Master's degree in English and Classical Studies in 1916 from the Harvard University. His poems got published in the Harvard Monthly and the Harvard Advocate in 1912 and in 1915. He came under the influence of avant garde writers like Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound.

The first collection of the poems appears in *Eight Harvard Poets* in 1917. He joined the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Corps in France during the First World War. On September 21, 1917, he was arrested with his friend William Slater Brown on suspicion of espionage, for openly expressing pacifist views on the war and sent to a concentration camp in Normandy. His experiences in the camp are narrated in the novel *The Enormous Room*, published in 1922. He was released from the camp in December 19, due to the untiring efforts of his politically influential father. He returned to the United States in 1918 and served in the army at Camp Devens, Massachusetts for eleven months.

He visited Paris in 1921 and remained there for two years. He traveled throughout Europe during the 1930's and 40's and met many eminent men including Pablo Picasso. The experiences during his visit to the Soviet Union in 1931 are expressed in *Eimi*, published in 1933. He worked as an essayist and portrait artist for Vanity Fair in 1924-1927. His collection of poems entitled *Tulips and Chimneys* in 1923 introduced to the public his eccentric use of grammar and punctuation.

Cummings is not only a poet but also a painter. He first received critical acclaim for his drawings and caricature published in the literary magazine *The Dial* during the 1920s. After gaining recognition as a painter, he participated in a number of art shows. He also published a collection of works in the mediums charcoal, ink, oil, and watercolor in 1931.

Cummings has also published four plays namely, *him* in 1927, *Anthropos: or, the Future of Art* in 1930, *Tom: A Ballet* in 1935, and *Santa Claus: A Morality* in 1946. In 1952, Harvard awarded him an honorary seat as a guest professor. The lectures he gave in 1952 and 1953 were later collected as *six nonlectures*. He spent the last decade of his life largely traveling, fulfilling speaking engagements, and spending time at his summer home, Joy Farm, in New Hampshire. He received numerous awards in recognition of his work during his lifetime. He died on September 3, 1962 due to a cerebral hemorrhage in North Conway, New Hampshire and was buried in Forest Hills Cemetery in Boston.

## **MY SWEET OLD ETCETERA**

In the poem, *My Sweet Old Etcetera*, Cummings criticises the American super patriots who praise the virtues of death in the war, the sacrifice and courage of the soldiers and their heroism. He says that his sweet old aunt Lucy can tell what war is for. His sister Isabel has created hundreds of socks for the soldiers fighting in the alien lands during the first world war. She also made shirts, fleaproof earwarmers, and wristers etc that would be useful to the soldiers.

The poet's mother had hoped that he will die. She firmly believes that a brave death in the war shows the courage and heroism of the soldier. His father used to talk about the privileges of going to war and fight for one's country. But the poet's soul lay quietly in the deep mud during his stay in the alien lands, dreaming of his sweet home and the love that waits for him there.

The poem uses repetition of words in large number. The word ectera is used eight times in the short poem of twenty six lines. He uses the word to denote adjectives, nouns, verb, etc. It also follows the typical Cummings style of using unorthodox punctuation. The poem doesnot capitalise the first words of the sentances. Nor does it makes use of any full stop. The only punctuation mark used in the poem is the comma that is used to separate the same kinds of words. All the words in the poem use small letters. Even the first letters of the proper nouns Lucy and Isabel are not capitalised.

The poem contrasts the thoughts of the patriots with that of the soldiers who go to the war. The aunt, sister, father and mother of the poet feel proud that he had enrolled himself in the army. However, the thoughts of the poet differs from all those people. His

mind laid at rest even in the battle front. It is detached from the happenings around him. His thoughts are far away from the field. He was only thinking of his home and the love that he would get at his home. Not the privileges of a soldier but the smile of his love's eyes and knees etc is filled in the mind and thoughts of the poet.

## **STYLE OF CUMMINGS**

E. E. Cummings was born in intensely creative. Besides being a poet, Cummings was also a fine artist, playwright and novelist. His life and art were tightly interwoven. He was influenced by notable modernists including Stein and Pound. His early work drew upon the imagist experiments of Amy Lowell. Later his visits to Paris exposed him to Dada and Surrealism, the influence of which can be found in his later works. Beginning with his years at Harvard and continuing on into the 1920s, Cummings identified with the artistic movements of cubism, dada, and surrealism.. He particularly admired the work of pablo picasso.

While some of his poetry is in the form of free verse with no concern for rhyme or any other figures of language, many of his poems have a recognizable sonnet structure of 14 lines, with an intricate rhyme scheme. A number of his poems feature a typographically exuberant style, with words, parts of words, or punctuation symbols scattered across the page. They make little sense until read aloud. Their meaning and emotion become clear only when they are read aloud. Being a painter, Cummings is able to understand the importance of presentation, and used typography to "paint a picture" in some of his poems.

The seeds of Cummings' unconventional style seem well established even in his earliest works. Cummings' first published work following *The Enormous Room* was a collection of poems entitled *Tulips and Chimneys* (1923). The collection was the public's first encounter with his characteristic and eccentric use of grammar and punctuation. Though most of his famous poems do not involve much of any odd typography or punctuation at all, they carry his unmistakable style.

The poems of cummings do not follow the conventional combinatorial rules that generate typical English sentences. This produce a jarring, incomprehensible effect on the readers. It is believed that Gertrude Stein in the early part of the century functioned as a

springboard into this aspect of his artistic development. Cummings's work shows more stylistic continuity with Stein's than with any other poet or writer in many respects.

Moreover, a number of Cummings' poems follow in part or in whole intentional misspellings and several follow phonetic spellings intended to represent particular dialects. They also make use of inventive formations of compound words such as "mud-luscious" and "puddle-wonderful".

Many of Cummings' poems address social issues and satirize society. However, they have an equal or even stronger bias toward romanticism. His poems celebrate love, sex and spring very often. His talent is extended to children's books, novels, and painting also.

Cummings has been criticized for being static in his techniques and accordingly showing a lack of artistic growth. He has also been labeled by some as a misanthrope because of his use of harsh satire. For a time there was a claim that some of his early works has traces of racism and anti-semitism overtones. However, it is more often noted by critics that although his approach to form did not often vary, his messages grew stronger, harsher, and more effortlessly romantic in his final years.

Cummings always considered himself just as much a painter as he was a poet or writer. Especially in his later years which was spent at his home in New Hampshire, Cummings would paint during the day and then write at night.

## QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the typographical distortions in the poetry of E.E. Cummings.
2. Explain the satire and irony in *My Sweet Old Etcetera*.
3. Attitude of modern men towards war as expressed in *My Sweet Old Etcetera*.

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## UNIT II

In this unit you will be acquainted with some of the contemporary American poets who have changed the literary trends in American writing. This unit will have the following lessons:

1. **ROBERT LOWELL**
2. **RANDALL JARRELL AND THEODORE ROETHKE**
3. **LANGSTON HUGHES**
4. **ANNE SEXTION**

### LESSON 1: ROBERT LOWELL

#### ROBERT LOWELL(1917-1977): BIO-NOTE

Robert Lowell is considered as the foremost American poet by many readers. The major themes of his poems are the anguish and anxieties of his own life. His ambition had been to be a poet and in university he was fortunate to have writers like Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren as classmates. His poetry developed to be complex and ambiguous during this time and his mentor Ransom accepted to publish two of Lowell's poems in Kenyou Review

In 1940 Lowell married Jean Stafford's in 1941 and then converted into Catholicism. In 1947 he divorced his wife and renounced Catholicism. He wrote his first book Land of Unlikeliness in 1944, When he was sentenced for imprisonment due to his disparaging remarks regarding the world war. He wrote this experiences in jail in the well-known poem. 'Memories of West Street and Lephe'. His first book faced a mild success. His second book, Lord Weary's Castle (1946) contains many of his finest poems. His poems in this collection are marked by a vision of apocalypse and a solution for the misery of human history. This collection reached a great success and he received Pulizer Prize, a Guggenheim Fellowship and an award from the American academy of arts and Letters. In 1947, he was appointed as a consult and in poetry at the library of congress. Well-known poems in this collection are "Mr.Felwards and the Spider", "After the surprising Conversions" and "The Qaber graveyard Nantucket". In 1949 he married Elizabeth Hardwick in 1949.

In The Mills of the Kavanaughs (1951) he followed the same compressed and allusive style developed from the poetry of Allan Tate, T.S.Eliot and the seventeenth

century metaphysical poets. In most of the poems, Lowell set his speakers in historical or contemporary spaces by using religious, classical and personal themes. Randall Jarrell, his friend thought that “Falling Asleep over the Aeneid” was the most successful poem in this collection.

After a long break Lowell published his ground-breaking work *Life Studies* in 1959. Due to nervous breakdown in 1949 he was hospitalized for a decade, During this time he was dissatisfied with his poetry and only his correspondence with William Carlos Williams revived him. In *Life Studies* Lowell wrote in a more direct way than his former work about his family background, and his troubles as a writer and husband. This style of autobiographical element was addressed by M.L.Rosenthal as being a confessional mode. The first section of this autobiographical book is in the manner of his early 1950s and second section is in prose regarding his personal experiences from childhood to the period of hospitalization. The third section devoted to a commentary on writers such as Ford Madox Ford, George Santayana, Delmore Schwartz and Hart Crane. The final section describes his personal feelings, losses and family deaths. Well-known poems in this collection are “May Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow”, “Walking in the Blue”, “Memories of West Street and Lepke and “Skunk Hour”. His *Life Studies* became a model for Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and Adrienne Rich.

*Life Studies* was followed by his work imitation in 1961. For this he received the Bollingen Translational Prize. His next work *For the Union Dead* (1964) has several of his innovations in style and some of the poems looks closer to his earlier form. Many critics argue that his poem “St. Gaudens’ Shaking Civil War relief” makes Lowell as the most important poet of his generation. He strongly opposed the Vietnam War. In order to his protest he refused an invitation from President Johnson to participate in a white house Festival of Arts. His feeling against an immoral war and theme of rebellion was presented in his plays. His trilogy *The Old Glory* (1965) based on the works of Hawthorne and Melville, and his version of Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* (1967) are the most notable plays of his.

His later works are considered as lesser achieved than of his earlier ones. His poems in *Near the Ocean* (1967) except for “Waking Early Sunday Morning” are not very great. His *Notebook 1967-68* (1968) enables him to publish his later two books *History* and for Lizzie and *Harriet*. His *The Dolphin* contains his most personal material.

In 1960s he was again hospitalized due to depression mainly because of his divorce with his wife Elizabeth Hardwick. His failure of his third marriage and old memories are reflected in his last volume *Day by Day* (1977). On September 1977 he died due to heart attack.

**PARAPHRASE OF ‘AFTER THE SURPRISING CONVERSIONS’:**

*September twenty-second*, Sir: today I answer. In the latter part of May,  
Hard on our Lord's Ascension, it began To be more sensible.  
A gentleman of more than common understanding, strict  
In morals, pious in behaviour,  
He was a man of some renown, a honored person in the town,  
And he came of melancholy parents;  
He was inclined to secret spells, for years they kept alone-  
While his uncle, was killed of it:  
Good people, but of too much or little wit.  
I preached one Sabbath on a text from Kings;  
Who shoed concernment for his soul.  
Some things in his experience were hopeful. He  
Would sit and watch the wind knocking a tree  
And praise this countryside that our Lord had created.  
Once when a poor man's heifer died, he laid  
A shilling on the doorsill;  
Even though a desire for loving shook him like a snake,  
He date not entertain much hope of his estate in heaven.  
Once we saw him sitting late behind his attic window by a light  
As he thought of terror, and he seemed  
Beyond advice or reason, for he dreamed  
That he was called to trumpet Judgment Day  
To Concord.  
Later in May he cut his throat and though the coroner  
Judged him delirious, soon a stir shook our village.  
At Jehovah's nod Satan seemed to be loose among us:  
Content was gone. All the good work was wasted. We were undone.  
The breath of God had carried out a planned

And sensible withdrawal from this land;  
The masses that were once unconcerned with doubt,  
Jumped at broad noon, and hurried with the words  
“My friend, Cut your own throat. Cut your own throat. Now! Now!”  
September twenty-second, Sir, is when the bough cracks with the unpicked apples, And at  
dawn the small-mouth bass breaks water, gorged with spawn.

This is a poem on a historical event that occurred in colonial New England. This was the time when the country was undergoing conversions and also the time when the country was filled with strife due to fundamental attitudes. The destructive religious fervor began after the sermons and speeches of Jonathan Edwards. The speaker in the poem is Edwards himself who narrating the origins and development of the event to a correspondent. The poem is based upon a letter of 1736.

The poem is a reflection of the present day religious bigotry and the line, “At Jehovah’s nod/Satan seemed more let loose amongst us”. Seems to be true in the contemporary world.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:**

**Jonathan Edwards** (1703-1758) was a Congregational preacher, and theologian. This piece from the website : <http://www.island-of-freedom.com/edwards.html> will give you a better understanding Jonathan Edwards, the religious awakening and the religious conversions which forms the base of Lowell’s poem.

Jonathan Edwards was one of the most significant religious thinkers in American history. Born October 5, 1703, in East Windsor, Connecticut Colony, Edwards was a child prodigy. At the age of ten he wrote an essay on the nature of the soul. At 13 he entered the Collegiate School of Connecticut (now Yale University) and he graduated in 1720 as valedictorian of his class. After two additional years of study in theology at Yale, he preached for eight months in New York church and then returned to Yale as a college tutor, studying, at the same time, for his master’s degree. He was ordained in 1727 and received a call to assist his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, pastor of the church at Northampton, Massachusetts Bay Colony, which had one of the largest and wealthiest congregations in the colony.

When Edwards was 26m his grandfather died, and the young man became pastor at Northampton, and remained there until 1750. He was a notable pupit orator. He was a firm believer in Calvinism and the doctrine of predestination; a tendency towards belief in Arminianism, a modified form of Calvinism, however, existed in the New England colonies. In 1731, in Boston, Edwards preached his first public attack on Arminianism and, in a sermon entitled “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence,” called for a return to rigorous Calvinism. Three years later he delivered a series of powerful sermons on the same subject in his own church; the series include the famous “Reality of Spiritual Light”, in which the preacher combined Calvinism with mysticism, religious experience directly given and experienced.

The result of Edward’s 1734-35 sermons was a religious revival in which a great number of conversions were made; he received 300 new members in to his church. Some of the converted were so obsessed by his fiery descriptions of eternal damnation that they contemplated suicide. In 1740 the British evangelist George Whitefield visited Edwards. Together, the two men started a revival movement that became known as the Great Awakening and developed into a religious frenzy engulfing all New England. The conversions were characterized by convulsions and hysteria on the part of the converts, and the harshness and appeal to religious fear in one of Edwards’s sermons, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” caused his congregation to rise weeping and moaning from their seats. By 1742 the revival movement had grown out of control, and for the next 60 to 70 years it had the effect on American religion of preventing any attempt at a liberal interpretation of doctrine.

### **COMPREHENSION:**

- Write a note on the poetry of Lowell.
- Write briefly about the major theme of Lowell, ‘After the Surprising Conversions’.
- Give the historical background of Lowell’s poem, ‘After the Surprising Conversions’.

## **LESSON 2: RANDALL JARRELL & THEODORE ROETHEKE:**

### **RANDALL JARRELL: (1914-1965): BIO-NOTE:**

Randall Jarrell was born in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1914. He studied in Vanderbilt University where he earned his bachelor's and master's degrees. He taught at Kenyon College, from 1937 to 1939 where he met John Crowe Ransom and Robert Lowell. Later he moved to the University of Texas. In 1942 his first book of poems, Blood for a Stranger, was published, and in the same year he enlisted in the Army Air Corps. He soon left the Air Corps for the army and worked as a control tower operator. This experience helped shape his consciousness and it provided a great deal of material for his poetry.

His second book, Little Friend, Little Friend was published in 1945 and this gained Jarrell a reputation as a poet. Little Friend, Little Friend was a collection of poems that dealt with the forceful fears and moral struggles of young soldiers. His later volumes revealed his great technical skill, as well as his empathy with the lives of others. It also portrayed the painful sensitivity and humane-ness of Jarrell. After the war, Jarrell accepted a teaching position at the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, and remained there, except for occasional absences to teach elsewhere, until his death. Jarrell is greatly regarded as a unrivaled literary essayist, and was also considered as the most incisive, judicious and scathing poetry critic of his generation. Randall Jarrell was killed in a car accident in 1965 at the age of fifty one.

### **Paraphrase of 'The Woman at the Washington Zoo':**

The saris go by me from the embassies.

They are Cloth from the moon and from another planet.

They look back at the leopard like the leopard.

And I feel that this print of mine, that has kept its color.

Alive through so many cleanings;

That this dull Navy I wear to work, and wear from work,

All day and night

To my bed, so to my grave, with no

Complaints, no comment;

Only I complain about my serviceable  
Body that no sunlight dyes, nor hand suffuses  
I can see  
In the eyes of animals, these beings that are trapped  
As I am trapped. They are  
Aging, but without knowledge of their age,  
They are kept safe here, knowing not of death, for death—  
Oh, bars of my own body, open, open!

The world goes by my cage and never sees me.  
And there come not to me, as come to these,  
The wild beasts, sparrows pecking the llamas' grain,  
Pigeons settling on the bears' bread, buzzards  
Tearing the meat the flied have clouded.....

Oh Vulture,  
When you come for the white rattle that the foxes left,  
And when you take off the red helmet of your head,  
When you step to me as man:  
The wild brother at whose feet the white wolves turn brown,  
To whose hand of power the great lioness stalks, purring....

You know what I was,  
You see what I am: change me, change me!  
This poem is about possibly a woman who is unhappy about her life and wishes to have a change. She thinks that she is like the animals in the Washington Zoo unhappy with her life. She feels that just as the animals live behind bars she too is forced into an imprisoned life due to the set patterns of life. She also realizes that the animals do not realize they are captive, nor that they are vulnerable to the elements, like she does. She feels like a woman who has no individuality/identity of her own.

**THEODORE ROETHKE: (1908-1963) : BIO-NOTE:**

Theodore Roethke was born in Saginaw, Michigan. His poems often present his childhood memories and about his father. Through his poems he tries to find out the elemental vision of life. He was influenced by the poetry of Walt Whitman and Dylan

Thomas, Due to the influence of Whitman, he writes poetry with lengthy lines and catalogue type narratives. His first work Open House (1941) shows influences of W.H.Auden, William Black, Emily Dickinson and John Donne and later in 1950s he consciously wrote some of his poems by following the works of Yeats. Even though he was influenced by several writers, he did not imitate their style in his works but used their style in an innovative way to explore his childhood attitudes and his relationship with his father.

Roethke began his career as a teacher at Lafayette College and later worked at Pennsylvania state University, where he met Kenneth Nurke, with whom he had along lasting friendship. In 1935 he was hospitalized due to mental illness. His illness coupled with his drinking habit developed within him a sense of self-doubt and he started to explore his self. This became an important theme in many of his poems.

Roethke started to write poetry from 1930s. His work Open House (1941) established him as a popular figure. In 1948 he published The Lost Son and Other Poems, which many consider as his great work. This Volume contains his famous poem such as “Frau Bauman, Frau Schmidt and Frau Schwartz”, “My Papa’s Waltz and “Cuttings”. In these Poems he used repressed memories of his father and his childhood days and he also attempted to connect the self, imagination, memory and nature. Some of the poems in this volume have forms and rhythms which is usually associated with childhood. This style of writing reached its height in Praise to the End! (1951). His The Walking: Poems 1933-1953 (1953) was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1954. This volume contains the often quoted poem “Four for Sir John Davis”, which has a theme similar to that of Yeats’ poem, “Among School Children”. This poem talks about ideas of memory, age and youth. In 1953 he was married to Beatrice O’ Connell, who supported him during his ill health.

In the 1950s Roethke’s career as poet took a giant stride when he received the Guggenheim Fellowship, two Ford Foundation grants and a Fulbright grant. His work Words for the Wind (1957) made him to receive many awards including the Bollingen Prize and the National Book Award. This collection contains two of his most famous poems entitled “ I knew a women”, which is a child verse and “Meditation of an Old Woman” which is a memory of his mother. In 1964 he published another volume of verse titled, The Far Field in 1964, which too received National Book Award. In his works we



can find influences of James Dickey, Seamus Heaney, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton and James Wright. Even though in his works we can find influences of several writers; he used those influences in an innovative way to present his poetry in an excellent way.

Extracts from 'The Dying Man'

*His Words*

I heard a dying man  
Say to his gathered kin,  
"My soul's hung out to dry,  
Like a fresh-salted skin;  
I doubt I'll use it again

"What's done is yet to come;  
The flesh deserts the bone,  
But a kiss widens the rose;  
I know, as the dying know,  
Eternity is now.

...

[“] I am that final thing,  
A man learning to sing”

Roethke's poem raises the notion of metaphysical existence and questions the validity of life. "The Dying Man" is a metaphorical journey that one needs to take to understand the vision of life. As Roethke puts it, humanity is bothered about misrepresenting their true selves and it is only at the time of death that one is capable of knowing the true self – bare and honest. Roethke's poem validates the notion of an endeavour and the need to broaden our vision.

### **COMPREHENSION:**

- What is the central idea of Jarrell's poem, 'The Woman at the Washington Zoo'.
- Write a note on Theodore Roethke's poetry and explain the theme of 'The Dying Man'.

## LESSON 3 : LANGSTON HUGHES:

### BIO-NOTE:

James Langston Hughes was born February 1, 1902, in Joplin, Missouri. His parents divorced when he was a small child, and his father moved to Mexico. He was raised by his grandmother until he was thirteen, when he moved to Lincoln, Illinois, to live with his mother and her husband, before the family eventually settled in Cleveland, Ohio. It was in Lincoln, Illinois, that Hughes began writing poetry. Following graduation, he spent a year in Mexico and a year at Columbia University. During these years, he held odd jobs as an assistant cook, launderer, and a busboy, and travelled to Africa and Europe working as a seaman. In November 1924, he moved to Washington, D.C. Hughes's first book of poetry, The Weary Blues, was published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1926. He finished his college education at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania three years later. In 1930 his first novel, Not Without Laughter, won the Harmon gold medal for literature.

Hughes, was influenced by writers such as Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Carl sandburg and Walt Whitman. His poetry is filled with perceptive, and colorful portrayals of black life in America from the twenties through the sixties. He wrote novels, short stories and plays, as well as poetry, and is also known for his engagement with the world of jazz and the influence it had on his writing, as in "Montage of a Dream Deferred." His life and work were enormously important in shaping the artistic contributions of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. Unlike other notable black poets of the period- Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, and Countee Cullen- Hughes refused to differentiate between his personal experience and the common experience of black America. He wanted to tell the stories of his people in ways that reflected their actual culture, including both their suffering and their love of music, laughter, and language itself. Langston Hughes passed away in 1967.

Besides poetry, Hughes also wrote eleven plays and countless works of prose, including the well-known "Simple" books: Simple Speaks His Mind, Simple Stakes a Claim, Simple Takes a Wife, and Simple's Uncle Sam. He edited the anthologies The Poetry of the Negro and The Book of Negro Folklore, wrote an acclaimed autobiography (The Big Sea) and co-wrote the play Mule Bone with Zora Neale Hurston.

## **PARAPHRASE OF 'MONTAGE OF A DREAM DEFERRED'**

### **Warning : Augmented**

Don't let your dog curb you!

Curb your doggie

..... You may play folks cheap,

Act rough and tough,

But a dog can tell

When you're full of stuff.

Them little old mutts

Look all scraggly and bad,

But they got more sense

Than some people ever had.

Cur dog, fice dog, Kerry blue-

Just don't let your dog curb you

### **Motto**

I play it cool

And dig all jive.

That;s the reason

I stay alive.

My motto,

....is

Dig And Be Dug

In Return.

### **Dead in There**

Sometimes

A night funeral

Carries home

A cool bop daddy.

Hearse and flowers

...He'll never hype

Another paddy.

It's hard to believe,

But dead in there,

He'll never lay a

Hype nowhere!

He's my ace-boy,

Gone away.

*Wake up and live!*

He used to say.

...

### **Final Curve**

When you turn the corner

And you run into yourself

Then you know that you have turned

All the corners that are left.

### **Boogie: 1 a.m.**

Good evening, daddy

I know you've heard

The boogie-woogie rumble

Of a dream deferred

...

### **Tell Me**

Why should it be my loneliness,

Why should it be my song,

Why should it be my dream deferred

overlong?

### **Good Morning**

Good morning, daddy!

