

POST GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMME (CBCS)

M.A. in ENGLISH

SEMESTER – III

DSE – 303

THE LITERATURE OF THE USA

Self-Learning Material



DIRECTORATE OF OPEN & DISTANCE LEARNING

UNIVERSITY OF KALYANI

KALYANI-741235, WEST BENGAL

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Director's Message

Satisfying the varied needs of distance learners, overcoming the obstacle of distance and reaching the unreached students are the threefold functions catered by Open and Distance Learning (ODL) systems. The onus lies on writers, editors, production professionals and other personnel involved in the process to overcome the challenges inherent to curriculum design and production of relevant Self Learning Materials (SLMs). At the University of Kalyani, a dedicated team under the able guidance of the Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor has invested its best efforts, professionally and in keeping with the demands of Post Graduate CBCS Programmes in Distance Mode to devise a self-sufficient curriculum for each course offered by the Directorate of Open and Distance Learning (DODL), University of Kalyani. Development of printed SLMs for students admitted to the DODL within a limited time to cater to the academic requirements of the Course as per standards set by the Distance Education Bureau of the University Grants Commission, New Delhi, India under Open and Distance Mode UGC Regulations, 2021 had been our endeavour. We are happy to have achieved our goal. Utmost care and precision have been ensured in the development of the SLMs, making them useful to the learners, besides avoiding errors as far as practicable. Further suggestions from the stakeholders in this would be welcome. During the production process of the SLMs, the team continuously received positive stimulations and feedback from Professor (Dr.) Amalendu Bhunia, Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor, University of Kalyani, who kindly accorded directions, encouragements and suggestions, offered constructive criticism to develop it within proper requirements. We, gracefully, acknowledge his inspiration and guidance. Sincere gratitude is due to the respective chairpersons as well as each and every member of PG-BOS (DODL), University of Kalyani. Heartfelt gratitude is also due to the faculty members of the DODL, subject-experts serving at the University Post Graduate departments and also to the authors and academicians whose academic contributions have enriched the SLMs. We humbly acknowledge their valuable academic contributions. I would especially like to convey gratitude to all other University dignitaries and personnel involved either at the conceptual or operational level at the DODL, University of Kalyani. Their persistent and coordinated efforts have resulted in the compilation of comprehensive, learner-friendly, flexible texts that meet the curriculum requirements of the Post Graduate Programme through the Distance Mode.

Director

Directorate of Open and Distance Learning

University of Kalyani

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Total Credits – 4

Study Hours – 16

BLOCK – I

UNITS: 1-4

THE GREAT GATSBY

BY

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

CONTENT STRUCTURE:

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UNIT – 1

UNIT 1 (A): INTRODUCTION TO F. SCOTT FITZGERALD – LIFE AND WORKS

Francis Key Scott Fitzgerald was born in St Paul on September 24, 1896, to Edward Fitzgerald and Mary Mary Macquillan Fitzgerald. His father's inability to keep any job for long resulted in Fitzgerald having an unsettled childhood. Having shifted from place to place in New York the family finally moved back to St Paul where financial help from Mrs. Fitzgerald's family helped keep the family afloat. Though never an outstanding student, F. Scott Fitzgerald was a talented storyteller. He attended Princeton from 1913 to 1917, but left without graduating to enlist in the US Army. But the World War I ended shortly and he never saw combat. In 1918, while being stationed at Montgomery, Alabama, he met Zelda Sayre-young, beautiful, wealthy, and coveted by others. Fitzgerald was one of her many suitors. The relationship became serious and he proposed to her many times. But Zelda refused to marry him until he became financially secure. In 1919, he travelled to New York City to work on his first novel. In 1920, when Zelda had started considering offers from other men, Fitzgerald's novel *This Side of Paradise* was published to outstanding reviews. Fitzgerald and Zelda married in 1920 and began living the life of rich, carefree and fashionable youngsters in New York. His first short story collection *Flappers and Philosophers* was published in the same year. In 1921, the couple had their first and only child-Francis Scot "Scottie" Fitzgerald. His second novel (*The Beautiful and the Damned*) and second short story collection (*Tales from the Jazz Age*) were both published in 1922. Their continuous partying and drinking were causing chaos and making their life problematic. To regain health and order, they moved from one city to another in Europe (which included Rome, Paris and the French Riviera), but in vain. Surrounded by Americans living abroad, Fitzgerald befriended celebrated contemporary author Hemingway and soon became intimate, much to the dislike of Zelda. She was becoming restless for her own fame and her behaviour outraged friends and acquaintances. Although his third novel, *The Great Gatsby*, was not immediately appraised, it is now considered the pinnacle of his career. Despite its position in the American literary canon, the novel marked the beginning of the slow death of Fitzgerald's career and marriage. Soon after the novel was published Zelda was diagnosed with schizophrenia and institutionalized, first in Switzerland and

later in Baltimore, Maryland. In 1926, his 3rd short story collection-*All the Sad Young Men* was published. As Zelda was moved from hospital to hospital, Fitzgerald stayed in nearby hotels. He fell deeper and deeper into alcoholism, making it increasingly difficult to concentrate on his work. It took him eight more years to publish anything worthwhile. His next novel *Tender is the Night* came in 1934. It describes in a sombre manner a mentally ill woman and her physician husband. The heaviness of the novel is a window into Fitzgerald's own feelings as he dealt with Zelda's death and the shock of the Great Depression. In 1935 his final short story collection *Taps at Reveille* was published. Fitzgerald tried his hand at screenwriting for Hollywood without success. His final novel *The Last Tycoon* was left unfinished as he died in 1940. He was buried in Rockville, Maryland.

UNIT 1 (B): SYNOPSIS OF THE NOVEL

Chapter One

Nick Carraway – born and brought up in a respectable family in the Midwest, begins narrating the story. Following a family tradition he attended the prestigious Yale University before enlisting in the army and going to West Asia to participate in the First World War. Returning from there, he settled down in New York and began working in the 'bond business. Though he had planned to roam across the cities of the East for several years, he could spend only one summer in New York. This book would narrate the history of that summer. Arriving in spring, he found the city hot and uncomfortable already. So he rented a little house for himself at West Egg-twenty miles from the city. It was located between two luxurious houses belonging to millionaires at Long Island. Nick remembers himself being engrossed in work, trying to attain success as a businessman. The history of the summer properly began the day his cousin Daisy called him up and invited him to dine with her and her husband, Tom Buchanan. The Buchanans lived right across the Bay at East Egg. Nick had known Tom during their days at Yale. He is the scion of a traditionally rich landowning family. He has a hulky physique of "enormous leverage", which Nick characterizes as a "cruel body". At the Buchanans' Nick also meets professional golfer Jordan Baker. On learning that Nick lives in West Egg, she presumes that he might be acquainted to Gatsby-a man who throws lavish parties every weekend. Daisy asks for the full name of this person, but the conversation shifts to another

topic. The Buchanans and Jordan Baker live privileged lives, contrasting sharply in sensibility and luxury with Nick's more modest and grounded lifestyle. Nick describes the immense beauty and desirability of Daisy. However, he senses an air of discord in the family when Tom leaves the dinner table to attend a telephone call again and again, followed by a visibly distraught Daisy, who follows Tom. Jordan Baker gossips about Tom having "some woman". When Nick returns home to West Egg, he notices a solitary silhouetted figure gazing at the waters under a starlit sky, standing on the dock adjacent to Gatsby's mansion. Nick intuitively feels that it might be the owner of the mansion-Mr Gatsby himself. He controls his impulse to converse with him, looking at his solemn manner of extending his arm towards a green light flashing at the end of someone's dock across the bay. When he looks again, the mysterious figure has vanished.

Chapter Two

The Second Chapter begins with a description of the desolate and forsaken expanse of formerly developed land, termed as the Valley of Ashes. It lies at the confluence of the city with the suburbs. This forlorn area contains a decaying advertisement billboard on which are starkly depicted the Eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg. Amid the predominance of grey all around, the eyes-"blue and gigantic", with "retinas are one yard high" immediately call attention towards themselves. It is here that Tom insists they get off the train in order for Nick to "meet [his] girl." Nick consequently encounters Tom's mistress - the sensuous Myrtle Wilson, wife of "spiritless" George Wilson, who owns a shabby garage. Under the pretense of visiting her sister in New York, she follows Tom and Nick on the next train to New York. Once in New York, Myrtle spies a man selling dogs on the way to their apartment and insists on having one. At the apartment, Myrtle calls up and invites her sister Catherine and their neighbours- the McKees to join the party. The following hours are spent in a frenzy of drunkenness. Under the spell of intoxication, a belligerent Myrtle takes Daisy's name again and again, at which Tom is incensed and wildly strikes out at Myrtle, thereby breaking Myrtle's nose. The party thereafter enters a downward spiral, the guests depart, Nick leads Mr. McKee home and finally heads home himself.

Chapter Three

Chapter 3 is wholly concerned with Nick's impression of Gatsby. In the summer months, celebrities and commoners alike from far and wide flocked to Gatsby's mansion to attend

extravagant parties. In a beautiful turn of phrase Fitzgerald compares the pleasure-seeking “men and girls” to moths who came and went every weekend, “among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars.” For their amusement, Gatsby gave uninhibited access to his pool, his boats, his car, besides serving two complete dinners and having a whole orchestra to entertain the guests. These parties would continue late into the night, accompanied by singing, dancing, flirting, gossips, etc. One weekend Nick is formally invited by Gatsby to join in the festivities, whereas the others arrive uninvited, knowing only that there will be a party to which all and sundry are welcome. Nick tries without luck to meet the host. Milling around, Nick comes across Jordan Baker and the two inadvertently gather rumors about Gatsby. After several glasses of champagne, Nick begins a conversation with a fellow who is, unbeknownst to him, Gatsby himself. Later, Gatsby takes Jordan Baker aside to speak with her privately. Though their conversation is left undisclosed, Jordan passes along that it is “the most amazing thing.”

Lest the reader be misled into thinking that Nick’s summer was relatively mundane with only the three incidents outlined in the first three chapters being noteworthy, Nick interjects that much more happened to him- in the form of working, casually dating one of his female colleagues, and dining at the Yale Club. He makes no secret of his fascination for New York’s “enchanted metropolitan twilight” and people madly rushing in search of “gayety.” By mid-summer Nick and Jordan begin meeting each other more frequently. Nick cannot help feeling toward her “a sort of tender curiosity.” He understands that Jordan is “incurably dishonest.” He recalls having read in the newspapers that Jordan had once been accused of cheating in a golf tournament. Notwithstanding her incurable dishonesty, Jordan intrigues Nick. By the end of the chapter, Nick commends his own cardinal virtue, claiming modestly- “I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known.”

Chapter Four

Nick acquaints us with the panorama of guests at Gatsby’s parties- the Chester Beckers, the Leeches, Doctor Webster Civet, the Hornbeams, the Ismays, the Chrysties, and others. Gatsby’s parties present a kaleidoscopic assortment of all kinds of fashionable people- socialites and debutantes, the famous and the infamous. A fellow called Klipspringer earns the title of “the boarder” since he can be found there most frequently.

One morning late in July, Gatsby arrives at Nick's and invites him to lunch with him in New York. During the "disconcerting ride" to the city, lest Nick harbors any misconceptions regarding Gatsby's past, Gatsby forbids Nick to listen to the rumors afloat. Nick is suspicious even as Gatsby babbles his descent from a wealthy Midwest family (in San Francisco), education at Oxford, tour across Europe and extraordinary heroics as an army major during the Great War. An incredulous Nick is left doubtful when Gatsby, pulled over for speeding, is let go after he flashes a card from his pocket declaring that the police commissioner is ever-grateful to him for a service he had once lent.

At lunch, Gatsby introduces Nick to Meyer Wolfsheimer - a professional gambler and the man rumored to have fixed the 1919 World Series. Gatsby's conversation with Wolfsheimer vaguely hints at the former's shady link to organized crime rackets. Later in the day, when Nick meets Jordan Baker, she recounts how one morning in 1917 she had met Daisy and an unknown admirer, a military officer and evidently in deep love. Daisy's family didn't approve of the match on account of his insecure financial status. The young man left for Europe to fight in World War I and after a long wait, Daisy was forced by circumstances to marry Tom Buchanan. The following April, Daisy gave birth to a daughter. Jordan continues, noting what Gatsby told her on the night of the party.

Gatsby returned from the war, expecting to find, convince and marry Daisy but the discovery of her marriage left him crestfallen. Determined to grow rich and gain eligibility for Daisy's hand, he worked hard for the next few years. It becomes clear that his throwing lavish parties and living in a West Egg mansion right across the Bay from the Buchanans was no coincidence. Jordan then relays Gatsby's request: that Nick invites Daisy over some afternoon so that he can arrange to come by and see her, as if by accident. As Chapter 4 ends, Nick reaches the realization that both Tom and Gatsby are linked by the pursuit of their respective dreams. Each is motivated by his desire to be loved, while Nick—lacking any such dream, pulls Jordan closer to him and kisses her. This moment of desire helps warm the reader to an otherwise aloof man.

Chapter Five

Upon returning home that evening Nick finds Gatsby's house lit top to bottom (without there being any party) and Gatsby waiting for him. Nick assures him that he will call Daisy the next

day and invite her to tea. Gatsby offers to arrange for Nick a way to augment his income only to be declined. The next day, Nick rings up and invites Daisy alone to tea a few days later. Gatsby, desiring absolute perfection, sends a man to cut Nick's grass and later and gets flowers delivered. Arriving an hour before Daisy, Gatsby is nervous and, for the first time in the novel, a little unsure of himself. At the appointed time, Daisy arrives. Nick ushers Daisy into the house to find that Gatsby has disappeared, only to reemerge at the front door, looking pale and tragic. Gatsby ushers himself into the living room and joins Daisy. The awkward reunion is unnaturally polite at first. All three feel somewhat embarrassed, but amid the tea preparations, a greater sense of ease overtakes the group. Excusing himself, Nick leaves the house and roams around the neighbourhood for half an hour. On returning he finds that Gatsby transformed- from embarrassment to unbounded delight, almost radiant in glee. Daisy's voice similarly betrays "unexpected joy" as the trio moves to leave for a visit to Gatsby's mansion. Awestruck by its magnificence, Daisy wanders from room to room, savoring the distinct ambience of each part of the estate, couched in opulence. Nick notices Gatsby's evident sense of wonder at Daisy's presence in his house-something he had contrived to attain so long. Daisy, at seeing Gatsby's array of shirts, buries her head in them weeping at their beauty. By the end of the afternoon, Gatsby has shown Daisy all the material stability he possesses, yet Nick hints that perhaps Daisy doesn't measure up — not because of a shortcoming on her part, but because of the magnitude of the dream that Gatsby has built over the past five years. While Nick departs at the end of the chapter, Daisy and Gatsby are left together.

Chapter Six

The beginning of this chapter marks the onset of Gatsby's downfall, signaled by the arrival of a suspicious reporter who comes to Gatsby, asking him "if he had anything to say." Gatsby and his grandiose parties had become the talk of the town and by summer's end he was rumored to be involved in illegal businesses.

Nick here gives a detailed account of Gatsby's real background-James Gatz became Jay Gatsby on the fateful day when, on the shores of Lake Superior, he saw Dan Cody drop anchor on his yacht. Impoverished Jay Gatz's younger days had been spent roaming parts of Minnesota, whence he had imbibed the toughness of character, which became so prominent later on. The

chance meeting with Cody gave Gatsby the opportunity to shape the fiction that would define his life. Cody, fifty years old with a penchant for women, took Gatsby under his wing and prepared him for the yachting life, and they embarked for the West Indies and the Barbary Coast. During their five years together, Cody and Gatsby went around the continent three times; in the end, Cody was mysteriously undone by his lady love.

Having spent the intermediate weeks with Jordan, Nick goes to visit Gatsby and is surprised to find there Tom Buchanan and two others from his social circle. After exchanging some social small talk Gatsby is invited to dine with the group, which he accepts. Tom and his friends criticize Gatsby behind his back for accepting this half-hearted invitation. To them, it shows Gatsby's cultural inferiority in stark contrast to their own.

Gatsby in return invites Tom and Daisy to the next gala party at his mansion, where he makes every effort to impress the Buchanans by pointing out all the celebrities present, then introduces Tom to them as "the polo player." Gatsby and Daisy dance, marking the only time Gatsby really gets involved with one of his own parties. Later, Daisy and Gatsby adjourn to Nick's steps for a half-hour of privacy. When they return for dinner, Tom leaves to dine with another group. Daisy, aware of Tom's penchant for casual affairs, describes the girl as "common but pretty", sarcastically offering a pencil in case he wants to take down her address. Daisy finds the party unnerving and abominable. The Buchanans leave, the party breaks up and Nick and Gatsby review the evening. Gatsby, fearing Daisy did not have a good time, worries about her. When Nick cautions Gatsby that "You can't repeat the past," Gatsby answers with conviction "Why of course you can!" Nick finds his belief exceedingly "sentimental".

Chapter Seven

With curiosity about Gatsby mounting, the gala Saturday parties abruptly cease. Nick learns that Gatsby's old servants have been substituted with a bunch of people recommended by Wolfsheimer, as he feared the old lot susceptible to spreading rumours about Daisy. The day being unbearably hot, the party heads for lunch at the Buchanans' house. When Tom leaves the room to speak with his mistress on the phone, Daisy boldly kisses Gatsby, declaring her love for him. Later, after Daisy suggests they go to town, the soft glance that passes between Daisy and Gatsby makes

it clear that Daisy and Tom are having an affair. Infuriated, Tom agrees to leave for the city. He takes a bottle of whiskey along with him. Tom takes Jordan and Nick on board Gatsby's car, while Gatsby and Daisy travel by Tom's. Noticing the car is low on gas, Tom stops at Wilson's station for a refill. Wilson is visibly unwell and announces his decision to head for the West shortly. His abrupt decision is prompted by the discovery of Myrtle's illicit affair, with a lover of undisclosed 31ormandy. Doubly enraged at the potential loss of his mistress and his wife, Tom spitefully confronts Gatsby about his intentions at the Plaza Hotel. Undeterred, Gatsby tells Tom that Daisy has loved him rather than Tom all along. Tom, is incredulous and demands Daisy to confirm. Daisy, feeling emotionally pressed, fails to admit that she never loved Tom. Gatsby senses his carefully constructed dream is on the brink of collapse and tries an alternative tactic by declaring that Daisy would soon leave Tom for Gatsby. Tom assures him that Daisy will never leave him for a bootlegger. Tom orders Daisy and Gatsby to head home (in Gatsby's own car this time). Tom, Jordan, and Nick follow in Tom's car.

The narration now skips to George Wilson who has been found ill by his neighbor, Michaelis. Wilson explains he has Myrtle locked inside and she will remain so until they leave in two days' time. Michael is, astonished and heads back to his restaurant. A few hours later, Myrtle's voice is heard. Trying to break free George Wilson, she rushes out into the road, where she sees the yellow vehicle (in which Tom had come earlier in the day) appearing at break-neck speed. But this time Gatsby and Daisy were aboard the car. Unsuspecting Myrtle's sudden dashing movement the car fails to stop, runs Myrtle over, then realizing what had just occurred, continues on its journey. When Nick, Tom, and Jordan arrive shortly afterwards, they find that a crowd has gathered. In order to find out the cause of the congregation, Tom steps out of the car and discovers Myrtle's lifeless body lying on a worktable. He learns the car that struck Myrtle matches Gatsby's description. Whimpering in anger, he leaves the place.

On reaching East Egg, Tom suggests Nick wait inside until the cab arrives to take him home. By now disgusted with the blatant cruelty and corruption of Tom, Daisy, and the class they represent, Nick declines the offer. Waiting outside Buchanan's residency, Nick runs into Gatsby who asks if they witnessed any trouble on the road. Nick reports the accident and in the ensuing conversation learns Daisy, not Gatsby, was driving at the time. Gatsby is chivalrous in offering to take the blame entirely. As Nick leaves, Gatsby- the paragon of chivalry and lost dreams,

decides to hide outside Buchanan residency, to ensure Tom doesn't bully Daisy. Nick, just before leaving, peeps inside to find Tom and Daisy sitting peacefully together, from which Nick surmises that Daisy's reconciliation with Tom is complete at the time of danger. It increases Nick's repulsion towards the entire class.

Chapter Eight

All night Nick remains awake for Gatsby to return. When he hears a car pull over at Gatsby's early in the morning, he goes over to Gatsby's. Gatsby reveals that nothing happened while he kept his watch. Apprehending that Gatsby's "death car" might be tracked down, he suggests that Gatsby leave town for a while. Gatsby then recounts the story of his past, "because 'Jay Gatsby' had broken up like glass against Tom's hard malice." Gatsby reveals how during their courtship, his physical intimacy with Daisy had bonded him to her inexorably. Nick learns how at the end of the war, Gatsby's return home has got unavoidably delayed. Daisy, unable to wait any longer, broke off their relationship.

Back in the United States, Gatsby went in search of Daisy to Louisville, but finding that she was already married and enjoying her honeymoon, Gatsby was left with the idea that if he had only searched harder he would have found her. As Gatsby and Nick finish breakfast Gatsby's gardener arrives and declares that he plans to drain the pool because the season is over. But Gatsby asks him to wait because he hasn't used the pool at all. Nick takes leave and catches the train to New York. Before leaving, he pays Gatsby the only compliment he ever paid her: "They're a rotten crowd . . . You're worth the whole damn bunch put together." At the office, Nick feels uneasy, preoccupied with the past day's adventures. He calls up Gatsby but is unable to reach him, decides to head home early.

Fitzgerald's narrative once again goes back in time, to the evening prior, in the valley of ashes where George Wilson, despondent over Myrtle's death, appears irrational when Michaelis attempts to engage him in conversation. Michaelis is concerned about his psychological health and stays with him all night. He takes leave only in the morning but returns four hours later to find Wilson missing.

The narrative now focuses on Wilson who roams from place to place before finally arriving at

Gatsby's house. There he finds Gatsby floating on an air mattress in the pool. Wilson, sure that Gatsby is responsible for Myrtle's death, shoots and kills Gatsby. Nick finds Gatsby's body floating in the pool and, while starting to the house with the body, the gardener discovers Wilson's lifeless body lying in the grass nearby.