I was born here, he said,

Watched Harlem grow

Until colored folks spread

from river to river

....

up from Cuba Haiti Jamaica,

In buses marked New York

From Georgia Florida Louisiana

To Harlem Brooklyn the Bronx

but most of all to Harlem

dusky sash across Manhattan

I've seen them come dark

    Wondering

wide-eyed

dreaming

”””

What happens

To a dream deferred?

Daddy, ain't you heard?

### **Harlem**

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

Like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore-

And then run?

...

May be it just sags like a heavy load.

Or does it *explode*?

### **Same in Blues**

I said to my baby,

Baby, take it slow.

I can't, she said,

I can't! I got to go!

*There's a certain*

*amount of traveling,*

*in a dream deferred.*

Lulu said to Leonard,  
I want a diamond ring.  
Leonard said to Lulu,  
You won't get a goddamn thing

*A certain amount  
Of nothing  
in a dream deferred.*

Daddy,daddy,daddy,  
All I want is you.  
You can have me, baby-  
but my lovin' days is through.

*A certain amount  
of impotence  
in a dream deferred.*

...

### **Comment on Curb**

You talk like they  
don't kick dreams  
around downtown.

I expect they do –  
But I'm talking about  
Harlem to you

### **Democracy**

Democracy will not come  
Today, this year  
Nor ever

....

I have as much right  
As the other fellow has  
To stand

On my two feet  
And own the land.

I tire so of hearing people say,  
Let things take their course.  
Tomorrow is another day.  
I do not need my freedom when I'm dead.

...

Freedom  
Is a strong seed  
Planted In a great need.  
I live here, too.  
I want freedom  
Just as you.

### **Island**

Between two rivers,  
North of the park,  
Like darker rivers  
The streets are dark.

Black and white,  
Gold and brown –  
Chocolate-custard  
Pie of a town.

Dream within a dream  
Our dream deferred.  
Good morning, daddy!  
Ain't you heard?

The above poem is a montage that is a set of different ideas that are put together. The poem discusses the nature of class consciousness, racism and the issue of colour. Most of the ideas in the poem are self-explanatory.

### **COMPREHENSION:**

- Langston Hughes' central purpose in writing was, in his own words, "to explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America." How does 'Montage' reflect this issue.
- What effect does the image of rivers create in the Black's history? Why are the rivers ancient and dusky?
- What is the dream Hughes refers to in "Harlem"? Why might explode rather than dry up? Why should the poem be called "Harlem"?

### **LESSON 4: ANNE SEXTON: (1928-74)**

#### **BIO-NATE:**

Anne Sexton was born in Newton, to the family of a wool merchant. She had her formal education at the same institute as a professor. She is along with Sylvia Plath and Robert Lowell considered to be a confessional poet. Her contemporary poems present the problems of identity for women and also portray the society and gender barriers that women face in a society.

In 1948, she married Alfred Sexton. She had a mental breakdown with the birth to her first two daughters in 1953. She was hospitalized for depression, anxiety and suicidal impulses. Then in 1955, when again she gave birth to her second daughter, her mental trauma increased and her poems at this period, namely, "Music Swims Back to Me", "Ringing the Bells" and "Unknown Girl in the Maternity Ward" show her anxiety and ailment. She was mentally depressed and her doctors thinking that her poetry may be therapeutic asked her to attend poetry workshop. In 1957, she met her life long



friend Maxine Kumesi at poetry class. Along with Maxine she co-authored four children's story books. Later she attended several poetry workshops and conferences. Meanwhile Sexton's parents passed away. Her poems belong to this period presents her feelings about her father. In these poems she presented her love and anger towards her father.

Sexton's first book To Bedlam and Part Way Back (1960) which deals with her powerful emotions such as child bearing, experiences in hospital, idea of death, anxiety and about her family members, was nominated for the National Book award. Her themes and her way of writing gained her immediate attention from the reader. In some of the poems in this collection, she addressed herself as a witch.

Her second book All my Pretty Ones appeared in 1962 and has Kafka's letters as its epigraph, "A book should serve as the ax for the frozen sex within us". This reveals how her poems have have direct confrontation with its subject matter. This book too was nominated for a National Book Award; and her third book, Live or Die, has themes of sickness and growth. And was selected for the award of the Pulitzer Prize in 1967. Her next collection presents once again her personal difficulties, love affairs and anxiety in a mere effective way than her first book. In 1969 she published her play Mercy Street which received a Guggenheim fellowship.

Sexton's Transformations (1971) retells Grimms number of fairy tales like 'Snow white' and 'Cinderella' by making use of contemporary references in 1972. It contains poems which presents her personal and religious themes. In 1974, she committed suicide and her unpublished poems were collected together and published as The Death Notebook, in 1981 posthumously. Sexton's biography was published by Diana Middle Brook in 1991 with the title Anne Sexton: a Biography.

### **PARAPHRASE OF 'THE FARMER'S WIFE':**

From the hodge porridge of their country lust,  
their local life in Illinois, where all their acres look  
like a sprouting broom factory, ....

Tonight he'll once again say, honey bunch let's go  
and she will not say how there  
must be more to living than this brief bright bridge  
of the noisy bed or even  
the feathery touch of him, like a heavy god grown light,

she still wants that ole pantomime of love  
it leaves here still alone, built back again at last,  
Her mind is apart from him, living  
her own self in her own words  
she is hating the sweat of the house  
that they retain when they finally lie  
each in separate dreams  
she watches him,  
still strong in the blowzy bag  
of his usual sleep while  
her young years bungle past  
their same marriage bed  
and then she wishes him cripple, or poet,  
or even lonely, or sometimes,  
better, dead.

This is a poem that discusses the patriarchal hold of the lover, husband or partner. The poem is rich in symbolism. The use of terms such as ‘hodge-podge’ refers to the country and the porridge served as breakfast. The line ‘They lie each in separate dreams...’ reveals how individual identities could be possible shaped when they lived separate lives. The poem also uses similes such as ‘acres look like a sprouting broom factory...’ and ‘touch of him like a heavy god grown light’ These indicate how the farm is infested with weeds and also the way the wife is treated like a toy and not as a partner or friend respectively. To increase the emphasis the poem also uses alliterative words such as ‘Brief bright bridge’ and personification such as the sweat of the house they keep. ...

The poem is about the married life and the havoc it causes if there is no understanding and compromise within it.

### **COMPREHENSION:**

- Write a note on the poetry of Anne Sexton.
- Write a summary of the poem, ‘The Farmer’s Wife’

#### **Poetry: General Reading**

Robert Lowell --- After the Surprising Conversions

Randal Jarrell--- The Woman at the Washington Zoo

Theodore Roethke – The Dying Man

Langston Hughes – Montage of a Dream Deferred

Anne Sexton--- The Farmer’s Wife

## Unit – III

### NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born to Captain Nathaniel Hathorne and Elizabeth Clarke Manning Hathorne on 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1804. His father died when he was four years old and the family had to move in with his mother's relatives, the Mannings. There, they came under the close scrutiny of his grandmother and uncles, Richard and Robert Manning. During his period, his mother began to withdraw in to a life time of near seclusion.

As a boy, Nathaniel was not fond of going to school. A foot injury helped him to avoid going to school regularly. At home, he spent his time in reading Shakespeare, Spenser and Bunyan. Shortly, Mrs. Hathorne moved the small family of her son and two daughters to the banks of Sebago Lake, near the town of Raymond, Maine. Nathaniel was sent to school again. However, he enjoyed his life by being close to nature with his activities of fishing and hunting all day long. This idyllic life continued till 1819, when he returned to Salem to prepare for entrance into college.

Nathaniel entered Bowdin College in 1821. One of his classmates, Horatio Bridge later offered Boston publisher Samuel G. Goodrich a guarantee against loss if he would publish Hawthorne's first collection of short stories. Hawthorne graduated in 1825. Till 1825, he spent much of his time in isolation in an upstairs room in his mother's home on Charter Street in Salem.

Hawthorne seemed to have mastered his craft during his seclusion and published his first novel, *Fanshaws: A Tale* in 1828, at his own expense. However, he was dissatisfied at his work and recalled the book and destroyed all the copies he could find. He published his first short story, *The Hollow of the Three Hills* in the *Salem Gazette* in 1830. By 1837, he had completed more than two thirds of the tales he was to write in his lifetime. Unfortunately, he was unable to get a publisher till 1837, when Bridge backed the publication of the first volume of *Twice Told Tales*.

The modest success of his first collection of stories did not provide him with a sufficient income to support his family. When he was engaged to Sophia Peabody in 1839, he found it necessary to find a better paying job. So he secured a job as a measurer of salt and coal in the Custom House at Boston. Unfortunately, he was not able to concentrate in writing in that period. Later he resigned the job in 1841 and invested in the Brook Farm

Community at West Roxbury. This was also unsuccessful and he left the community in the same year.

Hawthorne managed to reach an understanding about the rate of pay for future contributions to the *Democratic Review* and then married Sophia in 1842. Their life in the *Old Manse* was both happy and productive as he was able to contribute regularly to the *Democratic Review*. He also wrote some of the tales that later appeared in *Mosses from an Old Manse* published in 1846.

Despite the writing successes, financial problems continued to plague the family and Hawthorne had to work as a government official in 1846. Though the job consumed much of his time, he utilized the experiences when describing the “Custom House” in *The Scarlet Letter*.

Hawthorne lost his job in 1848. This, along with the loss of his mother in 1849, placed both financial and emotional strains on him. However, with the support of Sophia, he managed to utilize the time fruitfully and finish *The Scarlet Letter*. Unfortunately, certain passages from the “Custom House” section of the novel made a number of Salemites angry towards the writer and he had to move to the “Little Red House” in Lennox, Massachusetts where he got acquainted with Herman Melville. There, he wrote *The House of the Seven Gables* and some other minor works which were published during 1851. Following a dispute with the land owner, he moved to West Newton and in 1852, he published *The Blithedale Romance* and *A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys*. Later, in May 1852, the Hawthornes bought a house of their own in Concord and named it “The Wayside”. There, he wrote *Tanglewood Tales* and *A Life of Pierce*, which was rewarded with an appointment as United States Consul at Liverpool, England.

His experience as a Consul provided him with the source material for *Our Old Home*, published in 1863. In 1857, he resigned his job and moved to Italy. His final, complete work of fiction, *The Marble Faun* is based on his visits to the art museums and historical sites in Rome and Florence. It was published in England as *Transformation*. In 1860, the Hawthornes left Liverpool to Boston.

Back home, the life of Hawthorne was mixed with pleasure and frustration. His life was settled into a somewhat comfortable routine when he fell ill. He tried to improve his health by visiting places. Finally, in Plymouth, New Hampshire, he died in his sleep on May 19, 1864. He was buried in the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery at Conrad.

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## THE SCARLET LETTER

### Plot

In June 1642, the town of Boston has gathered to witness the sentence of Hester Prynne, who has been found guilty of adultery. She has been sentenced to wear a scarlet A on the bodice of her dress. Furthermore, she must stand on the scaffold for three hours, exposed to the scorn of her fellow people of the town. Most of the women of the town are angered by the beauty and the quiet dignity of Hester, as she approaches the scaffold and felt that her punishment is not sufficient enough for the nature of her crime. However, Hester has a good reputation in the past which influenced the judges to grant her some leniency in her sentence.

Hester's family was once wealthy in England. Later, when they lost their money, her parents arranged her marriage with an old scholar with a slight physical deformity. She lived in Amsterdam with her husband for some time before they decided to settle in the American colonies.

Hester arrived alone in Boston about two years ago, ahead of her husband who stayed back to settle things in Amsterdam. She never heard about him afterwards and assumed that he was lost at sea. She led a quiet life until the disgrace and therefore the judges decided to lighten her sentence.

Standing on the scaffold, Hester looks out over the crowd and saw a small misshapen man whom she recognizes as her long-lost husband. Unable to control her emotions, she pressed her baby to her bosom so tightly that it uttered a cry of pain. The stranger inquires a townsman and got the reason for Hester's punishment and vows to find the identity of the man who fathered Hester's child.

Meanwhile, Reverend Wilson and the pastor of her church, Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale urge Hester to reveal the name of her "fellow sinner", but in vain. Frustrated, Reverend Wilson gave a long lecture on the general topic of sin, stressing Hester's violation of the moral law. The child wailed and screamed throughout the ordeal.

Back in her prison cell, Hester becomes nervous and the jailor, Master Bracket is unable to control her. So he seeks the help of Roger Chillingworth, the misshapen old physician to calm both Hester and her child. The jailor does not know that it is Master Prynne, Hester's missing husband.

Chillingworth first treats Pearl, Hester's daughter. Speaking to Hester, he admits his mistake that he had betrayed her budding youth with his decaying old age. He demands to know the name of the child's father. Hester refuses and so he wants her to promise that she will never reveal their relationship to the world. He also warns her that if she ever does so he will kill Pearl's Father.

When released from prison, Hester settles in a small cottage at the end of the town, near the shore. She earns her living by doing a fancy needlework. Her extraordinary talent in the art made her handiwork "the fashion". She always wore the somber dress of the puritans whereas the clothes of the child are always bold and richly decorated.

Hester is troubled by the unusual character of her daughter. The child is at first fascinated by the scarlet A on her mother's dress. As she grows older, she becomes a capricious and unruly child and is hard to discipline. Her conduct in the town made the people believe that she is a "demon offspring" and the conservative members of the church suggest the removal of Pearl from Hester. When Hester hears the rumours, she fears that Pearl may be taken away from her. So, she meets Governor Bellingham and speaks to him about her fears. The governor has three guests at that time and he asks one of his guests, Reverend Wilson to see if Pearl "hath had enough Christian nurture as befits a child of her age.

Though Pearl has been taught the basic elements of catechism, she makes the situation desperate for Hester by refusing to answer to the questions of Reverend Wilson. When the child was about to be taken away from her, she appeals to Reverend Dimmesdale, another of the guests of the governor's guests who persuades the governor to let Hester keep the child. Pearl seems to be strangely attracted towards Dimmesdale. The third guest, Chillingworth was watching the proceedings.

While leaving the Governor's mansion, Heater meets Mistress Hibbins who was later hanged for being a witch. She asks Hester whether she is willing to go into the forest that evening. Hester declines her invitation but reveals that had Pearl been taken away from her, she would have been willing to accompany the witch and sign her name in blood in the Black Man's book.

Since his arrival in the town, Chillingworth has become intimately acquainted with Reverend Dimmesdale. The health of Dimmesdale began to fail immediately after Hester was punished in the scaffold and the people of the town were happy to have an old physician take up lodgings in the house of Dimmesdale. The close contact enabled Chillingworth to know the minister's intimate emotions and he suspects that Dimmesdale's

illness is a result of some unconfessed guilt rather than physical infliction. He applies psychological pressure on Dimmesdale and tried to discover the secret sin that is troubling him. In the meantime, he begins to suspect that Dimmesdale is Pearl's father and his suspicions are apparently confirmed when he found something startling on the pale chest of the sleeping minister one evening. Immediately, his behaviour towards the minister changed and he becomes "a chief actor in the minister's interior world".

Tormented by his guilty conscience, Dimmesdale goes to the square where Hester was punished seven years before and stands on the scaffold at night, unseen by others. Reverend Wilson, returning from the deathbed of Governor Winthrop crosses the place without noticing Dimmesdale. A little later, Hester, who has also been returning from the same deathbed, comes there and stands with him, united by Pearl in the middle. He admits his guilt and also the lack of courage to do so in public. He also refuses Pearl's request to stand with them on the scaffold the following day. Suddenly a meteor flashes across the sky in the form of a gigantic A in the sky. In the light, Pearl notices Chillingworth watching them. Dimmesdale asks Hester the identity of Chillingworth who had been torturing him for long, but she remains silent owing to her promise to her former husband in the beginning of the novel.

Dimmesdale's health deteriorated rapidly and Hester decides to meet Chillingworth and obtain a release from her vow of silence about his identity. However, Chillingworth refuses to pardon Dimmesdale and allow her to take her promise back.

Several days later, Hester meets Dimmesdale in the forest, on his way home from a Reverend Eliot, a missionary to the Indians. She tells him the identity of Chillingworth and asks him to be aware of the old physician's desire for revenge. She also convinces him to leave Boston and to start a new life somewhere and promises him to be with him in the new place. Hoping to begin life anew, she removes the scarlet A from her dress but Pearl compels her to fix it back.

On his return to the town, Dimmesdale is seized by a number of irrational thoughts. Eventually, he gets acquainted with Mistress Hibbins, the witch. However, he fears that he had sold himself to the devil and wants to make amends. On Election Day, when the new governor takes office, the people assembled in the square to watch the parade. The captain of the ship in which Hester has arranged for passage to Bristol comes to the square and informs her that Chillingworth would join them in the ship.



The crowd listens to the most inspired sermons that they have ever heard from Dimmesdale. Then the procession leaves the church. Dimmesdale walks with much difficulty, refusing the offers of help from Reverend Wilson.

The procession reaches the square and Dimmesdale sees Hester and Pearl at the foot of the scaffold. Chillingworth attempts to prevent the minister from doing anything unexpected but in vain. Hester helps Dimmesdale to ascend the scaffold, where he stands with Hester and Pearl. He then confesses to the astonished crowd that he is Pearl's father. He tears the ministerial band from his chest so that all people can see the evidence of his sin. Then, he collapses and falls down on the platform. Later, witnesses swear that they saw a stigma in the form of a scarlet A upon his chest.

Hester leaves Boston following the death of Dimmesdale. Chillingworth also dies shortly, leaving a great deal of wealth to Pearl. Hester returns to Boston several years later and engages herself in the service of others. When she dies, she is buried near the grave of Dimmesdale, but not so close that their dust can mingle. A single slate tombstone serves for both graves.

## **CHARACTERS**

### **HESTER PRYNNE**

Hester Prynne, a young, tall and beautiful lady comes from a noble family which was once rich in England. In Boston, she is sentenced to wear a scarlet A on the bodice of her dress and stand on the scaffold for three hours for her sin of adultery. She bears the punishment with courage and dignity. Her pride sustains her to face the scorn of her fellow people of the town.

The puritans of the seventeenth century Massachusetts considered adultery to be a serious crime and punished it with death. But, Hester is projected as a victim. She is a victim of her youth and circumstances. She marries Roger Chillingworth, an old misshapen man without any love for him. She lands in Boston ahead of her husband. She does not hear anything about him after her arrival in Boston and assumes that he is lost at sea. She led a quiet life until the time of her disgrace on the scaffold.

The sin of Hester is a sin of passion and not a sin of intellect. She yields to the love of Dimmesdale and faces the consequences with courage while her fellow sinner lacks the courage to admit his sin to the public. Her sin is not consciously done. Her deep love for Dimmesdale makes her ignore the puritan code of morals.

Hester is bold enough to acknowledge her sin. She embroiders the symbol of shame and wears it long after she could have removed it. She also dresses her daughter Pearl in scarlet when she goes to meet the governor to plead for her. She does not try to hide anything and her salvation lies in truth.

The sin of Hester and its punishment made her strong. Shame, despair and solitude taught her to be prepared for everything that comes on her way. The bitter experiences in her life made her a woman capable of helping others and she turns from being a condemned one to a respectable lady in course of time with her pride, patience and dignity.

### **ARTHUR DIMMESDALE**

Arthur Dimmesdale is young, pale and physically delicate. He is very sensitive with large melancholy eyes and a tremulous mouth. He is well educated and has a philosophical turn of mind. Yet, he remains modest as an ordained minister and his sermons influence the congregation more than the words of anybody else. He is a devoted servant of god. He is passionate in his religion and effective in the pulpit. But personally, he suffers from the sin of adultery and his inability to admit the truth.

Dimmesdale makes love to Hester but when she is punished for the crime, he lacked the courage to acknowledge his sin. This concealment of his guilt becomes the worst of all sins and makes him suffer till the end. Being a respectable minister of the congregation, he urges his people to confess their sins and repent for them. However, he knows that he himself is unable to confess his sin of adultery and repent for that openly. This conscience torments him to his end.

Dimmesdale realizes that it is not right to conceal his sin. However, he is not able to bring himself to confess his sin and repent. So he punishes himself secretly by lashing himself with a whip till he is bloody. He also allows Chillingworth to make him feel guilty until he almost goes crazy. His sense of guilt torments him and his suffering becomes greater when he sees Hester sparing him and accepting the shame with a calm dignity.

Dimmesdale is a weak man who yearns to be a perfect. He hates himself for his sin and his lack of courage. However, after seven long years of struggle, he overcomes his weakness and confesses his sin on the scaffold.

The central struggle in “The Scarlet Letter” is the sufferings of Dimmesdale. While all the other characters in the novel occupy fixed positions, the minister must reverse his actions of seven years and express the truth that is tormenting him. This reversal marks his victory over himself and the climax of the novel.

## **ROGER CHILLINGWORTH**

Roger Chillingworth is small, thin and slightly deformed with one shoulder higher than the other. He is old and unattractive. However, he has a look of calm intelligence and dim eyes with a strange penetrating power. His thirst for knowledge makes him live as a lonely scholar who has cut himself off from the world of other men. He spends most of his time in his study even after his marriage with Hester. Though he has a vast knowledge of various subjects, he specializes in alchemy and medicine.

Chillingworth was held a captive by the Indians for a year and when he returns to civilization, he sees his wife standing on the scaffold with a baby in her hands that was not his. Chillingworth learns about the adultery of his wife and vows to take revenge on the man who fathered the child.

Chillingworth was selfish when he married the lovely, young Hester who did not love him. Later, when he learns about his wife’s adultery, he vows to find out her fellow sinner and take revenge on him. He spends most of his waking hours in tormenting the troubled mind of Arthur Dimmesdale. In his attempt to destroy the sanity of the minister by tormenting him psychologically, he destroys himself. In the beginning Chillingworth tries to find out the secret fault that ails the minister and when he finds the scarlet A on the chest of the sleeping minister, his attitude towards him changes and he behaves with him in a cruel manner.

When Hester meets him and asks him to permit her to take back her promise of silence so that she can reveal his identity to Dimmesdale, she understands that he is not ready to pardon the minister. He behaves in a devilish manner with Dimmesdale while pretending to be his friend and physician. He feels that the minister has made him a fiend. However, it is he who sacrifices his human nature in his thirst for revenge. This makes his sin greater than that of the sin of others. Dimmesdale says that the sin of the physician is blacker than his own as he has violated the sanctity of human heart. In the end the author

makes it plain that the fate of Chillingworth was the most horrible of the three because his sin was the blackest.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. Discuss the use of symbols in “The Scarlet Letter”.
2. Analyse the style of Nathaniel Hawthorne.
3. Describe in detail, the agony of Dimmesdale from the opening scene to the climax of the novel.
4. Discuss Pearl as a symbol and device to work on the conscience of both Hester and Dimmesdale.
5. Analyse the scaffold scenes at different periods of time in the novel.
6. What are the sins committed by Chillingworth and discuss its effects.

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## MARK TWAIN

Mark Twain is the pen name of Samuel Langhorne Clemens. He was born on 30<sup>th</sup> November, 1835 in a little town of Florida, Missouri. His family moved to Hannibal, a small town on the Mississippi river about 80 miles from St. Louis, when he was four years old. The town had a population of about five hundred people. It is dusty and quiet, surrounded by forests and Twain uses his knowledge of the place which he got as a child in his novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The fascinating steam boats that passed on the river daily became the subject matter in his *Life on the Mississippi*. The portrayal of St. Petersburg in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is a recreation of Hannibal.

Twain's father, a lawyer by profession is a highly intelligent man and a strict disciplinarian. However, he was not successful in his profession. His mother had a natural sense of humour and was highly emotional in character. Her sense of humour and her love for animals and unfortunate human beings influenced Twain. Though the family is not wealthy, his childhood was apparently a happy one. The death of his father when he was eleven years old made him an apprentice printer and then a printer in Hannibal and New York City for the next ten years. He left home when he was seventeen and then returned after fifteen years to fulfill his boyhood dream of becoming a steamboat pilot on the Mississippi river. He also served as a volunteer soldier for a short time in a confederate cavalry unit at the beginning of the civil war. Later, he went to Nevada prospecting for gold and lost all his savings in mining stock. His experiences in Nevada are expressed in his book *Roughing It*, published in 1872.

Twain worked as a newspaper reporter during the last three years of the civil war and contributed sketches and stories to magazines under his pseudonym. His *Jumping Frog of Calaveras Country* in 1865 helped him establish himself as a writer. *The Innocents Abroad*, published in 1869 resulted from his experience on a cruise to the Mediterranean and Jerusalem during his tenure as a reporter. *Life on the Mississippi* in 1883 and *The adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in 1884 marked the artistic height of his productivity. He married the daughter of a wealthy businessman and settled in life in 1871. He also established himself as one of the best-known public lecturers in America with his skill in humorous oratory. The last twenty years of his life were marked by personal misfortunes and disasters which caused a bitterness that is reflected in his later works. He died in 1910.

## THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN

### Plot

*Huckleberry Finn* is an adventure tale with characters familiar from *Tom Sawyer*. It can be considered a sequel to *Tom Sawyer* and the novel portrays the frontier days in the Mississippi valley with its petty problems and superstitions. It also narrates the ways of the folk in a realistic and a satirical manner.

The readers have already familiar with Huckleberry Finn through *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and Huck goes on to narrate his own story. He is the son of the town drunkard. Huck was adopted by Widow Douglas and her sister, Miss Watson, who wants to civilize him. Earlier, Huck has lived a carefree life. He need not go to the school regularly. He can smoke like the Indians whenever he wishes to do so. But now, the condition has changed altogether as Widow Douglas and Miss Watson try to discipline him. He is expected to go to the school regularly and keep himself clean. But Huck prefers the free and easy manner of living wild.

When Huck's father comes to know of his son's fortune, he kidnaps him and held him a prisoner in a shack across the river. He also beats Huck like a brute and Huck realizes that his father would kill him if he does not escape. So he arranges the matters in such a way that it appears as if he has been murdered and then goes to Jackson's island and hides there.

Huck meets Jim, the slave who has escaped from the house of Miss Watson in the island. Huck promises to keep the presence of Jim a secret. He notices the men who come in search of Jim and the two escapes from the place in a raft which they had discovered earlier. They go to the Ohio River and then travel north towards the free states. They travel during the night and hide during the day. In the course of their journey, they caught in a storm and they search for a canoe as their raft cannot go upstream. Before they could find a canoe, their raft is damaged by a steamboat.

Huck goes to the shore where he is caught by the Grangerford men who are having a feud with the family of the Shepherdsons. They believe the story of Huck that he fell overboard off a steamboat. He tells his name as George Jackson and stays with them till he meets Jim again with a new raft that he had prepared for their journey. Before leaving the place he witnesses the death of many people from both the families in an outbreak of the feud.

Huck and Jim continued their journey in the raft. On the way they happen to accommodate two knaves who call themselves a duke and a king. The knaves make use of various tricks to cheat the townspeople of their money. Once the knaves discover that a Peter Wilks has died, leaving a large sum of money to two brothers who are expected to arrive at any time. They try to pose as the brothers and rob the family of their money. However, Huck spoils their attempt by exposing the knavery to one of the nieces of Wilks. When they escape from the town, the king and the duke sell Jim to Silas Phelps as they are desperately in need of money.

Huck hides the raft and sets for the Phelps farm. There he is mistaken to be Tom who is expected to arrive on the same day. He meets Tom on the way and they decide that Tom would act as his cousin Sid while Huck remains as Tom. They plan many fantastic and ridiculous plans and put them into effect in order to free Jim. Unfortunately, at the moment of escape, Tom is shot in his leg and Jim decides to give up his freedom in order to help nurse Tom. Later, Jim is arrested and Tom and Huck are taken to the plantation of the Phelps. Aunt Sally, the sister of Aunt Polly nurses Tom back to good health. He then reveals the truth that Jim was set free before two months by Miss Watson in her will. The real identity of Tom and Huck are revealed by Aunt Polly.

Tom feels proud of his wound and wears the bullet around his neck. Aunt Sally wants to adopt Huck and “civilise” him but he does not want to be caught amidst the civilized people and so he heads out for a new and unknown territory.

Despite the dramatic portrayal of man’s inhumanity towards his fellow beings and the hypocrisy of his professed virtues, “Huckleberry Finn” has a note of the resilient spirit of Huck’s instincts that were not taught by others and also the growth of a genuine friendship between Huck and Jim despite the difference in their races.

## **CHARACTERS**

### **HUCKLEBERRY FINN**

Similar to Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn is one of America’s best loved fictional characters. He has been the subject of various critical studies and interpretation.

The novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is filled with humour. However, the narrator and protagonist, Huckleberry Finn has no sense of humour. He is literal minded. He fails understand and enjoy even the simple jokes that are told and enjoyed by other men. He is kind at heart and feels sorry for the people who waste and lose their life

in feuds. He narrates the events that he sees and hears without any exaggeration. His narration is straight forward and realistic. He does not even comment on the incidents and people.

Huck is practical and natural in his character. He also has a good common sense. His terrible experiences with his drunkard father have made him adaptable to any situation. He is able to adjust himself to the ways of life in the house of widow Douglas but changes quickly once he is out in the wilderness. He could act well with a basic common sense in all situations.

Huck also has a good inventive power. He is able to invent various stories that people believe whenever he is by other people on his journey to the Free State with Jim. He is also shrewd like any other boy in the frontier. He is able to identify the motives of other people like the knaves who tell him that they are a king and a duke.

Huck is sympathetic to his fellow beings. The whole adventure in the novel takes place in his attempt to save Jim and free him from the people who are searching for him. His love for Jim is extra ordinary. He tries his best to save Jim and set him free from his slavery. He finally succeeds in his attempt. The maturity of Huck is expressed in his relationship with Jim. He also takes pity on the knaves and saves them from the angry crowd. He takes them with him in the raft but when they try to fool the Wilks family and rob them of their money, he is moved by the plight of the Wilks girls and spoils their plan by revealing their identity to them. However, he feels sorry for them when they were chased away by the people after the disclosure of their treachery.

Huck loves the easy and free way of living wild. When Aunt Sally want to adopt him and civilize him, he realizes that he cannot stand it and heads out in search of a new territory where he can have his own way of life without the compulsion of anyone else.

## **JIM**

Jim is the major figure in the novel next to Huckleberry Finn. Huck knows the slave of Miss Watson in St. Petersburg itself. But he learns to appreciate Jim as a human being only in Jackson's island and during their trip down the river.

In the beginning, Jim is portrayed as a person filled with superstitions. However, the fact that they are based on his common sense, practicability and the knowledge of the environment is expressed only in the Islands. His unselfish love for his family, his dedication towards his friends, Huck and Tom and his patience to his sufferings are his



fine attributes. He is even willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of others, a fine quality of his character, which is evident when he takes on Huck's duties as they float down the river. Moreover, he is ready to give up his freedom to nurse Tom when he was wounded in their attempt to free him. This unselfish nature of Jim made Huck to help him to gain his freedom.

### **TOM SAWYER**

Tom Sawyer represents the values of a traditional society from which Huck tries to escape. He conforms himself to the views of the traditional society to which belongs. But he is highly imaginative among all the characters in the novel. However, his ideas and words are based upon the romantic stories that he reads. He respects the society and conforms himself to its values and views. He does not go out of the ways of the society in any matter. He cannot function without a society. He always imitates something from the books that he reads. His plans are always extravagant, absurd and ridiculous.

### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Compare the characters of Tom and Huck.
2. How does the experience of Huck contribute to his education?
3. Comment on Huck's rejection of the civilized society.
4. Explain the symbolism of the river in "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn".
5. Discuss the relationship between Huck and Jim and their love for each other.

## HENRY JAMES

### LIFE AND WORKS

Henry James was born in 1843 and brought up in New York City amidst an atmosphere of affluence and intellectual activities. His grandfather, an Irish immigrant in America had amassed a great fortune and the preceding generations were not under pressure to earn money for their livelihood and they turned to philosophy and writing. James' father denounced the conventional careers and devoted himself to a life of study and travel. He was a close friend of Emerson and other transcendentalists. He also formed the member of a small but influential theatrical group which followed the Swedish mystic Swedenborg. He wanted his sons to be unconventional and free like himself.

Henry James had a succession of tutors and governesses and attended several exclusive academies till he became twelve years old. The family went on a European tour when he was twelve, which gave him a variety of experiences and also a chance to attend schools in Europe. He read a lot in his youth. His family settled in the fashionable city of Newport, Rhode Island and then in Cambridge. He attended the Harvard Law School for a short period. He began his career as a writer in 1864 and devoted himself single mindedly for the purpose.

James went abroad in 1869, at the age of twenty six. He was able to contrast the behaviour of the fellow Americans during their travels with that of the long established codes of manners of the Europeans. He eventually chose the new world as his home but did never forget that he was an American. He lived mainly in England after 1869 and established his permanent residence in London in 1876. He felt that England was the best place for living and writing. He wanted to confuse the readers about his identity between an Englishman writing about the Americans and an American writing about the English. He died in 1916.

The works of Henry James include *Roderick Hudson* in 1875, *The American* in 1877, *Watch and Ward* and *The Europeans* in 1878, *Confidence* in 1880, *The Portrait of a Lady* in 1881, *The Bostonians* in 1886 *The Ambassadors* in 1903, *The Golden Bowl* in 1904 among others. Though he did not enjoy wide popularity in his lifetime, he was acknowledged by their contemporaries as their master. His fiction reveals the most complex psychological motivations that animate men, the social situations that mould them, and the moral dilemmas from which they emerge enhanced or diminished.

## **THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY**

*The Portrait of a Lady* is the third in Henry James's group of fictional American expatriations. The protagonist, Isabel Archer is a young girl from Albany, who moves on to England in search of a free life. She is ideal and intelligent. She does not flirt. Her life becomes tragic due to the choice that she thinks is freely made. She wanted her freedom to continue even after her marriage. Therefore she rejects two wealthy suitors. However, when she makes her choice, she makes a mistake in choosing the man who restricts her freedom most.

Isabel is an heiress who strives for the freedom of the intellect. When she gets the proposal of marriage from a British lord, she rejects him because she does not want to be caught into the life of nobility with its rituals and responsibilities. She also rejects an intense and over insistent American. He was upright in his attitude and she feels that she would not get the expected freedom if she marries him. Finally she gets into the trap of an American who is a dilettante, fastidious and fussy. He collects her and her money as he collects his objects of artistic value.

Ralph Touchett is the cousin of Isabel. His friend, Lord Warburton is a young nobleman who visits Gardencourt frequently where he meets Isabel and falls in love with her. He is a wealthy lord with hundred thousand per year and fifty thousand acres of the soil of the tiny island besides many other things. He has a seat in the parliament and half a dozen houses to live in. He has elegant tastes and cares for arts, literature, science and charming young ladies. He has an affinity towards new ideas. He proposes to Isabel with confidence. Though poor at that time as Isabel has not inherited the wealth that was to come to her later, she rejects him as she lived in her own world of dreams and knows nothing about the ways of the world.

Her second suitor, Casper Goodwood, is the son of the proprietor of a cotton mill in Massachusetts. He is also a man of great fortune and an intellect who is talented in various fields. He liked to organize and administer and he could make people work to his will. His physical appearance itself suggests oppression, coercion and constraint. Though he is madly in love with Isabel, it is methodical to some extent. Nothing can distract him from his pursuit of his love. He wants to marry her even after her marriage to Osmond. He proposes to her for the second time when she comes to meet her dying cousin, Ralph, and gets rejected again. His love for Isabel remains unchanged till the end.

After rejecting the two suitors, Isabel felt herself free to pursue her own dreams when Madame Merle becomes her friend. She put her in the way of her former husband Gilbert Osmond who is awfully clever. His company gave her a private thrill as he showered all his love on her. She marries him against the warnings of her cousin Ralph and her aunt Mrs. Touchett. Her life with Osmond shatters all her dreams and makes her face reality with courage.

Isabel is trapped not only by her romantic illusions, self-absorption and ingrained egotism but by a carefully laid plot. Madame Merle was once the mistress of the man whom Isabel marries. She becomes the friend of Isabel but at the same time plots against her and makes her marry her former husband so that her daughter would get the fortune of the intelligent and free heiress. She secured the future of her child with the marriage of Isabel with her former husband.

Characterization is the strength of the novel. The series of portraits including that of the protagonist are realistic. The character of Gilbert Osmond whose egotism surpasses the freedom of Isabel is drawn with great power and care. The portrayal of his scheming and sympathetic mistress Madame Merle is realistic. Isabel is a conventional character that longs for freedom throughout her life.

The picture of the protagonist with her private history, illusions and her disillusionment along with the clash of her ego is purely psychological. Though Isabel faces her destiny with courage and determination, she has her own fears and uncertainties. In short, the novel is a picture of the ignorance of the New World citizens behind the hard realities of their life.

### **EXPRESSION OF FREEDOM IN *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY***

*The Portrait of a Lady* is a realistic novel. It deals with the protagonist's striving for freedom and happiness throughout her life. She tries to assert her freedom in the world dominated by men. In this respect, Isabel Archer resembles Ibsen's Dora and Shaw's Candida. She strongly believes in her opinions and cherishes the right to evaluate any person or situation independently. She does not want to be dependent on others for anything. Nor does she want to be controlled by others.

Isabel's love for freedom is expressed in the beginning itself when she meets her aunt Mrs. Touchett. Her aunt promises to take her to England if she could adhere to whatever she says. Isabel tells her that she cannot promise that she will do everything that

her aunt wants her to do. Though she wants to visit England, she does not want to lose her freedom in life. She asserts her independent nature very often in the novel. She rejects two wealthy and able suitors in fear that she would have to lose her independence if she marries any one of them. She does not want to be controlled by wealth or intellect.

Despite Isabel's careful selection of her husband, she is destined to lose her freedom and suffer in life. While asserting her freedom, she commits a mistake as she prefers to evaluate a person or situation individually. Gilbert Osmond showers all his love on her before their marriage but undergoes a complete change after his marriage with her. He collects her and her money as he collects materials of artistic importance. He also wants to use her as a tool to fulfill his needs. Isabel finds it difficult to support his plans and he ill-treats her. However, she does not try to move away from her stand. Nor does she complain to anyone about this ill-treatment.

Isabel tries to be a modern woman by asserting her freedom in the institution of marriage which is dominated by men. However, she has a trace of conventionality and prefers to bear the sufferings in her life with courage. She decides to take the responsibility of her mistake in selecting Osmond as her husband. She does not blame anybody else for her mistake. Critics feel that the attitude of Isabel in shouldering her responsibilities brings out the moralistic viewpoint of James that one should not blame others for one's mistakes but should accept it as a part of life.

The loyalty of Isabel to her husband and her step daughter even after enduring great sufferings in the house also shows her orthodox nature. She stands up to her sufferings and does not leave the Osmond house. She faces the indifference and the hostility of her husband with a great strength and courage that makes the novel the portrait of a "Lady" and not that of a girl or a woman. She behaves in the quiet manner of a lady by not complaining about her sufferings to anybody.

Isabel had the determination to endure her suffering till the end and thereby stands aside from all other characters. When she goes to England to meet her cousin Ralph who was dying, she meets Gasper Goodwood who requests her not to return to Rome. He also tells her that the world is a big one and both of them could live happily without being found out by Osmond. Isabel rejects his proposal for the second time for she feels that if she compromise with life, she would be no better than Madame Merle or Countess Gemini. Thus she rejects her freedom in the end and returns to her husband. Had she

married Goodwood and deserted her husband, the moral outlook of the novel would have failed tragically.

Henry James has great concern for the free nature of human beings. He feels that man is born free and should free throughout his life. Even if he is not free, he must try to acquire freedom. The attitude of James that everyone must assert their freedom in all possible situations is expressed in the portrayal of Isabel Archer.

## QUESTIONS

1. Analyze the style of Henry James.
2. Realism in *The Portrait of a Lady*.
3. Discuss the hypocritical nature of Osmond and Madame Merle.
4. Isabel's attitude towards life.
5. Isabel's failure in her life is due to her ego. Discuss.

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## ERNEST HEMINGWAY

Ernest Hemingway was born on 21<sup>st</sup> July 1899 in Oak Park, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. He was the second of six children born to Dr and Mrs. Clarence E. Hemingway. His mother was a devout, religious woman with a considerable talent in music and she hoped that Ernest would develop an interest in music. However, he acquired his father's enthusiasm for guns and was interested in fishing and hunting trips in the Michigan north woods. These phases of his childhood influenced him much. Those impressions can be seen reflected in the Nick Adams stories like *Indian Camp* and *Big Two-Hearted River*.

He excelled in football in his high school. He also learned boxing and in the process incurred permanent damage to one of his eyes. Because of this, his repeated efforts to enlist in the First World War were in vain. Interestingly, Boxing gave him a lasting enthusiasm for prize fights as well as provided him with material for his stories and a tendency to talk of his literary accomplishments in boxing terms later.

Hemingway edited the high school newspaper. He twice ran away from home. On his graduation, he tried to enlist himself in the army but in vain. He worked as a reporter in the Kansas City Star. Later, Hemingway joined the American Red Cross unit as a driver. He was seriously wounded at Fossalta on the Italian Piave on July 8, 1918. He joined the Italian infantry after a dozen operations on his knee and recuperation in Milan. His experiences in the battlefield provided him with the necessary information to write *A Farewell to Arms* in 1929.

The cruelty of war forms the major theme of most of the novels of Hemingway. This tradition started with his collection *In Our Time*, published in 1924 and extended up to the post Second World War novel, *Across the River and into the Trees*. He also covers the happenings of the Greek-Turkish war in 1920 and the Spanish civil war in 1937 in his novels.

Hemingway worked for the Toronto Star in Canada after the First World War. He married Hadley Richardson in 1921 and moved to Paris. He recorded life in Paris from 1921 to 1926 in *A Moveable Feast*, published in 1964. Sherwood Anderson introduced him to Gertrude Stein and this gained him the entrance into the world of working authors and artistes. His early writings are influenced by Sherwood Anderson, Scott Fitzgerald, James Joyce, Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein. His early works are published in German and French publications. However, *Fifty Grand*, published in the *Atlantic Monthly* introduced

the writer and his concept to the reading public of America. *Three Stories and Ten Poems* was published in 1923, followed by *In Our Time* in 1925. *The Torrents of Spring*, a satire on Anderson's *Dark Laughter* and *The Sun Also Rises* were published in 1926.

Hemingway divorced Hadley and married Pauline Pfeiffer in 1927. He moved to Key West in 1928. Besides war and books, his attention is attracted by hunting and other sports. His interest in bull fighting resulted in *Death in the Afternoon*. He got the material for *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* and *Green Hills of Africa*, from the African safari in 1934. His personal interest in the Spanish civil war gave the material for his novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

Hemingway divorced Pauline and married Martha Gelhorn. They toured to China and then settled in Cuba. He served with the US navy as a submarine spotter in the Caribbean during the Second World War. In 1944, he became a war correspondent and worked with the Allied forces in Europe. Hemingway and Pauline lived in Venice for a short time after the war. *Across the River and Into the Trees*, published in 1950, was not a success. However, *The Old Man and the Sea* received the Pulitzer Prize in 1952.

Hemingway suffered from high blood pressure in 1961 and was under treatment when he killed himself on July 2 the same year by gunshots. He was buried in Ketchum.

Hemingway had a life of adventure in his earlier years and was nick named "Champ". In his later years, he was fondly called as "Papa" when he became an almost legendary character with his reputation of being a worldwide celebrity of the celebrities.

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## A FAREWELL TO ARMS

### SUMMARY

The novel begins with a vivid picture of the warfront, the soldiers in the camp, their morals, illusions, and difficulties. It is not an attempt to glorify war but to expose the hard realities of life during the times of war.

Italy, as an ally of Great Britain, France and Imperial Russia engaged the forces of the Austro – Hungarian empire during the First World War. The fighting went on in the mountains and in the plains. In the end, Italy had a common border with Switzerland which was neutral in the war. The description of the difficulties of the troops during the march in the first chapter itself signifies that the campaign of the soldiers in the war front is going ‘very badly’.

The narrator, Frederick Henry is a second lieutenant in the Italian Army and an American volunteer in the Ambulance Corps. The priest advises him to go to the ‘clear, cold, dry country’. But he spends most of his leave in drinking and in the houses of prostitution. He cannot face the darkness of the night. He cannot sleep in dark and so he remains walking, hunting, searching and seeking the entire night. He feels that the world is unreal in the dark. Lieutenant Rinaldi, a friend of Henry tells him that a group of English nurses has arrived there. Rinaldi is always in love with someone and the next day, he introduces Henry to Catherine Barkley, whom he says that he loves at present.

Henry happens to meet Catherine often. Though he likes the friendly, young English girl in a casual manner, he does not love her. But when he tells her that he loves her, she understands that he does not mean it. She gives him a medal of St. Anthony to wear when he leaves for the battle front.

Henry is badly wounded in the legs by an Austrian mortar shell in the front and is taken to a field hospital. He is then shifted to a hospital in Milan. As he is the first patient there and he is not expected, there is no doctor in the hospital. The nurses tell him not to drink wine, but he manages to get some without their knowledge. He inquires whether Catherine would be there on duty. When Catherine comes there to see him, he realizes that he is in love with her. After two days, Major Valentini performs an operation on his knee. He was made to take rest for six months before he could recover. Throughout the period, Catherine manages to be with him.

Summer passes without any events of importance other than the war and in autumn, Henry gets a convalescent leave for three weeks in October. Catherine tells him that she is pregnant and both decide to spend the leave together. However, they are not able to make it out as Henry is affected by jaundice and had to stay in the hospital bed. The head nurse, Miss Van Campen accuses him that he had got jaundice purposely by drinking, in order to avoid going back to the front.

After recovering from jaundice, Henry returns to the front and finds the happenings going very badly. The news of the army striking with force spread very fast among the allied forces and they started retreating from Caporetto. There is confusion everywhere and Henry is ordered to take the three ambulances with hospital equipments to the Po Valley. The road to Udine is congested with wagons, and trucks carrying weapons and people who are retreating. Rain also makes the retreat difficult. Henry picks up two straggling Italian sergeants and two teenage girls on the way.

The next morning, Henry decides to take a short route through the countryside. Unfortunately, one of the trucks got stuck in the mud. They tried to dislodge the truck from the mud but in vain. The two Italian sergeants are not willing to help them. When they tried to go on their own way, Henry and his men kill one of them while the other one manages to escape.

Leaving the trucks in the mud, Henry and his companions started walking towards Udine. The soldiers of the allied forces are completely in a confused state and one of Henry's companions was killed by a nervous Italian sniper. The others were able to escape and reach Tagliamento River.

When they cross the river, Henry is detained by military police who suspect him of being a German in Italian uniform. They are dealing out death sentences on the spot. However, Henry manages to escape at night by plunging in the river and hanging on to a log. His bitter experiences with the Italian soldiers during the retreat makes him bid farewell to arms. He reaches Milan and learns that Catherine has gone to Stresa.

Henry borrows civilian clothes from an American friend in Milan. Then he goes to Stresa and meets Catherine. The bartender of the hotel in which Henry stays with Catherine informs him about the plan of the authorities to arrest him in the morning under the charges of desertion and advises them to go to Switzerland, where they can be safe. He also helps them by offering his boat. Henry rowed in the rough weather at night after a storm for about twenty miles across the lake with the help of Catherine.

They reach Switzerland safely but are arrested by the customs authorities. Fortunately, they have valid passports and ample money which saves them from getting into serious troubles with the authorities.

The couple spent their time happily in a house outside Montreux. Being far away from war, they enjoy their walks by the lake and visits to Montreux occasionally. Henry wants to marry her but Catherine does not want to marry while she was pregnant. They optimistically plan about their future.

The time for Catherine's confinement came near and they moved to Lausanne in order to be near a hospital. Catherine suffers for a long time with pain in the hospital but the child does not come out. So the doctors performed a surgery on her but the child is born dead. After the operation, Catherine has a hemorrhage and Henry stays with her till she dies. After her death, Henry realizes that there is nothing that he can do, nobody to talk to, and no place where he can go. He leaves the hospital and walks back to his hotel. It is dark and raining symbolizing his dark and dull future.

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## **CHARACTERS**

### **CATHERINE BARKLEY**

Critics consider the character of Catherine to be static. They feel that she remains the same from the beginning to the end of the novel. She understands the finality of death in the beginning of the novel itself. She represents the rejection of traditional values. Henry suggests marriage many times while she rejects it. Though she gives practical reasons for it, she realizes that marriage is just another empty form in life and is therefore meaningless. Moreover, Henry wants to have his child baptized whereas Catherine sees no need for that. The portrayal of Catherine by Hemingway is realistic.