Chapter Nine

The police and the journalists frequent Gatsby's mansion following his death. Entrusted with the execution of Gatsby's final rites, Nick wonders how to contact Gatsby's kin (if any). He rings up Daisy to inform her about the situation but learns she and Tom have left on a trip, leaving no itinerary. While hundreds had turned up for his parties, nobody-not even Wolfsheim or Klipspringer want to get involved in Gatsby's funeral. Later that afternoon when Gatsby's phone rings, Nick answers. Upon telling the unknown speaker that Gatsby is dead, the speaker hangs up.

Three days later, Nick receives a telegram from Henry C. Gatz, Gatsby's father in Minnesota. Learning of Jimmy's (Gatsby's) death through a Chicago newspaper. Gatz refuses to take the body to the Midwest, noting "Jimmy always liked it better down East." Mr. Gatz takes great pride in the wealth that his son had amassed in life, by virtue of his discipline and perseverance. Finally, at Gatsby's graveside the little group that assembles include a few servants, the mail carrier, the minister, Nick, and Mr. Gatz. That Gatsby, in whose parties hundreds used to come should die and be buried alone seems cruel injustice to Nick. Only "Owl Eyes," a grumpy-looking old man who attended some of Gatsby's parties, unexpectedly makes an appearance at his funeral (and he only made it to the gate after the services ended).

Nick then moves to memories of traveling West when he came home from college. As the train moved further and further West, he became more and more comfortable, as if he were returning to a special place just his own. These reveries launch Nick into a contrast between the merits of the Midwest and the vices of the East. The story reaches a conclusion when Nick interacts with two people from his past. One of them is Jordan-for whom there remains a soft corner though he dispels the tenderness the next time he meets her. Another day in autumn, Nick meets Tom who makes the first move to speak. Initially, Nick refuses to shake Tom's hand, upset with what Tom

has come to represent. In the course of their short discussion, Nick learns that Tom had informed George Wilson about the real owner of the “death car”. Nick before leaving shakes hands with Tom as the realization dawns upon him that Tom was as irresponsible, pampered, adamant and careless as a child.

Nick is so devastated by the death of Gatsby and the irresponsible behavior of a genteel society that he decides to leave West Egg and return to the West. On the night before his departure, he strolls across Gatsby’s mansion, contrasting its previous glamour and the crowds it attracted with its present desolation. The ending of the novel is poetic in its suggestiveness:

“Gatsby believed in the Green light and the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that’s no matter-tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther...An one fine morning- So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.”

UNIT - 2

UNIT 2 (A): THE ‘JAZZ AGE’

Born in the mid-1890s in New Orleans, Jazz was a mixture of Blues and marching band music. It was mainly played by and appreciated among African-American and Creole communities, to the accompaniment of U.S Army instruments like the cornet or marching drums. A key feature of jazz music was improvisation since most of the former virtuoso jazz musicians weren’t able to read musical notations at all. It wasn’t long before the American whites started noticing the popularity of jazz and started playing it too. Therefore, it would be safe to say that the twenties, sometimes referred to as the “Jazz Age”, was the time for experiments and discovering new jazz-styles. During this period of burgeoning industrialization black people and new-Orleans-musicians moved from the country site south to Chicago. In Chicago, their influence precipitated the creation of (white) Chicago-Style. Several Chicago musicians later moved to New York, which was another notable centre of Jazz too. The musical revolution begun by jazz saw the introduction of the saxophone as a potent musical instrument for the first time. Seen as provocative to close intimate dancing, many among the more orthodox denounced the loud and

extraordinary sound of the sax, disapproving of its negative influence on the younger generation. The music of jazz was thought to be propitious in instigating rebellion and sowing seeds of dissension against moral traditions. The yet barely known new musical form called jazz sound spread all over America through the medium of national radio, thereby garnering huge popularity. Several important clubs, even greater number of speakeasies (illegal pubs) helped jazz bands to get famous and featured their songs. This supposedly rebellion-inducing, dissension-sowing form of music Jazz often got connected with alcohol, intimate dancing and “other socially questionable activities”.

THE ‘JAZZ AGE’ IN *THE GREAT GATSBY*

Settled by the Puritans from Europe in huge numbers, American society for almost a century after acquiring independence, was characterized by its parsimony. But the early 20th century saw the nation enter its glorious position as world leader in industry and technology. Cities like New York boomed in financial importance, soon to be followed by the ushering in of a new culture. New York in the Jazz Age offered the spectacle of profusion all around. Prodigality came to characterize the new way of life for the wealthy and coveted by the rest. Parties were not cheap affairs anymore in this age of affluence when prudery was considered the opposite of popular.

In Fitzgerald’s novel, Gatsby’s parties may be looked upon as typical representations of this attitude bred by the contemporary social outlook. His extravagant are marked unmistakably by “charm, notoriety [and] mere good manners”, weighted more than money as a social asset.” All the gossip rampant about Gatsby among his guests testifies to this statement, especially because most of them do not even know him. Good manners are reflected by gentlemen who always offer a helpful hand to charming ladies. The age was one in which men and women were overcoming not only prudery, but they were getting rid of all inhibitions too. At Gatsby’s parties “people were not invited – they went there [...] came for the party with a simplicity of heart that was its own ticket of admission.” This spontaneous society considered Gatsby’s huge premises an amusement park-perennially animated with chatter and laughter,

underlain by seemingly interminable supplies of food and drink. The sheer volume and gathering of these parties offer privacy at bidding, since any two individuals growing intimate would not even be noticed by the others who are busy enjoying themselves. The narrator Nick Carraway describes repeatedly and in detail Gatsby's mansion, surrounding gardens, the intricate decoration and all the decorations that accompanied each weekend party. Sometimes they seem a little exaggerated: "Several hundred feet of canvas and enough colored lights to make a Christmas tree out of Gatsby's enormous garden" are hung up so that "the halls and salons and verandas are gaudy with primary colors". But one also gets the idea of Gatsby the host ready to go to any extent to please his hoards of uninvited guests from these descriptions. On every occasion, turkey, ham, salads and pastry pigs would await his guests. Five crates full of oranges and lemons would be delivered every weekend ready to cater to the guests. Despite the contemporary Prohibition alcohol would be literally poured out.

Fashion, dress, hairdo and similar matters are foregrounded time and again. Women's hair is "shorn in strange new ways" and around the women's necks are "shawls beyond the dreams of Castile". They wear "golden and silver slippers" and the best example is Gatsby himself "in a white flannel suit, silver shirt, and gold colored tie himself. During the course of one such party Gatsby's guests are entertained by cocktail music played by a typical jazz orchestra consisting of oboes, trombones, saxophones, viols, cornets and piccolos, low and high drums. Popular jazz songs of the contemporary period such as "Three O'Clock in the Morning" (attributed as the "neat, sad little waltz of that year") or W.C. Handy's (1873-1958) "Beale Street Blues", a famous jazz blues melody are played. Another song that is played in one of Gatsby's parties attended by Nick is Vladimir Tostoff's "Jazz History of the World".

VIRTUE AND MORALITY IN THE 'JAZZ AGE'

Strict adherence to neither virtue nor morality was particularly in favour during the Jazz Age. Exhibitionism and opulence prevailed during the period: "The American public not only embraced customs that fell outside the arm of the law, but it also admired figures who lived without restraint." The massive enthusiasm surrounding Gatsby, who flaunts the law with his business dealings and socializes with seemingly endless funds, testifies to this claim. That Gatsby's

millions have been made through shady dealings is an idea voiced in cavalier tones by his guests, suspiciously by Nick and disparagingly by Tom. Mysterious callers keep ringing up Gatsby from different parts of the country, which Gatsby attends solemnly and excuses himself from the rest while speaking to them. The secrecy he maintains in the entire affair Nick as well as the readers guessing about Gatsby's ethical standards. Tom presumes bootlegging to be the source of Gatsby's rapidly amassed wealth. After his death, Nick, who is the only one genuinely concerned about Gatsby's final rites receives the telephone call meant for Gatsby. The unknown caller's utterance confirms what had been a suspicion all along, especially when the caller abruptly disconnects midway after being told that Mr. Gatsby is no more.

The onset of Prohibition in the early 20th century USA had triggered a corresponding flourish in the bootlegging industry. Without the state or federal taxes imposed on them, the liquor became cheaper and alcohol consumption increased manifold. Though socially accepted and even prized at the time, Fitzgerald does not show it in a positive light.

MATERIALISM IN THE 'JAZZ AGE' AND *THE GREAT GATSBY*

The Jazz Age was unmistakably marked by heightened materialism. In *The Great Gatsby*, characters are superficial and materialistic. For instance, Daisy Buchanan is visibly affected by the beauty, excess, and variety of Gatsby's rich linen shirts. "Suddenly with a strained sound Daisy bent her head into the shirts and began to cry stormily. 'They're such beautiful shirts,' she sobbed, her voice muffled in the thick folds. 'It makes me sad because I've never seen such—such beautiful shirts before'" (Fitzgerald 98). Clearly, Daisy is infected with materialism. Emphasis on objects and money can easily be located in the novel. "Every Friday five crates of oranges and lemons arrived from a fruiterer in New York – every Monday these same oranges and lemons left his backdoor in a pyramid of pulpless halves" (Fitzgerald 43). The pulp-less halves might be considered as metaphoric representations of the guests, insipid people obsessed with external appearance and material acquisitiveness.

DISILLUSIONMENT IN *THE GREAT GATSBY*

When the fateful summer began, the urbane society with its promise of plentiful wealth, success, and enjoyment had seemed to beckon Nick. By the end of the novel, the upper class' ethical vacuity hidden behind the façade of opulence seems abhorrent to Nick, culminating in his disillusionment with all that the commercially successful East had come to stand for. But Nick is not the only character to be disillusioned. Gatsby-whose inexorable capacity for the hope of a reunion with Daisy lies at the heart of the novel, also faces disillusionment upon meeting Daisy, resulting from the sheer enormity of his dream. Nick felt that during the brief period of union with Daisy, her real self must have fallen short of the expectation that had built up in the mind of Gatsby. Gatsby remains a generous host in the middle of hundreds of strangers; still, he is aloof from all, resulting in disillusionment.

UNIT – 2

UNIT 2 (B): THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

A successful instance of modern narrative art – F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* unites content and form seamlessly. *The Great Gatsby* is not only the magnum opus of F. Scott Fitzgerald, but also one of the most outstanding exponents of twentieth-century American fiction. Fitzgerald's handling of a unique narrative point of view and the exquisite arrangement of spatio-temporal structure culminates in dramatic effects that strengthen the specific artistic charm and highlight the novel's conceptual content.

The entire story featuring Gatsby as a protagonist is based on Nick's memories and told as his first-person account. Besides being the narrator, Nick features as a key character in the story. A witness of the ups and downs in the lives of several people, Nick is a moral critic of sorts, commenting obliquely on the ethical standards of people around him. Based on his obliquely poised critiques, readers are driven to judge every character. Fitzgerald's chosen method of narrativization makes the story an integral whole as well as evocative.

Nick performs several functions in *The Great Gatsby* by being “both in and out of the story”. Nick is the protagonist Gatsby’s neighbor; he is also Daisy’s cousin; he had been Tom’s classmate in college and for a brief period he is quite close to Daisy’s friend, Jordan Baker. Fitzgerald lends him use curious eyes to view Gatsby’s actions and holds sympathy to suppose Gatsby’s thoughts. This creates distinct art effects. Through Nick’s eyes readers learn everything that happens. This aspect colours the readers’ viewpoint to a certain extent. As a witness possessed with key information, Nick can observe Gatsby’s actions standing a few steps behind. Moreover, the sense of suspicion regarding Gatsby’s behavior that starts to build up is carefully constructed using Nick as a narrator possessed with key, though incomplete information. However, the story consists of events recollected in retrospect. This means Nick has had access to them prior to his divulging them with readers. Therefore, he can employ his story using this material in the order that suits the writer.

THE TRANSGRESSION OF THE POINT OF VIEW

Notwithstanding its vivid and persuasive effect on readers, the first person narrative does have some shortcomings. The narrator’s knowledge of events and intentions is limited. This hinders the narrator’s ability to reveal other characters’ inner beings. For a more complete narration, the narrator must transcend his narrative limits to present things, a phenomenon known as the transgression of the point of view. For instance, in Chapter Five, witnessing Gatsby and Daisy reunite after five years, Nick tries to present things from Gatsby’s perspective”, transgressing the perspective of his own self.

“As I went over to say good-by I saw that the expression of bewilderment had come back into Gatsby’s face, as though a faint doubt had occurred to him as to the quality of his present happiness. Almost five years! There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams-not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything. He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way. No

amount of five or thirty years can challenge what a man will store up in his ghostly heart.” (Fitzgerald 128).

Through this transgression, the narrator allows readers a peep into Gatsby’s mind and lets them catch Gatsby’s emotional changes. In this way, readers feel reasonable about Gatsby’s feelings— “a faint doubt had occurred to him as to the quality of his present happiness” and faithful about the narrator’s comment.

Similarly, chapter six describes Gatsby and Daisy’s courtship five years ago. Once again, Nick could not possibly have known what Gatsby felt then, as he neither knew Gatsby nor of his affair with Daisy.

SHIFTS IN POINT OF VIEW

Unlike the transgression of the point of view, the shift of the point of view is another special figure in *The Great Gatsby*. The latter is “legal” while the former is “illegal”. It is an expedient measure to use the transgression little and temporarily when needed. But when the narration needs from one point of view to another largely for a long time, the transgression is incompetent but only the shift of the point of view can do. In *The Great Gatsby*, the shift mainly presents in the first person narration, though limited in essence, tending to be omniscient or partially omniscient.

In chapter two, when the narrator pictures Tom’s mistress, he uses a shift of the point of view. It is a rumour for Nick about Tom having a mistress, so when he states about this event, it is reasonable for him to use the omniscient narrative. But quickly, the omniscient narrative tends to the first person narrative – “Though I was curious to see her, I had no desire to meet her— but I did.” (Fitzgerald 1982:31). Here, these changes result in the development of the story’s plot for *The Great Gatsby* is about the story of Gatsby not of Tom. Thus, in order to not be far away from the center event and let readers’ attention focus on the latter narration, the narrator must change the narrative eyes to avoid enlarging readers’ observation.

In chapter seven, where the narrator Nick presents Daisy and Gatsby’s emotional reactions after Gatsby and Tom’s direct conflict, he firstly uses the eye of “I” to observe Gatsby, Daisy, and

Tom, then instead by the eye of “he”. It is to say that the point of view tends from the first person narration to the omniscience. Through this change, the narrator makes readers know clear that after Tom’s malicious attack, Gatsby’s dash is shortened and Daisy’s emotional direction changes accordingly, from Gatsby to Tom again. As a symbol for Gatsby’s pursuing ideal, Daisy’s gradual cowering means Gatsby’s pursuit disperses little by little until nothing. The narrator and readers all know it, but Gatsby himself knows nothing about it, more exactly speaking, he is unwilling to know it. From this point, his shift makes up for the point of view of the first person’s shortcoming. More important, it usefully adjusts narrative distance effectively satirizes Gatsby’s hopeless pursuit and reaches a satiric effect. In the same chapter, there are also some phenomena of the shift of the point of view in the event of Daisy’s driver killing Tom’s mistress Myrtle. When the event happened, Nike was not at hand. His narration about the event is not his experience but from a character in the story named Michaelis’ description. In order to tell this story, Nike gives up his eyes but makes use of the characters and then lets readers observe the whole story through the character’s eyes. This shortens the narration distance and builds a feeling of experience personally for readers and also reinforces the narrative truth.

The similar shift phenomenon also appears in other place in the novel. Here does not to present one by one. One more which needs to mention is that the shift from one point of view to another is the narration requirement for observing character’s inner being, developing story’s plot and producing narrative truth. Such requirement fulfills by these changes in *The Great Gatsby*. All of these turn up Fitzgerald’s novel’s narrative features.

ARRANGEMENT OF SPATIO-TEMPORAL STRUCTURE

The exquisite spatio-temporal structure is another narrative technique in *The Great Gatsby*. As to the temporal narrative arrangement, the novel follows the seasonal cycle in time sequence but adjusts the speed and order of a particular time, thereby characterizing itself by the non-linear development of the story, a strategy widely adopted in modern fiction. As to the spatial arrangement, the contrast of East and West, East and West Eggs, and New York and Foul Dust in the novel, constitute the beyond-geographic-sense metaphors, which reveal and highlight the theme of the novel.

THE NARRATIVE TIME

The narrative time is one of the most important research parts for narrative theorists. The traditional narrative works press on the description and reproduction of the truth of real life, lacking some temporal arrangement skills—omission, abbreviation, extension, pause, flashback, and so on, while modern fiction broke away from the form of linear narration, beginning to extend or shorten the narrative time. Fitzgerald lived in the 1920s, which was called “the transformation from traditional fiction to modern fiction” (McMichael 1980:64). In his novels, there are some new points on the narrative time.

Like other modern fiction, *The Great Gatsby* reflects the author’s concerns on the time. In the novel, Fitzgerald arranges the narrative time skillfully. The whole story is based on Nick’s memories of the experiences in the East with two years’ time-span. It is almost an omission for Nick’s life when he came back from east. Unusually, Nick’s East’s experience exactly completes a seasonal cycle. According to Northrop Frye’s literature meanings in seasonal cycle, for instance, spring means “revival and refreshing” (Wu Zhizhe 1997:90). In the novel, Nick goes to East restlessly after coming back from the war field. It is just in the spring at that time. Nick feels that he himself is becoming “an exploiter” and has a new life and hopes in a new area. There are some senses of relaxing and joyful between the lines. Summer is “a season at zenith of power” (Wu Zhizhe 1997:90). It is used to celebrate hero. In the summer, Nick acquaints with Gatsby. And through all the summer nights, there are parties in Gatsby’s blue gardens. Gatsby takes an incomparable way to arrange his feasts and also takes an incomparable permanence to pursue his dream. At last, he meets Daisy wish-fulfilled and wins her favor. Though Nick does not make any comment as a stranger, he names Gatsby “the son of God” (Fitzgerald 1982:153) in a narrative. Nick’s favor for Gatsby’s spirit coincides with temporal metaphors. Autumn is “the stage of hero’s comedown and dying process” (Wu Zhizhe 1997:90). When the author arranges Nick and Gatsby’s farewell, he mentions of Gatsby— “disappeared among the yellowing trees” (Fitzgerald 1982:216), then Gatsby is killed in his pool, above him “the touch of a cluster of leaves revolved it slowly, tracing, like the leg of transit, a thin red circle in the water” (Fitzgerald 1982:217). Finally, Nick goes back to the West. Winter is “the stage of hero dying tragically”

(Wu Zhizhe 1997:90), corresponding to Nike's mood of disheartening to the East and going back home after Gatsby's death.

When the author handles the text processing, he does not arrange the narrative time equally, but effectively adjusts the speed, extending one season, one day, or one point during his narrative. For example, the first three chapters are mainly about three nights. Chapter one is the night of Nike's visit to Daisy and Tom. Chapter two is mainly about the night of Nike and Tom and his mistress in New York. Chapter three is the description of the night of Nike's attendance at Gatsby's feast. Nike calls these three nights "they were merely casual events in a crowded summer" (Fitzgerald 1982:25), but in the story, these three nights take up a large description from page one to page seventy-five while other time is omitted. This change in the speed of narrative time brings a particular narrative effect. The extended description of these three nights reflects the author's perspectives and thoughts on three kinds of people.

Another feature of the arrangement in narrative time is the order of a particular time. In *The Great Gatsby*, the author first lets Nike catch a lot of gossips about Gatsby, giving the character a mysterious veil and producing a suspension, and then Jordan's saying about Gatsby and Daisy's love story, adding a romantic colour to the characters. Finally, he uncovers the character's veil little by little; opening Gatsby's various vicissitudes gradually before the reader's view until his death. Such order disorganizes the time sequence of narration, making the structure of the fiction has an internal tension. In the description of Nike and Gatsby's association, the time directs to "now" while in other people's description of Gatsby's experiences, the time directs to the "past". These two different time directions go through each other and alternate constantly, disorganizing the linear development of story. Let us make an analysis and compare the time sequence between in the story and in the narrative words. Here are things about Gatsby in the story:

- A) Gatsby's boyhood (in chapter 8);
- B) Gatsby's life when he was in 17 in Dan Cody's yacht (in chapter 6);
- C) Gatsby met Daisy and fell in love with her (in chapters 4, 6, 8);
- D) Gatsby's experience of visiting Daisy after the war (in chapter 8);
- E) Gatsby took part in Wolfsheim's illegal business (in chapter 8);

F) Gatsby's end. The normal time sequence is A-B-C-D-E-F-G. But after the author's artful handling, the order presents C-BC-DCF-E-A.

THE SPATIAL STRUCTURE

The spatial structure is very profound and abstract in *The Great Gatsby*. The contrasts of East and West, East and West Eggs, and New York and Foul Dust in the novel constitute the vivid spatial framework.

The early culture of America arose from Eastern Colony. After the Independence War, American was independent in politics from Britain, but also contacted with them in culture and ideology. Along with the culture extending to Middle Western, the Western Culture presented a new activity and attracted many dream-cherishing exploits because there were more chances and large free space to them. Thus, "East" and "West" are not only two opposite geographic meanings but also two different cultural meanings. In *The Great Gatsby*, Nike's experience from West to East and then back to West is not so much the changes in space as the seeking for the source of spirit and culture.

Nike is from the West in a wealthy family; his family's prosperity corresponded to the development of the West. Nike calls this area where is the dream place for many Americans—"the warm center of the world" (Fitzgerald 1982:3). But after the Great War, he loses his heart for it and wants to skip from her. At that time, the East has finished the Industrial Revolution. The property in the East gives Nike new hope. He believes that he is becoming a settler like his ancestor. Nevertheless, after witnessing Gatsby's tragedy, he again feels sorry about his nation's civilization and back to West. The recurrence of place and action forms the spatial lock, no way to break out.