Catherine is young and attractive. She is also frank. In the beginning of the novel, she is portrayed as still immersed in the dislocation of personality that results from a terrible personal loss. She has lost her fiancé in the war and is not able to overcome the sorrow at her loss. The casual wartime affair with Henry turns into love that becomes significant in her life. Though she is committed to her job, she values her love towards Henry to be superior and spends much of her time with him. He admires her for her ability to adapt to any situation. They live together in various places like a strange hotel room, a

hospital bed, and an isolated chalet but she treats all the places equally. Her pleasure, thoughts and life are concentrated around Henry.

Catherine makes a religion out of her love for Henry. She devotes herself entirely to the man she loves. She has realized the reality of death when she lost her fiancé and has the conviction that life and all its pleasures are more important. So, she devotes herself entirely in loving Henry.

The death of Catherine is noble and stoic as her life. She is not afraid of death. She knows that death is the end of all things. She realizes that all the pleasures she has looked forward to in life end with her death. She meets her end with courage. She is unchangeable. She lives and dies with courage, honesty and discipline.

## **FREDERICK HENRY or THE HEMINGWAY CODE HERO**

Hemingway created a general concept regarding his heroes which began to be popularly known as the “code hero”. His hero is a hero in every sense of the term. His hero is a man who is admired by every man. He is involved in a lot of drinking. He moves from one love affair to another. He participates in various adventures. He is involved in all of the so-called manly activities which the typical American male did not participate in.

Frederick Henry is a typical code hero of Hemingway. Like all other Americans, he is a disillusioned man who seeks for some values or system in which he can believe. He has lost faith in the traditional values of life. He lives in the present. He participates actively in the war in the beginning.

Henry is lonely, confused and restless. Unable to find a meaning in life, he wanders from one house of prostitution to another. The priest advises him to go to the cold, clear, and dry country which stands for a system of values and order in life. But he is confused and does not listen to the words of the priest. His relation with Catherine Barkley is physical at first. But as he becomes involved with her more and more in the affair with her, he realizes a type of order and commitment in it.

Henry returns to the front after discovering his commitment to his love and life, only to find things in a confused state. The sudden and a fierce attack of the enemy made the morale low in the camp of the allied forces. His experiences with the soldiers of the allied forces are bitter. He finds the loyalty which he expects in them to be missing and

this makes him to desert the army. He also realizes that he is more loyal to Catherine and he discovers a sense of duty and order in their love for each other.

The concept of death drives all the heroes of Hemingway. The idea of death and the realization that death is the end of everything form the basis of all the actions of the code hero. Henry wants to enjoy the pleasures of life before it ends. So he drinks a lot and spends most of his leave in the houses of prostitution. However, he realizes the realities of life and death only when Catherine dies.

The main consideration of the code hero is to avoid death and to keep life going. He wants to enjoy the valuable life till the end. Therefore he is often made to confront death. To drive away his fear of death, the code hero engages himself in various adventures that take him face to face with death. He lives most intensely even when he is face to face with death. He is afraid of death, but he is not afraid to die.

The hero of Hemingway cannot live alone and devotes himself to the love of women. Henry devotes himself to the love of Catherine. However, he realizes in the end that he can face life only when he develops an inner strength and discipline. He hoped to find contentment, peace and happiness in his life with Catherine. But these virtues of life is denied to a code hero and with the death of Catherine with whom Henry had optimistically planned his future, he is left in darkness to face his encounters in life alone.

#### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Narrate the experiences of Henry as a member of the Army of the Allied Forces.
2. Discuss the idea of disillusionment as expressed in the novel.
3. Discuss the relationship that existed between Catherine and Henry.
4. Describe the bitter experiences of Henry during the retreat from Caporetto.
5. Explain the terrible effects of war as expressed in "A Farewell to Arms".
6. What are the differences seen in the behaviour of the soldiers in the times of attack and retreat?
7. Style of Hemingway.
8. Concept of death and loss of traditional values as revealed in the novel.

## **RALPH ELLISON (1914-1994)**

Ralph Waldo Ellison was born on first march, 1914 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma to Lewis Alfred and Ida Millsap Ellison. At the beginning of the century, Oklahoma had not been a state for very long and was still considered a part of the frontier. Lewis and Ida Ellison had each grown up in the south to parents who had been slaves. The couple moved out west to Oklahoma hoping that the lives of their children would be fuelled with a sense of possibility in this state that was reputed for its freedom. Though the prejudices of Texas and Arkansas soon encroached upon Oklahoma, the open spaces and the fighting spirit of the people whom Ellison grew up among provided him with a relatively unbiased atmosphere.

The death of Lewis Ellison in 1917 left Ida, Ralph and his younger brother Herbert quite poor. In order to support the family, Ida worked as a domestic servant and stewardess at the Avery Chapel, an Afro-Methodist Episcopal Church. With this, the family moved in to the parsonage and Ellison was brought into close contact with the Minister's library, which he made good use of it. Literature was a destined medium for Ellison, whose father named him after the famous writer Ralph Waldo Emerson and hoped that he would become a poet. His mother encouraged his enthusiasm for reading over the years of his youth by bringing him books and magazines from the houses she cleaned. In addition to this, a black Episcopal priest challenged the white custom of barring the blacks from the public library and the custom was overturned. With this, Ellison's horizons were broadened by the large number of books now available to him from in the public library.

During his teenage years, Ellison and his friends imagined themselves of being the eclectic combination of men from the frontiers and Renaissance. The ideal they created in their life gave them the courage to expect anything out of life. They were prepared to face life as it comes. They believed that they had the ability and power to do whatever they wanted in life as well as or better than any men of any race. Ellison first used this credo when he attacked the medium of music by participating in an intense musical programme for twelve years at the Frederick Douglas School in Oklahoma City. Although he received musical training in a variety of instruments as well as theory, he held a high preference for the trumpet and was talented enough to obtain training from the conductor of the Oklahoma City Orchestra. Ellison took part in many concerts, marches, bands and celebrations for the town. Even when he devoted his time to his study of music, he did not

lose sight of his desire to be a man of renaissance. Therefore he spent time in playing football, working at small jobs, and experimenting in electronics.

In 1933, Ellison won a scholarship from the State of Oklahoma. So, he left Oklahoma and headed to the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama to study music. One of his music teachers at the school was Hazel Harrison who later introduced him to Alain Locke, a new Negro thinker who later led Ellison to his writing career years later through his connections with eminent men like Langston Hughes and Richard Wright. At Tuskegee, Ellison excelled in his music. He also took a particular liking to his sociology and sculpture classes and the outside classroom that Alabama provided. Literature also influenced him at Tuskegee and he delved again into the expansive libraries at his disposal. T.S. Elliot's *The Waste Land* with its elusive lyricism influenced him very much. Disappointed in the limited capacity of the African- American literature at that point, Ellison practiced playing with the force of words as he had found Elliot to do. He later used his experiences at Tuskegee and the injustices that he encountered in the south to structure his writing of the *Invisible Man*.

Ellison left Tuskegee after his third year in the music school due to financial reasons. He was introduced to Augusta Savage, a black sculptor in Harlem, New York in 1936. The sculptor liked his works and so Ellison moved to Harlem. New York lured him with its energy and reputation of freedom. Harlem was a vibrant cultural centre in the 1930s and the 1940s and Ellison spent most of the rest of his life there. His mother died and he attended her funeral in Dayton, Ohio. On his return, he met Richard Wright who had a great literary influence on him. This meeting along with his poverty led him to concentrate more on his writing. His first book review, titled *Creative and Cultural Lag* was published in *New Challenge*. However, his first short story, *Heine's Bull* was not published.

The few wrings successes did not provide Ellison with the necessary money. Finally, Wright helped him to get a job with the Federal Writers Project. During this time, he came into contact with many interesting interviewees who influenced him to collect materials about folklore and the distinctly African-American collection of rhymes, games, stories, and so on. This enriched his knowledge of American culture and added to the stock of experiences he had in Oklahoma and Alabama. He also wrote articles to radical periodicals like *Negro Quarterly*, *New Challenge* and *New Masses*. Between 1937 and 1944, he published over twenty reviews. His belief that every text should have a conscious

protagonist led to his break with his mentor, Richard Wright. By the time, Ellison had published some of his short stories such as *Slick Gonna Learn*, *The Birthmark*, *King of the Bingo Game* and *Flying Home*. When the Second World War began, he got a chance to edit the Negro Quarterly and to begin *Invisible Man*. By the end of the war, the quality of his writing reached masterful proportions as he had learnt to incorporate the likes of Mark Twain, William Faulkner, Feodar Doestovsky and Earnest Hemingway into his work. *Invisible Man* was published in 1952.

Ellison became almost invisible after the publication of his first novel. However, between 1952 and 1994, he published two acclaimed books of essays, *Shadow and Act* and *Going to the territory*. He received many honours for his works, especially his masterpiece, that include the National Book Award, Russwarm Award, and the election to the American Academy of Arts. In 1970, he became the Albert Schweitzer Professor of Humanities at New York University. He died of cancer in 1994.

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## INVISIBLE MAN

### Plot

The novel opens with a prologue describing the depressed state of the narrator who remains nameless throughout the novel. He proclaims that he is an invisible man and has taken to living underground, unknown to others. The novel is the story of how he comes to be in this position.

As a young boy the narrator overheard the last words of his dying grandfather that the blacks should overcome the whites “with Yeses, undermine ’em with grins, agree ’em to death and destruction”. This message lingered with him through high school. He remembered this when he is asked to give his college oration to the town’s most honoured white men. The narrator, along with other boys hired for the evening’s entertainment were made to pass through a room where a naked woman danced. Then they were made to box with each other and also sent to grab for gold coins on an electrified rag. Finally, the narrator was allowed to give his oration and awarded a scholarship to a renowned black college. He was disillusioned at the college and this disillusionment overcomes him by the end. He remembered the fateful day when he was given the honour of driving an old white trustee, Mr. Norton, around the campus. The drive went on smoothly for a while. Norton said that he saw every student at the college as part of his fate. He wanted to explore parts of the surrounding town and the narrator took him in to a poor district of sharecroppers where Norton was intrigued by a disgraced member of the community, Jim Trueblood, who was rumoured to have impregnated both his daughter and wife. He gave a long description of the dream which made him commit the act of incest. His wife had tried to kill him after the incident. Hearing this, Norton felt ill and the narrator took him to the Golden Day brothel to get whisky to revive him. Unfortunately, mental patients visiting the bar rose up against their attendant, trapping the narrator and Norton in the middle of their fight. Norton fell unconscious and a former doctor revived him. When they return to the college, the narrator was punished for his treatment of Mr. Norton. The college president, Bledsoe expelled the narrator and sent him to New York with seven sealed letters to wealthy employers with the promise that he could return as a paying student later. The narrator felt insulted and decided to take advantage of the opportunity to work for an important person in New York City.

The narrator arrived in Harlem, rented a room at the Men's House and set out to hand out his letters in the next morning. He was not able to meet the employers directly and so he handed over the letters to the secretaries of the employers. But, as he did not hear anything from the employers, he became suspicious of the secretaries and held back the last letter. He tried to meet Mr. Emerson directly but his son took the letter from him and tried to talk him out of returning to the college or speaking to his father. As the narrator was not ready to give up, Emerson's son showed him the letter which he had been told not to look at. The narrator was horrified to read Bledsoe's request to the employers not to allow him to return to the school as a paying student. Disillusioned, he decided to take a job at a paint factory in order to be able to fund his revenge on Bledsoe.

Mr. Kimbro, his boss put the narrator immediately on the job with a few instructions and the order not to ask questions. As he was afraid to ask Kimbro, the narrator mixed the wrong ingredients in to the paint and he was fired from his job. He was handed to another boss, Mr. Brockway who worked as an engineer of sorts. Brockway feared that the narrator is trying to take his job and felt quite irritable towards him. He asked many questions about his past. They get along agreeably until the narrator ran into what he thought was a union meeting, which delayed him in his lunch time. When he explained this to Brockway, he exploded in anger at his participation in a union and attacked him. The narrator, in order to defend himself, fought off Brockway. At that time, the tanks burst from pressure because of their inattention to the gauges in the room and the narrator was covered in white paint and knocked unconscious.

The narrator swam in and out of consciousness surrounded by doctors who speak of lobotomies and tests which they would not try on him if he had been a white Harvard student. He was unable to remember his name when he was asked. Finally, the doctors released him from the machines and tubes, saying that he is saved although he did not know from what. The director of the hospital told him that he can no longer work at the plant but he would receive ample compensation. He stumbled back towards the Men's House when he was relieved on the way by a strong motherly woman named Mary Rambo. She took him to her home to rest and to revive himself. When he returned to his House, he felt inferior and realized that he could no longer stay there. After offending a man whom he first believes to be Bledsoe, he was thrown out of the house. He then returned to Mary and lived with her for a while.

In winter, the narrator felt restless and wandered in the streets. His anger towards Bledsoe was still intact. On his way, he was drawn towards a place where an old black couple was being thrown out in the cold. The crowd that stood around the defenceless couple shrieked and cried against the injustice. This scene of dispossession struck the narrator and he spoke to the crowd after the couple was denied the chance to go into the house and pray. He was able to calm the crowd and formed their chaos into an ordered rage. The crowd rushed into the house and the narrator runs to escape the police. He was followed by a short man who later met him on the streets. He introduced himself as Brother Jack and offered him a job with the Brotherhood, taking advantage of his speaking skills. He first brushed aside the offer but later accepted it in order to pay back to Mary with whom he was staying at that time. He also decided to stop living with her once he was accepted in to the Brotherhood. He attended the party meeting at the Chthonian Hotel. The crowd was mostly white but they all appeared friendly. All the members of the Brotherhood who were present at the meeting praised his action at the eviction. Brother Jack explained to him that his job would be to lead the community of Harlem in line with the teachings of the Brotherhood in the manner of Booker T. Washington. However, the narrator secretly decided to act in the opposite, following the example set by the founder of his college, Mr. Bledsoe.

The narrator was sent to Brother Hambro for training. He was then given a new name, and a new apartment. After completing the training, he worked with Brother Tarp and Brother Clifton in Harlem. During a meeting, the narrator and Clifton met Ras the Exhorter, who competed with them for the support of the community and criticizes them for being traitors to their own race. A fight followed between the two groups and the narrator had to lead Clifton away from the place. Even after this incident, the narrator felt secure and contented in his position.

After a few weeks the narrator was charged by Brother Westrum for attempting to overshadow and dominate the Brotherhood and the narrator goes in search of someone who would help him to prove his innocence. When he returned, he found that the spirit in the district was much subdued and the people felt that the Brotherhood had let them down. He met Clifton on the streets chased by the police which ended with his death. The narrator used the chance to unite the people of Harlem around the fallen hero. His success made the Brotherhood angry and Jack told him that he was not hired to think. He also

ordered the narrator to go to Hambro in order to understand the new, less aggressive programme.

The narrator felt angry towards the Brotherhood. He was also chased by Ras and his men. So he disguised himself using dark green glasses and a wide hat. People who met him in his disguise thought him to be Rhinehart. Later, on his way to Hambro's, he entered a church where Rhinehart was a Reverend. The views of Rhinehart made the narrator more cynical than ever and Hambro was not able to make him accept the Brotherhood's ways of life. However, he remembered the words of his grandfather and decided to attack the Brotherhood from inside.

The narrator wanted to find a woman from whom he can get inside information of the Brotherhood. He chooses Sybil, the wife of an important brother but she wanted him to rape her. He was caught in a riot when he tried to escape. Ras, who was leading the riot, identified the narrator and wanted him to be hanged. Running from Ras and his men, the narrator falls down a manhole and realizes that he must live underground for a while.

Living underground, the narrator takes revenge on the society in silent, unsuspecting ways. He steals electricity from a power company by wiring his room full of light bulbs. He covers even the floor of his underground hole with bulbs, out of spite and a desire to hold as much light as possible. In this way, his hibernation would be warm and well lit and he will continue to be alive. The epilogue talks of his resolution to reemerge into the world of social responsibility.

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### **QUESTIONS:**

1. What are values of the Invisible man?
2. Describe the qualities of the man living underground.
3. Bring out the hypocritical nature of the Brotherhood.
4. Why is the narrator invisible in the novel?
5. Describe in detail, the terrible experiences of the narrator before he goes to live underground.

## **ALICE WALKER**

### **LIFE AND WORKS**

Alice Malsenior Walker was born on February 9, 1944, in Eatonton, Georgia, to Willie Lee and Minnie Lou Grant Walker. Her parents were sharecroppers. She lost sight of one eye by accident when she was eight year old. Her achievement as a valedictorian of her class in high school, coupled with a rehabilitation scholarship enabled her to enter Spelman, a college for black women in Atlanta, Georgia. She transferred to Sarah Lawrence College in New York, after two years and got her bachelor degree in 1965.

Walker was active in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's. She also gave her support for the women's movement, anti-nuclear movement and also against the female genital mutilation. She started her own publishing company in 1984. At present, she resides in Northern California.

Walker received the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book award in 1983 of her novel, *The Color Purple*. Her writings focus on the struggles of Afro-American women, against the racist, sexist and often violent societies. They also tend to emphasize the strength of black women and the importance of African-American heritage and culture. She has also received the Lillian Smith Award, the Rosenthal Award, Radcliffe Institute Fellowship, Merrill Fellowship, Guggenheim Fellowship and the Front Page Award among other honours.

The works of Alice Walker include *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), *Everyday Use* (1973), *In Love & Trouble: Stories of Black Women* (1973), *Meridian* (1976), *To Hell with Dying* (1988), *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989), *Revolutionary Petunias & Other Poems* (1973), *Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful* (1985), *Her Blue Body Everything We Know: Earthling Poems* (1991), *Collected Poems* (2005), *Warrior Marks* (1993), *The Same River Twice: Honoring the Difficult* (1996), *Anything We Love Can Be Saved: A Writer's Activism* (1997), and *Go Girl!: The Black Woman's Book of Travel And Adventure* (1997).

### **THE COLOR PURPLE**

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, published in 1982, narrates the story of Celie, a Black woman in the South, who writes letters to God in which she tells about her life and about her roles as daughter, wife, sister and mother. In the course of her story, Celie tells

about a series of other Black women who shape her life. Her sister Nettie becomes a missionary teacher in Africa. Shug Avery is the blues singer her husband Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ is in love with who helps in her salvation. The strength and courage of Sofia, the strong-willed daughter-in-law inspires Celie. Squeak, goes through awakenings of her own. Throughout the story Celie remains the center of women who know how to survive.

Celie's son Harpo has some conflicts with his wife Sofia. She leaves him and Celie presents her a hand-made quilt as a token of her love towards her daughter-in-law. Harpo shows his inclination towards household chores by changing the child's wet nappy and caring for it while she walks out of the house. It took half a year for Harpo to begin a new life.

Harpo opens a juke joint with the hope that people would come and listen to the music played there. Harpo's plan turns to be a failure except Shug Avery who once comes there with Albert and sings for them. She has been staying with Albert and Celie because of her illness. Shug wants to leave when she becomes well and Celie convinces her to stay with them further. Her husband Albert is frustrated that he is not able to marry Shug. He treats Celie in a terrible manner because of his love for Shug and his realization that Celie is not Shug. Later, when Shug and Albert start sharing the same bed, she feels jealous of Albert and not of Shug as she has never enjoyed sex with men.

Sofia visits Harpo with her boyfriend Henry Broadnax, a prizefighter. She has given birth to her sixth child. Harpo and Sofia dance together and his new girlfriend Squeak becomes jealous and quarrels with Sofia. Later, Sofia picks up a quarrel in the town with the Mayor's wife Miss Millie who wants to buy her services. She is arrested and convicted for twelve years. She is made to wash the uniforms in the prison. Albert and Celie visits her in the prison and find that she is in a demoralized state as she has been forced to submit herself to the wishes of the prison guards since her conviction. The visitors took pity on her and devise a plan to get her out of the prison.

Celie dreams of God coming down to the earth to rescue Sofia from the prison. Shug and Celie dress Squeak as a relative of the prison guard. Unfortunately, the guard

disavows the relationship rapes her. She returns to the house bruised and molested but with a renewed self confidence. She asserts her identity by asking Harpo to call her as Mary Agnes and not by her per name Squeak.

After asserting her identity, Agnes wants to make singing as her career. Though her voice is like meowing, everyone begin to like it very soon. Later, Sofia is released from the prison and reconciles with Miss Millie and becomes her maid. Celie visits Sofia and they discuss about white people. At that time, the Miss Millie's son Billy orders her to fetch a ball that his sister Eleanor Jane failed to catch. When Sofia fails to do that he tries to kick her but ends in hurting his foot. Mille accuses Sofia.

Later, Sofia writes to Celie about the problems of living with the white people. She is forced to teach driving to Millie. On Christmas day, Millie takes Sofia to her sister Odessa where she meets her sons but she is not able to stay with them for a long time. Millie does not know how to reverse the car and ends up flooding the engine, thereby forcing Sofia to leave early.

Shug goes away for vacation and returns to the house of Albert with her husband Grady. Celie is upset by this. She tells Shug in private about her past experiences with Alphonso who lied to his wife while he continuously raped her. Shug comforts her and sleeps with her. Later, Shug convinces Harpo to allow Agnes to sing in public.

Celie receives the long awaited letter from her sister Nettie. It informs her of her children's safety and her plans to return home after a year. Later, Celie finds out that Albert has been hiding all the letters that Nettie has sent for her sister. Meanwhile Shug tells Celie about her love for Albert whom she had loved before her marriage. She has been continuing to meet him and continuing their love for each other. She also tells her how he has changed a lot from the time they used to court each other.

Celie and Shug search for the letters of Nettie and find them in his trunk. Celie learns from her sister's letters about how Albert followed her to seduce her. She was able to resist his advances. This made him angry and he vowed never to allow Celie to read her letters. As she did not receive any reply from Celie, Nettie met Celie's children Olivia and Adam. They try to involve her in church business. Later, the family moved to Africa to carry out missionary work because of the lack of work in the town.

As soon as she reached Africa, Nettie started writing to Celie in a desperate tone which was similar to the tone of Celie's letters to God. Nettie got a ticket from a woman whose husband prohibited her from going to Africa. She also wrote to Celie about the condition of living in Africa. She had met Sofia who was working as Miss Millie's maid in Africa. Nettie also retells her journey from America to Africa as a missionary. The Africans behave in a different manner towards the Americans and Nettie is dejected.

Celie retains her anger against Albert and wants to kill him. Shug comforts her and tries to reduce her anger. They start making pants as a vent to their anger. Nettie describes her arrival in Olinka in the next letter. The people of the African village were amazed at the black women missionary and inquired whose children are there in the group. They also want to know whether Samuel, the clergyman and Nettie are husband and wife.

The men of Olinka have very traditional views about education of women. However, they are willing to have their boys educated. Olivia compares the men who do not want their women to be educated to the whites who do not want the black people to get educated. Corrine, Samuel's wife gets limited by the comments of the natives by referring to Nettie as Samuel's wife and asks Nettie whether they can refer to each other as sisters.

Tashi's father gets angry and afraid when she becomes increasingly pensive. He fears that she will change the system. At the same time, Corrine



becomes suspicious and prevents Samuel from visiting Nettie. Soon Tashi's father dies. Later Corrine becomes ill with African fever. She wants Nettie to swear on the bible about her relationship with Samuel. She also asks about the children and Samuel tells the story of the stranger who seduced the widow of a businessman and fathered the children Olivia and Adam.

Celie understands that Alphonso is their stepfather and sets off to his house with Shug. They find that he is living with a much younger woman called daisy who seems to be happy with him. Unable to find the gravestone of Celie's mother, the two leave. In Africa, Nettie was able to convince Corrine about her innocence before she died. She is buried in the traditional Olinka way and Nettie comforts Samuel.

Celie decides to write to her sister instead of God. She becomes skeptical and questions the existence of God. Shug explains her about the omnipotence of God who wishes to please all his believers. Later, Celie decides to leave Albert and move to a new house with Shug. Agnes and Grady. She also realizes that it time to set up her own business.

Sofia's mother dies and Sofia has to fight with Harpo over the right to carry her mother's coffin from the church to the grave. Celie meets a reformed and remorseful Albert in the funeral. Harpo also has changed a lot, helping his father to be a normal man and forcing him to sent back all of Nettie's letters to his mother. Meanwhile Agnes has achieved success in her career of singing and enjoys her time with her husband Grady.

The missionaries return to England to get funds for the Olinkas but in vain. In order to comfort him, Nettie marries Samuel while Adam misses Tashi

Who decides to undergo the female initiation ceremony to please the elders. They return to Africa and Adam shuns Tashi for her decision.