The contradiction between "East" and "West" also embodies in the conflict between the "East Egg" and "West Egg" which releases Gatsby's tragedy and highlights the theme. From the beginning, the author tries to make metaphors for East and West Eggs. Their physical resemblances are both like "the egg in the Columbus story" (Fitzgerald 1982:6) but "their

dissimilarity in every particular except shape and size” (Fitzgerald 1982:7). Tom and Daisy live on the East Egg who are born in rich and powerful families and social status while Gatsby is on the West Egg who is born in a humble family but cherishes dream and longs for success. The author arranges an important symbol in the novel that is the green light played an important role in the process of modeling the protagonist Gatsby’s character. At the end of chapter one, when Nick goes back home in the evening and sees that Gatsby stares at the green light— “he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily, I glanced seaward—and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and faraway, that might have been the end of a dock.” (Fitzgerald 1982:29)

This green light means the dream and hope to Gatsby, which he adheres constantly all his life to pursue and seek hard. However, the green light is of puzzled, dangerous and destructive. When Gatsby closes one more step to it, he also nears destruction and death. The green light arranged at the end of the novel exactly proves this symbolic and ironic meaning— “Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year reached before us. It eluded us then, but that’s no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther— And one fine morning—” (Fitzgerald 1982:24)

Another important symbolic temporal location is New York and Foul Dust. As a modern city, New York is the center of modern civilization. But between this center and West Egg, there locates a certain desolate area of land named by the author the Valley of Ashes, which is full of symbolic meanings. This is the place “where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke” (Fitzgerald 1982:30). Wilson and his wife Myrtle live in this valley of ashes. Wilson believes Tom’s words and shoots Gatsby, then suicide; Myrtle degenerates herself as Tom’s mistress and finally dies under Daisy’s driving. These two tragedies express the darkness of the modern civilization center. The author connects the depiction of space with the character’s feelings and fully releases the narrator’s disappointment and disgust to this modern civilization center.

To sum up, Fitzgerald is skillful and creative enough to use kinds of distinctive narrative techniques to enrich the depth of the novel and emphasize the theme. Through using the new and unique narrative point of view and the exquisite arrangement of spatio-temporal structure, he

successfully makes the novel more charming and splendid in Modern American Fiction, even in the World Fiction. The famous critic Thomas Stearns Eliot who is known as his rigor on literature values appreciated *The Great Gatsby* as “the first step on American fiction after Henry James” (Poupard 1984:149). Such high comment enough lights us to recognize correctly the novel’s literature values and the prominent status in American fiction history.

UNIT – 3

UNIT 3 (A): THE ‘AMERICAN DREAM’

F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* appeared in 1925, 6 years before the first literary reference to ‘the American Dream’ in J.T. Adams’s novel *Epic of America*. With the Gold Coast mansions of Long Island, New York as its setting, Fitzgerald’s literary classic captures the aspirations that represented the opulent, excessive, and exuberant 1920s. As Fitzgerald illustrates through this microcosm of American society, despite the optimism of the era, the dreams of status-seeking Long Islanders soon become nightmares. Using Jay Gatsby to exemplify the rise and fall of the American Dream, Fitzgerald’s novel traces the arc of life as it begins in wonder, reaches for the stars, confronts society’s spiritual emptiness and gratuitous materialism, and ends in tragic death.

Throughout *The Great Gatsby*, narrator Nick Carraway searches for a world that is “in uniform, and at a sort of moral attention forever”. Disillusioned by the death and destruction of World War I, Nick decides to relocate from the Midwest to New York during the summer of 1922 to seek his fortune as a Wall Street bonds trader. On the advice of his affluent cousin Daisy Buchanan, he rents “a house in one of the strangest communities in North America”: Long Island. Expecting to find personal fulfillment there, he comes up against the “foul dust” of moral decay. At the center of Nick’s empirical observations lies Jay Gatsby. Like the Long Island he inhabits, Gatsby lives in a world of deception that replaces the “moral attention” Nick is so desperately seeking. Gatsby refashions himself by changing his name from the ethnic-sounding James Gatz to Jay Gatsby, claiming he is Oxford-educated, speaking in a staged British accent, and addressing everyone as “old sport.” Fitzgerald reinforces this image of moral vacuity by portraying Long Island as a

“valley of ashes” or “wasteland”—a metaphorical device he most likely borrowed from T. S. Eliot. The hues of the terrain—grey, cloudy, faded—reflect the polluted environment and offer a bleak depiction of humanity. Dr. Eckleburg’s piercing; unblinking, blue billboard eyes glare over this new generation of Americans. Like an omnipresent God, Dr. Eckleburg monitors Long Island and its inhabitants, his golden spectacles glittering over the wasteland of despair.

Fitzgerald contrasts the valley of ashes with the “eggs,” the two peninsulas described by Nick that jut out of Long Island’s north shore. Gatsby’s West Egg (present-day Great Neck) is the domicile of nouveau riche Americans who made their fortunes during the booming years of the United States stock market and lived like Gilded Age robber barons. Gatsby, who acquired his wealth through organized crime (e.g., distributing illegal alcohol, trading in stolen securities, and bribing police officers), is part of this new element of society. As such, he can never participate in the arrogant, inherited “old wealth” of Tom and Daisy Buchanan, who live in East Egg (present-day Manhasset Neck and Port Washington), the playground of upper-class, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant Americans.

Unlike the inhabitants of East Egg (where the sun symbolically rises), Gatsby and the other newly minted, self-made millionaires of the Gold Coast are crude, garish, and flamboyant. Gatsby exposes his questionable background through numerous *faux pas* (e.g., he states that San Francisco is in the Hamptons). Nick even characterizes his manners as having “sprung from the swamps of Louisiana or from the lower east side of New York” (32). Gatsby lives in “a colossal affair by any standard—it was a factual imitation of Hôtel de Ville in the Hamptons, with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy, and a marble swimming pool and more than forty acres of lawn and garden” (3-4). He bought the mansion from another nouveau riche family that was so tactless they sold the estate with their father’s black funeral wreath “still [hanging] on the door”.

Gatsby, just like the brand-new monstrosity he inhabits, is “flashy”: he wears pink suits, gaudy shirts, and drives an extravagant Rolls Royce. Despite all of their obvious wealth, the nouveau riche are imposters—cheap materialistic imitations of the American Dream. They can never possess the Buchanans’ old-wealth taste, epitomized by their “cheerful red and white Georgian

colonial mansion, overlooking the bay” (4). On Long Island, aristocratic grace and elegance cannot be purchased, only inherited.

Tom’s violent attitudes towards those he deems inferior are not only evident in his racism, but also through sexist encounters with his wife Daisy, and his mistress du jour, Myrtle Wilson, an aspiring social climber whom he met while riding the Long Island Railroad into the city. Tom is not afraid to lash out against women (especially his lower-class mistress whose materialism makes him feel powerful) in order to exert authority over them. He cheated on Daisy a week after they were married with the chambermaid from their honeymoon resort, and speaks to all women with a tone of paternal contempt, even calling Myrtle’s “mongrel” dog (and presumably its owner) a “bitch” (18). When Myrtle oversteps her boundaries, Tom becomes abusive, and with “a short deft movement [breaks] her nose with his open hand” (25). After he discovers Daisy’s relationship with Gatsby, he becomes outraged, and threatens to beat his wife. Afraid of what Tom might do to her, Gatsby keeps vigil outside the Buchanan home, all night long, to “protect” Daisy, just as a hero would his lady: “I’m just going to wait here and see if he tries to bother her about that unpleasantness this afternoon.”

Despite the racism, sexism, and vice-laden violence of old wealth, the nouveau riche continues to be attached to their lifestyle. As Nick notes, “Americans, while occasionally willing to be serfs, have always been obstinate about being peasantry” (58). Gatsby escapes this “peasantry” through conspicuous consumption, his accumulation of meaningless materialistic trophies, such as his piles of silk shirts, ostentatious car, extravagant mansion, and library full of unread books. To Gatsby, these status symbols *are* the ‘American Dream’. When Daisy realizes that the shirts represent Gatsby’s self-destructive obsession with the American Dream (which he perceives to be the accumulation of wealth), she begins to cry with a passion that foreshadows Gatsby’s eventual demise: “They’re such beautiful shirts, her voice muffled in the thick folds. “it makes me sad because I’ve never seen such—such beautiful shirts before”.

Fitzgerald uses Gatsby’s elaborately staged weekend parties as another metaphor for the greed, material excess, and unrestrained desire for pleasure that resulted in the corruption and disintegration of the American Dream. The anonymous guests, who are nouveau riche social

climbers and freeloaders, attend Gatsby's spectacles with the hope of acquiring aristocratic wealth, power, and status. On the other hand, the parties, where guests dance to jazz music on tables, mingle with Roosevelts, and drink bootleg "champagne . . . in glasses bigger than finger bowls," subsume Gatsby's real identity (31). Illusion, conjecture, intrigue, and gossip sustain this identity.

Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker and Myrtle Wilson epitomize yet another bitter manifestation of the American Dream: the fickle, bored, selfish, and materialistic "new woman" of the 1920s. Although Gatsby creates an aura of sublime purity around his "flower" Daisy, she is anything but innocent. When Nick begins to question Daisy about her empty existence, she admits, in a jaded tone of experience, that it is all a "sophisticated" act: "I think everything's terrible anyhow . . . everybody thinks so—the most advanced people. And I know. I've been everywhere and seen everything and done everything . . . Sophisticated—God, I'm sophisticated!" (12). Gatsby is so entranced by Daisy, however, that he embraces her façade: "It excited him that many men had already loved Daisy—it increased her value in his eyes" (99). Tom's relatively public love affair with Myrtle Wilson has turned Daisy into a caustic cynic who maintains her aristocratic socialite image because it strokes her vanity and camouflages her husband's infidelities. She is indifferent to her daughter Pammy, and plans on raising her to be "a fool— that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool," most likely so she will not have to suffer the indignity of struggling with a moral conscience.

Daisy, whose voice is "full of money," is Gatsby's "silver idol" of illusion (76, 120). Obsessed with the idea of recreating the past "just as it was," Gatsby is blind to Daisy's selfish, juvenile, and self-destructive personality. He cannot confront the fact that she would never abandon her family to be with him, and refuses to acknowledge Tom and Pammy, for to do so would extinguish the nostalgic flame of their romance. The innocence and hope with which Gatsby stares at the "green light that burns all night at the end of [Daisy's] dock," is, like his own future, metaphorically shrouded in an impenetrable mist (61). In the end, Gatsby becomes Daisy's victim and a victim of the elusive American Dream.

Jordan Baker, like Daisy, also represents the "new woman" of the 1920s: independent, intelligent,

and witty, yet cynical, elusive, and conniving. A well-known amateur golfer, Jordan, like Daisy, suffers from spiritual emptiness; her constant yawning symbolizes her empty life and adolescent ennui. She is constantly manipulating her surroundings in a childish effort to maintain her superficial image. Jordan applies the same strategies to her romantic entanglements as she does to her career. She deceives Nick into thinking that they have a future together and then, when she realizes that he cannot secure her materialistic needs, she capriciously decides to marry someone who can. Unlike Gatsby, Nick is able to see through the charade of innocence feigned by Daisy and Jordan, and is able to save himself from their self-destructive influence.

Like her East Egg counterparts, Myrtle Wilson, who lives “on the other side of town” in the “valley of ashes,” is also consumed by materialism, spiritual emptiness, and elusive dreams. As Tom’s mistress, Myrtle endures his constant abuse because she is attracted to the old wealth and glamour he represents. Tom indulges her, even acquiring a small apartment in New York City for their romantic trysts. Aspiring to join the ranks of the East Egg aristocracy, she, like Gatsby, tries to transcend her working-class roots by mimicking their nonchalant sophistication and superior manners. However, Myrtle’s act is inherently flawed because she does not possess the social skills that would allow her to detect the subtleties of her chosen role. Myrtle naively believes that dressing like a member of the old wealth elite will grant her instant admission into their exclusive world. Clearly, Myrtle is conscious of the way in which clothing serves as a class marker. Like Gatsby, she cannot comprehend that attaining the American Dream is far more complicated than slipping into a disguise of cream-colored chiffon, and is therefore doomed to a life of disillusionment.

Even though for a fleeting moment, Gatsby is able to recapture his past with Daisy, he eventually realizes that his fascination with Daisy is grounded not in genuine love, but in deceptive memories of their romance in Louisville. When Daisy refuses to admit that she never loved Tom, Gatsby’s ability to reclaim his lost years and feel he is married to Daisy, if only in spirit, disappears. Cynicism replaces enchantment when he painfully comprehends that it is “saddening to look through new eyes at things upon which you have expended your own powers of adjustment” (69). Gatsby “wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could at

once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was” (73). After devoting so many years to this elusive dream, Gatsby cannot go back in time and relive these lost years. His dream comes to a bitter end. Myrtle’s accident, which Fitzgerald describes in graphic detail, is important not only for its conflation of sex and violence, but also for its role in the death of Gatsby’s idealism. Daisy accidentally kills Myrtle with Gatsby’s Rolls Royce—the quintessential symbol of Jazz Age materialism—and then leaves the scene of the crime for the security and respectability of East Egg:

“When [two passers by tore open Myrtle’s] shirtwaist . . . they saw that her left breast was swinging loose like a flap and there was no need to listen for the heart beneath. [Her] mouth was wide open and ripped at the corners as though she had choked a little in giving up the tremendous vitality she had stored so long” (92).

The fact that Myrtle’s breast was violently ripped open “like a flap” illustrates how she, and her breast, were simply sexualized pawns, objects to be played with by old-wealth men like Tom who had social permission to abuse, and then discard, working-class women when they grew tired of them. Myrtle died with her mouth ripped open, as if gasping for air, because her vision of the American Dream had left her suffocating in the valley of ashes. The only way out became using her body to acquire the materialism that she believed defined happiness.

In the end, Daisy ultimately chooses Tom over Gatsby, and then allows Gatsby to take the blame for killing Myrtle. She rationalizes her selfish behavior, claiming, “It takes two to make an accident” (39). This sequence of lies leads George Wilson to believe, erroneously, that Gatsby is having an affair with his wife, and was behind the wheel of the Rolls Royce that killed her. The shame of the affair compels Wilson to shoot Gatsby and then commit suicide. Instead of attending Gatsby’s funeral, Daisy hastily flees Long Island without leaving any forwarding address. She could have intervened and saved Gatsby’s life. But for Daisy, self-preservation is far more valuable than personal honor. As Nick comments, Daisy is no more than a “grotesque rose” (108). Gatsby, as Nick knows, is “worth the whole damn bunch put together” (103).

Gatsby’s death, like his unrelenting quest for personal fulfillment, is marked by solitude and

desecration. Daisy flees with Tom, while Gatsby's perpetually freeloading houseguest, Ewing Klipspringer, moves on to his next target in Greenwich, Connecticut, and a boy even scrawls an obscene word on Gatsby's pure white steps (we are left to imagine what sort of slur this could be). Even his underworld connection, Meyer Wolfsheim (who allegedly fixed the 1919 World Series), refuses to get "mixed up" with the mess, declaring that the only way to survive in this world is to "move on" (110). The only souls worthy enough to accompany Gatsby on his final journey are the three characters who, at the end of the novel, still have their moral integrity intact: Nick, Henry Gatz (Gatsby's father), and Owl-eyes, a party guest who is in perpetual awe of Gatsby's library of unread books. Gatsby's party is over, and the only tangible proofs of his life are the possessions—the books, the mansions, the cars—he acquired. Gatsby's indomitable optimism and his insistence that the past can be recreated destroys any hope for a salvageable future. While standing outside the Gatsby mansion, looking across Manhattan Bay, Nick realizes that Gatsby's death, like his life, is the product of an elusive, outlived dream. As the moon shines in the night sky, Nick wonders how "for a transitory enchanted moment, man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder" (182). Daisy had been Gatsby's "continent," the "new world" that he had once wished to conquer. But Gatsby became a victim of the greed, apathy, and indifference that corrupts dreams, betrays promises, and destroys possibilities. Nick's final commentary serves as a poetic epilogue on the futility and emptiness of Jay Gatsby's life. His conversation with Gatsby's father at the end of the novel reveals what made Gatsby, and the American Dream that he tried to achieve, "great": individualism, a dedication to self-improvement, an unwavering "capacity for wonder," and a steadfast devotion to a "righteous" set of moral and social values. Gatsby "had a big future before him . . . He was only a young man but he had a lot of brain power . . . if he'd of lived he'd of been a great man . . . He'd of helped build up the country" (112). Gatsby, like the young men who perished during WWI, does not live to realize this impossible dream. Despite all of his efforts, Gatsby is unable to disown his humble past; he manages to obtain the artificial security of wealth, but can never secure the respectability of old money that Daisy represents. In his blind pursuit of wealth, status, and success for his own gain, Gatsby follows a dream that ultimately becomes a nightmare.

UNIT 3 (B): GENDER ISSUES

The novel was written and is set in the decade following World War I, which ended in November 1918. The “Roaring Twenties,” or the “Jazz Age,” a term coined by Fitzgerald, was a period of enormous social change in America, especially in the area of women’s rights. (*A Feminist Reading of the Great Gatsby*, 2013) Before World War I, American women did not enjoy universal suffrage. In 1920, two years after the end of the war, they were finally given the vote. Before the war, standard dress for women included long skirts, tightly laced corsets, high-buttoned shoes, and long hair. A few years after the war, skirts became shorter, laced corsets began to disappear, modern footwear frequently replaced high-buttoned shoes, and “bobbed” hair became the fashion for young women.

Perhaps most alarming for proponents of the old ways, was that women’s behavior began to change. Women could now be seen smoking and drinking, often in the company of men and without chaperones, even the new dances of the era, which seemed wild and sexual. In other words, as we often see during times of social change, a “New Woman” emerged in the 1920s. (Bode, 1990) And, again as usual, her appearance on the scene evoked a good deal of negative reaction from conservative members of society, both male and female, who felt, as they generally did at these times, that women’s rejection of any aspect of their traditional role inevitably would result in the destruction of the family and the moral decline of society as a whole.

Literary works often reflect the ideological conflicts of their culture, whether or not it is their intention to do so, because, like the rest of us, authors are influenced by the ideological tenor of the times. One of the greatest writers F. Scott Fitzgerald perfectly explained the new era for females in his novel, *The Great Gatsby*. In spite of numerous differences in female characters, Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker, and Myrtle Wilson, are all versions of the New Woman. Women share much of the focus that the men do in this book; however, they are not always shown in a positive light. In fact, they are often seen as negative things. Fitzgerald presents very contrasting roles for women in *The Great Gatsby*, making distinct challenges to both Flappers and the traditional woman. (*Flapper Fashion Look Book*, 2013) For example, Jordan Baker represents the new woman of the 1920s, who is characterized as an erogenous and therefore oddly desirable

for Nick, the narrator. Jordan is a symbol of the principles of the Flappers, as she is arrogant, unemotional, and often irresponsible. Fitzgerald criticizes Jordan in *The Great Gatsby*. However, *Gatsby* also criticizes the traditional roles of women in his characterization of Daisy, a damsel in distress and an object of desire in men. Daisy abandons love and Gatsby and settles down with Tom, a man who is wealthy and can provide for her financially. Yet Daisy also embodies some Flapper values of irresponsibility and detachment, in her treatment of her daughter, as well as irresponsibility for her actions. To Fitzgerald, Daisy may have embodied the 1920s woman in transition between old and new values.

As we begin the book, Daisy is seen as a sort of pessimist when mentioning her newly born female baby. When she first offhandedly mentions her daughter, she doesn't even specify the gender. This could be taken several ways. One way is that Daisy doesn't care much about her daughter at all. This idea is supported later when Daisy says after Nick has asked about her daughter, "I suppose she talks, and—eats, and everything." (Fitzgerald, n.d.) Another way to look at it, which seems to be more plausible given the context of the book, is that she is disappointed in having a female, rather than a male, child. When Daisy is explaining to Nick her daughter's birth, she explains how she wept and said of her daughter, "... I hope she'll be a fool — that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool." (Fitzgerald, n.d.) This not only shows Daisy's cynicism for the world they live in, but also her idea of women in the world. In her eyes, women have no place in this world to be intelligent, only beautiful and stupid. The best thing a woman could be in the world is eye candy for the hulking brutes. To her, that is the best way for a woman to get ahead in life. While this may seem a recognition of the plight of women in the world of Daisy, her actions later in the book imply that she wants to do nothing to change it. *Gatsby* describes her as having a "voice full of money." The ideal woman *Gatsby* once loved has been corrupted by money and the lifestyle that Tom has provided for her. She has allowed herself to become a snooty, rich American. When Daisy is finally confronted with whom she should choose, Tom or Gatsby, she ends up staying with her cheating, hulking, brute of a husband. While this may seem the fault of the husband, and cheating most certainly is his fault, going back to him even though she knows he is a cheater makes her look nearly as bad because she is comfortable with the wealthy lifestyle that Tom provides for her. Before the 1920s, it was considered that women's main role in their lives was to take care of their husbands and children, but in the novel, we can see that later they care more about themselves and about their place in

society and they became careless and unfaithful towards their families. Myrtle cheats on Wilson with Tom. "Tom's got some women in New York."

Mr. Wilson finds out about the affair and locks Myrtle in her room. In a desperate attempt to escape she runs into the street getting hit by Daisy thinking it's Tom. Daisy also cheats on her husband with Jay Gatsby. "He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God." This affair is different from Tom and Myrtle's in that it's based on a previous love that she used to have for Gatsby, which he still has for her. The re-kindled relationship exhibits her unfaithfulness to her husband. Another kind of unfaithfulness could be Jordan Baker. The above quote shows that she was aware of the affair, but did not tell Daisy. Although it's a sticky situation her refrain from telling Daisy the truth was a betrayal of their friendship. All the women in *The Great Gatsby* to some extent or another are unfaithful, whether it is their husbands or friends.

From their unfaithfulness stems foolishness. Myrtle and Tom's views of their affair were completely different. Myrtle saw it as a way to receive materialistic gifts and as a way out of poverty. Tom thought of it as a game where Myrtle was just a sex object kept on a leash of luxurious bestowments. Myrtle's foolishness is that she saw what she wanted to see, a man who was providing her lavish gifts because she thought he loved her. She thought Tom would leave Daisy for her sake. In reality, Tom was using her, but blinded by her own foolishness she couldn't see it. Daisy is also foolish. Her foolishness is also in roots with her unfaithfulness, Tom and Gatsby fight as Tom knows of their adultery. Staying with Gatsby she decides to drive the car overwhelmed with anger and realizes her fun with Gatsby has ended. Daisy ends up hitting Myrtle with the car killing her. And as a result of Myrtle's death Gatsby gets killed for Daisy's foolish behavior. Daisy is also foolish in the context that if she had waited for Gatsby to come back from the war and married him instead of Tom, she would not have regretted marrying him. Daisy's dissatisfaction with her marriage is revealed through her attempt to become unfaithful to Tom.

The marriage also has other problems like Tom being rude to Daisy. He bruises Daisy's knuckle. Tom's aggressiveness is also shown when strikes Myrtle. Tom's display of physical power over

Daisy and Myrtle reflects that in both relationships they are powerless. It was mentioned before that Myrtle was locked in her room by Wilson. This contributes to the idea that men back then had control and power over their wives. Tom doesn't use physical dominance but flaunts that Daisy won't leave him. Later he tells Daisy that she can go to Gatsby, exhibiting power over Gatsby as well.

UNIT – 4

UNIT 4: THE ROLE OF MEMORY IN THE NOVEL

The novel begins with the homodiegetic narrator Nick's careful "turning over in [his] mind" of an advice given by his father years ago. A person prone to reserving his judgments and thereby "privy to the secret griefs of wild, unknown men" (Fitzgerald 4), scion of a well-to-do family in the mid-west and a veteran of the Great War, Nick Carraway follows the trail of successful young men of his era in coming to New York and joining the bond business. Putting up at a "weather-beaten cardboard bungalow at eighty a month" (Fitzgerald 4) among the nouveaux riches West Egg, he unwittingly becomes the neighbour of millionaire Jay Gatsby from whose mansion, lawns and private beaches floated "music (...) through the summer nights" (Fitzgerald 26). It is interesting to note his repeated mention of fast-paced life in the modern American city, accentuated by the favourable weather (Fitzgerald 5) and his resolve to capitalize on the lucrative economic prospects of the 1920's economic boom.

Nick identifies his visit to Buchanan residence in old-moneyed East Egg as the beginning of the "history of the summer" (Fitzgerald 6). Readers, intimated of the narrator's intentions early on, form a pattern of expectation of the course of events to follow. However, they quickly find their expectations frustrated, as Nick proves false to his own claim of being reserved in his judgments (Fitzgerald 3). From bodies-Tom Buchanan's as "cruel" (Fitzgerald 7), Miss Baker's as "jaunty" (Fitzgerald 9) to the claret he is offered as "corky" (Fitzgerald 10), Nick proves himself not just as perceptive, but highly judgmental. Such a failure to remain true to his promises makes Nick unreliable as narrator, forcing readers to take him with a pinch of salt.

Allusions to Gatsby, the eponymous character begin, couched in romantic suspense when his

name being brought up by Miss Baker elicits a concerned reaction by Daisy Buchanan, only to be stifled by the announcement of dinner. The aura is mystified when Nick returns home to find the supposed proprietor of Gatsby mansion standing alone, emotionally worked up (Fitzgerald 16) on his dock, extending his arm towards a green light, before vanishing abruptly. Even later, when he is invited to Gatsby's party (Fitzgerald 27) Nick tries to search for his elusive host in vain, acquainting himself with many of the fantastical rumours about the man, before meeting the man himself- "an elegant roughneck a year or two over thirty, whose elaborate formality of speech just missed being absurd" (Fitzgerald 32). Nick's expectation of finding a man advanced in years at the helm of affairs was visibly frustrated at this discovery, forcing him to take stock of the situation anew.

When Gatsby comes calling on Nick and they subsequently drive to New York in Gatsby's "gorgeous car", Gatsby plainly tells Nick the details of his life, corroborating his claims with authentic-looking artifacts. Nick gets the feeling of "skimming hastily through a dozen magazines" (Fitzgerald 43), "with an effort managing to restrain (...) incredulous laughter" (Fitzgerald 42). When Meyer Wolfsheim at a 42nd Street cellar testifies to Gatsby's being "a man of fine breeding" (Fitzgerald 47) he chooses the very same words as Gatsby himself had done, thereby heightening the sense of suspicion to a level of disbelief, notwithstanding the seeming authenticity of the Oxford photograph Gatsby had adduced in favour of his history. When a visibly irritated Nick meets Miss Jordan Baker and learns of Gatsby's past (and his affair with Daisy) he is dumbfounded by "the modesty" (Fitzgerald 51) of Gatsby's demand. The fact that Miss Baker had come across Gatsby the soldier (and Daisy's lover) in Louisville reinstates Gatsby's position to Nick partially, but the balance is always precarious since Gatsby can never furnish an adequate explanation regarding the source of his fascinating wealth.

Nick perpetually feels at a loss, while trying to fathom the essence of Daisy's beauty, like his inability to comprehend Gatsby completely. Surprisingly Gatsby comes to his aid at the party at the Buchanans' when he characterizes Daisy's voice as "full of money" (Fitzgerald 76) and Nick feels this to be the fact that has long eluded him. He goes on to elaborate the idea by likening her to the spotless princesses of folklore, resplendent in their lavishness (Fitzgerald 99). Gatsby succeeds in identifying the secret behind the charm in Daisy's voice because he had been acutely aware of his own lack of wealth, even before he met Daisy. And it was this gulf that he had set

out to fill. With his illegally earned millions, Gatsby silently moved closer to Daisy, acquiring a mansion exactly across the bay from her, expecting her to walk into one of his gaudy parties. When with the help of Nick and Jordan they begin corresponding once again, Gatsby tries to wean Daisy away from Tom, severing her marital ties, and returning to Jay Gatsby as in her Louisville days. Considering the immense pressure this would force Daisy into, Nick reminds him of the impossibility of recreating the past. To this Gatsby replied: "Can't repeat the past? (...) Why of course you can!" (Fitzgerald 70)

The lines which describe Gatsby explicitly voicing his "extraordinary gift for hope" simultaneously suggest the impending fall, as Gatsby "broke off and began to walk up and down the desolate path of fruit rinds and discarded favours and crushed flowers (Fitzgerald 70). While the path that Gatsby walked had always been desolate and murky on account of his shadowy businesses, the 'discarded favours' and 'crushed favours' foreshadow the destruction of the long-nurtured dream. It is the sheer weight of Gatsby's dream that checks its flight, bringing it down to the ground and shattering it to pieces. Tom Buchanan serves as the representative of that class of traditionally rich men (like Braddock Washington of 'The Diamond as Big as the Ritz' or Anson Hunter of 'The Rich Boy') who feel insecure and suffocated as social climbers share the platform of social exclusivity guaranteed by wealth with them. When Daisy accidentally kills Myrtle Wilson while driving Gatsby's car (which Myrtle's wife Wilson, recognizes), Tom finds a way to incite the emotionally unstable Wilson to serve his end. When Tom and Daisy leave for a vacation without corresponding or even sending a word of condolence, Nick sums up his description of the Buchanans as "careless people", who "smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness" (Fitzgerald 114).

Nick comes to the belated realization that both Tom and Daisy care only for deriving the maximum entertainment from the present, their success in doing so being guaranteed by their families' prestigious socio-economic clout. In the case of Tom, this enjoins with his awareness of this illustriousness, culminating in his sneering upon anyone or anything that falls short of maintaining adequate decorum. Daisy on the other hand cherishes the memory of love and humanity transcending class boundaries. But in the end, she proves herself to be the "beautiful fool" (Fitzgerald 13) too engrossed with comfort to take a bold leap of faith. Jordan Baker, to Nick's disgust, is found to be equally vacuous and of a piece with Tom, Daisy and "the whole

damn bunch put together” (Fitzgerald 98).

Gatsby, on the contrary, had built himself up into the romantic persona that he exuded, based on a firm belief of his own worth and unflinching hard work. All along, he had employed his present and planned his future in order that he may replicate the summer and autumn of 1917 when he and Daisy became lovers in Louisville. Apart from the workings of Gatsby’s mind, readers of Fitzgerald’s novel gain access to this cherished past through the narration of Jordan Baker. But her description of this period is also couched in distinctly romantic terms, for instance, the dominance of pristine white in descriptions of Daisy Fay (her “white” dresses, “little white roadster”, their “white girlhood”, etc). Told in flashbacks, the narrative purposefully allows an idea of the past to shrink into a foreshortened background, while this background is brought up again and again in newer situations (Iser 111) in the present. What Jordan Baker reports is her memory of Daisy and Jay Gatsby in Louisville in the summer and autumn of 1917. But it is strikingly similar to the way in which Gatsby uses his memory to complete what was left unfinished under the pressure of past compulsions. Moreover, this is the history of the unfinished Gatsby-Daisy affair which Nick comes to learn and in turn to pass on to readers. Gatsby serves to bring the affair to its consummation; Nick records the attempt and readers are consequently told about the culmination.

Gatsby’s “incorruptible dream” (Fitzgerald 98), enlivened in his re-telling of the events of his life to Nick on the last night of his life to win back Daisy elicits from Nick the only explicit compliment he ever gave Gatsby. But that dream had been dreamt and the future of his dreams constructed intensely within the confines of his psyche, so that its revelation in front of others proves harmful to the dream itself. Even the symbolic power of the green light burning at the end of the Buchanans’ dock seemingly diminishes once he has mentioned it to Daisy, as if “his count of enchanted objects had diminished by one”. Quite perceptibly, thus, Fitzgerald weaves an imminence of doom into the narrative in the second half of the novel, preparing the way for Wilson’s mistaken retribution and the tragic fall of Gatsby. In spite of Gatsby’s dubious ‘connections’, there were some who believed in the general virtue of his character and endeavours, not least among whom was Gatsby’s own father-Mr. Henry C. Gatz, who brings along with him a copy of *Hopalong Cassidy* on which the young James Gatz had inscribed the details of his daily schedule, reflecting his high regard for the value of time, besides the focus on

an all-round development of brain and brawn (Fitzgerald 110). While Gatsby's industriousness till the end of his days captivated Nick, his moral degeneration concurrent with social ascent served as a cruel parody to the supposed idealism of Gatsby's youth. Moreover, Gatsby's schedule itself (written on the back cover of a sensationalist dime-novel) becomes a parody of Benjamin Franklin's 'Scheme of Employment for the Twenty-Four Hours of a Natural Day', outlined in Franklin's 1791 *Autobiography*. In a final estimation, Gatsby, therefore, remains a failure in spite of his heroic endeavour- he fails to win acceptance among the rich (who attend his gala parties but spread rumours about him), he fails to convince them of his goodwill (none other than Nick, not even Meyer Wolfsheim, attend his funeral) and most importantly he fails to unite with Daisy in his lifetime.

Nick, who began the novel with the intention of recounting the "history of the summer" (Fitzgerald 6), tells us a lot about himself in the process. His narration of the story is ineluctably shrouded in his romantic view of Gatsby, his view of the promising summer offered by the East that changes course into a "haunted" place, "distorted between (...) power of correction (Fitzgerald 112)." The elaborate plans he had made, of making himself a "well rounded" man (Fitzgerald 7) at the beginning of the summer vapourize after Gatsby's death, leaving him with the agonizing awareness of being thirty, with "a decade of loneliness, a thinning list of single men to know, a thinning briefcase of enthusiasm, thinning hair" (Fitzgerald 87) staring him at the face. His story, which promised to set out towards the future, harks back, like Gatsby's, "boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past. (Fitzgerald 115)".

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ASSIGNMENTS

1. Analyze the use of imagery in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.
2. Present a detailed study of Nick Carraway's function as narrator in *The Great Gatsby*.

3. Do you think *The Great Gatsby* is an indictment of 'The American Dream'? Give reasons.
4. Comment on the significance of the green light in *The Great Gatsby*.
5. How do questions of class feature in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*?
6. *The Great Gatsby* by Fitzgerald presents different versions of 'The New Woman'. Present a thorough analysis of Fitzgerald's handling of the same.

BLOCK – II

UNITS: 5 - 6

“THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR”

BY

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

CONTENT STRUCTURE:

Unit 5 (a): Introduction – The Rise of the Transcendentalist Movements in America

Unit 5 (b): Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 – 1882) – Life and Works

Unit 6 (a): An Introduction to “The American Scholar” by Ralph Waldo Emerson

Unit 6 (b): “The American Scholar” – The Text and its Detailed Summary

Unit 6 (c): “The American Scholar” – Some Key Issues and Concerns

UNIT - 5

**UNIT 5 (A): INTRODUCTION – THE RISE OF THE TRANSCENDENTALIST
MOVEMENTS IN AMERICA**

In the early to mid-nineteenth century, an eclectic body of radical new ideas regarding philosophy, religion, and social issues emerged among a varied group of intellectuals in New England. This new body of ideas, which challenged nearly every aspect of popular society, became known as Transcendentalism. The term, by its own nature, is difficult to define; it was not entirely cohesive, in the traditional sense at least, but rather a collection of varied ideas and objectives that existed among various thinkers, writers, and philosophers. In fact, many members of the movement disliked the label “transcendentalism” because it implied a coherent dogma, which all of them rejected. The leader of the movement, Ralph Waldo Emerson, offered one of the most famous brief

definitions in 1836 when he said that Transcendentalism was simply, “a little beyond” (Habich 90). Most simply, Transcendentalists believed in *transcending*, or moving beyond, the boundaries of body and of society. Among the numerous Transcendentalist writers and thinkers involved alongside Emerson were the likes of Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Walt Whitman, and Amos Bronson Alcott, to name a few. It was the essays, poems, lectures, and other publications from this broad group of like-minded individuals from which the central, recurring ideas of Transcendentalism have been extracted. These ideas manifested themselves in many ways over the course of the movement and even after its end. Building off a new philosophical foundation, the transcendentalists created an essentially new theology from Boston Unitarianism, progressed beyond their time in controversial social issues such as slavery, women’s rights, and education, and in doing so forged a uniquely American body of literature that would earn them the praise, study, and critique of scholars into modern times. Given its far-reaching nature, there is no doubt that Transcendentalism was a philosophical, theological, social, and literary movement.

For the Transcendentalists, a direct relationship with God and nature was of great importance. In his essay, “Nature”, Ralph Waldo Emerson (2008) wrote: “The foregoing generations beheld God and Nature face to face; we—through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe?” (P. 38) What Transcendentalists wanted to reclaim was the divine, mystical, and supernatural light bestowed upon the human soul by the spirit of God. They regarded the free development of individual emotions as the only solution to human problems.

For the Transcendentalists, the world of spirits is the only source of reality. A person sees only appearances, which are transient reflections of the world of the spirit, in the existing physical world. The only way for people to learn about the physical world is through their senses and understanding. They learn about the world of spirit through another power, called reason by which they meant insight. For them, reason or insight was nothing but an independent and intuitive ability to distinguish the absolute truth. In his “An Essay on Transcendentalism”, Charles Mayo Ellis (1970) expressed:

“That belief we term Transcendentalism which maintains that man has ideas, that come not through the five senses or the powers of reasoning; but are either the result

of direct revelation from God, his immediate inspiration, or his immanent presence in the spiritual world...” (P. 23).

As a leading proponent of American Transcendentalism, Ralph Waldo Emerson thought that the spiritual world is primary in comparison to the physical world, which is regarded as secondary. He believed that the physical world by making humans aware of its beauty and providing useful goods serves human beings. What Emerson and his followers believed was that human beings find the truth within themselves; for them, self-reliance and individuality were of prime importance, and so were individuality, a strong connection with nature, beauty, and God.

Transcendentalists believed that for a person to be able to distinguish what is right from what is wrong, he should ignore social customs and principles and rely only on reason (insight). Emerson emphasized on his “Two Truth” theory of knowledge – Understanding and Reason - in which the former means the empirical truth and the latter, refers to the absolute truth transcending sense, experience and directly perceived by intuition.

Transcendentalists regarded the doctrine and organized churches of Orthodox Christianity as interfering with the personal relationship of man with his God. What they emphasized was a rejection of the authority of Christianity and gaining knowledge of God through insight. Transcendentalists believed that all people were equal in the eyes of God, and all had sufficient spiritual power to intuit God in their daily lives (Phillips, 2010). American Transcendentalism believed in the existence of God within every creature and the importance of intuitive thought.

Ralph Waldo Emerson in his essays, “Nature” (1836), “Self-Reliance” and “The Over-Soul” (both 1841), and Henry David Thoreau in his book, *Walden* (1854) expressed the basic ideas underlying transcendentalism which regarded nature not only as beautiful but as a reflection of divinity, which is literally the face of God. Leslie Perrin Wilson (2000) noted, “Above all the Transcendentalists believed in the importance of a direct relationship with God and with nature” (P.4). For them ‘macrocosm’ (the universe) and the ‘microcosm’ (the individual) were in direct connection with each other. They both also took hold of all animate and inanimate objects, and the divine as well. They believed that Nature represented all of humankind as well as God, and also, they stated that much could be learned through a careful examination of the minute elements of nature as microcosms of the larger world (Felton, 2006, P. 120). Also, the union with the “Over-

soul”, which was regarded as reflected in everything in the world, was claimed to be the purpose of human life. According to the Transcendentalists, people could develop their capacity by submerging themselves in the beauty of the natural world. They were only the beauty and truth which could be experienced through intuition, though careful observation of nature might help to uncover its laws. They also identified the soul of each individual as similar to that of the world and it contained what the world contained. So, Transcendentalism emerged as a religious movement. In his “Nature”, Emerson (2008) stated: “I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God” (P. 38).

UNIT 5 (B): RALPH WALDO EMERSON (1803 – 1882) – LIFE AND WORKS

Ralph Waldo Emerson—a New England preacher, essayist, lecturer, poet, and philosopher—was one of the most influential writers and thinkers of the 19th century in the United States. Emerson was also the first major American literary and intellectual figure to widely explore, write seriously about, and seek to broaden the domestic audience for classical Asian and Middle Eastern works. He not only gave countless readers their first exposure to non-Western modes of thinking, metaphysical concepts, and sacred mythologies; he also shaped the way subsequent generations of American writers and thinkers approached the vast cultural resources of Asia and the Middle East.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was born on May 25, 1803, to the Reverend William and Ruth Haskins Emerson. His father, pastor of the First Unitarian Church of Boston, chaplain of the Massachusetts Senate, and an editor of *Monthly Anthology*, a literary review, once described two-year-old son Waldo as "a rather dull scholar." (Emerson was called Waldo throughout his lifetime and even signed his checks as Waldo.) Following William's death from stomach cancer in 1811, the family was left in a state of near-poverty, and Emerson was raised by his mother and Mary Moody Emerson, an aunt whose acute, critical intelligence would have a lifelong influence on him. Through the persistence of these two women, he completed studies at the Boston Public Latin School.

Emerson entered Harvard College on a scholarship in 1817, and during collegiate holidays he taught school. An unremarkable student, he made no particular impression on his contemporaries. In 1821, he graduated thirteenth in his class of 1959, and he was elected class poet only after six other students declined the honour. It was at Harvard that he began keeping his celebrated journals.

After graduating from college, Emerson moved to Boston to teach at his brother William's School for Young Ladies and began to experiment with fiction and verse. In 1825, after quitting the ladies' school, he entered Harvard Divinity School; one year later, he received his master's degree, which qualified him to preach. He began to suffer from symptoms of tuberculosis, and in the fall of 1827, he went to Georgia and Florida in hopes of improving his health. He returned in late December to Boston, where he preached occasionally. In Concord, New Hampshire, he met Ellen Tucker, a seventeen-year-old poet who also suffered from tuberculosis. The two were married in September 1829, just after Emerson had been ordained pastor of the Second Unitarian Church of Boston. They were very happy in the marriage, but, unfortunately, both were also quite ill with tuberculosis; in 1831, after less than two years of marriage, Ellen died.

By the end of the following year, Emerson had resigned his pastorate at Second Unitarian Church. Among his reasons for resigning were his refusal to administer the sacrament of the Last Supper, which he believed to be an unnecessary theological rite, and his belief that the ministry was an "antiquated profession." On Christmas Day, 1832, he left for Europe even though he was so ill that many of his friends thought he would not survive the rigors of the winter voyage. While in Europe, he met many of the leading thinkers of his time, including the economist and philosopher John Stuart Mill; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose *Aids to Reflection* Emerson admired; the poet William Wordsworth; and Thomas Carlyle, the historian and social critic, with whom Emerson established a lifelong friendship.

After his return from Europe in the fall of 1833, Emerson began a career as a public lecturer with an address in Boston. One of his first lectures, "The Uses of Natural History," attempted to humanize science by explaining that "the whole of Nature is a metaphor or image of the human mind," an observation that he would often repeat. Other lectures followed — on diverse subjects such as Italy, biography, English literature, the philosophy of history, and human culture.

In September 1834, Emerson moved to Concord, Massachusetts, as a boarder in the home of his step-grandfather, Ezra Ripley. On September 14, 1835, he married Lydia Jackson of Plymouth, Massachusetts, and they moved into a house of their own in Concord, where they lived for the rest of their lives.

Emerson's first book, *Nature*, was published anonymously in 1836. Although only a slim volume, it contains in brief the whole substance of his thought. It sold very poorly — after twelve years, its first edition of 500 copies had not yet sold out. However, "The American Scholar," the Phi Beta Kappa address that Emerson presented at Harvard in 1837, was very popular and, when printed, sold well. A year after he made this speech, he was invited back to Harvard to speak to the graduating class of Harvard Divinity School. His address, which advocated intuitive, personal revelation, created such an uproar that he was not invited back to his alma mater for thirty years. Perhaps Amos Bronson Alcott best summarizes this phase of Emerson's life when he wrote: "Emerson's church consists of one member — himself."