Alphonso dies and his house falls in the hands of Celie and Nettie. Celie goes out with Shug to celebrate and finds that Shug has fallen for a nineteen year old flutist Germaine. Shug goes away with her new boy friend and Celie develops a strong friendship for Sofia. Albert also joins the group in their rendezvous and makes their time enjoyable. Albert gives her a telegram that informs her that the ship with Samuel and Nettie on it has sunk. However, Celie continues to receive letters from Nettie.

Tashi and Catherine join the mbeles tribe and Adam goes missing, Shug also writes letters to Celie from Arizona. Meantime Sofia encounters problems from Millie's daughter Eleanor Jane who forces her racist husband and her destructive baby against the pitiable black maid.

Adam marries Tashi and joins her and his mother Catherine at the mbeles tribe. Sofia starts working for Celie and Jane, after realizing the greatness of Sofia cares for her child Henerietta. Shug returns to Celie as Germaine has gone to his college. Nettie also returns to her sister with Samuel, Olivia, Adam, and Tashi. Celie is overjoyed at the union of her family and friends and thanks God for the happy moment.

## **RELATIONSHIPS IN THE COLOR PURPLE**

The novel treats the relationships between various characters, the foremost of them being the relationship between Celie and Shug Avery. Celie feels that she has turned into a man when she saw Avery for the first time. Their relationship is spiritual. It appears to be a sort of lesbianism between the two though Celie says that they lived like sisters. They understand each other and offer comfort in times of crisis. They share similar experiences in life and therefore can understand the feelings of each other. Celie acts as a pillar of support to Avery and in turn Avery helps in the salvation of Celie by giving a voice for her and asserting her identity.

Avery is the second wife of Albert. Both love each other. She has a bewitching power over people and her influence can be felt even when she is not around among the people whom she knows. She calls him as Albert and he becomes a weak man in her presence. Moreover, he appears a little feminine in his relationship with Avery while she dominates the scene with her manly qualities. The two are equal in their relationship with each other.

The relationship between Harpo and Sofia also remain similar to that of Avery and Albert. Sofia is manlier than Harpo. Harpo is the feminine and subservient man while Sofia is marching as if she is going to war. Their relationship is the reverse of the fixed stereotype of the behaviour of married people where the man leads and the wife follows. Harpo finds the domestic chores interesting and his manliness gets expressed only when he is in bed with Sofia. He expresses his anger towards the wayward spirit of Sofia only because of his fear of the conservative society in which he lives. Otherwise he is proud of her as he loves dominant women. The conflict between Sofia arises because of his confusion between his love for her and his necessity to keep face in front of other men.

Harpo's relationship with that of Squeak is extremely different from that of his relationship with Sofia. The conflict in his life with Sofia makes him choose Squeak who is submissive. She would do anything that Harpo says. She has no voice or identity of her own. She lives with the image that Harpo has created for her, she is controlled by Harpo and satisfies all his needs. She gains confidence only after being raped by the prison guard. She asks Harpo to stop calling her by her pet name and address her as Mary Agnes. Harpo does not want her to sing before Shug convinces him that allowing her to sing would make him rich.

The relationship between Celie and Albert also occupies an important place in the novel. Celie is the third choice of Albert as his wife and he gives her only a third class treatment. Albert loves Shug Avery very much that he weights Celie in the same balance. He hates her for being herself and not being Shug. He does not care for her emotions and takes in account her physical appearance alone. He sees her as a black, ugly pore. Their relationship is not smooth till he gives her the letters that her sister Nettie has written for her before her death. He has been hiding the letters from her for years.

Thus, the novel portrays the conflicts in the relationship between various couple. They separate from their partners and find new ones for a short while but the men realize the real worth of the women from whom they have separated and reconcile with them in the end.

## QUESTIONS:

1. Treatment of lesbian relationship in *The Color Purple*.
2. How does Walker treat the conflict between various characters in their relationship with each other in the novel, *The Color Purple*?
3. Trace the expression of identity crisis in the novel *The Color Purple*.
4. Does the novel speak about the condition of blacks in America? Explain
5. Discuss the theme of *The Color Purple*.
6. Identify the style of women's writing in *The Color Purple*.
7. Explain the atrocities of men against women as narrated in *The Color Purple*.
8. How is the relationship between man and women portrayed in the novel *The Color Purple*.

## **TONI MORRISON**

### **Introduction**

#### **LIFE AND WORKS:**

Winner of the Nobel Prize in 1993, Toni Morrison was born on February 18, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio as Chloe Anthony Wofford. Her father George Wofford was hard working and took pride in his works. Her mother, Ramah Willis Wofford is a member of the choir in the church. The Wofford children grew up hearing to many songs and tales of southern black folklore. They were proud of their heritage.

Chole graduated from the Lorain high School in 1949 with honours. Later, she got her B.A from Howard University in 1953 and M.A from Cornell University in 1955. She taught at Texas Southern University, Howard University, and State University of New York at Albany and at Princeton.

Chole married Harold Morrison in 1958. Her married life was unhappy and she joined a small writer's group that gave her temporary relief. She left her husband and returned to her parents after the birth of her second son. She also left her job in the University and became an associate editor in the textbook subsidiary of Random House in New York. She became a senior editor in 1967.

Her works focus on the experience of black Americans, particularly women's experiences in an unjust society and the search for cultural identity. She uses fantasy and mythic elements along with realistic depiction of racial, gender and class conflict to highlight her views.

## **BELOVED**

### **THEME OF BELOVED**

The issue of racial discrimination and the effects of slavery on the coloured race is the main theme of *Beloved*. The novel focuses more on a community of people who were slaves and narrates how they manage to get on with their lives. It looks through the eyes of school teacher and tries to find out whether there is any difference between a man and an animal. The portrayal of the Negro community with their desires and troubles shows that a coloured man is like any other man. The novel portrays the condition of the slaves who endure the injustices and also those who fight against such cruelties.

The terrible past life of the people who worked as slave are filled with the worst of all experiences. Sethe has been raped and forced to murder her child. Paul D has been imprisoned in a cube in a ditch. Stamp paid was forced to give his wife away to be a sex toy to his employers. The list of atrocities committed by the employers is endless. The slaves prefer to suppress their past and Sethe and Paul D are no exception. However, people like stamp paid chose to work actively against racial discrimination. They realize in the end that they cannot live without their past and that their future rests with their acceptance of the past and their effort to deal with it as their past is very much alive in the present.

The evil of slavery has become an ordinary thing for the characters in the novel. The Garners were respected by the slaves like Sethe and Paul D as they treat their slaves well. However, the lives of the slaves rested with the lives of their master. Their life would be in trouble if the master dies. Moreover, the Negroes on Sweet home were no better than toys to be manipulated by the Garners despite being treated nicely. Similarly, the bodwins, who have taken an active stance in the fight against slavery, have the statue of a black boy with the words "At your Service". It is ironic that they fail to comprehend the mindset behind that statue. This expresses the real nature of slavery in America of the time.

The murder of Beloved is the only thing that Sethe could do to save herself and her children from the lige of slavery. However, the murder was treated in a severe manner by the white masters. The murder is the only right thing that can be done in such a situation but the truth is that Sethe does not have the right to do it. As a result, she is shunned by the entire community and placed at the mercy of her white masters who rule the state with their own laws.

The novel treats the idea of the freedom of the slaves in a sarcastic manner. Baby Suggs is allowed to be free but at the same time white men were allowed to barge into her yard at any time. Similarly, Paul D was not allowed to love whatever he wanted to love. Moreover, the Negroes has to wait at the back of the supermarket for the whites to be served before they could get their groceries. The novel clearly points out that an escape from their masters does not give the necessary freedom for the Negroes in the right sense.

The slaves are not allowed to remain with their family. Most of the slaves have been torn apart from their families at an early age, and they cannot hope to go back to their family at any early age, and they cannot hope to go back to their family. However, Sethe is possessive of her children and wants to enjoy a free life with her children. But the truth

that he is not free, and cannot own his family makes Paul D decide not to love anything too much.

### **SYMBOLISM IN BELOVED**

The novel has strong Christian overtones. The discussions of flesh and spirit, the trinity are allusions from the Bible. Moreover, the use words and phrases like “she is mine” and “beloved” have direct reference to the bible. These allusions add weight to the story and bring another perspective into the moral issues.

The difference between the blacks and the whites is the main subject in the novel. The two colours stand as a symbol for the characters’ search for identity. The difference between the two races is shown with the use of their colours. The characters hold on to objects of vivid colours. Baby Suggs, in defeat, went “to bed to think about the colours of things” it is not until the end that Paul D discovers the colors of the flowers in Sethe’s yard. The characters do not wish to find any harsh differences in race, but something more “harmless” in them.

The description of a heart is used many times in the novel. It represents life. Paul D uses the words “Red heart” while he is having sex with beloved. Baby Suggs does not have life until she is freed and realizes her heart is beating. Paul D does not have life until his tobacco tin is forced open, leaving him a red heart.

The house with the number 124 carries the implication of a past repressed. Sethe has 4 children, and the third one is dead. Hence the three is missing in the address. The child, like the number, has been disremembered. Moreover, the novel makes use of words like “rememory” and “disremember” instead of “remember and “forget”. Sethe feels that the past is alive in the present, and so that word “remember” is substituted with the more organic word “rememory”. It reminds the readers that everything is held in memory. Similarly, the word “forget” is replaced by the word “disremember” as the characters take conscious efforts to force their past memories to the back of their minds.

Sethe has a maze of scars on her back. Paul D refers to it as a “chokecherry tree”. It is present on her back all the time but it can never be seen by others. It symbolizes the burden of her past memories which Sethe carries on her back. It is also the prejudice of white men against her. It is a mark made by the white people who believed her to be an animal.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. Trace the elements of racial discrimination in the novel.
2. Describe the condition of the slaves as narrated in *Beloved*.
3. Explain the behaviour of the masters towards their slaves as expressed in *Beloved*.



## Unit – IV

### EUGENE O' NEIL

#### LIFE AND WORKS

O'Neill is eminent among the playwrights of the modern world. His view of man in his plays is essentially tragic and he tries to bring into his work an effect in harmony with traditional tragedy. Unlike other dramatists of the modern world who are concerned with the relationship between man and man, O'Neil is concerned with the relationship between man and god. Therefore man's fate and his judgment under God have an important place in his plays.

O'Neill was born as the son of a well-known romantic actor on October 16, 1888, in New York City. He was educated privately by tutors and attended the Princeton University for a brief period but did not graduate. He had also acted on the stage when he was a child. The experiences of his developing years are expressed in the play *Long Night into Night*.

He lived the life of seaman and a wanderer for several years from 1907, when he returned from the university. He associated himself with stevedores, waifs, loiters, and drunkards at the ports throughout South and Central America, England and Africa. He also served as a reporter for a newspaper at Connecticut. He developed an interest in writing when he was admitted in a hospital for tuberculosis. He then attended the famous class in playwriting under Professor George Baker at Harvard University in 1914. His first play was staged in 1916.

O'Neill gained superiority in the American theatre with his plays *Beyond the Horizon* and *The Emperor Jones* in 1920 and *Anna Christie* in 1921. *The Hairy Ape* followed in 1922. His other works include *All God's Chillun Got Wings* and *Desire Under the Elms* in 1924, *The Great God Brown* and *Strange Interlude* in 1928, Mourning Becomes Electra in 1931, Ah, Wilderness! in 1933, Long Day's Journey into Night in 1940, The Iceman Cometh in 1946, and A Touch of the Poet in 1957. He received the Pulitzer Prize for literature thrice. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1938. He left the world on November 27, 1953.

## **MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA**

David Mammon, an American New Englander has morally transgressed by seducing his maid-servant, Marie Brantome. The curse falls upon the descendants in his family. Marie's son Adam Brant tries to avenge the cruelty meted out to his mother by seducing both the wife and daughter of Ezra Mannon, one of the descendants of the Mannon family. Ezra has gone out to the civil war and when he returns, he was killed by his wife Christine. By the time, she had fallen in love with Adam and so she substitutes a poison sent by Adam instead of the medicine prescribed by the doctor for his heart trouble and kills her husband. However Adam was not able to seduce Ezra's daughter Lavinia as she finds out his real identity. Lavinia, when she finds out that her mother has poisoned her father to death, becomes furious and excites her brother Orin against her. Orin has a sort of incest towards his mother and therefore he regards Adam as his rival.

Christine understands that her children have turned against her love, and goes to meet her lover secretly in his ship in order to warn him against them. Orin and Lavinia follow her to the ship and Orin shoots Adam. Unable to bear the death of her lover, Christine commits suicide. Orin and Lavinia takes a long trip to China, spent their life in the southern islands and return home. They find that they look exactly like their parents. Lavinia wants to marry Peter whom she loved long before and so she encourages the love affair between her brother Orin and Hazel, Peter's sister. However, his affair with Hazel did not work and Orin finds himself making an incestuous proposal to his sister Lavinia who resembled her mother in her appearance now. Lavinia rejects him and he kills himself. After getting disillusioned with life because of the terrible incidents that happened in her family, Lavinia breaks with Peter and decides to withdraw herself from the society. She draws the blinds and shuts herself inside the house that remains as an earthly equivalent to hell. She decides to stay there in the cursed house till her death and thereby cleanse herself of the sin of her ancestor.

The play opens with Christine and Lavinia waiting for the return of Ezra Mannon from the civil war which was nearing its end with the surrender of Lee. A thread of romance begins between Lavinia and Peter and between her brother and Peter's sister, Hazel. Adam Brant comes to call and courts Lavinia. But Lavinia finds out her true identity. She suspects her mother and follows her to New York when she goes to see her father. Lavinia finds out that her mother meets Adam secretly. He has forgotten his idea of

revenge and fallen passionately in love with Christine. Similarly, Christine also loves him passionately and starts hating her husband. Lavinia writes to her father and brother hinting at the town gossip about the affair between Christine and Adam. However, the events of the play take a turn when Ezra Mannon returns from the war and gets killed.

The play treats the father's hatred of the son and vice versa, the son's adoration of his mother, the antagonism between the mother and the daughter and the devotion and love between the father and the daughter.

### **STYLE OF EUGENE O'NEIL**

In the play, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, O'Neil illustrates the condition of modern intellect that is over powered by a growing power of its Satanism. Violence in this play is not a necessity but an end in itself. The characters choose violence in preference to the other normal alternatives available to them. It is an urge to justify cruelty and violence as the normal condition of our existence. The variety of changes that one faces in his life makes the condition unstable and this urged the writer to invent an eternity out of nothing. He tries to escape from the hard realities of life and creates a world of abstract emotion out of the emotions from which he was trying to escape.

Repetition is the basic structural pattern of the play. The movement of the events does not help with the progression of the play. The characters have no aim towards which they could move. Free will does not have any part in the actions of the characters which are preconceived patterns. They accept violence and cruelty as positive emotions.

The theme of the play is the struggle between life and death. It portrays private and personal agonies of the characters in a world where the ultimate reality of life is a return to nothingness. The characters, instead of submitting themselves to the hard realities of life, take to violence as a mode of escape. For them, the last enemy that remains to be overcome is death. *Mourning Becomes Electra* is more realistic than any other play of O'Neill.

The root of the tragedy lies in the limitations of human life. The major concern of the writer lies in the portrayal of the sense of betrayal and disillusionment within the individual. The characters want to live a life that is full of love, trust and innocence. However, they find it difficult to find those virtues in real life. Life wrings, twists and tortures all their lives till they poison themselves to death. Every thing that life is, is done even before they could realize what is happening and in the end those happenings come in between them and what they want to do, and make them lose their souls.

O’Neil terms the play as “unreal realism”. Though he does not make use of various dramatic techniques like the soliloquy and the masks, he suggests them in the play. All the characters have a life-like mask in the play. The malevolent spell of the Mannons drives all vitality and reality from the life of Lavinia and her family, leaving only appearance till the shell is broken with the violence of long held repression. The conflict that results from denial of life becomes self-destructive.

### **USE OF MYTH IN THE PLAY**

*Mourning Becomes Electra* makes use of the myth of Agamemnon to symbolize the theme of incest. The use of myths helps the author to explore the subject and generalize the theme. The characters of O’Neill are endowed with the motivation to enact the myth. Though the characters are of different nature, they contribute to the unified vision of the dramatic vision.

The myth of Agamemnon or Orpheus or Oedipus is treated by most of the Greek dramatists in their tragedies. The house of Agamemnon is shadowed by an ancient curse. It is because of the sin of incest committed by one of his great grandfathers. Agamemnon is the king of Argos and his wife is Clytemnestra, the sister of Helen. He goes to the war at Troy and in his absence, his wife, takes for her paramour, Aegisthus and shares the government with him. Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia at the behest of the gods and returns home with Cassandra, the daughter of Priam the defeated king of Troy. Agamemnon is murdered by Clytemnestra and her lover. His daughter Electra arranges for the return of her brother Orestes who was sent out of the country by his mother when he was a child. He has now become a man. He returns to the country secretly with the help of his sister and kills his mother and Aegisthus. He is then pursued by the Erinyes. After a long time of agony and wandering, he vindicates himself before the tribunal of Athena’s Areopagus and gets himself cleansed of his sins. Electra is then married to the friend of Orestes.

Eugene O’Neill makes use of the myth of Agamemnon in his play *Mourning Becomes Electra*. The Mannon house is under a curse due to a sin of incest committed by one of their forefathers. Ezra Mannon serves as Agamemnon, Captain Brant Aegisthus, Christine Clytemnestra, Lavinia Electra and Orin Orestes in the modern equivalent of the play which treats the conflict between life and death as its theme.

## **GREEK ELEMENTS IN THE PLAY**

*Mourning Becomes Electra* is considered to be the most important and poignant tragedy of O'Neill. The conflict between passion and circumstances and the conscious mind and the unconscious mind is portrayed in the play. It makes use of the Greek myth of Agamemnon and Electra in a modern way of thought. The play interprets the classical myth in terms of modern psychology, philosophy, sociology and anthropology. The modern interpretation of the classical myth serves to universalize the myth. Though the same myth is treated in drama by other American playwrights like T. S. Eliot, in *The Family Reunion* in 1939 and Arthur Miller in *The Crucible* in 1953, O'Neill is the most successful in evoking deep emotions and in sustaining them by extraordinary dramatic skill.

O'Neill follows the broad outlines of the trilogy written by Aeschylus on the myth of Agamemnon and gives his own version of the story. The family of Agamemnon is under the curse of the sin of incest committed by his great grandfather Orpheus or Oedipus. Similarly, in O'Neill, David Mannon transgresses morally by seducing his maid-servant, Marie Brantome and the sin falls upon his descendants. O'Neill tries to find a reasonable explanation of fate on the basis of modern psychology. He is successful in evoking a positive response from the modern audience who had no faith in God or any other supernatural power to the psychological approximation of the Greek sense of fate. The greater dramatic skill of the writer and his deeper understanding of human psychology made the play successful even without the presence of any supernatural power in it as represented by the Greek tragedies. For O'Neill, fate is not an external force but an internal power working through the mind and soul of different characters. He replaces the mental furies that haunt the guilty in the Greek plays with the mental and moral struggle in the minds of the guilty characters in plays.

The incidents in the play and its end make us view them in a detached manner. Civil war forms the perfect background for the story of murderous family love and hatred, similar to the Trojan War in the Greek treatment of the same story. O'Neill gives a psychological colour to the classical story and tries to achieve a tragic equivalent that his audience may accept. The idea of fate is conveyed through the force of the collective unconscious of the guilt in the family. The portrayal of Orin's love for his mother and his sister, Lavinia's love for her father and her brother and Christine's love for her son and Adam Brant gives the readers a deep insight into the working of the minds of the characters. The theme of love and hatred runs through the play as is the theme of life and

death. The characters are fed up with war and death and they want to seek refuge in some blessed island where love and peace reigns. The islands represent everything that is peace, warmth and security. The spirit of love makes them forget death. Almost all the characters in the play express a desire for love and life. When they fail to find these virtues in life, Christine and Orin commit suicide whereas Lavinia's thirst for love sustains her life. She wants to love life and never be possessed by hatred and death. She also believes that her love for Peter is able to drive death away.

Though Lavinia is heroic, she has a note of tragedy in her. She is different from Christine and Orin who cannot bear the effects of their sin. She realizes the power of the curse working upon her family and is ready to pay for it. Therefore, she decides to stay alone in her house that remained as a hell on earth till her death. She feels that death is an escape from punishment and she tries to save her soul by accepting the effect of the curse with courage. Moreover, she avoids marriage in order to prevent the curse from passing on to the next generation.

Catharsis in the play is effected by the message of self-sacrifice. Lavinia sacrifices her life of love and happiness with Peter in order to drive away the curse that had befallen her family. She goes into recluse like Emily Dickinson and withdraws herself from an active social life. She purifies herself of the sin by giving up all her search for love, life and peace.

The play is a trilogy in itself with three plays named *Homecoming*, *The Hunted* and *The Haunted*. All the three are separate entities that form an organic unity. The conflict between life and death and the conscious and the unconscious forms the main theme of the plays. The first play ending with the death of Ezra Mannon begins the complication. The second play develops the plot and the climax is reached when Orin kills Adam Brant. The denouement begins with the suicide of Christine which is followed by Orin's death. The catastrophe lies in Lavinia's acceptance of her fate and her submission to it.

The settings with the interior and exterior scenes along with the ship scene are able to produce the intended effect upon the audience. The island symbolizes a place of love and peace and the sea forms the means of escape. The interior and the exterior scenes indicate the desire to escape from the hard realities in life. The atmosphere itself gives a tragic appearance in and around the Mannon house with its strange tension and mysteriousness.

The characters of Peter and Hazel serve as a contrast to the main characters. They symbolize the normal human life from which the main characters had deviated and to

which they earnestly wish to return. The townsfolk appearing at the beginning of each part serves as the chorus. The dialogues provide an insight into the unconscious mind of the main characters. Though the language is simple, it is able to serve the purpose.

In short, despite the deliberate imitation of the Greek trilogy of Aeschylus, *Mourning Becomes Electra* remains a modern play that treats one of the fundamental problems of life in the modern world where the people are always in conflict between life and death. It remains as one of the greatest tragedies in the world literature in the modern context.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. Discuss the conflict between life and death in the play.
2. Analyze the style of O'Neill.
3. Explain the portrayal of sin and repentance in the play.
4. Analyze the elements that make the play a tragedy.
5. Explain O'Neill's concept of life as expressed in *Mourning Becomes Electra*.
6. Portrayal of violence in *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

## TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

Tennessee Williams was born to Cornelius Coffin Williams on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1911 in the town of Columbus in Mississippi State. His real name was Thomas Lanier Williams. He lived in the Episcopal rectory with his grandfather till he was twelve years old. His father, a practical, aggressive man and a hard drinker, worked as a traveling salesman and did not have a settled home of their own.

Young Williams was a boy of frail health and timid nature with a disinclination for sports. He suffered from diphtheria early in his life which resulted in a partial paralysis of his legs. He also had his eyes operated thrice for removing a cataract in his right eye. He developed a deep and lasting affection for his sister Rose, who was delicate in her constitution. His taste for reading was developed right from his childhood.

Williams, his sister and his mother started living with his father in 1926 when Cornelius Williams was transferred to the St. Louis office of the international shoe company. His schoolmates teased him often for his ill-health and his inability to take part in sports. Therefore both Williams and his sister Rose rejected the new environment and lived mainly in each others' company. Williams and his father had no love for each other.

Though an average student in the high school, Williams enjoyed reading a variety of books and also began to write poems, stories and essays for school competitions. After his graduation, he joined the University of Missouri in Columbia in 1929. But he did not stay longer in the college and his father got him a job in his shoe company where he had become the Sales Manager. He was not satisfied with his job and found a means of escape by writing poems and stories in his leisure. Later, he left the job due to a nervous breakdown and went to live with his grandparents in Memphis where Williams wrote his first play.

Williams returned to St. Louis in 1936 and joined Washington University in order to pursue his writing career. He wrote poems and short stories in the beginning but his real talent lay in the field of drama. At that time, he got the first prize in the play-writing competition for his *The Magic Tower*. He also made contact with *The Mummies*, a small theatre group in St. Louis.

The excellent drama department in the University of Iowa attracted him and he got his B.A degree from the University of Iowa in 1938. He went to Chicago but returned to St. Louis to produce his fourth play, *Not About Nightingales*. The play is considered to be more violent and horrible than any of his plays. In 1938-39, he worked in a restaurant in



New Orleans where he discovered the existence of lonely people with whom he shared a sort of kinship. He then underwent a course in advanced playwriting under John Gassner. He took up odd jobs like waiting on tables and reciting poetry in a night club while he wrote *Battle of Angels*. The play was put on stage with the recommendation of Gassner but it proved to be a failure.