In 1836, Emerson joined the Transcendental Club, and in the ensuing years the group, which included Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, and Alcott, met often at his home. In 1840, he helped launch *The Dial*, a journal of literature, philosophy, and religion that focused on transcendentalist views. After the first two years, he succeeded Fuller as its editor. *The Dial* was recognized as the official voice of transcendentalism, and Emerson became intimately associated with the movement. Two years later, however, the journal ceased publication.

In 1841, Emerson published the first volume of his *Essays*, a carefully constructed collection of some of his best-remembered writings, including "Self-Reliance" and "The Over-Soul." A second series of *Essays* in 1844 would firmly establish his reputation as an authentic American voice.

Tragedy struck the Emerson family in January 1842 when Emerson's son, Waldo, died of scarlet fever. Emerson would later write "Threnody," an elegy expressing his grief for Waldo; the poem was included in his collection *Poems* (1846). Ellen, Edith, and Edward Waldo, his other children, survived to adulthood.

In 1847, Emerson again travelled abroad, lecturing in England with success. He renewed his friendship with Carlyle, met other notable English authors, and collected materials for *English Traits*, which was eventually published in 1856. A collection called *Addresses and Lectures* appeared in 1849, and *Representative Men* was published in 1850.

Emerson's later works were never so highly esteemed as his writings previous to 1850. However, he continued to lead an active intellectual and social life. He made many lecture appearances in all parts of the country, and he continued writing and publishing. During the 1850s, he vigorously supported the antislavery movement. When the American Civil War broke out, he supported the Northern cause, but the war troubled him: He was deeply appalled by the amount of violence, bloodshed, and destruction it engendered,

In 1866, Emerson was reconciled with Harvard, and a year later the college invited him to give the Phi Beta Kappa address. *May-Day and Other Pieces*, published in 1867, was a second gathering of his poems, and his later essays were collected in *Society and Solitude* (1870).

As he grew older, Emerson's health and mental acuity began to decline rapidly. In 1872, after his Concord home was badly damaged by fire, his friend Russell Lowell and others raised \$17,000 to repair the house and send him on vacation. However, the trauma added to his intellectual decline.

In 1879, Emerson joined Amos Bronson Alcott and others in establishing the Concord School of Philosophy. He often lamented that he had "no new ideas" in his later years. He also had to quit the lecture circuit as his memory began to lapse.

Emerson died of pneumonia on April 27, 1882, and, announcing his death, Concord's church bells rang 79 times.

UNIT – 6

UNIT 6 (A): AN INTRODUCTION TO “THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR”

BY RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Originally titled "An Oration Delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society, at Cambridge, [Massachusetts,] August 31, 1837," Emerson delivered what is now referred to as "The American Scholar" essay as a speech to Harvard's Phi Beta Kappa Society, an honorary society of male college students with unusually high-grade point averages. At the time, women were barred from higher education, and scholarship was reserved exclusively for men. Emerson published the speech under its original title as a pamphlet later that same year and republished it in 1838. In 1841, he included the essay in his book *Essays*, but changed its title to "The American Scholar" to enlarge his audience to all college students, as well as other individuals interested in American letters. Placed in his *Man Thinking: An Oration* (1841), the essay found its final home in *Nature; Addresses, and Lectures* (1849).

The text begins with an introduction (paragraphs 1-7) in which Emerson explains that his intent is to explore the scholar as one function of the whole human being: The scholar is "Man Thinking." The remainder of the essay is organized into four sections, the first three discussing the influence of nature (paragraphs 8 and 9), the influence of the past and books (paragraphs 10-20), and the influence of action (paragraphs 21-30) on the education of the thinking man. In the last section (paragraphs 31-45), Emerson considers the duties of the scholar and then discusses his views of America in his own time.

**UNIT 6 (B): “THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR” – THE TEXT AND ITS
DETAILED SUMMARY**

Paragraphs: 1-7

Mr. President and Gentlemen,

I greet you on the recommencement of our literary year. Our anniversary is one of hope, and, perhaps, not enough of labor. We do not meet for games of strength or skill, for the recitation of histories, tragedies, and odes, like the ancient Greeks; for parliaments of love and poesy, like the Troubadours; nor for the advancement of science, like our co-temporaries in the British and European capitals. Thus far, our holiday has been simply a friendly sign of the survival of the love of letters amongst a people too busy to give to letters any more. As such it is precious as the sign of an indestructible instinct. Perhaps the time is already come when it ought to be, and will be, something else; when the sluggard intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill. Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions that around us are rushing into life cannot always be fed on the sere remains of foreign harvests. Events, actions arise that must be sung, that will sing themselves. Who can doubt that poetry will revive and lead in a new age, as the star in the constellation Harp, which now flames in our zenith, astronomers announce, shall one day be the pole-star for a thousand years?

In the light of this hope I accept the topic which not only usage but the nature of our association seem to prescribe to this day,—the American Scholar. Year by year we come up hither to read one more chapter of his biography. Let us inquire what new lights, new events, and more days have thrown on his character, his duties, and his hopes.

It is one of those fables which out of an unknown antiquity convey an unlooked-for wisdom, that the gods, in the beginning, divided Man into men, that he might be more helpful to himself; just as the hand was divided into fingers, the better to answer its end.

The old fable covers a doctrine ever new and sublime; that there is One Man,—present to all particular men only partially, or through one faculty; and that you must take the whole society to find the [21] whole man. Man is not a farmer, or a professor, or an engineer, but he is all. Man is priest, and scholar, and statesman, and producer, and soldier. In the divided or social state these functions are parceled out to individuals, each of whom aims to do his stint of the joint work, whilst each other performs his. The fable implies that the individual, to possess himself, must sometimes return from his own labor to embrace all the other laborers. But, unfortunately, this original unit, this fountain of power, has been so distributed to multitudes, has been so minutely subdivided and peddled out, that it is spilled into drops, and cannot be gathered. The state of society is one in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk and strut about so many walking monsters,—a good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man.

Man is thus metamorphosed into a thing, into many things. The planter, who is Man sent out into the field to gather food, is seldom cheered by any idea of the true dignity of his ministry. He sees his bushel and his cart, and nothing beyond, and sinks into the farmer, instead of Man on the farm. The tradesman scarcely ever gives an ideal worth to his work, but is ridden by the routine of his craft, and the soul is subject to dollars. The priest becomes a form; the attorney a statute-book; the mechanic a machine; the sailor a rope of the ship.

In this distribution of functions the scholar is the delegated intellect. In the right state he is Man [22] Thinking. In the degenerate state, when the victim of society, he tends to become a mere thinker, or, still worse, the parrot of other men's thinking.

In this view of him, as Man Thinking, the whole theory of his office is contained. Him Nature solicits with all her placid, all her monitory pictures. Him the past instructs. Him the future invites. Is not indeed every man a student, and do not all things exist for the student's behoof? And, finally, is not the true scholar the only true master? But as the old oracle said, "All things have two handles: Beware of the wrong one." In life, too often, the scholar errs with mankind and forfeits his privilege. Let us see him in his school, and consider him in reference to the main influences he receives.

Emerson opens "The American Scholar" with greetings to the college president and members of the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Harvard College. Pointing out the differences between this gathering and the athletic and dramatic contests of ancient Greece, the poetry contests of the Middle Ages, and the scientific academies of nineteenth-century Europe, he voices a theme that draws the entire essay together: the notion of an independent American intelligentsia that will no longer depend for authority on its European past. He sounds what one critic contends is "the first clarion of an American literary renaissance," a call for Americans to seek their creative inspirations using America as their source, much like Walt Whitman would do in *Leaves of Grass* eighteen years later. In the second paragraph, Emerson announces his theme as "The American Scholar" not a particular individual but an abstract ideal.

The remaining five paragraphs relate an allegory that underlies the discussion to follow. According to an ancient fable, there was once only "One Man," who then was divided into many men so that society could work more efficiently. Ideally, society labors together — each person doing his or her task — so that it can function properly. However, society has now subdivided to so great an extent that it no longer serves the good of its citizens. And the scholar, being a part of society, has degenerated also. Formerly a "Man Thinking," the scholar is now "a mere thinker," a problem that Emerson hopes to correct successfully by re-familiarizing his audience with how the true scholar is educated and what the duties of this scholar are.

Paragraphs: 8-9

I. The first in time and the first in importance of the influences upon the mind is that of nature. Every day, the sun; and, after sunset, Night and her stars. Ever the winds blow; ever the grass grows. Every day, men and women, conversing, beholding and beholden. The scholar must needs stand wistful and admiring before this great spectacle. He must settle its value in his mind. What is nature to him? There is never a beginning, there is never an end, to the inexplicable continuity of this web of God, but always circular power returning into itself. Therein it resembles his own spirit, whose beginning, whose ending, he never can find,—so entire, so boundless. Far too as her splendors shine, system on system shooting like rays, upward, downward, without center, without circumference,—in the mass and in the particle, Nature hastens to render account of herself to the mind. Classification begins. To the young mind everything is individual, stands by itself. By and

by it finds how to join two things and see in them one nature; then three, then three thousand; and so, tyrannized over by its own unifying instinct, it goes on tying things together, diminishing anomalies, discovering roots running under ground whereby contrary and remote things cohere and flower out from one stem. It presently learns that since the dawn of history there has been a constant accumulation and classifying of facts. But what is classification but the perceiving that these objects are not chaotic, and are not foreign, but have a law which is also a law of the human mind? The astronomer discovers that geometry, a pure abstraction of the human mind, is the measure of planetary motion. The chemist finds proportions and intelligible method throughout matter; and science is nothing but the finding of analogy, identity, in the most remote parts. The ambitious soul sits down before each refractory fact; one after another reduces all strange constitutions, all new powers, to their class and their law, and goes on forever to animate the last fiber of organization, the outskirts of nature, by insight.

Thus to him, to this school-boy under the bending dome of day, is suggested that he and it proceed from one Root; one is leaf and one is flower; relation, [24] sympathy, stirring in every vein. And what is that root? Is not that the soul of his soul?—A thought too bold?—A dream too wild? Yet when this spiritual light shall have revealed the law of more earthly natures,—when he has learned to worship the soul, and to see that the natural philosophy that now is, is only the first gropings of its gigantic hand,—he shall look forward to an ever-expanding knowledge as to a becoming creator. He shall see that nature is the opposite of the soul, answering to it part for part. One is seal and one is print. Its beauty is the beauty of his own mind. Its laws are the laws of his own mind. Nature then becomes to him the measure of his attainments. So much of nature as he is ignorant of, so much of his own mind does he not yet possess. And, in fine, the ancient precept, "Know thyself," and the modern precept, "Study nature," become at last one maxim.

In these two paragraphs comprising the first section on how a scholar should be educated, Emerson envisions nature as a teacher that instructs individuals who observe the natural world to see — eventually — how similar their minds and nature are. The first similarity he discusses concerns the notion of circular power — a theme familiar to readers of the *Nature* essay — found in nature and in the scholar's spirit. Both nature and the scholar's spirit, "whose beginning, whose ending he never can find — so entire, so boundless," are eternal.

Order is another similarity — as it is in *Nature* — between the scholar and nature. At first, the mind views a chaotic and infinite reality of individual facts, but then it begins to classify these facts into categories, to make comparisons and distinctions. A person discovers nature's laws and can understand them because they are similar to the operations of the intellect. Eventually, we realize that nature and the soul — both proceeding from what Emerson terms "one root" — are parallel structures that mirror each other (Emerson's term for "parallel" may be misleading; he says that nature is the "opposite" of the soul). So, a greater knowledge of nature results in a greater understanding of the self, and vice versa. The maxims "Know thyself" and "Study nature" are equivalent: They are two ways of saying the same thing.

Paragraphs: 10-20

II. The next great influence into the spirit of the scholar is the mind of the Past,—in whatever form, whether of literature, of art, of institutions, that mind is inscribed. Books are the best type of the influence of the past, and perhaps we shall get at the truth,—learn the amount of this influence more conveniently,—by considering their value alone.

The theory of books is noble. The scholar of the first age received into him the world around; brooded thereon; gave it the new arrangement of his own mind, and uttered it again. It came into him life; it went out from him truth. It came to him short-lived actions; it went out from him immortal thoughts. It came to him business; it went from him poetry. It was dead fact; now, it is quick thought. It can stand, and it can go. It now endures, it now flies, it now inspires. Precisely in proportion to the depth of mind from which it issued, so high does it soar, so long does it sing.

Or, I might say, it depends on how far the process had gone, of transmuting life into truth. In proportion to the completeness of the distillation, so will the purity and imperishableness of the product be. But none is quite perfect. As no air-pump can by any means make a perfect vacuum, so neither can any artist entirely exclude the conventional, the local, the perishable from his book, or write a book of pure thought, that shall be as efficient, in all respects, to a remote posterity, as to contemporaries, or rather to the second age. Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding. The books of an older period will not fit this.

Yet hence arises a grave mischief. The sacredness which attaches to the act of creation, the act of thought, is instantly transferred to the record. The poet chanting was felt to be a divine man. Henceforth the chant is divine also. The writer was a just and wise spirit. Henceforward it is settled the book is perfect; as love of the hero corrupts into worship of his statue. Instantly the book becomes noxious. The guide is a tyrant. We sought a brother, and lo, a governor. The sluggish and perverted mind of the multitude, always slow to open to the incursions of Reason, having once so opened, having once received this book, stands upon it, and makes an outcry if it is disparaged. Colleges are built on it. Books are written on it by thinkers, not by Man Thinking, by men of talent, that is, who start wrong, who set out from accepted dogmas, not from their own sight of principles. Meek young men grow up in libraries, believing it their duty to accept the views which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon, have given; forgetful that Cicero, Locke and Bacon were only young men in libraries when they wrote these books.

Hence, instead of Man Thinking, we have the bookworm. Hence the book-learned class, who value books, as such; not as related to nature and the human constitution, but as making a sort of Third Estate with the world and soul. Hence the restorers of readings, the emendators, the bibliomaniacs of all degrees. This is bad; this is worse than it seems.

Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst. What is the right use? What is the one end which all means go to effect? They are for nothing but to inspire. I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system. The one thing in the world of value is the [27] active soul,—the soul, free, sovereign, active. This every man is entitled to; this every man contains within him, although in almost all men obstructed, and as yet unborn. The soul active sees absolute truth and utters truth, or creates. In this action it is genius; not the privilege of here and there a favorite, but the sound estate of every man. In its essence it is progressive. The book, the college, the school of art, the institution of any kind, stop with some past utterance of genius. This is good, say they,—let us hold by this. They pin me down. They look backward and not forward. But genius always looks forward. The eyes of man are set in his forehead, not in his hindhead. Man hopes. Genius creates. To create,—to create,—is the proof of a divine presence. Whatever talents may be, if the man create not, the pure efflux of the Deity is not his;—cinders and smoke there may be, but not yet flame. There are creative manners, there are creative actions, and creative words; manners, actions,

words, that is, indicative of no custom or authority, but springing spontaneous from the mind's own sense of good and fair.

On the other part, instead of being its own seer, let it receive always from another mind its truth, though it were in torrents of light, without periods of solitude, inquest, and self-recovery; and a fatal disservice is done. Genius is always sufficiently the enemy of genius by over-influence. The literature of every nation bear me witness. The English dramatic poets have Shakespearized now for two hundred years.

Undoubtedly there is a right way of reading, so it be sternly subordinated. Man Thinking must not be subdued by his instruments. Books are for the scholar's idle times. When he can read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other men's transcripts of their readings. But when the intervals of darkness come, as come they must,—when the soul seeth not, when the sun is hid and the stars withdraw their shining,—we repair to the lamps which were kindled by their ray, to guide our steps to the East again, where the dawn is. We hear, that we may speak. The Arabian proverb says, "A fig-tree, looking on a fig-tree, becometh fruitful."

It is remarkable, the character of the pleasure we derive from the best books. They impress us ever with the conviction that one nature wrote and the same reads. We read the verses of one of the great English poets, of Chaucer, of Marvell, of Dryden, with the most modern joy,—with a pleasure, I mean, which is in great part caused by the abstraction of all time from their verses. There is some awe mixed with the joy of our surprise, when this poet, who lived in some past world, two or three hundred years ago, says that which lies close to my own soul, that which I also had well-nigh thought and said. But for the evidence thence afforded to the philosophical doctrine of the identity of all minds, we should suppose some pre-established harmony, some foresight of souls that were to be, and some preparation of stores for their future wants, like the fact observed in insects, who lay up food before death for the young grub they shall never see.

I would not be hurried by any love of system, by any exaggeration of instincts, to underrate the Book. We all know that as the human body can be nourished on any food, though it were boiled grass and the broth of shoes, so the human mind can be fed by any knowledge. And great and heroic men have existed who had almost no other information than by the printed page. I only

would say that it needs a strong head to bear that diet. One must be an inventor to read well. As the proverb says, "He that would bring home the wealth of the Indies must carry out the wealth of the Indies." There is then creative reading as well as creative writing. When the mind is braced by labor and invention, the page of whatever book we read becomes luminous with manifold allusion. Every sentence is doubly significant, and the sense of our author is as broad as the world. We then see, what is always true, that as the seer's hour of vision is short and rare among heavy days and months, so is its record, perchance, the least part of his volume. The discerning will read, in his Plato or Shakespeare, only that least part,—only the authentic utterances of the oracle;—all the rest he rejects, were it never so many times Plato's and Shakespeare's.

Of course there is a portion of reading quite indispensable to a wise man. History and exact science he must learn by laborious reading. Colleges, in like manner, have their indispensable office,—to teach elements. But they can only highly serve us when they aim not to drill, but to create; when they gather from far every ray of various genius to their hospitable halls, and by the concentrated fires set the hearts of their youth on flame. Thought and knowledge are natures in which apparatus and pretension avail nothing. Gowns and pecuniary foundations, though of towns of gold, can never countervail the least sentence or syllable of wit. Forget this, and our American colleges will recede in their public importance, whilst they grow richer every year.

Emerson devotes much of his discussion to the second influence on the mind, past learning — or, as he expresses it, the influence of books. In the first three paragraphs of this section, he emphasizes that books contain the learning of the past; however, he also says that these books pose a great danger. While it is true that books transform mere facts ("short-lived actions") into vital truths ("immortal thoughts"), every book is inevitably a partial truth, biased by society's standards when it was written. Each age must create its own books and find its own truths for itself.

Following this call for each age's creating truth, Emerson dwells on other dangers in books. They are dangerous, he says, because they tempt the scholar away from the original thought. Excessive respect for the brilliance of past thinkers can discourage us from exploring new ideas and seeking individualized truths.

The worst example of slavish deference to past thinkers is the bookworm, a pedant who focuses all thought on trivial matters of scholarship and ignores large, universal ideas. This type of person becomes passive and uncreative, and is the antithesis of Emerson's ideal of the creative imagination: "Man hopes. Genius creates. To create, — to create, — is the proof of a divine presence." The non-creative bookworm is more spiritually distanced from God — and, therefore, from nature — than is the thinker of original thoughts.

But the genius, too, can suffer from the undue influence of books. Emerson's example of this kind of sufferer are the English dramatic poets, who, he says, have been "Shakespearized" for two hundred years: Rather than producing new, original texts and thoughts, they mimic Shakespeare's writings. Citing an Arabic proverb that says that one fig tree fertilizes another — just like one author can inspire another — Emerson suggests that true scholars should resort to books only when their own creative genius dries up or is blocked.

The last three paragraphs of this section refer to the pleasures and benefits of reading, provided it is done correctly. There is a unique pleasure in reading. Because ancient authors thought and felt as people do today, books defeat time, a phenomenon that Emerson argues is evidence of the transcendental oneness of human minds. Qualifying his previous insistence on individual creation, he says that he never underestimates the written word: Great thinkers are nourished by any knowledge, even that in books, although it takes a remarkably independent mind to read critically at all times. This kind of reading mines the essential vein of truth in an author while discarding the trivial or biased.

Emerson concedes that there are certain kinds of reading that are essential to an educated person: History, science, and similar subjects, which must be acquired by laborious reading and study. Foremost, schools must foster creativity rather than rely on rote memorization of texts: ". . . [schools] can only highly serve us, when they aim not to drill, but to create."

Paragraphs: 21-30

III. There goes in the world a notion that the scholar should be a recluse, a valetudinarian,—as unfit for any handiwork or public labor as a penknife for an axe. The so-called "practical men" sneer at speculative men, as if, because they speculate or see, they could do nothing. I have heard it said that the clergy—who are always, more universally than any other class, the scholars of their day—are addressed as women; that the rough, spontaneous conversation of men they do not hear, but only a mincing and diluted speech. They are often virtually disfranchised; and indeed there are advocates for their celibacy. As far as this is true of the studious classes, it is not just and wise. Action is with the scholar subordinate, but it is essential. Without it he is not yet man. Without it thought can never ripen into truth. Whilst the world hangs before the eye as a cloud of beauty, we cannot even see its beauty. Inaction is cowardice, but there can be no scholar without the heroic mind. The preamble of thought, the transition through which it passes from the unconscious to the conscious, is action. Only so much do I know, as I have lived. Instantly we know whose words are loaded with life, and whose not.

The world—this shadow of the soul, or other me, lies wide around. Its attractions are the keys which unlock my thoughts and make me acquainted with myself. I launch eagerly into this resounding tumult. I grasp the hands of those next me, and take my place in the ring to suffer and to work, taught by an instinct that so shall the dumb abyss be vocal with speech. I pierce its order; I dissipate its fear; I dispose of it within the circuit of my expanding life. So much only of life as I know by experience, so much of the wilderness have I vanquished and planted, or so far have I extended my being, my dominion. I do not see how any man can afford, for the sake of his nerves and his nap, to spare any action in which he can partake. It is pearls and rubies to his discourse. Drudgery, calamity, exasperation, want, are instructors in eloquence and wisdom. The true scholar grudges every opportunity of action passed by, as a loss of power.

It is the raw material out of which the intellect molds her splendid products. A strange process too, this by which experience is converted into thought, as a mulberry-leaf is converted into satin. The manufacture goes forward at all hours.

The actions and events of our childhood and youth are now matters of calmest observation. They lie like fair pictures in the air. Not so with our recent actions,—with the business which we now have in hand. On this we are quite unable to speculate. Our affections as yet circulate through it. We no more feel or know it than we feel the feet, or the hand, or the brain of our body. The new deed is yet a part of life,—remains for a time immersed in our unconscious life. In some contemplative hour it detaches itself from the life like a ripe fruit,[46] to become a thought of the mind. Instantly it is raised, transfigured; the corruptible has put on incorruption. Henceforth it is an object of beauty, however base its origin and neighborhood. Observe, too, the impossibility of antedating this act. In its grub state it cannot fly, it cannot shine, it is a dull grub. But suddenly, without observation, the selfsame thing unfurls beautiful wings, and is an angel of wisdom. So is there no fact, no event, in our private history, which shall not, sooner or later, lose its adhesive, inert form, and astonish us by soaring from our body into the empyrean. Cradle and infancy, school and playground, the fear of boys, and dogs, and ferules, the love of little maids and berries, and many another fact that once filled the whole sky, are gone already; friend and relative, profession and party, town and country, nation and world, must also soar and sing.

Of course, he who has put forth his total strength in fit actions has the richest return of wisdom. I will not shut myself out of this globe of action, and transplant an oak into a flower-pot, there to hunger and pine; nor trust the revenue of some single faculty, and exhaust one vein of thought, much like those Savoyards, who, getting their livelihood by carving shepherds, shepherdesses, and smoking Dutchmen, for all Europe, went out one day to the mountain to find stock, and discovered that they had whittled up the last of their pine-trees. Authors we have, in numbers, who have written out their vein, and who, moved by a commendable prudence, sail for Greece or Palestine, follow the trapper into the prairie, or ramble round Algiers, to replenish their merchantable stock.

If it were only for a vocabulary, the scholar would be covetous of action. Life is our dictionary. Years are well spent in country labors; in town; in the insight into trades and manufactures; in frank intercourse with many men and women; in science; in art; to the one end of mastering in all their facts a language by which to illustrate and embody our perceptions. I learn immediately from any speaker how much he has already lived, through the poverty or the splendor of his speech. Life lies behind us as the quarry from whence we get tiles and

copestones for the masonry of to-day. This is the way to learn grammar. Colleges and books only copy the language which the field and the work-yard made.

But the final value of action, like that of books, and better than books, is that it is a resource. That great principle of Undulation in nature, that shows itself in the inspiring and expiring of the breath; in desire and satiety; in the ebb and flow of the sea; in day and night; in heat and cold; and, as yet more deeply ingrained in every atom and every fluid, is known to us under the name of Polarity,—these "fits of easy transmission and reflection," as Newton called them, are the law of nature because they are the law of spirit.

The mind now thinks, now acts, and each fit reproduces the other. When the artist has exhausted his materials, when the fancy no longer paints, when thoughts are no longer apprehended and books are a weariness,—he has always the resource to live. Character is higher than intellect. Thinking is the function. Living is the functionary. The stream retreats to its source. A great soul will be strong to live, as well as strong to think. Does he lack organ or medium to impart his truth? He can still fall back on this elemental force of living them. This is a total act. Thinking is a partial act. Let the grandeur of justice shine in his affairs. Let the beauty of affection cheer his lowly roof. Those "far from fame," who dwell and act with him, will feel the force of his constitution in the doings and passages of the day better than it can be measured by any public and designed display. Time shall teach him that the scholar loses no hour which the man lives. Herein he unfolds the sacred germ of his instinct, screened from influence. What is lost in seemliness is gained in strength. Not out of those on whom systems of education have exhausted their culture comes the helpful giant to destroy the old or to build the new, but out of unhandselled savage nature; out of terrible Druids and Berserkers come at last Alfred and Shakespeare. I hear therefore with joy whatever is beginning to be said of the dignity and necessity of labor to every citizen. There is virtue yet in the hoe and the spade, for learned as well as for unlearned hands. And labor is everywhere welcome; always we are invited to work; only be this limitation observed, that a man shall not for the sake of wider activity sacrifice any opinion to the popular judgments and modes of action.

In this third section, Emerson comments on the scholar's need for action, for physical labor. He rejects the notion that the scholar should not engage in practical action. Action, while secondary

to thought, is still necessary: "Action is with the scholar subordinate, but it is essential." Furthermore, not to act — declining to put principle into practice — is cowardly. The transcendental concept of the world as an expression of ourselves makes action the natural duty of a thinking person.

Emerson observes the difference between recent actions and past actions. Over time, he says, a person's past deeds are transformed into thought, but recent acts are too entangled with present feelings to undergo this transformation. He compares "the recent act" to an insect larva, which eventually metamorphoses into a butterfly — symbolic of action becoming thought.

Finally, he praises labour as valuable in and of itself, for such action is the material creatively used by the scholar. An active person has a richer existence than a scholar who merely undergoes a second-hand existence through the words and thoughts of others. The ideal life has "undulation" — a rhythm that balances, or alternates, thought and action, labour and contemplation: "A great soul will be strong to live, as well as strong to think." This cycle creates a person's character that is far superior to the fame or the honour too easily expected by a mere display of higher learning.

Paragraphs: 31-45

I have now spoken of the education of the scholar by nature, by books, and by action. It remains to say somewhat of his duties.

They are such as become Man Thinking. They may all be comprised in self-trust. The office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances. He plies the slow, unhonored, and unpaid task of observation. Flamsteed and Herschel, in their glazed observatories, may catalogue the stars with the praise of all men, and, the results being splendid and useful, honor is sure. But he, in his private observatory, cataloguing obscure and nebulous stars of the human mind, which as yet no man has thought of as such,—watching days and months sometimes for a few facts; correcting still his old records,—must relinquish display and immediate fame. In the long period of his preparation he must betray often an ignorance and shiftlessness in popular arts, incurring the disdain of the able who shoulder him aside. Long he

must stammer in his speech; often forego the living for the dead. Worse yet, he must accept—how often!—poverty and solitude. For the ease and pleasure of treading the old road, accepting the fashions, the education, the religion of society, he takes the cross of making his own, and, of course, the self-accusation, the faint heart, the frequent uncertainty and loss of time, which are the nettles and tangling vines in the way of the self-relying and self-directed; and the state of virtual hostility in which he seems to stand to society, and especially to educated society. For all this loss and scorn, what offset? He is to find consolation in exercising the highest functions of human nature. He is one who raises himself from private considerations and breathes and lives on public and illustrious thoughts. He is the world's eye. He is the world's heart. He is to resist the vulgar prosperity that retrogrades ever to barbarism, by preserving and communicating heroic sentiments, noble biographies, melodious verse, and the conclusions of history. Whatsoever oracles the human heart, in all emergencies, in all solemn hours, has uttered as its commentary on the world of actions,—these he shall receive and impart. And whatsoever new verdict Reason from her inviolable seat pronounces on the passing men and events of to-day,—this he shall hear and promulgate.

These being his functions, it becomes him to feel all confidence in himself, and to defer never to the popular cry. He and he only knows the world. The world of any moment is the merest appearance. Some great decorum, some fetich of a government, some ephemeral trade, or war, or man, is cried up by half mankind and cried down by the other half, as if all depended on this particular up or down. The odds are that the whole question is not worth the poorest thought which the scholar has lost in listening to the controversy. Let him not quit his belief that a popgun is a popgun, though the ancient and honorable of the earth affirm it to be the crack of doom. In silence, in steadiness, in severe abstraction, let him hold by himself; add observation to observation, patient of neglect, patient of reproach, and bide his own time,—happy enough if he can satisfy himself alone that this day he has seen something truly. Success treads on every right step. For the instinct is sure that prompts him to tell his brother what he thinks. He then learns that in going down into the secrets of his own mind he has descended into the secrets of all minds. He learns that he who has mastered any law in his private thoughts is master to that extent of all men whose language he speaks, and of all into whose language his own can be translated. The poet, in utter solitude remembering his spontaneous thoughts and recording them, is found to have recorded

that which men in cities vast find true for them also. The orator distrusts at first the fitness of his frank confessions, his want of knowledge of the persons he addresses, until he finds that he is the complement of his hearers;—that they drink his words because he fulfills for them their own nature; the deeper he dives into his privatest, secretest presentiment, to his wonder he finds this is the most acceptable, most public and universally true. The people delight in it; the better part of every man feels—This is my music; this is myself.

In self-trust all the virtues are comprehended. Free should the scholar be,—free and brave. Free even to the definition of freedom, "without any hindrance that does not arise out of his own constitution." Brave; for fear is a thing which a scholar by his very function puts behind him. Fear always springs from ignorance. It is a shame to him if his tranquility, amid dangerous times, arise from the presumption that like children and women his is a protected class; or if he seek a temporary peace by the diversion of his thoughts from politics or vexed questions, hiding his head like an ostrich in the flowering bushes, peeping into microscopes, and turning rhymes, as a boy whistles to keep his courage up. So is the danger a danger still; so is the fear worse. Manlike let him turn and face it. Let him look into its eye and search its nature, inspect its origin,—see the whelping of this lion,—which lies no great way back; he will then find in himself a perfect comprehension of its nature and extent; he will have made his hands meet on the other side, and can henceforth defy it and pass on superior. The world is his who can see through its pretension. What deafness, what stone-blind custom, what overgrown error you behold is there only by sufferance,—by your sufferance. See it to be a lie, and you have already dealt it its mortal blow.

Yes, we are the cowed,—we the trustless. It is a mischievous notion that we are come late into nature; that the world was finished a long time ago. As the world was plastic and fluid in the hands of God, so it is ever to so much of his attributes as we bring to it. To ignorance and sin it is flint. They adapt themselves to it as they may; but in proportion as a man has any thing in him divine, the firmament flows before him and takes his signet and form. Not he is great who can alter matter, but he who can alter my state of mind. They are the kings of the world who give the color of their present thought to all nature and all art, and persuade men, by the cheerful serenity of their carrying the matter, that this thing which they do is the apple which the ages have desired to pluck, now at last ripe, and inviting nations to the harvest. The great man makes the great thing. Wherever Macdonald sits, there is the head of the table. Linnæus makes botany the most

alluring of studies, and wins it from the farmer and the herb-woman: Davy, chemistry; and Cuvier, fossils. The day is always his who works in it with serenity and great aims. The unstable estimates of men crowd to him whose mind is filled with a truth, as the heaped waves of the Atlantic follow the moon.

For this self-trust, the reason is deeper than can be fathomed,—darker than can be enlightened. I might not carry with me the feeling of my audience in stating my own belief. But I have already shown the ground of my hope, in adverting to the doctrine that man is one. I believe man has been wronged; he has wronged himself. He has almost lost the light that can lead him back to his prerogatives. Men are become of no account. Men in history, men in the world of to-day, are bugs, are spawn, and are called "the mass" and "the herd." In a century, in a millenium, one or two men; that is to say, one or two approximations to the right state of every man. All the rest behold in the hero or the poet their own green and crude being,—ripened; yes, and are content to be less, so that may attain to its full stature. What a testimony, full of grandeur, full of pity, is borne to the demands of his own nature, by the poor clansman, the poor partisan, who rejoices in the glory of his chief! The poor and the low find some amends to their immense moral capacity, for their acquiescence in a political and social inferiority. They are content to be brushed like flies from the path of a great person, so that justice shall be done by him to that common nature which it is the dearest desire of all to see enlarged and glorified. They sun themselves in the great man's light, and feel it to be their own element. They cast the dignity of man from their downtrod selves upon the shoulders of a hero, and will perish to add one drop of blood to make that great heart beat, those giant sinews combat and conquer. He lives for us, and we live in him.

Men such as they are very naturally seek money or power; and power because it is as good as money,—the "spoils," so called, "of office." And why not? For they aspire to the highest, and this, in their sleep-walking, they dream is highest. Wake them and they shall quit the false good and leap to the true, and leave governments to clerks and desks. This revolution is to be wrought by the gradual domestication of the idea of Culture. The main enterprise of the world for splendor, for extent, is the upbuilding of a man. Here are the materials strewn along the ground. The private life of one man shall be a more illustrious monarchy, more formidable to its enemy, more sweet and serene in its influence to its friend, than any kingdom in history. For a man, rightly viewed, comprehendeth the particular natures of all men. Each philosopher, each bard, each actor has

only done for me, as by a delegate, what one day I can do for myself. The books which once we valued more than the apple of the eye, we have quite exhausted. What is that but saying that we have come up with the point of view which the universal mind took through the eyes of one scribe; we have been that man, and have passed on. First, one, then another, we drain all cisterns, and waxing greater by all these supplies, we crave a better and a more abundant food. The man has never lived that can feed us ever. The human mind cannot be enshrined in a person who shall set a barrier on any one side to this unbounded, unboundable empire. It is one central fire, which, flaming now out of the lips of Etna, lightens the capes of Sicily, and now out of the throat of Vesuvius, illuminates the towers and vineyards of Naples. It is one light which beams out of a thousand stars. It is one soul which animates all men.

But I have dwelt perhaps tediously upon this abstraction of the Scholar. I ought not to delay longer to add what I have to say of nearer reference to the time and to this country.

Historically, there is thought to be a difference in the ideas which predominate over successive epochs, and there are data for marking the genius of the Classic, of the Romantic, and now of the Reflective or Philosophical age. With the views I have intimated of the oneness or the identity of the mind through all individuals, I do not much dwell on these differences. In fact, I believe each individual passes through all three. The boy is a Greek; the youth, romantic; the adult, reflective. I deny not, however, that a revolution in the leading idea may be distinctly enough traced.

Our age is bewailed as the age of Introversion. Must that needs be evil? We, it seems, are critical. We are embarrassed with second thoughts. We cannot enjoy anything for hankering to know whereof the pleasure consists. We are lined with eyes. We see with our feet. The time is infected with Hamlet's unhappiness,—

"Sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought."

Is it so bad then? Sight is the last thing to be pitied. Would we be blind? Do we fear lest we should outsee nature and God, and drink truth dry? I look upon the discontent of the literary class as a mere announcement of the fact that they find themselves not in the state of mind of their fathers,

and regret the coming state as untried; as a boy dreads the water before he has learned that he can swim. If there is any period one would desire to be born in, is it not the age of Revolution; when the old and the new stand side by side and admit of being compared; when the energies of all men are searched by fear and by hope; when the historic glories of the old can be compensated by the rich possibilities of the new era? This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it.

I read with some joy of the auspicious signs of the coming days, as they glimmer already through poetry and art, through philosophy and science, through church and state.

One of these signs is the fact that the same movement which effected the elevation of what was called the lowest class in the state assumed in literature a very marked and as benign an aspect. Instead of the sublime and beautiful, the near, the low, the common, was explored and poetized. That which had been negligently trodden under foot by those who were harnessing and provisioning themselves for long journeys into far countries, is suddenly found to be richer than all foreign parts. The literature of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life, are the topics of the time. It is a great stride. It is a sign—is it not?—of new vigor when the extremities are made active, when currents of warm life run into the hands and the feet. I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic; what is doing in Italy or Arabia; what is Greek art, or Provençal minstrelsy; I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low. Give me insight into to-day, and you may have the antique and future worlds. What would we really know the meaning of? The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street; the news of the boat; the glance of the eye; the form and the gait of the body;—show me the ultimate reason of these matters; show me the sublime presence of the highest spiritual cause lurking, as always it does lurk, in these suburbs and extremities of nature; let me see every trifle bristling with the polarity that ranges it instantly on an eternal law; and the shop, the plow, and the ledger referred to the like cause by which light undulates and poets sing;—and the world lies no longer a dull miscellany and lumber-room, but has form and order: there is no trifle, there is no puzzle, but one design unites and animates the farthest pinnacle and the lowest trench.

This idea has inspired the genius of Goldsmith, Burns, Cowper, and, in a newer time, of Goethe, Wordsworth, and Carlyle. This idea they have differently followed and with various

success. In contrast with their writing, the style of Pope, of Johnson, of Gibbon, looks cold and pedantic. This writing is blood-warm. Man is surprised to find that things near are not less beautiful and wondrous than things remote. The near explains the far. The drop is a small ocean. A man is related to all nature. This perception of the worth of the vulgar is fruitful in discoveries. Goethe, in this very thing the most modern of the moderns, has shown us, as none ever did, the genius of the ancients.

There is one man of genius who has done much for this philosophy of life, whose literary value has never yet been rightly estimated:—I mean Emanuel Swedenborg. The most imaginative of men, yet writing with the precision of a mathematician, he endeavored to engraft a purely philosophical Ethics on the popular Christianity of his time. Such an attempt of course must have difficulty which no genius could surmount. But he saw and showed the connexion between nature and the affections of the soul. He pierced the emblematic or spiritual character of the visible, audible, tangible world. Especially did his shade-loving muse hover over and interpret the lower parts of nature; he showed the mysterious bond that allies moral evil to the foul material forms, and has given in epical parables a theory of insanity, of beasts, of unclean and fearful things.

Another sign of our times, also marked by an analogous political movement, is the new importance given to the single person. Everything that tends to insulate the individual—to surround him with barriers of natural respect, so that each man shall feel the world is his, and man shall treat with man as a sovereign state with a sovereign state—tends to true union as well as greatness. "I learned," said the melancholy Pestalozzi, "that no man in God's wide earth is either willing or able to help any other man." Help must come from the bosom alone. The scholar is that man who must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future. He must be an university of knowledges. If there be one lesson more than another that should pierce his ear, it is—The world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature, and you know not yet how a globule of sap ascends; in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all; it is for you to dare all. Mr. President and Gentlemen, this confidence in the unsearched might of man belongs, by all motives, by all prophecy, by all preparation, to the American Scholar. We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. The spirit of the American freeman is already suspected to be timid, imitative, tame. Public and private avarice make the air we breathe thick and fat. The scholar is decent, indolent, complaisant.

See already the tragic consequence. The mind of this country, taught to aim at low objects, eats upon itself. There is no work for any one but the decorous and the complaisant. Young men of the fairest promise, who begin life upon our shores, inflated by the mountain winds, shined upon by all the stars of God, find the earth below not in unison with these, but are hindered from action by the disgust which the principles on which business is managed inspire, and turn drudges, or die of disgust, some of them suicides. What is the remedy? They did not yet see, and thousands of young men as hopeful now crowding to the barriers for the career do not yet see, that if the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come round to him. Patience,—patience; with the shades of all the good and great for company; and for solace the perspective of your own infinite life; and for work the study and the communication of principles, the making those instincts prevalent, the conversion of the world. Is it not the chief disgrace in the world, not to be an unit; not to be reckoned one character; not to yield that peculiar fruit which each man was created to bear, but to be reckoned in the gross, in the hundred, or the thousand, of the party, the section, to which we belong; and our opinion predicted geographically, as the north, or the south? Not so, brothers and friends,—please God, ours shall not be so. We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds. Then shall man be no longer a name for pity, for doubt, and for sensual indulgence. The dread of man and the love of man shall be a wall of defense and a wreath of joy around all. A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men.

After Emerson has discussed how nature, books, and action educates the scholar, he now addresses the scholar's obligations to society. First, he considers these obligations in general, abstract terms; then he relates them to the particular situation of the American scholar.

The scholar's first and most important duty is to develop unflinching self-trust and a mind that will be a repository of wisdom for other people. This is a difficult task, Emerson says, because the scholar must endure poverty, hardship, tedium, solitude, and other privations while following the path of knowledge. Self-sacrifice is often called for, as demonstrated in Emerson's examples of two astronomers who spent many hours in tedious and solitary observation of space in order to make discoveries that benefited mankind. Many readers will wonder just how satisfying the reward

really is when Emerson acknowledges that the scholar "is to find consolation in exercising the highest functions of human nature."

The true scholar is dedicated to preserving the wisdom of the past and is obligated to communicate the noblest thoughts and feelings to the public. This last duty means that the scholar — "who raises himself from private considerations, and breathes and lives on public illustrious thoughts" — must always remain independent in thinking and judgment, regardless of popular opinion, fad, notoriety, or expediency. Because the scholar discovers universal ideas, those held by the universal human mind, he can communicate with people of all classes and ages: "He is the world's eye. He is the world's heart."

Although he appears to lead a reclusive and benign life, the scholar must be brave because he deals in ideas, a dangerous currency. Self-trust is the source of courage and can be traced to the transcendental conviction that the true thinker sees all thought as one; universal truth is present in all people, although not all people are aware of it. Instead of thinking individually, we live vicariously through our heroes; we seek self-worth through others when we should search for it in ourselves. The noblest ambition is to improve human nature by fulfilling our individual natures.

Emerson concludes the essay by observing that different ages in Western civilization, which he terms the Classic, the Romantic, and the Reflective (or the Philosophical) periods, have been characterized by different dominant ideas, and he acknowledges that he has neglected speaking about the importance of differences between ages while speaking perhaps too fervently about the transcendental unity of all human thought.

Emerson now proposes an evolutionary development of civilization, comparable to the development of a person from childhood to adulthood. The present age — the first half of the 1800s — is an age of criticism, especially self-criticism. Although some people find such criticism to be an inferior philosophy, Emerson believes that it is valid and important. Initiating a series of questions, he asks whether discontent with the quality of current thought and literature is such a bad thing; he answers that it is not. Dissatisfaction, he says, marks a transitional period of growth and evolution into new knowledge: "If there is any period one would desire to be born in, is it not

the age of Revolution; when the old and the new stand side by side, and admit of being compared; . . . This [present] time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it."

Emerson applauds the views of English and German romantic poets like Wordsworth and Goethe, who find inspiration and nobility in the lives and work of common people. Instead of regarding only royal and aristocratic subjects as appropriate for great and philosophical literature, the Romantic writers reveal the poetry and sublimity in the lives of lower-class and working people. Their writing is full of life and vitality, and it exemplifies the transcendental doctrine of the unity of all people. Ironically, we should remember that at the beginning of the essay, Emerson advocated Americans' throwing off the European mantle that cloaks their own culture. Here, he distinguishes between a European tradition that celebrates the lives of common people, and one that celebrates only the monarchical rule of nations: "We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe."