Williams also worked in a film company in Hollywood before *The Glass Menagerie* established him as a talented playwright. It was recognized as the best play of the season in America. His next play, *A Streetcar Named Desire* proved to be more successful than its predecessor. His successful run in the field continued with more plays coming out of his pen. Many of his play were made into films. He got the Pulitzer Prize thrice, besides many other honours.

## A STREET CAR NAMED DESIRE

*A Street Car Named Desire* is the play about the panicky flight of Blanche DeBois, who can no longer sustain the catastrophe of a gentle way of life that cannot sustain her in an animalized world any longer. Stanley Kowalski and his wife Stella led a happy life in a street called Elysian Fields in the city of New Orleans. The situation changes when Stella's sister comes to stay with them. Blanche DeBois is a hyper-sensitive woman who is suffering from bad nerves. She takes hot baths frequently to keep herself calm. She got married at an early age and her husband died when she was young.

Blanche tells her sister that the superintendent of the high school at Laurel, where she was working as a teacher, advised her to go on a long leave. She has no other place to go as the family estate called Belle Reve in the State of Mississippi has been lost due to the extravagance of her ancestors. But the costly dresses and the rich jewels that she had aroused the suspicion of Stanley who insisted on seeing the legal papers regarding the property. When she was showing him the legal papers, Stanley got hold of the love letters that her husband had written to her once and she burns the letters in anger. This incident is the beginning of an antagonism between the two, which gets deepens with each scene that follows.

The next day, while Stanley is playing poker with his friends Steve, Mitch and Pablo, Blanche turns on the radio. This irritates Stanley who has been losing in the game and throws the radio out of the window. In the quarrel that followed, Stanley hits his wife. Blanche takes Stella upstairs to the flat of their neighbours, Eunice. When Stanley comes back to his senses, he calls Stella back and they get reconciled. Meanwhile, Blanche makes the opportunity to talk to Mitch with whom she had acquainted only on that day. She tells him that the violent behaviour of Stanley has upset her.

Next morning, Blanche scolds Stella for having reconciled with her husband so soon. She also suggests her sister to leave her husband so that they both could lead an independent life. But Stella remains devoted to her husband and rejects the plan. Blanche feels that Stella is married to a madman. She condemns Stanley and says that he is uncivilized. Stella remains unmoved but Stanley who was overhearing the conversation becomes more hostile towards Blanche.

Stanley once asks Blanche whether she knows somebody by the name Shaw. Though she responds in the negative, the mention of Shaw upsets her greatly. She later

confides to Stella secretly that unable to face life alone, she has been seeking protection and help from various men who took advantage of the situation. She also tells that she now feels ashamed of her past actions. She then tells her sister about her interest in Mitch and her wish to settle in life with him. Stella assures her that her desire would materialize soon.

In the evening, when Stanley and Stella have gone out, Blanche develops an interest on a young boy who calls at the house to collect funds for an evening newspaper. She wants to go to bed with him but controls herself. Later, she goes out with Mitch. When they return, she asks him to stay with her for a chat till the lord and the lady of the house arrives. She tells him about her views of Stanley that he goes out of his ways to offend her and hurt her feelings. She also tells Mitch that Stanley hates her and makes no effort to hide his hatred. Mitch tells Blanche that he has spoken to his sick mother about her and that his mother wants him to get married and settle down in his life before she dies. This news cheered Blanche who tells him about her marriage at a very early age. Her husband, Allan Gray was a homosexual and when she expressed her disgust to him on her discovery of his homosexuality, he shot himself dead. Mitch then proposes to her and she accepts him gratefully.

In mid-September, Stella arranged for a special dinner on Blanche's birthday. Mitch has also been invited to join them. Blanche was in the bathroom. Stanley reveals to Stella the loose life that Blanche had been having in the town of Laurel. Blanche used to visit a notorious hotel called "The Flamingo" with her customers for her one night engagements. Moreover, she had been making herself freely available to the soldiers at the army camp near Laurel. Moreover, Blanche was dismissed from her school because she had got involved with a seventeen year old boy whose father had reported the matter to the school superintendent. Stella refused to believe this and accuses her husband of inventing such stories. Stanley assures her that all that he told was true and that Mitch would not join them for dinner as he had told him all the truth about Blanche. He also tells her that he will not allow her to stay in the house any more. Stella is distressed at the turn of events.

The dinner seems to go on in a gloomy mood as Stanley and Stella remained silent. Blanche's efforts to cheer them up went in vain. When Stella asks her husband to wash his greasy hands and help her to clean the table, he loses his temper and behaves in a rude manner. He hurls a cup, plate and a saucer to the floor and tells her that this is the way he

will help her to clear the table. He also reprimands her for the negative words like “pig”, “Polack”, “disgusting”, “vulgar”, and “greasy” which the sisters were using to refer to him. He also hands over a bus ticket to Laurel as a birthday present to Blanche. The act of Stanley shatters her. Stella disapproves of the cruelty of Stanley towards her sister, but Stanley comforts her by saying that once Blanche leaves their home, they would be happy again. Stella realizes that the time of her delivery has neared and Stanley takes her to the hospital.

Blanche is alone in the house when Mitch calls upon her and confronts her. She confesses about the loose end in her past life and requests him to accept her. But he rejects her and she sent him immediately out of the house. Stanley returns home a few hours later, leaving Stella in the hospital, as the baby is expected only in the morning. He is completely drunk and when Blanche tells him that her millionaire friend has offered to take her to a cruise of the Caribbean Sea on the yacht, he does not believe her. He mocks at her saying that she cannot deceive him. Then Stanley takes revenge on her by raping her.

Stella returns home with her baby after a few weeks. By the time, Blanche has become crazy due to the rejection of Mitch and the rape by Stanley. Stella does not believe Blanche’s story of the rape as her husband has denied it. Stanley decides to send Blanche to a mental asylum to which Stella agrees reluctantly.

Later, when Stanley and his friends were playing poker, Blanche tells them that she is anxious to get out of the house as she feels it to a trap. She has been told that she is being sent to the countryside for a vacation but she believes that her millionaire friend Shep Huntleigh would take her away for a cruise in the Caribbean Sea. She starts speaking about the sea and says that she will die on the sea and be buried in the sea.

When the doctor and a matron arrive from the mental asylum to take Blanche away, she refuses to go with them. She has become completely insane and resists the attempt of the matron to take her away. Then the doctor approaches her and his gentle behaviour made her trust him and go out with him. Stella feels depressed at the cruelty of her husband and her behaviour towards her sister. Eunice comes and puts Stella’s child in her arms in order to console her. Stanley also fondles her in his bid to comfort her. Thus, the ruin of Blanche and the revenge of Stanley on his wife’s sister become complete.

## **RELEVANCE OF THE TITLE**

Almost all the names in the play are symbolical. When Blanche reaches the house of her sister, “Elysian Fields”, which means the abode of the blessed dead, she tells their neighbour Eunice that she had taken a streetcar named “Desire” and then switched over to another called “Cemeteries” in order to reach her destination. It is the desire to re-establish herself that brought her to the Elysian Fields. But, she is taken to the mental asylum in the end that is a kind of a cemetery for her as it represents a living death which she has to endure. It is her desire to project herself above all other people ruins her life and mind.

## **CHARACTERS**

### **BLANCHE DUBOIS**

The portrayal of Blanche DuBois in the play, “A Streetcar Named Desire” is considered to be one of the major triumphs of Tennessee Williams in the field of characterization. Blanche is one of the most interesting, intriguing and haunting figures in modern American drama. The play is the portrayal of Blanche’s frustration that leads to her tragedy.

Blanche is well-educated. She works as a teacher in a school in Laurel before she gets in to a scandal with a fifteen year old boy and is dismissed. She is familiar with a large number of books and her speech is often ironical and sarcastic. She becomes bitterly satiric when she speaks about Stanley. She has an excellent taste for clothes and jewels. She is also a lover of nature. However, with her youth slipping and her beauty fading, her life becomes tragic.

Blanche has an air of superiority over her despite the decline in her property and character. She is married at a young age. When she discovers that her husband is a homosexual, she expresses her displeasure over the fact and he commits suicide. This, along with the loss of their family estate at Belle Reve makes her fly from one man to another seeking protection. She takes her customers for her one night engagements to a notorious hotel called “The Flamingo” in Laurel. Later, she is dismissed from her job due to her involvement with a fifteen year old boy whose father reported the matter to the superintendent of the school where she was working. Having no other place to go in search

of a shelter, she comes to the house of her sister Stella. However, she projects her superiority by expressing her contempt of the locality and the house in which her sister is living.

Blanche has a weakness for liquor, but she pretends as if she is not really fond of the drink. She drinks a lot to escape from her present condition and her past memories. She also takes hot baths frequently that enabled her to attain a state of peace whenever she feels unhappy or angry. She tells her brother-in-law Stanley that she takes hot baths for her nerves. She is trying to escape some sort of guilt.

Exhibitionism is another weakness of Blanche. She cares more about her dress and her looks. She tells Stanley that their family estate was lost but the presence of costly dress and jewels in her trunk makes Stanley feel that she is trying to cheat her sister of her share of the property. She often asks Stella how she looks. Moreover, she expects a word of compliment from her brother- in-law. When Stanley failed to compliment her, the antagonism started between the two. She fears to stand in naked light as she does not want men to guess her age. So, she covers the bulb with a coloured paper lantern.

Blanche provokes Stanley who rapes her and makes her ruin complete. She fancies about a millionaire and believes that he will take her to a cruise in the Caribbean Sea. She fails to understand the temperament of Stanley and Stella and accuses him of being a representative of the Stone Age. She also asks Stella to leave her husband so that they can establish a business and be independent of him.

Blanche hopes to marry Mitch, a friend of Stanley and settle in life. But her hopes were destroyed by the revelation of her past life. When she was confronted by Mitch, she confesses the truths about her past life and begs him to marry her. He rejects her proposal but when he tries to get to bed with her, she turns him out of the house. The rejection of Mitch and the rape by Stanley makes her insane. Finally, she goes out of the house with the doctor, trusting a complete stranger, as she has always done in her life.

## **STANLEY KOWALSKI**

Stanley Kowalski, a man in his late twenties, was formerly a master sergeant in the engineer's corps in the army during the war. But now he works in an industrial plant. He seems to have better prospects in his job because of his efficiency and skill. He is fond of bowling and playing poker with his friends. He is always informal in his manners and his motto in his life is to "be comfortable".

Stanley is unable to tolerate the air of superiority and refinement in Blanche. When he hears that the family estate called Belle Reve is lost, Stanley suspects Blanche of trying to cheat his wife of her share of property and demands her to show the legal papers. This marks the beginning of a silent war between the two. Later, when he overhears Blanche condemning him to his wife, his antagonism towards her changes into hatred.

Stanley has a sort of animal temperament in him. Blanche expects him to pay compliments to her but in vain. He takes the bunch of love letters that her husband has written to her, much against her wish. Moreover, he moves about in the apartment freely in his underwear without any regard for another woman staying there. He does not close the bathroom door until he is asked to do so. When drunk, he quarrels with his wife and insults her sister over petty things.

Stanley chases Blanche like an animal chasing its prey. He secretly collects information about her past life in Laurel. He reveals the truths about the loose life that Blanche has been living in Laurel to his wife and his friend Mitch who is planning to marry Blanche. This revelation of Stanley shattered the hopes of Blanche that Mitch would marry her. His rudeness is also expressed in his decision to send her away from his home and the manner in which he gives the bus ticket to Laurel as his present for her birthday. A few hours later, after leaving his wife at the hospital, he comes home with a pre-meditated plan to complete his revenge on her. Blanche provokes him with the stories about her millionaire friend willing to take her on a cruise on the Caribbean Sea and Mitch returning with roses to beg her pardon. Stanley mocks at the stories that she has invented and then rapes her in a brutal manner. His rudeness towards Blanche is seen at its height when he sends her to the mental asylum.

Stanley is not a detestable character altogether. He is well educated and capable of passing sarcastic comments like Blanche. However, his sarcasm against Blanche is very cruel, similar to his behaviour towards her. He is a good friend and a loving husband. He reveals the truths about the past life of Blanche to Mitch in order to save his best friend from marrying her. Moreover, whenever he quarrels with his wife Stella, he makes a compromise immediately and makes her forget the unpleasant quarrel. Stella believes her husband to such an extent that she does not believe the story of her sister about the rape as her husband had denied it.

### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Characterization in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
2. Symbolism in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
3. Defend the cruelty of Stanley towards Blanche.
4. Explain the journey of Blanche from one broken world to another seeking protection and comfort.
5. Trace the autobiographical elements present in the play.
6. Describe the antagonism between Stanley and Blanche in the play.
7. Explain the conflict between Stanley's brutish nature and Blanche's civilization.
8. What are the factors that make *A Streetcar Named Desire* a tragedy?

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## ARTHUR MILLER

### LIFE AND WORKS

Arthur Miller, one of the leading American playwrights of the twentieth century and a celebrity of equal notoriety was born on October 17, 1915 in New York City as the son of a ladies-wear manufacturer. His father's business was ruined during the economic collapse of the 1930s. After graduation from high school, he worked in a warehouse to earn money to attend the University of Michigan. Miller decided to become a writer when he read Dostoevsky.

Miller studied journalism in the University of Michigan where his ability as a playwright was recognized and encouraged. He joined the Federal Theatre Project after his graduation from the university. He wrote novels and plays. His novel, *Focus* was published in 1945 but he emerged as an important playwright with the play *All My Sons*, two years later in 1947. The play is about a manufacturer of faulty war materials and has traces of the influence of Henrik Ibsen.

*Death of a Salesman*, published in 1949 gained him international acclaim. The protagonist, Willy Loman is an American archetype and a victim of his own delusions of grandeur and obsession with success that haunts him in his failure. Miller received the Pulitzer Prize and the Tony Award for the play. *The crucible* followed in 1953. It is about the Salem witch trials with which the author criticized the contemporary society. *A Memory of Two Mondays* and *A View from the Bridge* were staged in 1955.

Miller married Marilyn Monroe in 1956, but the marriage ended in 1961. He then married an Austrian photographer and continued to write plays, screenplays, essays and memoirs till his death in 2005. His other works include a censored account of his marriage to Monroe titled, *After the Fall* in 1964, *The Price* in 1967, *The archbishop's ceiling* in 1977, *The American Clock* in 1980, *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan* in 1991, *The Last Yankee* and *Broken Glass* in 1993.

### DEATH OF A SALESMAN

*Death of a Salesman*, published in 1949, mixes the tradition of social realism that runs throughout the works of Miller with a more experimental structure that includes the

expressionistic technique used by O'Neill in *The Emperor Jones*. The protagonist Willy Loman stands as an American archetype. He is a victim of his own delusions of grandeur and obsession of success that haunts him in his failure.

Miller is not concerned with the lives of great men of importance. He is occupied with the predicament of the common man in a rapidly advancing commercial and materialistic society. His characters are drawn from the lower strata of the society. They are not impressive enough to attract the attention of other people in their daily life. Their lives begin and end as ordinary men without any events of importance. His plays deal with the conflict between the business ethics and the emotional attitude of the members of the family.

The protagonist of Miller's play, *Death of a Salesman* is a salesman who sells products that are unknown to the audience. He stands as a representative all salesmen of the modern age who in the process of their work sell themselves. He is an ordinary man who never made any money. He did not make any news in his lifetime. He is not the finest character that ever lived. However, there is one virtue in his character that is his humane nature.

Willy worked as a salesman for thirty six years and opened up new markets for the product which he was selling. Miller keeps the name of the product a secret so as to generalize the thing. Later, in his old age, when he was not able to make any profit for the company with his tactics as a salesman they take away his salary and thereby makes his life terrible. He was not able to see the reality of life that lay beyond his grasp. However, his son Biff was able to realize the hollowness of the dream of success.

Willy believed that success depends on personality, and contacts. He also thought that a quick smile and good clothes can bring success in life. In the end he realizes that something had gone wrong with him in his life. However, he was not able to realize that he had chosen the wrong profession with the conviction that selling is the best profession in the world. Once Willy happened to see how an eight four years old salesman names Dave Singleman contacted his customers from thirty one states from his house and lured them through the telephone. He was also impressed by the large number of mourners who came

for the funeral of Singleman when he died. This made him feel proud that he had chosen the right profession.

Willy's employer Howard and Bill Oliver stands as representatives of the ruthlessness of the business community. Howard knows what is good for his commercial organization and eliminates what is not good. Therefore he dismisses Willy without any pity or consideration for his service in the organization for thirty six years. Willy says that he eats the orange and throws the peel away. He throws away whatever is old. As he throws away his old camera and bandsaw after substituting them with new ones, he throws away Willy who has become old.

Every cloud has its silver lining and the neighbours of the Lomans represent tolerance, sympathy and goodwill. Charlie and his Bernard are plain, honest and kind. Charley prospers in his business without much effort and Bernard achieves glory without being pushed by his father. Moreover, Bernard does not have the education of the University of Virginia and therefore Willy feels that he ought not to have been a success.

Willy dotes on the success of his teenaged son Biff. But ironically Bernard succeeds in his life whereas Biff's life comes to an end with his Ebbets field match. He could not go back to his studies. Nor could he succeed in his business. He cannot fulfill the wish of Willy that every man must earn the utmost he can. Willy had much faith in his sons and he will not accept that they are bums.

The positive values of life are shown rather dimly and vaguely. However, the aspects that impoverishes life, like illicit love is portrayed directly and plainly. Willy is responsible for his failure in life. His affair with the woman in the hotel makes him feel guilty. Once he was surprised by his son Biff in the hotel. Moreover, his guilt comes to the surface of his mind when he sees his wife Linda mending the old stockings, for he had given the new stockings that he had brought for his wife to the woman at the hotel.

Biff remained in the shadow of his father till he learns of his infidelity. Later, Biff and his brother desert their father and go with the girls whom they pick up in the restaurant. The exposures of illicit sex of the father in the past and the sons in the present shows the poor condition of the life of the Lomans who find a way of escape in sex.

Willy stands as the representative of every American who strives to come up in his life. His very name Loman symbolizes his low status in the society. He is an average American whose friends and neighbours have no last name or a family heritage of importance. Even his employer Howard does not have a last name. Moreover, the product that Willy sells is kept a secret to suggest that Willy could be any man who takes sales as his profession. The ordinary language of the masses that he uses and the shabby atmosphere in which he lives contributes to the common place of his character.

Willy's dreams occupy nearly half of the play. They are the dreams of all the people throughout the world. They are the dreams of a happy and hopeful past. They are also the memory of a guilty past from which the character tries to escape. The stage effects with its special music and lightening add to the effect of the play.

Manual labour and nature are suggested as healthy alternatives to the tiresome commercialization of life in the modern world. Willy and Biff remain as themselves only when they spend their energy in manual labour. Their love for nature put them on the right track. When Willy loose his job and puts aside his personality of a salesman, he could admire the beauty of nature around him. Miller's concern for his society is present in his portrayal of the conflict between commercialization and a natural life that results in the disillusionment of the characters.

## **QUESTIONS**

1. Describe Willy's disillusionment with life.
2. Give the reasons that account for the failure of Willy.
3. Contrast the character of Willy from that of his neighbour Charley and Bernard.
4. Describe the disadvantages of commercialization as expressed by Miller in his play.
5. Dramatic techniques of Miller.

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## EDWARD ALBEE

### LIFE AND WORKS

Edward Franklin Albee was born on first march, 1914 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma to Lewis Alfred and Ida Millsap Ellison. At the beginning of the century, Oklahoma had not been a state for very long and was still considered a part of the frontier. Lewis and Ida Ellison had each grown up in the south to parents who had been slaves. The couple moved out west to Oklahoma hoping that the lives of their children would be fuelled with a sense of possibility in this state that was reputed for its freedom. Though the prejudices of Texas and Arkansas soon encroached upon Oklahoma, the open spaces and the fighting spirit of the people whom Ellison grew up among provided him with a relatively unbiased atmosphere.

The death of Lewis Ellison in 1917 left Ida, Ralph and his younger brother Herbert quite poor. In order to support the family, Ida worked as a domestic servant and stewardess at the Avery Chapel, an Afro-Methodist Episcopal Church. With this, the family moved in to the parsonage and Ellison was brought into close contact with the Minister's library, which he made good use of it. Literature was a destined medium for Ellison, whose father named him after the famous writer Ralph Waldo Emerson and hoped that he would become a poet. His mother encouraged his enthusiasm for reading over the years of his youth by bringing him books and magazines from the houses she cleaned. In addition to this, a black Episcopal priest challenged the white custom of barring the blacks from the public library and the custom was overturned. With this, Ellison's horizons were broadened by the large number of books now available to him from in the public library.

During his teenage years, Ellison and his friends imagined themselves of being the eclectic combination of men from the frontiers and Renaissance. The ideal they created in their life gave them the courage to expect anything out of life. They were prepared to face life as it comes. They believed that they had the ability and power to do whatever they wanted in life as well as or better than any men of any race. Ellison first used this credo when he attacked the medium of music by participating in an intense musical programme for twelve years at the Frederick Douglas School in Oklahoma City. Although he received musical training in a variety of instruments as well as theory, he held a high preference for

the trumpet and was talented enough to obtain training from the conductor of the Oklahoma City Orchestra. Ellison took part in many concerts, marches, bands and celebrations for the town. Even when he devoted his time to his study of music, he did not lose sight of his desire to be a man of renaissance. Therefore he spent time in playing football, working at small jobs, and experimenting in electronics.

In 1933, Ellison won a scholarship from the State of Oklahoma. So, he left Oklahoma and headed to the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama to study music. One of his music teachers at the school was Hazel Harrison who later introduced him to Alain Locke, a new Negro thinker who later led Ellison to his writing career years later through his connections with eminent men like Langston Hughes and Richard Wright. At Tuskegee, Ellison excelled in his music. He also took a particular liking to his sociology and sculpture classes and the outside classroom that Alabama provided. Literature also influenced him at Tuskegee and he delved again into the expansive libraries at his disposal. T.S. Elliot's *The Waste Land* with its elusive lyricism influenced him very much. Disappointed in the limited capacity of the African- American literature at that point, Ellison practiced playing with the force of words as he had found Elliot to do. He later used his experiences at Tuskegee and the injustices that he encountered in the south to structure his writing of the *Invisible Man*.

Ellison left Tuskegee after his third year in the music school due to financial reasons. He was introduced to Augusta Savage, a black sculptor in Harlem, New York in 1936. The sculptor liked his works and so Ellison moved to Harlem. New York lured him with its energy and reputation of freedom. Harlem was a vibrant cultural centre in the 1930s and the 1940s and Ellison spent most of the rest of his life there. His mother died and he attended her funeral in Dayton, Ohio. On his return, he met Richard Wright who had a great literary influence on him. This meeting along with his poverty led him to concentrate more on his writing. His first book review, titled *Creative and Cultural Lag* was published in *New Challenge*. However, his first short story, *Heine's Bull* was not published.

The few wrings successes did not provide Ellison with the necessary money. Finally, Wright helped him to get a job with the Federal Writers Project. During this time, he came into contact with many interesting interviewees who influenced him to collect materials about folklore and the distinctly African-American collection of rhymes, games, stories, and so on. This enriched his knowledge of American culture and added to the stock of experiences he had in Oklahoma and Alabama. He also wrote articles to radical periodicals like *Negro Quarterly*, *New Challenge* and *New Masses*. Between 1937 and 1944, he published over twenty reviews. His belief that every text should have a conscious protagonist led to his break with his mentor, Richard Wright. By the time, Ellison had published some of his short stories such as *Slick Gonna Learn*, *The Birthmark*, *King of the Bingo Game* and *Flying Home*. When the Second World War began, he got a chance to edit the *Negro Quarterly* and to begin *Invisible Man*. By the end of the war, the quality of his writing reached masterful proportions as he had learnt to incorporate the likes of Mark Twain, William Faulkner, Feodar Doestovsky and Earnest Hemingway into his work. *Invisible Man* was published in 1952.

Ellison became almost invisible after the publication of his first novel. However, between 1952 and 1994, he published two acclaimed books of essays, *Shadow and Act* and *Going to the territory*. He received many honours for his works, especially his masterpiece, that include the National Book Award, Russwarm Award, and the election to the American Academy of Arts. In 1970, he became the Albert Schweitzer Professor of Humanities at New York University. He died of cancer in 1994.

## INVISIBLE MAN

### Plot

The novel opens with a prologue describing the depressed state of the narrator who remains nameless throughout the novel. He proclaims that he is an invisible man and has taken to living underground, unknown to others. The novel is the story of how he comes to be in this position.

As a young boy the narrator overheard the last words of his dying grandfather that the blacks should overcome the whites “with Yeses, undermine ’em with grins, agree ’em to death and destruction”. This message lingered with him through high school. He remembered this when he is asked to give his college oration to the town’s most honoured white men. The narrator, along with other boys hired for the evening’s entertainment were made to pass through a room where a naked woman danced. Then they were made to box with each other and also sent to grab for gold coins on an electrified rag. Finally, the narrator was allowed to give his oration and awarded a scholarship to a renowned black college. He was disillusioned at the college and this disillusionment overcomes him by the end. He remembered the fateful day when he was given the honour of driving an old white trustee, Mr. Norton, around the campus. The drive went on smoothly for a while. Norton said that he saw every student at the college as part of his fate. He wanted to explore parts of the surrounding town and the narrator took him in to a poor district of sharecroppers where Norton was intrigued by a disgraced member of the community, Jim Trueblood, who was rumoured to have impregnated both his daughter and wife. He gave a long description of the dream which made him commit the act of incest. His wife had tried to kill him after the incident. Hearing this, Norton felt ill and the narrator took him to the Golden Day brothel to get whisky to revive him. Unfortunately, mental patients visiting the bar rose up against their attendant, trapping the narrator and Norton in the middle of their fight. Norton fell unconscious and a former doctor revived him. When they return to the college, the narrator was punished for his treatment of Mr. Norton. The college president, Bledsoe expelled the narrator and sent him to New York with seven sealed letters to wealthy employers with the promise that he could return as a paying student later. The narrator felt insulted and decided to take advantage of the opportunity to work for an important person in New York City.



The narrator arrived in Harlem, rented a room at the Men's House and set out to hand out his letters in the next morning. He was not able to meet the employers directly and so he handed over the letters to the secretaries of the employers. But, as he did not hear anything from the employers, he became suspicious of the secretaries and held back the last letter. He tried to meet Mr. Emerson directly but his son took the letter from him and tried to talk him out of returning to the college or speaking to his father. As the narrator was not ready to give up, Emerson's son showed him the letter which he had been told not to look at. The narrator was horrified to read Bledsoe's request to the employers not to allow him to return to the school as a paying student. Disillusioned, he decided to take a job at a paint factory in order to be able to fund his revenge on Bledsoe.

Mr. Kimbro, his boss put the narrator immediately on the job with a few instructions and the order not to ask questions. As he was afraid to ask Kimbro, the narrator mixed the wrong ingredients in to the paint and he was fired from his job. He was handed to another boss, Mr. Brockway who worked as an engineer of sorts. Brockway feared that the narrator is trying to take his job and felt quite irritable towards him. He asked many questions about his past. They get along agreeably until the narrator ran into what he thought was a union meeting, which delayed him in his lunch time. When he explained this to Brockway, he exploded in anger at his participation in a union and attacked him. The narrator, in order to defend himself, fought off Brockway. At that time, the tanks burst from pressure because of their inattention to the gauges in the room and the narrator was covered in white paint and knocked unconscious.

The narrator swam in and out of consciousness surrounded by doctors who speak of lobotomies and tests which they would not try on him if he had been a white Harvard student. He was unable to remember his name when he was asked. Finally, the doctors released him from the machines and tubes, saying that he is saved although he did not know from what. The director of the hospital told him that he can no longer work at the plant but he would receive ample compensation. He stumbled back towards the Men's House when he was relieved on the way by a strong motherly woman named Mary Rambo. She took him to her home to rest and to revive himself. When he returned to his

House, he felt inferior and realized that he could no longer stay there. After offending a man whom he first believes to be Bledsoe, he was thrown out of the house. He then returned to Mary and lived with her for a while.

In winter, the narrator felt restless and wandered in the streets. His anger towards Bledsoe was still intact. On his way, he was drawn towards a place where an old black couple was being thrown out in the cold. The crowd that stood around the defenceless couple shrieked and cried against the injustice. This scene of dispossession struck the narrator and he spoke to the crowd after the couple was denied the chance to go into the house and pray. He was able to calm the crowd and formed their chaos into an ordered rage. The crowd rushed into the house and the narrator runs to escape the police. He was followed by a short man who later met him on the streets. He introduced himself as Brother Jack and offered him a job with the Brotherhood, taking advantage of his speaking skills. He first brushed aside the offer but later accepted it in order to pay back to Mary with whom he was staying at that time. He also decided to stop living with her once he was accepted in to the Brotherhood. He attended the party meeting at the Chthonian Hotel. The crowd was mostly white but they all appeared friendly. All the members of the Brotherhood who were present at the meeting praised his action at the eviction. Brother Jack explained to him that his job would be to lead the community of Harlem in line with the teachings of the Brotherhood in the manner of Booker T. Washington. However, the narrator secretly decided to act in the opposite, following the example set by the founder of his college, Mr. Bledsoe.

The narrator was sent to Brother Hambro for training. He was then given a new name, and a new apartment. After completing the training, he worked with Brother Tarp and Brother Clifton in Harlem. During a meeting, the narrator and Clifton met Ras the Exhorter, who competed with them for the support of the community and criticizes them for being traitors to their own race. A fight followed between the two groups and the narrator had to lead Clifton away from the place. Even after this incident, the narrator felt secure and contented in his position.

After a few weeks the narrator was charged by Brother Westrum for attempting to overshadow and dominate the Brotherhood and the narrator goes in search of someone who would help him to prove his innocence. When he returned, he found that the spirit in the district was much subdued and the people felt that the Brotherhood had let them down. He met Clifton on the streets chased by the police which ended with his death. The narrator used the chance to unite the people of Harlem around the fallen hero. His success made the Brotherhood angry and Jack told him that he was not hired to think. He also ordered the narrator to go to Hambro in order to understand the new, less aggressive programme.

The narrator felt angry towards the Brotherhood. He was also chased by Ras and his men. So he disguised himself using dark green glasses and a wide hat. People who met him in his disguise thought him to be Rhinehart. Later, on his way to Hambro's, he entered a church where Rhinehart was a Reverend. The views of Rhinehart made the narrator more cynical than ever and Hambro was not able to make him accept the Brotherhood's ways of life. However, he remembered the words of his grandfather and decided to attack the Brotherhood from inside.

The narrator wanted to find a woman from whom he can get inside information of the Brotherhood. He chooses Sybil, the wife of an important brother but she wanted him to rape her. He was caught in a riot when he tried to escape. Ras, who was leading the riot, identified the narrator and wanted him to be hanged. Running from Ras and his men, the narrator falls down a manhole and realizes that he must live underground for a while.

Living underground, the narrator takes revenge on the society in silent, unsuspecting ways. He steals electricity from a power company by wiring his room full of light bulbs. He covers even the floor of his underground hole with bulbs, out of spite and a desire to hold as much light as possible. In this way, his hibernation would be warm and well lit and he will continue to be alive. The epilogue talks of his resolution to reemerge into the world of social responsibility.

## **QUESTIONS:**

1. What are values of the Invisible man?
2. Describe the qualities of the man living underground.
3. Bring out the hypocritical nature of the Brotherhood.
4. Why is the narrator invisible in the novel?
5. Describe in detail, the terrible experiences of the narrator before he goes to live underground.

Blanche has a weakness for liquor, but she pretends as if she is not really fond of the drink. She drinks a lot to escape from her present condition and her past memories. She also takes hot baths frequently that enabled her to attain a state of peace whenever she feels unhappy or angry. She tells her brother-in-law Stanley that she takes hot baths for her nerves. She is trying to escape some sort of guilt.

Exhibitionism is another weakness of Blanche. She cares more about her dress and her looks. She tells Stanley that their family estate was lost but the presence of costly dress and jewels in her trunk makes Stanley feel that she is trying to cheat her sister of her share of the property. She often asks Stella how she looks. Moreover, she expects a word of compliment from her brother-in-law. When Stanley failed to compliment her, the antagonism started between the two. She fears to stand in naked light as she does not want men to guess her age. So, she covers the bulb with a coloured paper lantern.

Blanche provokes Stanley who rapes her and makes her ruin complete. She fancies about a millionaire and believes that he will take her to a cruise in the Caribbean Sea. She fails to understand the temperament of Stanley and Stella and accuses him of being a representative of the Stone Age. She also asks Stella to leave her husband so that they can establish a business and be independent of him.

Blanche hopes to marry Mitch, a friend of Stanley and settle in life. But her hopes were destroyed by the revelation of her past life. When she was confronted by Mitch, she confesses the truths about her past life and begs him to marry her. He rejects her proposal but when he tries to get to bed with her, she turns him out of the house. The rejection of Mitch and the rape by Stanley makes her insane. Finally, she goes out of the house with the doctor, trusting a complete stranger, as she has always done in her life.

## **STANLEY KOWALSKI**

Stanley Kowalski, a man in his late twenties, was formerly a master sergeant in the engineer's corps in the army during the war. But now he works in an industrial plant. He seems to have better prospects in his job because of his efficiency and skill. He is fond of bowling and playing poker with his friends. He is always informal in his manners and his motto in his life is to "be comfortable".

Stanley is unable to tolerate the air of superiority and refinement in Blanche. When he hears that the family estate called Belle Reve is lost, Stanley suspects Blanche of trying to cheat his wife of her share of property and demands her to show the legal papers. This marks the beginning of a silent war between the two. Later, when he overhears Blanche condemning him to his wife, his antagonism towards her changes into hatred.

Stanley has a sort of animal temperament in him. Blanche expects him to pay compliments to her but in vain. He takes the bunch of love letters that her husband has written to her, much against her wish. Moreover, he moves about in the apartment freely in his underwear without any regard for another woman staying there. He does not close the bathroom door until he is asked to do so. When drunk, he quarrels with his wife and insults her sister over petty things.

Stanley chases Blanche like an animal chasing its prey. He secretly collects information about her past life in Laurel. He reveals the truths about the loose life that Blanche has been living in Laurel to his wife and his friend Mitch who is planning to marry Blanche. This revelation of Stanley shattered the hopes of Blanche that Mitch would marry her. His rudeness is also expressed in his decision to send her away from his home and the manner in which he gives the bus ticket to Laurel as his present for her birthday. A few hours later, after leaving his wife at the hospital, he comes home with a pre-meditated plan to complete his revenge on her. Blanche provokes him with the stories about her millionaire friend willing to take her on a cruise on the Caribbean Sea and Mitch returning with roses to beg her pardon. Stanley mocks at the stories that she has invented and then rapes her in a brutal manner. His rudeness towards Blanche is seen at its height when he sends her to the mental asylum.

## LORRAINE HANSBERRY

### A RAISIN IN THE SUN

#### SUMMARY

*A Raisin in the Sun* records the experiences of Lorraine Hansberry as a black fighter in a realistic and natural manner. The play portrays a few weeks in the life of the Youngers, an African-American family living on the south side of Chicago in the 1950. Mr. Younger is dead and the family is about to receive an insurance amount of ten thousand dollars. Every member of the family has their own idea of expenditure for the money they are expected to get.

The play is set at the Youngers' apartment in Chicago. Mr. Younger is survived by his wife Lena and two children, Beneatha and Walter Lee. The day dawns for the Youngers like any other day. While carrying out their routine works, they discuss about the insurance money they are about to receive very soon. Walter tells his wife Ruth about his plans to invest the money in a liquor store with his friends.

Beneatha studies medicine and wants a share of the money to use for her tuition. However, Walter feels that she doing something womanly than studying medicine as he does not want to share the money with his sister. Walter's wife Ruth hopes that their life would improve if her husband invests the money in business and runs it in a profitable manner. But Lena or Mama, as she is called by all in the family feels morally repulsed by the very idea of getting into liquor business. Her idea was to move to a new house. It was the cherished dream of both Mama and her husband Mr. Younger.

By the time, Beneatha has been dating a man called George Murchison. Ruth and Mama hail her for her selection but she feels that he is shallow in his ideals. Moreover, she dislikes him for his willingness to submit to white culture and forget his African heritage.

The cheque for the expected money arrives from the insurance company and the family rejoices at their fortune. Soon the quarrel over the sharing of money dominates the scene and it makes Mama exclaim that freedom used to be the main concern of people in life earlier but now it is the money. Meanwhile Beneatha receives a visitor in Joseph

Asagai who presents her some records and the colourful robes of a Nigerian woman. His gift expresses his secret desire to change her into an African woman.

Mama uses the money to buy a new house. When Walter comes to know of that he shouts at her saying that she has butchered up his dream of coming up well in life. A few weeks later, Mama agrees to give Walter the sixty five hundred dollars as she has given the remaining thirty five hundred as down payment for the new house. By the time, Beneatha has expressed that she is not interested in Murchison.

On Saturday, when the Youngers' family is packing to move to their new apartment, Karl Linder comes and tries to persuade them against their move to the white neighbourhood. He is a representative of the Clybourne Park Improvement Association where Mama has bought the house. He does not want the coloured people to enter the white neighbourhood and tells them that they are not wanted there. However, when Mama heard about this, she remains unaffected. She is stubborn in her decision to move into the new apartment and decides to fight the racial discrimination that is prevalent in Chicago. At that time, Bobo comes and tells them that Walter's friend Willy has gone away with his money. The whole family is stunned to hear that Walter has lost his investment.

The play is about the shattered dreams of the family of the Youngers. With the loss of the money, everyone in the family lose hope except Mama who seems optimistic. Asagai meets Beneatha and expresses his desire to take her to Africa. Everyone moves towards their new home in Clybourne Park in a dejected mood. The loss of money makes them stand united as a family. Their dejection makes them strong enough to face life and they start functioning as the part of a family. They merge their dreams with the family's dream of owning a house of their own.

## **THEME OF THE PLAY**

*A Raisin in the Sun* shows the pitiable condition of the black family in the real light. The play probes deep into issues like poverty, discrimination, and the need for the development of an African-American racial identity. It explores the racial discrimination in the American society and the determination of the black family to fight the discrimination against them.



The different characters in the play react in different manner to the problem of discrimination before they submit themselves to the view of Mama to fight against the whites. The need for an African identity is expressed in the character of Joseph Asagai who wants to take Beneatha to Africa. Similarly Beneatha's longing to have a native identity is expressed in her refusal of Murchison because of his willingness to submit himself to the superiority of the whites and accepting Asagai. She also wears the dress of the Nigerian woman that was presented to her by Asagai.

The problems of women and the need to liberate them are also expressed by the female characters in the play. The family is run by the matriarch, Mama. Unlike Walter who wastes a major portion of the insurance amount in his liquor business, Mama invests a share of the money in the new home that would provide more space for all of them to grow. It was the cherished dream of all the members of the family including Mr. Younger, who is dead at that time. She is determinant not to give up their chance of living in the new and spacious house. She ignores the advice of Karl Linder who asks them not to shift to the white neighbourhood where they are not wanted. She decides to stand strong against racial discrimination and she gets the support of her family members in the end. She is the decision maker in her home.

The problem of women's education is represented by Beneatha who wants to study medicine. Her brother Walter wants her to do something womanly as he fears that her option of tuition for her course will have a cut in the insurance money which he wants to invest in business. However, Beneatha is not ready to give up and continues her studies even when the family suffers from financial crisis. She does not give much importance to marriage. She selects her spouse with care. She chooses Joseph Asagai who is eager to restore his African identity in preference to Murchison who is willing to submit to the power of the whites. She feels that his ideals are shallow.

Walter's wife Ruth represents the problem of abortion. She takes enough freedom to decide on the future of her child. She supports the ambition of Mama to own a house as she feels that her son Travis would get enough space to grow. When she learns that she is pregnant, she opts for an abortion as she thinks that the house does not have enough space for another child to grow. Moreover, she fears that the presence of another child will have financial strains on the family and it will affect the growth of Travis.

On the whole, the play treats the shattered dreams of a black family as its theme. The arrival of the insurance money gave everyone in the family the hope of fulfilling their dreams. Mama wants to get a new home of their own and the idea is shared by her daughter-in-law, Ruth. Beneatha wants some money for her tuitions to continue her education. Walter wants to invest the money in business. Unfortunately, all their dreams are shattered in the end as the house that Mama buys is in the white neighbourhood where they are not wanted. Walter's partner Willy runs away with his money and Beneatha has no money left for her tuitions. Everyone loses their hope except Mama who hopes that she can fight the racial discrimination with the help of her family.

### **RELEVANCE OF THE TITLE**

The title of the play is taken from the poem, *Harlem*, which appeared in a sequence of poems titled, *Montage of a Dream Deferred* by Langston Hughes:

What happens to a dream deferred  
Does it dry up  
Like a raisin in the Sun?  
Or fester like a sore-  
And then run?

The title emphasize the theme of the play in which each character struggles with their dreams deferred. Not only their dreams but the characters themselves shrivel up like a raisin in the sun. All the members of the family of Younger have their own ideas about spending the insurance amount of ten thousand dollars. But no one is able to achieve them their fullest satisfaction.

Mama or Lena Younger wants to own a house of their own. Her dream is shared by Ruth Younger who wants more space for her son Travis to grow up. Mama succeeds in getting a new house but in a white neighbourhood where they are not wanted. Similarly, Beneatha wants to become a doctor. She also tries hard to find her identity by pursuing an independent career and does not want to be dependant on men. Her dreams are shattered by the loss of money by Walter in his business.

Walter wants to become rich by investing his money in liquor business. Unfortunately, his friend and partner, Willy Harvis runs away with the money. Thus the

play narrates the struggle of the individual for survival. The triumph of the Younger family lies in the optimism of Mama who decides to stand against the discrimination of the blacks by facing the whites in the new neighbourhood.

## **CHARACTER SKETCHES**

### **LENA YOUNGER (MAMA)**

Lena is the matriarch of the family of the Youngers. She is affectionately called as Mama. She is highly religious, moral and motherly. She wants to use her husband's insurance amount to buy a new house of their own where they have enough space to move about. She dreams of going up in her life. She is highly conservative and sticks to her faiths. She is an agnostic who defends her religions. She is not able to accept the views of Beneatha who talks against god and makes her believe in Him. Nor can she welcome Ruth's idea of abortion. Moreover, she does not encourage Walter's idea of investing the money in liquor business because she is repulsed by the very idea of a liquor business.

Mama is proud though she is poor. She represents human dignity. She wants her children to be respected in their life. Moreover, her love and affection towards her family members is seen when she consents to give sixty five hundred dollars to Walter for his business. Moreover, she consoles Ruth when Walter loses the money. She supports Beneatha's view that Murchison is self-centered and that his ideals are shallow.

Lena stands as an archetype of the black matriarch who is able to impose the ideas and lifestyle that she considers as good for her children. She respects her husband and makes him a role model for her children. She also expects unity in the family. She is unselfish and works hard for the betterment of the family. She gives Walter the necessary money despite her repulsion towards liquor business. Though she realizes the limitations of the blacks in the society dominated by the whites, she encourages her children to pursue their own dreams. She enables Walter to bloom into a matured man by her patient understanding of his dreams and selfless love for the family.

Lena has the courage to defy the whites who discriminates the blacks in their own neighbourhood. She feels proud of her African heritage and opens the door to

emancipation. She teaches her children to enjoy life despite the financial strains and the racial prejudice in their life.

Lena has great mental strength. She remains confident even when everyone else in the family loses their hope of a future. She does not give importance to money. She is concerned more with human values than with anything else. Her strength and the ability to make everyone united is the strength of the family and the Youngers are able to retain happiness in their life because of her moral strength.

### **RUTH YOUNGER**

Walter's wife Ruth is young, patient and hardworking. She contributes to the family income by her hard work. She understands her husband and supports him in all his endeavours. She talks to Mama in support of her husband and thereby acts as the peacemaker between the mother and the son.

Ruth is determined in all her decisions. She shares Mama's dream of buying a new house. When Walter loses a major share of the money in liquor business, Mama wanted to reconsider her decision of moving into the white neighbourhood. But Ruth remained unmoved as she desperately needs to move to the place where her children would have more space to grow up. She is ready to work throughout her life in order to fulfill her dream of living in a house with more space. Her love for her child and her concern for the family makes her the epitome of womanhood.

### **BENEATHA YOUNGER**

Beneatha is the most autobiographical of Hansberry's characters. She has a pioneering spirit that does not seek solutions to problems. However, she has an ambition to fulfill. She wants to be a doctor and considers it to be the most concrete thing in the world that a human being could do. She is sarcastic of her brother's aim of investing the money in the liquor business. She also understands the financial crisis in the family and therefore hesitates to demand money for her studies.

Beneatha is highly independent and courageous. She hates Murchison of his willingness to submit to white culture. Moreover, she understands that his ideals in life are

shallow. She protests against her family members when they ask her to marry him. She does not want to marry for money. Instead, she encourages Joseph Asagai who is eager to take her to Africa to love her. She is proud of her African heritage and wants to be “a queen of the Nile”. However, her pride is suppressed with the financial crisis in the family and becomes more tolerant and compassionate in the end.

## **WALTER YOUNGER**

Walter Lee Younger is the antagonist as well as the protagonist of the play which revolves around his actions. His mistakes hurt the family greatly and make him the antagonist and his maturity to manhood makes him the protagonist. He is the representative of the men who struggle to support their family and try various methods to improve their economy. The financial crisis in his family makes him frustrated. He is highly materialistic and believes in the power of money. He is also self-conceited and never listens to the views of others. He invests a major share of his father’s money in liquor business and his loss teaches him that the integrity of the family and money is important for life. He also realizes the necessity of an identity of his own. Therefore, he refuses the money that Mr. Linder offers him and like his mother decides to fight against racial discrimination.

Walter is a victim of American materialism. However, he submits before the traditional values of pride and selfhood. He later succeeds in identifying his soul when he shares the dream of his mother to own a house of their own. The failures in his life made him ready to face life with new strength and energy.

### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Trace the feministic elements in the play, *A Raisin in the Sun*.
2. Trace the representation of racial discrimination in *A Raisin in the Sun*.
3. Explain how dreams drive the Youngers in their life.

## UNIT V

### RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Born as the son of a Unitarian minister on May 20, 1803, Ralph Waldo Emerson was helped by his Aunt Mary Moody Everson to have a good education. The death of his father when he was eleven years old left him completely dependant on his aunt. He entered Harvard when he was fourteen, working his way through as a messenger boy to the president. He began to work on his journal in 1820. He worked as a teacher in a girls' school in Boston after his graduation in 1821.

Emerson gave up teaching and joined Divinity School at Cambridge in 1825. Ill-health forced him to move on between preaching and convalescence. He married Ellen Tucker in 1829 but she died in less than two years of their marriage. Though he was quite successful as a Unitarian minister, he was plagued by doubts and misunderstandings. He broke away from the church as he was unwilling to administer the Lord's Supper with his whole heart. He went on a tour to Europe in 1833 and met famous literary figures like Landor, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Carlyle. He returned to his mother in Concord in 1835 after the European tour, married Lydia Jackson and settled down.

Emerson published his first book *Nature* in 1836 which was not a great success. However, his challenging addresses entitled *The American Scholar* in 1837 and *The Divinity School Address* in 1838 made him famous. The circle of his lectures widened in the next two decades. Moreover, he began to collect his essays and lectures into collected volumes which were published in two volumes in 1841 and in 1844. *Representative Men* in 1850, *English Traits* in 1856 and *The Conduct of Life* in 1860 are also noteworthy collections of the essays of Emerson.

Emerson worked with *The Dial*, a transcendental magazine from 1840 to 1844. He lectured extensively in the 1840's and the 1850's. His *Poems* was published in 1847. He was awarded the LL.D. from Harvard. His active participation in literary and political activities declined from 1860 and he became one with Nature on April 27, 1882.

## NATURE

### **A Brief Critical Summary**

*Nature* is a little book of less than one hundred pages and has eight chapters. The second chapter has an addition of the verse motto and an introduction. The verse motto tells the readers that it is a striving to be man that enables the worm to mount through all spires of form. The first chapter endeavours to express the writer's love for nature and solitude. To go into solitude a man must retire both from his chamber and society. Reading and writing prevented the author from feeling lonely. However, when someone feels lonely, he could look at the stars. The sight of the heavenly bodies makes man sublime. As the stars are inaccessible, they evoke a sense of awe in the mind of the onlooker. Nature will never look mean. Among the adults, only a few enjoy nature whereas most of the children love nature. Everything around man gives pleasure to man. However, it is a great pity that man's careless attitude towards nature destroys its beauty.