Making special reference to the Swedish philosopher and mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, Emerson contends that although Swedenborg has not received his due recognition, he revealed the essential connection between the human mind and the natural world, the fundamental oneness of humans and nature. Emerson finds much inspiration for his own thinking and writing in the doctrines of Swedenborg.

In his long, concluding paragraph, Emerson dwells on the romantic ideal of the individual. This fundamentally American concept, which he develops at much greater length in the essay "Self-Reliance," is America's major contribution to the world of ideas. The scholar must be independent, courageous, and original; in thinking and acting, the scholar must demonstrate that America is not the timid society it is assumed to be. We must refuse to be mere purveyors of the past's wisdom: ". . . this confidence in the unsearched might of man, belongs by all motives, by all prophecy, by all preparation, to the American Scholar," who will create a native, truly American culture.

UNIT 6 (C): “THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR” - SOME KEY ISSUES AND CONCERNS

“The American Scholar” is an oration addressed by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) on August 31, 1837, to the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Harvard College in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The essay contains several essential themes such as social unity, nature and connection, creation, and national identity to develop its construction. Let’s see these.

The prime theme of Emerson’s “The American Scholar” is that intellectualism in America needs to be independent of European thought and shape itself within the distinctive character of America. At the onset of his address to the Harvard chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, Emerson states, “Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close.”

In his essay “The American Scholar,” Emerson urges his audience to remember that they are essential parts of a larger society and have a specific function: to facilitate unity. He asserts that all people, regardless of their education or social standing, play an equally important role in building and maintaining a prosperous society.

In his essay, Emerson points out nature’s special role in the scholar’s development. He believes that man and nature are bound to the same root and that by studying nature, man can learn more about himself and all humankind. As a new and larger nation, America has created for scholars a way of exploring nature that the more minor but developed European countries cannot.

Emerson concludes that the role of the American scholar is crucial. A scholar should actively seek knowledge through interaction with life and nature rather than merely reading the works of others and adopting European thought.

He should actively seek knowledge rather than just reading the works of others and adopting European thought; moreover, he should seek knowledge through interaction with life and nature. In this way, the scholar/writer can develop his own ideas and a style of writing that is uniquely American. Thus, the scholar can build his own thoughts and a type of writing that is uniquely American.

UNITS: 7-8

“SOLITUDE”

(CHAPTER – V)

FROM WALDEN

BY

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

CONTENT STRUCTURE:

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Unit 7 (b): An Introduction to Thoreau’s *Walden*

Unit 8 (a): A Brief Synopsis of *Walden*

Unit 8 (b): Chapter - V: “Solitude” (The Text)

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Conclusion

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UNIT – 7

UNIT 7 (A): HENRY DAVID THOREAU (1817–1862) – LIFE AND WORKS

Henry David Thoreau was an American philosopher, poet, environmental scientist, and political activist whose major work, *Walden*, draws upon each of these various identities in meditating upon the concrete problems of living in the world as a human being. Thoreau was born in Concord, Massachusetts in 1817 and died there in 1862, at the age of forty-four.

Henry David Thoreau was born on July 12, 1817, to rather ordinary parents in Concord, outside of Boston, Massachusetts. His childhood and adolescence, from what little is known about these periods of his life, appear to have been typical for the time. Thoreau attended the Concord Academy as an undistinguished student, and when he was sixteen, his father, a pencil manufacturer, had saved enough money to send him to Harvard. There he read a great deal and thus philosophically and literarily prepared himself to become a spokesman for the transcendentalist movement; again, however, his career as a student was unspectacular.

Like that of his contemporary Søren Kierkegaard, Thoreau's intellectual career unfolded in a close and polemical relation to the town in which he spent almost his entire life. After graduating from Harvard in 1837, he struck up a friendship with fellow Concord resident Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose essay "Nature" he had first encountered earlier that year. Although the two American thinkers had a turbulent relationship due to serious philosophical and personal differences, they had a profound and lasting effect on one another. It was in the fall of 1837 that Thoreau made his first entries in the multivolume journal he would keep for the rest of his life. Most of his published writings were developed from notes that first appeared on these pages, and Thoreau subsequently revised many entries, suggesting that his journal can be considered a finished work in itself. During his lifetime he published only two books, along with numerous shorter essays that were first delivered as lectures. He lived a simple and relatively quiet life, making his living briefly as a teacher and pencil maker but mostly as a land surveyor. Thoreau had intimate bonds with his family and friends (the loss of his brother John in 1842 was a major trauma) and remained unmarried, although he was deeply in love at least twice. His first book, *A Week on*

the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, was still a work in progress in 1845, when he went to live in the woods by Walden Pond for two years and two months.

Emerson had high ambitions for his young friend and, in 1843, he arranged for Thoreau to stay with his brother, William Emerson, on Staten Island so that he might make contacts with New York publishers. Unfortunately, this attempt to find publication was a failure, and Thoreau soon returned to Concord and resumed work on his journal. Then in March 1845, he initiated what was to be the most significant event of his life: he borrowed an ax and began to construct a cabin on Emerson's land by the north shore of Walden Pond.

He moved into his cabin on July 4, 1845, and, as *Walden* indicates, he attempted to reduce his needs to the barest essentials of life and to establish an intimate, spiritual relationship with nature.

This “experiment” in living on the outskirts of town was an intensive time of examination for Thoreau, as he drew close to nature and contemplated the final ends of his own life, which was otherwise at risk of ending in quiet desperation. Thoreau viewed his existential quest as a venture in philosophy, in the ancient Greek sense of the word, because it was motivated by an urgent need to find a reflective understanding of reality that could inform a life of wisdom. This is because, according to the belief that philosophy is a way of life, that very way of life “will necessarily be deliberative and reflective”; accordingly, for Thoreau, “thinking about his life in the woods is central to his life in the woods” (Bates 2012, 29). Moreover, it is only after having cultivated “a meticulous and discerning awareness of the particularities of nature” in one specific place (Robinson 2004, 100) that he became able to articulate a vision of the human being’s capacity to be grounded and at home in the world.

Thoreau left the pond in 1847, and when Emerson went to England in the fall of that year, Thoreau once again joined the household to look after the family's needs. Upon Emerson's return in 1848, Thoreau moved back to his parent’s home, where he remained until his death.

Between 1847 and 1854, Thoreau spent his time walking through the countryside, making pencils, surveying, and devoting himself to a new passion: the composition of *Walden*. The work went through many painstaking revisions during those seven years; yet when it appeared, the product of those years of labor was not well received. While it was not so great a failure as *A Week*

on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers (275 sold; 75 given away), and while it did receive some good reviews, it hardly fulfilled Thoreau's dream of becoming a major spokesman for the transcendentalist movement. He did not complain about the poor reception given to *Walden*, but it must have been a major psychological setback. Viewed today, its publication marked the high point of his career, and his contemporaries virtually ignored it.

Thoreau's later years were characterized by an increased interest in the cause of abolition and the scientific study of nature. In 1844, he wrote an essay entitled "Herald of Freedom," which praised abolitionist Wendell Phillips, and in 1849 he published "Civil Disobedience," which also dealt with the subject of slavery in America. In neither piece did Thoreau protest loudly, but in 1854, his indignation began to grow when he delivered a speech entitled "Slavery in Massachusetts." He became more involved with the abolitionist movement, and in 1859 delivered his fiery "Plea for Captain John Brown," wherein he praised the morality of Brown's violent resistance to slavery and sternly denounced the federal government for sanctioning the institution of slavery. This speech was soon followed by another entitled "The Last Days of John Brown." In 1844, Thoreau advocated non-violent, passive resistance to slavery, but as it became more and more a central concern of his life, he gradually came to advocate armed revolt, even civil war, as a valid means of destroying an immoral system.

In his abolitionist speeches and essays, Thoreau revealed a turbulent sense of outrage. That was one side of his personality. The other side, as seen when he was in the presence of nature, also remained strong during his later years. And as he grew weaker after his bouts with tuberculosis in 1851 and 1855, he turned to nature in order to regain his health — but not with the transcendentalist fervor that characterized his youth. During this period of decline, his journal reveals a growing interest in natural history accompanied by a more "scientific," less transcendental, approach to nature. Although the latter part of his journal does contain many imaginative descriptions of nature similar to those found in *Walden*, there is an increasing number of entries like the following of 1860:

“It rained hard on the twentieth and part of the following night — two and one eighth inches of rain in all, there being no drought — raising the river from some two or three inches above summer level to seven and a half inches above the summer level at 7 A.M. of the twenty-first.”

Such entries have led some scholars to think that Thoreau gradually "decayed" as a transcendentalist during the late 1850s and early 1860s.

On May 6, 1862, Thoreau died in his parents' home in Concord. A man of admirable spirit, he passed out of the world with typical Thoreauvian humor: when a friend asked him if he had made amends with God, Thoreau quipped, "I did not know that we had ever quarreled."

When Thoreau died, scarcely anyone in America noticed, and the few that did mourn his passing would have been surprised to learn that, a century later, he would be unanimously acknowledged as one of America's greatest literary artists. George W. Curtis did not understate the matter when he wrote in Thoreau's obituary that "the name of Henry Thoreau is known to very few persons beyond those who personally knew him." Thoreau had fervently devoted himself to the pursuit of a literary career in the late 1830s, but after thirty years of intense effort in his art, he died a failure by contemporary standards of success. In his eulogy at Thoreau's funeral, Emerson declared that "the country knows not yet, or in the least part, how great a son it has lost," and it was not until the twentieth century was well underway that Thoreau came to be recognized as the genius that he was.

What little recognition Thoreau did receive during the latter half of the nineteenth century was strongly coloured by some unfortunate remarks made by Emerson and James Russell Lowell, two very influential men in matters of literary taste. Both men published essays on Thoreau shortly after his death and virtually determined for quite some time what the public's attitude toward Thoreau would be. While supposedly eulogizing Thoreau, Emerson managed to emphasize every negative trait that he had found (or imagined) in Thoreau's personality. One sees in his portrait of Thoreau an almost inhuman ascetic and stoic ("He had no temptations to fight against — no appetites, no passions, no taste for elegant trifles") and a somewhat cranky, anti-social hermit ("Few lives contained so many renunciations. . . . It cost him nothing to say No; indeed, he found it much easier than to say Yes"). In this eulogy, Emerson also strongly emphasized Thoreau's abilities as a naturalist, and thus established the image of Thoreau-the-nature-lover (in the worst sense of the term) that was to obscure his primary significance as an artist for quite some time. Three years later, in 1865, James Russell Lowell published his essay on Thoreau, and reinforced Emerson's caricature of Thoreau as a cold, brittle, anti-social recluse. He wrote that Thoreau "seems to me to have been a man with so high a conceit of himself that he accepted without

questioning, and insisted on accepting, his defects and weaknesses of character as virtues and powers peculiar to himself. . . . His mind strikes us as cold and wintry. This was a damning indictment, but even more detrimental to Thoreau's reputation was Lowell's assertion that Thoreau was merely a minor Emerson, an imitator of his mentor. In *A Fable for Critics*, Lowell depicted a Thoreau who trod "in Emerson's tracks with legs painfully short." In addition, he opened the essay on Thoreau with a similar gibe:

Among the pistillate plants kindled to fruitage by the Emersonian pollen, Thoreau is thus far the most remarkable; and it is something eminently fitting that his posthumous works should be offered us by Emerson, for they are strawberries from his own garden.

To realize the influence that Lowell's opinion carried in literary circles, one should note that as late as 1916, Mark Van Doren reiterated a similar misconception in his *Henry David Thoreau*. Van Doren wrote that "Thoreau is a specific Emerson" and that, philosophically, Thoreau's position was "almost identical with Emerson's."

To those familiar with Emerson's and Thoreau's writings, such a view of an "Emersonian Thoreau" is a gross misconception. Philosophically and aesthetically, they were often at odds, and one need only read Emerson's *Nature* and Thoreau's *Walden* to note the differences in personality and, most important, the differences in their art. Yet, the "Emersonian" tag hindered the recognition of Thoreau's unique greatness for over half a century, as did the popular conceptions of the effete "nature lover" and the cranky hermit. One finds, for example, Oliver Wendell Holmes treating Thoreau as a joke: "Thoreau, the nullifier of civilization . . . insisted on nibbling his asparagus at the wrong end." And Robert Louis Stevenson echoed Lowell by terming Thoreau "dry, priggish, and selfish," adding that "it was not inappropriate, surely, that he had many close relations with the fish."

The ill-founded jokes began to come to an end during the 1890s when serious scholars began to take a closer look at the basis of Thoreau's small reputation. The portraits of Thoreau by Emerson and Lowell were re-examined and most critics came to the conclusion that, as Charles C. Abbot wrote in 1895, "neither Emerson nor Lowell was fitted to the task they undertook." Emerson's journals revealed a basic misunderstanding of Thoreau's aims and accomplishments; Lowell, the "in-door, kid-glove critic," was obviously out of touch with the thorny world that

Thoreau inhabited. Between the 1890s and the mid-twentieth century, the old misconceptions about Thoreau withered away, and as critics began examining Thoreau on his own ground — that is, his writings — his reputation grew rapidly. Today, his reputation as an artist is greater than Emerson's, and, ironically, virtually no one except specialists in American literature reads either Lowell's poetry or his literary criticism. As Wendell Glick has noted: "One of the most conspicuous nails in the coffin of Lowell's reputation is his maligning of Thoreau's genius." By the unanimous consent of literary critics, "genius" is the only word to describe the once unappreciated artist of a small town in Massachusetts.

UNIT 7 (B): AN INTRODUCTION TO THOREAU'S *WALDEN*

In "The American Scholar," Emerson described the three basic stages of a transcendentalist's life: first, he learns all that is of merit in the wisdom of the past; second, he establishes a harmonious relationship with nature through which he is able to discover ethical truths and communicate with the divine. With these two stages, the transcendentalist has developed his higher faculties; he has cultivated his life and "spiritualized" it. (We see the narrator of *Walden* go through these two stages in his progress toward spiritual rebirth.) After thus cultivating his own spirit, the transcendentalist does not selfishly remain content with himself. The third stage he must attempt, after self-renewal, is the renewal of society at large. After being nurtured by books and nature, he must attempt to share his spiritual gains with other men who have not yet achieved their perfect spiritual states.

Walden may be viewed as Thoreau's attempt at this third stage in the transcendental life. In it, we hear the "bragging" narrator reiterating the firm conviction that all men may achieve the exhilaration that he feels. He vividly shows us his life; he "brags" about his achievement; and he tries by his example to renew "the dead dry life of society." Thus, when the narrator "brags," it is not only for himself but for all humanity's *potential* for greatness. Like the other transcendentalists, Thoreau was a strong moralist, and one of the most distinctive characteristics of *Walden* is that the narrator consistently tries to alert his readers to their potential for spiritual growth. So, while the narrator may crow loudly, sometimes proudly strutting about, and may boast of his "clear flame" with a degree of pride approaching *hubris*, it should not be forgotten that his self-pride is to be

shared by his readers. If the narrator sometimes seems smug and self-righteous, it must be recalled that he is crowing "to wake his neighbors up" to *their* own greatness, not just his own.

Walden, in full Walden; or, Life in the Woods, series of eighteen essays by Henry David Thoreau, published in 1854. An important contribution to New England Transcendentalism, the book was a record of Thoreau's experiment in simple living on the northern shore of Walden Pond in eastern Massachusetts (1845–47). Walden is viewed not only as a philosophical treatise on labour, leisure, self-reliance, and individualism but also as an influential piece of nature writing. It is considered Thoreau's masterwork.

In some editions of *Walden*, there is included an inscription page that precedes the first chapter. On this page, the narrator of *Walden* declares:

“I DO NOT PROPOSE TO WRITE AN ODE TO DEJECTION, BUT TO BRAG AS LUSTILY AS CHANTICLEER IN THE MORNING, STANDING ON HIS ROOST, IF ONLY TO WAKE MY NEIGHBORS UP.”

Although Thoreau actually lived at Walden for two years, *Walden* is a narrative of his life at the pond compressed into the cycle of a single year, from spring to spring. The book is presented in eighteen chapters.

UNIT – 8

UNIT 8 (A): A BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF WALDEN

Thoreau opens with the chapter titled, "Economy." Here, he sets forth the basic principles that guided his experiment in living, and urges his reader to aim higher than the values of society, to spiritualize. He explains that he writes in response to the curiosity of his townsmen, and draws attention to the fact that *Walden* is a first-person account. He writes of himself, the subject he knows best. Through his story, he hopes to tell his readers something of their own condition and how to improve it. Perceiving widespread anxiety and dissatisfaction with modern civilized life, he writes for the discontented, the mass of men who "lead lives of quiet desperation." Distinguishing between the outer and the inner man, he emphasizes the corrosiveness of

materialism and constant labour to the individual's humanity and spiritual development. Thoreau encourages his readers to seek the divinity within, to throw off resignation to the status quo, to be satisfied with less materially, and to embrace independence, self-reliance, and simplicity of life. In identifying necessities — food, shelter, clothing, and fuel — and detailing specifically the costs of his experiment, he points out that many so-called necessities are, in fact, luxuries that contribute to spiritual stagnation. Technological progress, moreover, has not truly enhanced the quality of life or the condition of mankind. Comparing civilized and primitive man, Thoreau observes that civilization has institutionalized life and absorbed the individual. He writes of living fully in the present. He stresses that going to Walden was not a statement of economic protest, but an attempt to overcome society's obstacles to transacting his "private business." He does not suggest that anyone else should follow his particular course of action. Each man must find and follow his own path in understanding reality and seeking higher truth. Discussing philanthropy and reform, Thoreau highlights the importance of individual self-realization. Society will be reformed through reform of the individual, not through the development and refinement of institutions.

In "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For," Thoreau recounts his near-purchase of the Hollowell farm in Concord, which he ultimately did not buy. He remains unencumbered, able to enjoy all the benefits of the landscape without the burdens of property ownership. He becomes a homeowner instead at Walden, moving in, significantly, on July 4, 1845 — his personal Independence Day, as well as the nation's. He casts himself as a chanticler — a rooster — and *Walden* — his account of his experience — as the lusty crowing that wakes men up in the morning. More than the details of his situation at the pond, he relates the spiritual exhilaration of his going there, an experience surpassing the limitations of place and time. He writes of the morning hours as a daily opportunity to reaffirm his life in nature, a time of heightened awareness. To be awake — to be intellectually and spiritually alert — is to be alive. He states his purpose in going to Walden: to live deliberately, to confront the essentials, and to extract the meaning of life as it is, good or bad. He exhorts his readers to simplify, and points out our reluctance to alter the course of our lives. He again disputes the value of modern improvements, the railroad in particular. Our proper business is to seek the reality — the absolute — beyond what we think we know. This higher truth may be sought in the here and now — in the world we inhabit. Our existence forms a part of time, which flows into eternity, and affords access to the universal.

In the chapter titled, "Reading," Thoreau discusses literature and books — a valuable inheritance from the past, useful to the individual in his quest for higher understanding. True works of literature convey significant, universal meaning to all generations. Such classics must be read as deliberately as they were written. He complains of current taste, and of the prevailing inability to read in a "high sense." Instead of reading the best, we choose the mediocre, which dulls our perception. Good books help us to throw off narrowness and ignorance, and serve as powerful catalysts to provoke change within.

In "Sounds," Thoreau turns from books to reality. He advises alertness to all that can be observed, coupled with an Oriental contemplation that allows the assimilation of experience. As he describes what he hears and sees of nature through his window, his reverie is interrupted by the noise of the passing train. At first, he responds to the train — a symbol of nineteenth-century commerce and progress — with admiration for its almost mythical power. He then focuses on its inexorability and on the fact that as some things thrive, so others decline — the trees around the pond, for instance, which are cut and transported by train, or animals carried in the railroad cars. His comments on the railroad end on a note of disgust and dismissal, and he returns to his solitude and the sounds of the woods and the nearby community — church bells on Sundays, echoes, the call of the whippoorwill, the scream of the screech owl (indicative of the dark side of nature) and the cry of the hoot owl. The noise of the owls suggests a "vast and undeveloped nature which men have not recognized . . . the stark twilight and unsatisfied thoughts which all have." Sounds, in other words, express the reality of nature in its full complexity, and our longing to connect with it. He builds on his earlier image of himself as a crowing rooster through playful discussion of an imagined wild rooster in the woods, and closes the chapter with reference to the lack of domestic sounds at his Walden home. Nature, not the incidental noise of living, fills his senses.

Thoreau opens "Solitude" with a lyrical expression of his pleasure in and sympathy with nature. When he returns to his house after walking in the evening, he finds that visitors have stopped by, which prompts him to comment both on his literal distance from others while at the pond and on the figurative space between men. There is intimacy in his connection with nature, which provides sufficient companionship and precludes the possibility of loneliness. The vastness of the universe puts the space between men in perspective. Thoreau points out that if we attain a greater closeness to nature and the divine, we will not require physical proximity to others in the

"depot, the post-office, the bar-room, the meeting-house, the school-house" — places that offer the kind of company that distracts and dissipates. He comments on man's dual nature as a physical entity and as an intellectual spectator within his own body, which separates a person from himself and adds further perspective to his distance from others. Moreover, a man is always alone when thinking and working. He concludes the chapter by referring to metaphorical visitors who represent God and nature, to his own oneness with nature, and to the health and vitality that nature imparts.

Thoreau asserts in "Visitors" that he is no hermit and that he enjoys the society of worthwhile people as much as any man does. He comments on the difficulty of maintaining sufficient space between himself and others to discuss significant subjects and suggests that meaningful intimacy — intellectual communion — allows and requires silence (the opportunity to ponder and absorb what has been said) and distance (a suspension of interest in temporal and trivial personal matters). True companionship has nothing to do with the trappings of conventional hospitality. He writes at length of one of his favourite visitors, a French-Canadian woodchopper, a simple, natural, direct man, skillful, quiet, solitary, humble, and contented, possessed of a well-developed animal nature but a spiritual nature only rudimentary, at best. As much as Thoreau appreciates the woodchopper's character and perceives that he has some ability to think for himself, he recognizes that the man accepts the human situation as it is and has no desire to improve himself. Thoreau mentions other visitors — half-wits, runaway slaves, and those who do not recognize when they have worn out their welcome. Visiting girls, boys, and young women seem able to respond to nature, whereas men of business, farmers, and others cannot leave their preoccupations behind. Reformers — "the greatest bores of all" — are most unwelcome guests, but Thoreau enjoys the company of children, railroad men taking a holiday, fishermen, poets, and philosophers — all of whom can leave the village temporarily behind and immerse themselves in the woods.