The second chapter is devoted to the Commodities that man considers to be important to his livelihood. The things that please our senses owe something to nature and nature, in its service to mankind remains not only as the material, but also as the process and its results.

The love of beauty is a nobler want of human life and nature serves to its purpose. The ancient Greeks considered the world to be a beauty. All the objects of nature like the sky, the mountains, the fields, the tree and the animals give us delight. The enjoyment of beauty in nature can be at three levels: the simple perception of the various forms of nature, and this gives man delight which is born out of the sheer enjoyment of beauty; the presence and the understanding of higher elements of nature is essential for enjoying the perfection of beauty; and nature may be seen as an object of the intellect. The very appearance of the world or the mere look at the objects in the world impresses all. The love of beauty is a kind of taste given to human and that is denied to other living beings on earth. The creation of beauty results in art.

The fourth chapter talks about the language that has been made subservient to man by nature. Nature also serves as the vehicle of thought and works in a three fold degree in which words become the signs of natural facts, particular natural facts become the symbols

of particular spiritual facts and finally nature becomes the symbol of the spirit itself. These three characteristic features are discussed in detail in the fourth chapter.

The fifth chapter treats nature as a discipline for us. This includes commodity, beauty and language as parts in itself. All the objects of nature like the space, time, society, labour, climate, food locomotion, animals, and the mechanical forces, give us lessons everyday. They educate man to understand and to reason. Every object of nature serves as a school for understanding. Reason, then transfers all the lessons learnt into its own world of thought by perceiving the analogy that unites the matter and the mind. Emerson tries to make clear that *Nature* is a discipline of understanding in intellectual truths and sensible objects conform to the premonitions of Reason and reflect the conscience.

The sixth chapter is devoted to Idealism, which delights all men and women including the frivolous. God had taught human beings that the world is an appearance. The philosophy of the Ideal is taught by nature herself and therefore nature becomes the first institution of philosophy that teaches the truth to mankind. Nature often conspires with the spirit to emancipate man from the bondage of the worldly life. Man becomes stable in his spirit when the word becomes the spectacle. The poets communicate the experience of the pleasure of stability mixed with awe in their poetry. He is able to lift the world from the ground and make it float in the air in a short period of time. He perceives nature with his own thoughts and differs from the philosopher from his view of truth. Intellectual science doubts the existence of matter. Religion and ethics have a similar effect with the degrading nature and suggests the dependence of nature on spirit. While ethics is based on man, religion is based on god. Religion includes the personality of God whereas ethics involves the nature and character of man. However, both put nature under their foot. The view of the ideal theory is the most desirable to the mind and its evidence is supplied by reason.

The seventh chapter relates itself to the Spirit and investigates some essential facts related to man and nature. It puts forward the questions: what is matter? Whence is it? and Where to? Idealism explains the first question that matter is a phenomenon and not a substance. The other two questions can be explained by “the recesses of consciousness” or by the “Soul of man”. Spirit is the god closest to us and man’s spirit is related to the Divine Spirit.



The concluding chapter tells that while inquiring into the laws of the world and the frame of things, the highest reason always remains the truest. The foundations of man are not in matter, but in his spirit. Moreover human beings inwardly distrust and deny their sympathy with nature. Also man is a god in ruins and that he is a dwarf of himself as he denies his own fulfillment by applying to nature half heartedly. The author concludes the book with his strong belief that man must trust Nature completely to reach god.

### **DUALISM IN “NATURE”**

Emerson's *Nature*, published in 1836 started an epoch in American Literature though it was not an immediate success in its sale. The style and substance of *Nature* marked the beginning of a national literature that was different from derivative or colonial literature. It is the “First Philosophy” of Emerson which is entangled in idealistic metaphysics. After rejecting all the established doctrines of the age, Emerson formulated a new doctrine based on the assumptions that he got from his own experience. Unlike Thoreau's *Walden* that records an experience, *Nature* is the gospel of a new faith proposed by Emerson.

The book opens with a distinction between the Me and the Not Me, and the soul and nature. This is the first of his provincial dualities. The Me is the consciousness or the part of man that partakes the divinity whereas the Not Me and nature serves as the objective of the consciousness. However, the Not Me and nature also becomes the consciousness when it serves as the “projection of God in the unconscious”. Nature and God becomes the second duality and the third duality is established between God and Man. The relations between Man, God and Nature form a triangle and the value of the relationship lies in the common relationship between any two of the three factors. Man could very well learn to worship God through the contemplation of Nature and the very objects of Nature like the stars, flowers, animals and the mountains reflect the wisdom of the best hour in which he has an awareness of the divine principle.

The method of Emerson is invariably dualistic. He refers to Nature in two senses: the common sense in which the elements of nature are unchanged by man and the ideal sense in which it becomes the phenomenal expression of the soul. He makes use of the phenomenal dualism in order to explore the ultimate unity. Moreover, his position is

dualistic in its method as he is wholly concerned with the process of thinking rather than with the objects of his thought.

Human beings are capable of discovering the moral law or the means of intuition. Emerson calls it as the Reason as distinguished from Understanding. Similar to the English romantics, he also makes distinction between Imagination and Fancy, Genius and Talent. Understanding, Fancy and Talent are lower faculties that keep man in the plane of nature. They have nobler counterparts in Reason, Imagination and Genius .

### **PHILOSOPHY OF EMERSON**

Being a profound thinker, Emerson has his own philosophy of life. His philosophy is concrete and easy to understand. However, it is more abstract than that of Thoreau. His philosophy is to follow the natural course of the mind as it is related to the One which is the Over-soul to the many. Moreover, the One related the Many to the One. He felt that the One and the Many are dependant on each other.

The paradox of unity arising out of diversity is widely seen in philosophical and religious thinking and Emerson fortifies the universal impulse to believe by testing it with the daily facts of life. His philosophy is that of practical idealism and he prefers idealism to materialism in philosophy. Critics feel that the decline in the popularity of Emerson in modern times is due to the importance given to materialism in philosophy.

Emerson is not a systematic thinker and he took his materials from different sources. However, his works have a grand unifying factor that resolves the contradictions. His doctrine is the infinitude of the private man. His philosophy is influenced by those of Plato, the Neo- Platonists the Hindu scriptures and the Bible. He believes in the close relationship between the soul of nature and the soul of man. Moreover, the faith of St. Paul that the advocates that what we see are temporal and the things that are unseen are eternal also find expression in the works of Emerson.

Emerson's philosophy is practical. He believed that a man is capable of drawing power more than what he thinks is capable of doing. He uses well chosen figures of speech to describe the Supreme Power or the Over- soul. He compares man to the mill wheel and the Over-Soul to the mountain stream that turns the wheel. He also suggests the

availability of the spiritual energy of the universe to man by means of a variety of metaphors and similes.

Emerson believes that every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. He is concerned with nature that symbolizes some spiritual truth. The reality is that the material world is a reflection of the spiritual world. While reasoning, Emerson tends to generalize as he is followed by the preachers and lecturers. In his speeches on *The American Scholar*, he appealed for courage and action among the American thinkers for freedom from the tyranny of European ideas and to begin a new era. Moreover, in *The Divinity School Address* he considered the institutions of the church as being incapable of achieving salvation and called for a new revelation that is appropriate for the new era. The idea that regeneration is possible only through the individual soul is the core of Emerson's philosophy. This idea is expressed in most of his poems, essays and lectures conceived over two decades before the civil war.

Emerson has no sentimental needs. His pride of intellect magnifies his mind. The value of his soul is authenticated by the Over-Soul. He feels that the undisciplined man is close to nature. He trusted in the power of the individual soul and the Divine Soul that guides the individual soul. In short, Emerson had a set of noble ideas which he adhered to in his life and his works and his philosophy is idealistic.

### **SELF RELIANCE**

*Self Reliance*, first published in the "Essays" of 1841, talks about the enormous power of man and calls for relying on oneself. Emerson says that the infinite resources at his command make man self reliant and that he is directly inspired by god. Man's reliance on himself is similar to his reliance on God. Man becomes great only when he is "inspired by the Divine soul which also inspires all men".

Self Reliance is the best known and most often quoted essay in American literature. The motto of Emerson as expressed in Self Reliance is "Trust thyself". Though critics consider this to mean "Do as you please", it is a high spiritual doctrine which advocates man to follow the highest dictates of his mind. Emerson also warns that those who imagine the law to be lax must have to keep its commandment one day.

Emerson advises the American Scholar to stand on his own feet without the help of the philosophy of others. He also asks the student of divinity to learn to love god without a mediator or the veil of religious principles. The artist, instead of imitating the Gothic or the Doric model, should study the precise thing to be done by him with love and hope. The poet and the artisan are also channels of divinity like any other professional. Emerson advocates the capital virtue of self trust that can be developed only by experience.

Every heart vibrates to the iron string of self trust. Only the triumph of principles could bring peace to man. Emerson believes in the doctrine of an Over-Soul that connects all living souls on the earth. His faith in the omnipotent and omnipresent Over-Soul makes him self reliant. He believes that every man has some divinity in him, which is capable of connecting his soul in direct relationship with the universal spirit. Every man is able to perceive the highest truth in his life. Therefore everyone could rely on himself and his own spiritual perceptions could lead him in the right path in life.

Emerson gives importance to the individuals and not to the society. However, he does not ignore the society as he considered society to have been formed of individuals. A good society is made only by good individuals. Therefore the primary obligation of the individual is to perfect his own life. Moreover, social salvation could be achieved only through the salvation of individuals who forms part of the society.

When Emerson asks the individuals to give importance to the voice of their soul and live as they like, he is referring to an almost intolerably high standard of thoughts and life. The individual must obey his own highest instinct and must involve himself in activities that are dictated by his soul. He must adhere to the self-imposed requirements rigorously to the last degree. The integrity of his own soul and mind remains sacred for a man who relies on himself. Names and titles cannot conform himself to the activities that he does not like. Large societies are nothing but dead institutions for an individual who relies on himself. However, all the custom and traditions that we follow like the activities of housekeeping, arts, occupations, and marriages are imposed upon the individual by the society. Emerson asks the individual to rely on himself and not to imitate such customs. The reliance on property and the government symbolize the lack of self trust. A cultivated man feels ashamed of his property as it does not belong to him in reality. A man who understands the power of his self hates materialism.

A greater self reliance could cause revolution in every possible field including the relationship between men. On the other hand, the lack of self reliance would lead to man's faith in superstitions. Emerson feels that the educational system of the age fosters restlessness and makes the intellect a vagabond. Imitation makes the mind to travel without any aim. Though the society undergoes continual changes, it never moves forward. Man claims to have civilized but lost his communion with nature. Fortune is a deceptive handmaid whom modern man relies on more than anything else. The normal events in life seem to bring him peace, but it is only an illusion. Only the inner self and the triumph of its principles could bring real peace to the mind.

#### QUESTIONS:

1. What is Emerson's attitude towards the society?
2. Explain Emerson's philosophy of life.
3. What is Emerson's attitude towards man? Discuss
4. Explain Emerson's concept of the soul and the Over-Soul.
5. Discuss Emerson's attitude towards nature.
6. Elucidate Oriental influence in the works and philosophy of Emerson.

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## HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Thoreau, who believed that the universe is always on the side of the most sensitive, was able to contrive a definite pattern of life in his lifetime. He was able to realize that life is more primitive at its bottom and carved out a pattern of the pioneer mind itself. He had great respect for the men who lived close to the elements of nature like the sea, the forest and the soil from whom he was able to discover the perfect integrity with nature.

Born on July 12, 1817 to ordinary parents in Concord, near Boston, Massachusetts, Henry David Thoreau had a childhood and adolescence that are typical of the age. He attended the Concord Academy as an undistinguished student before he joined the Harvard University. When he was graduated in 1837, he had been trained for four professions – law, theology, business and teaching. However, Thoreau was not interested in any of these professions. He tried teaching for a while but in vain. So, he joined his father in making pencils. He also did some surveying works occasionally.

Thoreau was influenced by the recognition of Emerson as a transcendentalist writer and lecturer. He tried teaching again with his brother John in 1838. He began his journal in 1837 and worked for it till his death in 1862. A boat trip with his brother in 1839 provided the material for *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, published in 1849. He tried his hands in all the possible and odd jobs for his livelihood.

Thoreau moved into the household of Emerson in 1841 as the handyman of the family. He made good use of the library there and also submitted poems to the “Dial”, a journal that Emerson edited. Emerson admired the talent of Thoreau and allowed him to edit the entire April 1842 issue of the journal. However, Emerson’s attempts to find a publisher for his friend in New York proved a failure. In March 1845, Thoreau constructed a cabin at Walden Pond on the land of Emerson and moved there on July 4, 1845. He attempted to reduce his needs to the barest and thereby establish an intimate and spiritual relationship with nature. He also made use of the time to work on *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*.

He left the pond in 1847 and lived in the house of Emerson for some time before he returned to his parents in 1848. The composition of Walden took seven years before it was

published in 1854. Though the work was not a failure, it was not able to fulfill his dream of becoming a major spokesman for the transcendentalist movement. He gave lectures and wrote articles in support of the abolition of slavery from 1844. His transcendentalist ideals got a setback during his later years. He grew weaker with tuberculosis from 1851 to 1855. He died in his parents' home in Concord on May 6, 1862. Despite the power of his works, it took nearly three decades after the death of Thoreau for the world to acknowledge his greatness.

## WALDEN

*Walden* is the experiences of a traveler who, instead of leaving his home for adventures, explores the very ground he lives in. The singleness of the problem explored, the definiteness of aim, and the mature development of the metaphorical prose, along with the narrative hold *Walden* together. Thoreau goes on a retreat to the dualistic position and tries to experience the ideal through the senses. It describes the practical experiment of the author to discover how far the "higher potentials of a human being can be developed when one lives deliberately" for that purpose. It is not only an insight into one's own thoughts but also a solution to the problems that cause anxiety, conflict or sluggishness.

The beginning and end of *Walden* is unknown. It is a search for spiritual evolution or awakening among the humans. It begins with a discussion of the means utilized by man so far for his improvement and concludes with an invitation to all to wake up and to explore themselves in order to find out exactly who they are. The symbols of spring, morning and restorative medicines can be found in all the chapters as the metaphor for spirituality. Thoreau lived at Walden Pond for more than two years but his book is an ideal record of a single year, following the seasons from summer to spring. The seasonal change from winter to spring is exploited metaphorically at the end to describe the awakening of the human being to self-realization, well-being and development. He means that it is the time for the whole human race to awaken and assume a consciousness it has rarely shown yet and seize the opportunity to live.

Thoreau tries to advance in spirituality by living in primitive conditions and through the study of nature. Economy is the reason for choosing a primitive way of life as financial problems does not trouble a man who is living in primitive conditions. Moreover, nature has a strong bond with man and man is dependant on nature for the basic means of

keeping himself alive. One cannot develop his high potentialities when he has problems with his economic conditions. He also needs leisure and energy to enjoy his life as work cannot always be the labour of love. Therefore Thoreau decides to set up his home at the Walden Pond and records his experiences in *Walden*. For him, “Economy” is not about economics but the economic utilization of one’s time and energy.

The enjoyment of life is the predominant theme of Walden. Thoreau asks all men to enjoy life and to attain it by consciously directing their lives towards it. The higher and lower halves of life are the two ends of a single rising scale which stays within nature. It is also continuous with nature. This idea of Thoreau can be understood only when it is related to his assumption of evolution. He feels that man has scarcely developed from the savage state. He says that “The civilized man is a more civilized and experienced savage”. Man tends to go one or two steps beyond his instinct. Even after the successful spreading of various religions and the destruction of witchcraft, man is still afraid of dark. Superstitions are preferred to truths that we could get by means of patient investigation.

The highest point of our evolutionary development is the higher life and man is yet to go that far. Though man is capable of achieving many things, he is reluctant to try any new means in life to achieve the high life. Thoreau calls the readers to enter a new stage of conscious development and to act deliberately with regard to problems we have hitherto tried to settle blunderingly. We must first have the courage to lose ourselves deliberately for that cause, freeze in winter alone and investigate the state of our ignorance. Only primitive nature can define the extent of our development and clarify the direction in which we may most profitably go.

Man can find himself by exploring nature. Man knows himself only by relating himself to things outside himself. Our thought may become humble when we realize that the universe is wider than what we think of it. Moreover, understanding the true and accurate focus of the world of nature around us would help us realize what we are and this is an awakening or revelation of our self.



Thoreau uses metaphor to express relations. Nature and a part of the world becomes a symbol to express his thought. Nature is used as a symbol to express his own life as Thoreau finds in spirit in the objects of nature.

## **STYLE OF THOREAU**

Thoreau carried out an experiment in living with nature successfully at Walden Pond. It demonstrates the power of the spirit of man. Thoreau is viewed as Naturalist, escapist and a subtle satirist of contemporary civilization. He finds that the life of man in the civilized world is a life of desperation but understands that man has accepted the standards of a social system and learned to adapt himself to the situation. Walden is a sort of escape literature which is aimed at self reform.

*Walden* is free from literary self-consciousness. It is addressed directly to the reader as though the author is holding a conversation. It is a report that he intends to deliver in person to the readers. It seems to be philosophical and tries to ignore the technical problems of the literary artist. In fact, the writer had worked hard to evolve his own style.

*Walden* makes use of the language that was commonly spoken by ordinary men and his figures are drawn from the commonplaces of experience and not from the literary models. Vocabulary of informal speech and images from common household and trade are used. It is a document which is related in spirit more closely to the folk tradition than to the formal literary tradition.

Thoreau makes use of the proverbs, old saws and catch phrases that the common people rely on in their speech and twists them to suit his purpose. He also makes use of the opinions of the uneducated, judging the wisdom of the customs they follow and the extent to which they rely on practices devised by their own learning. Custom and practical experience and not the theories and school that educated the common people living in the countryside. Thoreau reports the results of his own practical education. He often assumes the attitudes of the wise old codger. However, he is mostly ironical in his approach. He makes use of the phrases such as “as they say” and “it is said” etc. when he reports the information that he has read or heard from others. This shows how useful knowledge and

expressive myths circulate among men in the society. Moreover, the author helps the message to pass on to other people by discussing those he has heard in his book.

In short, *Walden* is a record of practical experiments in various household activities like building, cooking, planting, keeping warm etc. even minor details of ordinary life is expressed with exactness. It arranges the practical details of one's life. Thoreau's reliance on first hand information and his love of myth and hearsay can be found in abundance in *Walden*. In addition to metaphor, paradox and contradiction is also used. His figures of speech rely more on total experience than on intellect. The author uses a shift in the tense between the present and the past in order to show the present time and the present experiences.

### **SYMBOLISM IN WALDEN**

In *Walden*, Thoreau is concerned with the values of the spirit and goes on a quest for the stable values that would uplift the life of man. He searches for the real self amidst the chaos of civilization. He strives hard for spiritual awareness and self realization with out its impression on his economy. In this respect, *Walden* becomes a spiritual biography.

“The Ponds” is the central and important section of *Walden* that abounds in symbols. The seasonal change along the pond is highly symbolical of the changes in life. Regular changes cleanse life and reflect heaven. In the beginning, the people thought that the pond is bottomless. Thoreau brings the legend to an end by measuring the depth of the pond accurately. Similarly, human life is considered to be without a beginning and an end. However, Thoreau was able to shatter the myth by his self-exploration. The pond is not as deep as it is considered to be. The exploration of the pond stands as a symbol of self-exploration and Thoreau proves that exploration of the self would help us to understand life better. The depth of the pond stands as a symbol for the depth and purity of human mind.

The pond also stands as a symbol for the character of man. The measurement of the depth of the pond symbolize the daily behaviour of man that would help in the measurement of the depth and purity of his character. The exploration of one's own surroundings becomes the central metaphor in the book. The spirit of the explorer could

have its base strongly on the ground before he could explore his surrounding in all the direction around him. The soul fixes its position before it could connect itself to the soul of nature.

The pond is as deep as one's dependence on the services of the self. The mind of man could thrive only because of his meeting and coming to terms with the objects of nature. Self discovery is dependant on the fact outside oneself and self realization is infinite and eternal like the depth of the pond. The depth and purity are the merits of the pond, as is the depth and purity of the spirit.

The colour of the pond is also symbolic as it seems to unite heaven and earth. It looks blue at one time and green at another, even from the same point of view. Serving as a link between heaven and earth, it looks green like the earth and blue like the sky. It partakes and shares the colours from earth and heaven in order to show the merging of the divine and the nature.

The heat of the sun penetrating to the bottom of the pond to warm and melt the frozen waters stands as a symbol for rebirth. As the melted water remain pure without any dirt, all the sins are cleared off the man who is born again and *Walden* becomes a ritual of cleansing for Thoreau. The symbols of the organic processes of birth, growth, death and rebirth organize the whole process of life on this earth. A routine bath in the pond stands for purification and renewal of life and energy. The book ends with the magical emerging of the spring season suggesting renewal of life of rebirth.

In short, the pond stands as a symbol of the spirit with the changing seasons symbolizing the different attitudes of man in different times. Symbols of birth, death and rebirth are found in plenty in the book. Altogether, *Walden* is highly optimistic in nature as it shows the means to attain heaven on earth.

## **THOREAU AND EMERSON**

Emerson was honoured both in America and in England while Thoreau was ignored as an eccentric. However, both have diminished in their stature as great transcendentalists in course of time. At present, Emerson has got only historical importance while Thoreau is remembered not only as a better artist but also as a better personality and idealist.

Emerson had great moral integrity and strength. He also had a deep sense of belonging to the society in which he lived. His attack against the New England society of puritans was only verbal. His attack was not against the tradition followed by the people but on the people who failed to live up to the tradition. Unlike Thoreau, Emerson would not do anything that would injure his reputation in the society.

Emerson was an idealist only in his words and not in his behaviour. He called traveling to be a fool's paradise but he himself traveled extensively in Europe. His Naturalism, Orientalism, and his longing for simplicity in life reflect his intellectual fascination towards certain unorthodox way of life.

Emerson often confused certain scientific statements with moral statements. In reality, he does not seem to understand either science or morality in its logical implications. This became a defect in his intellectual perception as he completely ignores the difference between moral values and scientific truths. He uses the term "Over-Soul" to represent his own super-ego. He had no idea about evil and believed that his self-reliance had taken him to the right path of moral behaviour. Critics feel that he had misused the Hindu concepts of the soul to his own advantage.

Emerson cannot be viewed as an idealist. Instead, he can be considered a simple poet and philosopher. The combination of a preacher, philosopher, literary writer and poet made him a success during his lifetime. Thoreau, on the other hand is a man whose life and philosophy are simple. Unlike Emerson, his attitude to the objects and problems around him are genuine and spontaneous. He practiced in his life, what he said in his works. However, most of his ideas were unpragmatic.

Thoreau believed in a natural way of life. He thought that life was primitive at its roots. He tried to prove at Walden that one could live in close relation to nature, without the help of any of the artificial inventions. It was a practical answer to the desperation in life that most men feel at present. However, Walden was not far away from the society and he always had visitors. He maintained a good contact with the civilized community though he led the life of a noble savage in Walden.

Thoreau did not try the simple economic livelihood in Walden after his return to the civilized world. He was able to adapt himself and compromise with the complexities of the social life. Like Emerson, he strongly believed in the power of the individual. He felt that the conscience of the individual is the safest guide regarding the conduct of human affairs. However, he laid down a few basic principles of individual and social living. Unlike Emerson, he was able to break the rules and laws of the government. Emerson called him a fool when he did not pay the tax and was prepared to go to the jail in defiance of the government.

Thoreau felt that individual protests would help him to maintain a pure and clean conscience. He did not give importance to the results. However, his aim was to free himself from evil and not to redeem the society. His individualism is rather primitive and rude. People considered him to be an escapist whose idealism was lacking in realism. However, his writings express an awareness of the deep personal problems and conflicts that need to be tackled before he starts to live. It is an attempt to discover his mental process and a trial to communicate it to others. He knew that the mental processes were different for different people and asked his readers to pursue their own way. He also wanted them to discover the basis of one's conscience before obeying it.

Thoreau is also a man of contradictions. In the beginning, he supported passive violence. However, his greatness lies in his moral courage sincerity and his genuine inquiry into his conscience. Though he insisted on practicing his principles, he did not make it a routine thing and his popularity among his readers is more for his austerity and saintliness than for his literary achievements.

#### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Discuss Thoreau's concept of simplicity.
2. Discuss the theme of Walden.
3. Explain Thoreau's fascination of a primitive life.
4. Elucidate the influence of spirituality in the works of Thoreau.
5. Discuss Thoreau's rejection of the civilized society.