In "The Bean-Field," Thoreau describes his experience of farming while living at Walden. His bean-field offers reality in the forms of physical labour and closeness to nature. He writes of turning up Indian arrowheads as he hoes and plants, suggesting that his use of the land is only one phase in the history of man's relation to the natural world. His bean-field is real enough, but it also metaphorically represents the field of inner self that must be carefully tended to produce a crop. Thoreau comments on the position of his bean-field between the wild and the cultivated — a position not unlike that which he himself occupies at the pond. He recalls the sights and sounds

encountered while hoeing, focusing on the noise of town celebrations and military training, and cannot resist satirically underscoring the vainglory of the participants. He notes that he tends his beans while his contemporaries study art in Boston and Rome, or engage in contemplation and trade in faraway places, but in no way suggests that his efforts are inferior. Thoreau has no interest in beans per se, but rather in their symbolic meaning, which he as a writer will later be able to draw upon. He vows that in the future he will not sow beans but rather the seeds of "sincerity, truth, simplicity, faith, innocence, and the like." He expands upon seed imagery in referring to planting the seeds of new men. Lamenting a decline in farming from ancient times, he points out that agriculture is now a commercial enterprise, and that the farmer has lost his integral relationship with nature. The true husbandman will cease to worry about the size of the crop and the gain to be had from it and will pay attention only to the work that is particularly his in making the land fruitful.

Thoreau begins "The Village" by remarking that he visits the town every day or two to catch up on the news and to observe the villagers in their habitat as he does birds and squirrels in nature. But the town, full of idle curiosity and materialism, threatens the independence and simplicity of life. He resists the shops on Concord's Mill Dam and makes his escape from the beckoning houses, and returns to the woods. He writes of going back to Walden at night and discusses the value of occasionally becoming lost in the dark or in a snowstorm. Sometimes a person lost is so disoriented that he begins to appreciate nature anew. Fresh perception of the familiar offers a different perspective, allowing us "to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations." He refers to his overnight jailing in 1846 for refusal to pay his poll tax in protest against slavery and the Mexican War, and comments on the insistent intrusion of institutions upon men's lives.

Turning from his experience in town, Thoreau refers in the opening of "The Ponds" to his occasional ramblings "farther westward . . . into yet more unfrequented parts of the town." Throughout his writings, the West represents the unexplored in the wild and in the inner regions of man. In *Walden*, these regions are explored by the author through the pond. He writes of fishing on the pond by moonlight, his mind wandering into philosophical and universal realms, and of feeling the jerk of a fish on his line, which links him again to the reality of nature. He thus presents

concrete reality and the spiritual element as opposing forces. He goes on to suggest that through his life at the pond, he has found a means of reconciling these forces.

Walden is presented in a variety of metaphorical ways in this chapter. Believed by many to be bottomless, it is emblematic of the mystery of the universe. As the "earth's eye," through which the "beholder measures the depth of his own nature," it reflects aspects of the narrator himself. As "a perfect forest mirror" on a September or October day, Walden is a "field of water" that "betrays the spirit that is in the air . . . continually receiving new life and motion from above" — a direct conduit between the divine and the beholder, embodying the workings of God and stimulating the narrator's receptivity and faculties. Walden is ancient, having existed perhaps from before the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. At the same time, it is perennially young. It possesses and imparts innocence. Its waters, remarkably transparent and pure, serve as a catalyst to revelation, understanding, and vision. Thoreau refers to talk of piping water from Walden into town and to the fact that the railroad and woodcutters have affected the surrounding area. And yet, the pond is eternal. It endures despite all of man's activities on and around it. In this chapter, Thoreau also writes of the other bodies of water that form his "lake country" (an indirect reference to English Romantic poets Coleridge and Wordsworth) — Goose Pond, Flint's Pond, Fair Haven Bay on the Sudbury River, and White Pond (Walden's "lesser twin"). He concludes "The Ponds" reproachfully, commenting that man does not sufficiently appreciate nature. Like Walden, she flourishes alone, away from the towns of men.

In "Baker Farm," Thoreau presents a study in contrasts between himself and John Field, a man unable to rise above his animal nature and material values. The chapter begins with lush natural detail. A worshipper of nature absorbed in reverie and aglow with perception, Thoreau visits pine groves reminiscent of ancient temples. He calls upon particular familiar trees. He describes once standing "in the very abutment of a rainbow's arch," bathed briefly and joyfully in a lake of light, "like a dolphin." The scene changes when, to escape a rain shower, he visits the squalid home of Irishman John Field. Field came to America to advance his material condition. The meanness of his life is compounded by his belief in the necessity of coffee, tea, butter, milk, and beef — all luxuries to Thoreau. Thoreau talks to Field as if he were a philosopher, urging him to simplify, but his words fall on uncomprehending ears. Exultant in his own joy in nature and aspiration toward meaning and understanding, Thoreau runs "down the hill toward the reddening

west, with the rainbow over my shoulder," the "Good Genius" within urging him to "fish and hunt far and wide day by day," to remember God, to grow wild, to shun trade, to enjoy the land but not own it. The last paragraph is about John Field, by comparison with Thoreau "a poor man, born to be poor . . . not to rise in this world" — a man impoverished spiritually as well as materially.

In "Higher Laws," Thoreau deals with the conflict between two instincts that coexist side by side within himself — the hunger for wildness (expressed in his desire to seize and devour a woodchuck raw) and the drive toward a higher spiritual life. In discussing hunting and fishing (occupations that foster involvement with nature and that constitute the closest connection that many have with the woods), he suggests that all men are hunters and fishermen at a certain stage of development. Although most don't advance beyond this stage, if a man has the "seeds of better life in him," he may evolve to understanding nature as a poet or naturalist and may ultimately comprehend higher truth. Thoreau says that he himself has lost the desire to fish, but admits that if he lived in the wilderness, he would be tempted to take up hunting and fishing again. A man can't deny either his animal or his spiritual side. In discussing vegetarian diet and moderation in eating, sobriety, and chastity, he advocates both accepting and subordinating the physical appetites, but not disregarding them. The chapter concludes with reference to a generic John Farmer who, sitting at his door one September evening, despite himself is gradually induced to put aside his mundane thoughts and to consider practicing "some new austerity, to let his mind descend into his body and redeem it, and treat himself with ever increasing respect."

Continuing the theme developed in "Higher Laws," "Brute Neighbors" opens with a dialogue between Hermit and Poet, who epitomize polarized aspects of the author himself (animal nature and the yearning to transcend it). Through the rest of the chapter, he focuses his thoughts on the varieties of animal life — mice, phoebes, raccoons, woodchucks, turtle doves, red squirrels, ants, loons, and others — that parade before him at Walden. He provides context for his observations by posing the question of why man has "just these species of animals for his neighbors." He answers that they are "all beasts of burden, in a sense, made to carry some portion of our thoughts," thus imparting these animals with symbolic meaning as representations of something broader and higher. Several animals (the partridge and the "winged cat") are developed in such a way as to suggest a synthesis of animal and spiritual qualities. Thoreau devotes pages to describing a mock-heroic battle of ants, compared to the Concord Fight of 1775 and presented in

straightforward annalistic style as having taken place "in the Presidency of Polk, five years before the passage of Webster's Fugitive-Slave Bill." He thus ironically undercuts the significance of human history and politics. The battle of the ants is every bit as dramatic as any human saga, and there is no reason that we should perceive it as less meaningful than events on the human stage. The image of the loon is also developed at length. Diving into the depths of the pond, the loon suggests the seeker of spiritual truth. It also represents the dark, mysterious aspect of nature. Thoreau thus uses the animal world to present the unity of animal and human life and to emphasize nature's complexity.

The narrative moves decisively into fall in the chapter "House-Warming." Thoreau praises the ground-nut, an indigenous and almost exterminated plant, which yet may demonstrate the vigor of the wild by outlasting cultivated crops. He describes the turning of the leaves, the movement of wasps into his house, and the building of his chimney. Described as an "independent structure, standing on the ground and rising through the house to the heavens," the chimney clearly represents the author himself, grounded in this world but striving for universal truth. The pond cools and begins to freeze, and Thoreau withdraws both into his house, which he has plastered, and into his soul as well. He continues his spiritual quest indoors, and dreams of a more metaphorical house, cavernous, open to the heavens, requiring no housekeeping. He regrets the superficiality of hospitality as we know it, which does not permit real communion between host and guest. He writes of gathering wood for fuel, of his woodpile, and of the moles in his cellar, enjoying the perpetual summer maintained inside even in the middle of winter. Winter makes Thoreau lethargic, but the atmosphere of the house revives him and prolongs his spiritual life through the season. He is now prepared for physical and spiritual winter.

Thoreau begins "Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors" by recalling cheerful winter evenings spent by the fireside. But winter is quiet — even the owl is hushed — and his thoughts turn to past inhabitants of the Walden Woods. He writes of Cato Ingraham (a former slave), the black woman Zilpha (who led a "hard and inhumane" life), Brister Freeman (another slave) and his wife Fenda (a fortune-teller), the Stratton and Breed families, Wyman (a potter), and Hugh Quoil — all people on the margin of society, whose social isolation matches the isolation of their life near the pond. Thoreau ponders why Walden's "small village, germ of something more" failed, while Concord thrives, and comments on how little the former inhabitants have affected the

landscape. The past failed to realize the promise of Walden, but perhaps Thoreau himself will do so. He observes that nobody has previously built on the spot he now occupies — that is, he does not labor under the burden of the past. He has few visitors in winter, but no lack of society nevertheless. He still goes into town (where he visits Emerson, who is referred to but not mentioned by name), and receives a few welcome visitors (none of them named specifically) — a "long-headed farmer" (Edmund Hosmer), a poet (Ellery Channing), and a philosopher (Bronson Alcott). He waits for the mysterious "Visitor who never comes."

Thoreau again takes up the subject of fresh perspective on the familiar in "Winter Animals." He examines the landscape from frozen Flint's Pond, and comments on how wide and strange it appears. He writes of winter sounds — of the hoot owl, of ice on the pond, of the ground cracking, of wild animals, of a hunter and his hounds. He describes a pathetic, trembling hare that shows surprising energy as it leaps away, demonstrating the "vigor and dignity of Nature."

At the beginning of "The Pond in Winter," Thoreau awakens with a vague impression that he has been asked a question that he has been trying unsuccessfully to answer. But he looks out upon nature, itself "an answered question," and into the daylight, and his anxiety is quelled. The darkness and dormancy of winter may slow down spiritual processes, but the dawn of each day provides a new beginning. In search of water, Thoreau takes an axe to the pond's frozen surface and, looking into the window he cuts in the ice, sees life below despite its apparent absence from above. The workings of God in nature are present even where we don't expect them. He writes of the fishermen who come to the pond, simple men, but wiser than they know, wild, who pay little attention to society's dictates and whims. He describes surveying the bottom of Walden in 1846, and is able to assure his reader that Walden is, in fact, not bottomless. There is a need for mystery, however, and as long as there are believers in the infinite, some ponds will be bottomless. In probing the depths of bodies of water, imagination dives down deeper than nature's reality. Thoreau expresses the Transcendental notion that if we knew all the laws of nature, one natural fact or phenomenon would allow us to infer the whole. But our knowledge of nature's laws is imperfect. He extrapolates from the pond to humankind, suggesting the scientific calculation of a man's height or depth of character from his exterior and his circumstances. The pond and the individual are both microcosms. Thoreau describes commercial ice-cutting at Walden Pond. Despite what might at first seem a violation of the pond's integrity, Walden is unchanged and

unharmd. Moreover, ice from the pond is shipped far and wide, even to India, where others thus drink from Thoreau's spiritual well. Walden water mixes with Ganges water, while Thoreau bathes his intellect "in the stupendous and cosmogonal philosophy of the Bhagvat Geeta" — no doubt an even exchange, in Thoreau's mind.

"Spring" brings the breaking up of the ice on Walden Pond and a celebration of the rebirth of both nature and the spirit. Thoreau again presents the pond as a microcosm, remarking, "The phenomena of the year take place every day in a pond on a small scale." He revels in listening and watching for evidence of spring, and describes in great detail the "sand foliage" (patterns made by thawing sand and clay flowing down a bank of earth in the railroad cut near Walden), an early sign of spring that presages the verdant foliage to come. In its similarity to real foliage, the sand foliage demonstrates that nothing is inorganic, and that the earth is not an artifact of dead history. It is, rather, living poetry, compared with which human art and institutions are insignificant. The chapter is rich with expressions of vitality, expansion, exhilaration, and joy. Thoreau focuses on the details of nature that mark the awakening of spring. He asks what meaning chronologies, traditions, and written revelations have at such a time. Rebirth after death suggests immortality. Walden has seemingly died, and yet now, in the spring, reasserts its vigour and endurance. The narrator, too, is reinvigorated, becomes "elastic" again. A man's thoughts improve in spring, and his ability to forgive and forget the shortcomings of his fellows — to start afresh — increases. Thoreau states the need for the "tonic of wildness," noting that life would stagnate without it. He comments also on the duality of our need to explore and explain things and our simultaneous longing for the mysterious. Taking either approach, we can never have enough of nature — it is a source of strength and proof of a more lasting life beyond our limited human span. Thoreau refers to the passage of time, to the seasons "rolling on into summer," and abruptly ends the narrative. He compresses his entire second year at the pond into the half-sentence, "and the second year was similar to it." The last sentence records his departure from the pond on September 6, 1847.

In his "Conclusion," Thoreau again exhorts his reader to begin a new, higher life. He points out that we restrict ourselves and our view of the universe by accepting externally imposed limits, and urges us to make life's journey deliberately, to look inward and to make the interior voyage of discovery. Evoking the great explorers Mungo Park, Lewis and Clark, Frobisher, and Columbus, he presents inner exploration as comparable to the exploration of the North American continent.

Thoreau explains that he left the woods for the same reason that he went there and that he must move on to new endeavors. There is danger even in a new enterprise of falling into a pattern of tradition and conformity. One must move forward optimistically toward his dream, leaving some things behind and gaining awareness of others. A man will replace his former thoughts and conventional common sense with a new, broader understanding, thereby putting a solid foundation under his aspirations. Thoreau expresses unqualified confidence that man's dreams are achievable, and that his experiment at Walden successfully demonstrates this. The experience and truth to which a man attains cannot be adequately conveyed in ordinary language, must be "translated" through a more expressive, suggestive, figurative language. Thoreau entreats his readers to accept and make the most of what we are, to "mind our business," not somebody else's idea of what our business should be. He presents the parable of the artist of Kouroo, who strove for perfection and whose singleness of purpose endowed him with perennial youth. Transcending time and the decay of civilization, the artist endures, creates true art, and achieves perfection. This parable demonstrates the endurance of truth. Thoreau again urges us to face life as it is, to reject materialism, to embrace simplicity, serenely to cultivate self, and to understand the difference between the temporal and the permanent. He ends *Walden* with an affirmation of resurrection and immortality through the quest for higher truth. One last time, he uses the morning imagery that throughout the book signifies new beginnings and heightened perception: "Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star."

UNIT 8 (B): CHAPTER - V: "SOLITUDE" (THE TEXT)

This is a delicious evening, when the whole body is one sense, and imbibes delight through every pore. I go and come with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself. As I walk along the stony shore of the pond in my shirt-sleeves, though it is cool as well as cloudy and windy, and I see nothing special to attract me, all the elements are unusually congenial to me. The bullfrogs trump to usher in the night, and the note of the whip-poor-will is borne on the rippling wind from over the water. Sympathy with the fluttering alder and poplar leaves almost takes away my breath; yet,

like the lake, my serenity is rippled but not ruffled. These small waves raised by the evening wind are as remote from storm as the smooth reflecting surface. Though it is now dark, the wind still blows and roars in the wood, the waves still dash, and some creatures lull the rest with their notes. The repose is never complete. The wildest animals do not repose, but seek their prey now; the fox, and skunk, and rabbit, now roam the fields and woods without fear. They are Nature's watchmen—links which connect the days of animated life.

When I return to my house I find that visitors have been there and left their cards, either a bunch of flowers, or a wreath of evergreen, or a name in pencil on a yellow walnut leaf or a chip. They who come rarely to the woods take some little piece of the forest into their hands to play with by the way, which they leave, either intentionally or accidentally. One has peeled a willow wand, woven it into a ring, and dropped it on my table. I could always tell if visitors had called in my absence, either by the bended twigs or grass, or the print of their shoes, and generally of what sex or age or quality they were by some slight trace left, as a flower dropped, or a bunch of grass plucked and thrown away, even as far off as the railroad, half a mile distant, or by the lingering odor of a cigar or pipe. Nay, I was frequently notified of the passage of a traveller along the highway sixty rods off by the scent of his pipe.

There is commonly sufficient space about us. Our horizon is never quite at our elbows. The thick wood is not just at our door, nor the pond, but somewhat is always clearing, familiar and worn by us, appropriated and fenced in some way, and reclaimed from Nature. For what reason have I this vast range and circuit, some square miles of unfrequented forest, for my privacy, abandoned to me by men? My nearest neighbor is a mile distant, and no house is visible from any place but the hill-tops within half a mile of my own. I have my horizon bounded by woods all to myself; a distant view of the railroad where it touches the pond on the one hand, and of the fence which skirts the woodland road on the other. But for the most part it is as solitary where I live as on the prairies. It is as much Asia or Africa as New England. I have, as it were, my own sun and moon and stars, and a little world all to myself. At night there was never a traveller passed my house, or knocked at my door, more than if I were the first or last man; unless it were in the spring, when at long intervals some came from the village to fish for pouts—they plainly fished much more in the Walden Pond of their own natures, and baited their hooks with darkness—but they soon retreated, usually with light baskets, and left "the world to darkness and to me," and the black kernel of the

night was never profaned by any human neighborhood. I believe that men are generally still a little afraid of the dark, though the witches are all hung, and Christianity and candles have been introduced.

Yet I experienced sometimes that the most sweet and tender, the most innocent and encouraging society may be found in any natural object, even for the poor misanthrope and most melancholy man. There can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of Nature and has his senses still. There was never yet such a storm but it was AEolian music to a healthy and innocent ear. Nothing can rightly compel a simple and brave man to a vulgar sadness. While I enjoy the friendship of the seasons I trust that nothing can make life a burden to me. The gentle rain which waters my beans and keeps me in the house today is not drear and melancholy, but good for me too. Though it prevents my hoeing them, it is of far more worth than my hoeing. If it should continue so long as to cause the seeds to rot in the ground and destroy the potatoes in the low lands, it would still be good for the grass on the uplands, and, being good for the grass, it would be good for me. Sometimes, when I compare myself with other men, it seems as if I were more favored by the gods than they, beyond any deserts that I am conscious of; as if I had a warrant and surety at their hands which my fellows have not, and were especially guided and guarded. I do not flatter myself, but if it be possible they flatter me. I have never felt lonesome, or in the least oppressed by a sense of solitude, but once, and that was a few weeks after I came to the woods, when, for an hour, I doubted if the near neighborhood of man was not essential to a serene and healthy life. To be alone was something unpleasant. But I was at the same time conscious of a slight insanity in my mood, and seemed to foresee my recovery. In the midst of a gentle rain while these thoughts prevailed, I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very pattering of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house, an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me, as made the fancied advantages of human neighborhood insignificant, and I have never thought of them since. Every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me. I was so distinctly made aware of the presence of something kindred to me, even in scenes which we are accustomed to call wild and dreary, and also that the nearest of blood to me and humanest was not a person nor a villager, that I thought no place could ever be strange to me again.

"Mourning untimely consumes the sad;
Few are their days in the land of the living,
Beautiful daughter of Toscar."

Some of my pleasantest hours were during the long rain–storms in the spring or fall, which confined me to the house for the afternoon as well as the forenoon, soothed by their ceaseless roar and pelting; when an early twilight ushered in a long evening in which many thoughts had time to take root and unfold themselves. In those driving northeast rains which tried the village houses so, when the maids stood ready with mop and pail in front entries to keep the deluge out, I sat behind my door in my little house, which was all entry, and thoroughly enjoyed its protection. In one heavy thunder–shower the lightning struck a large pitch pine across the pond, making a very conspicuous and perfectly regular spiral groove from top to bottom, an inch or more deep, and four or five inches wide, as you would groove a walking–stick. I passed it again the other day, and was struck with awe on looking up and beholding that mark, now more distinct than ever, where a terrific and resistless bolt came down out of the harmless sky eight years ago. Men frequently say to me, "I should think you would feel lonesome down there, and want to be nearer to folks, rainy and snowy days and nights especially." I am tempted to reply to such—This whole earth which we inhabit is but a point in space. How far apart, think you, dwell the two most distant inhabitants of yonder star, the breadth of whose disk cannot be appreciated by our instruments? Why should I feel lonely? is not our planet in the Milky Way? This which you put seems to me not to be the most important question. What sort of space is that which separates a man from his fellows and makes him solitary? I have found that no exertion of the legs can bring two minds much nearer to one another. What do we want most to dwell near to? Not to many men surely, the depot, the post–office, the bar–room, the meeting–house, the school–house, the grocery, Beacon Hill, or the Five Points, where men most congregate, but to the perennial source of our life, whence in all our experience we have found that to issue, as the willow stands near the water and sends out its roots in that direction. This will vary with different natures, but this is the place where a wise man will dig his cellar.... I one evening overtook one of my townsmen, who has accumulated what is called "a handsome property"—though I never got a fair view of it—on the Walden road, driving a pair of cattle to market, who inquired of me how I could bring my mind to give up so many of the comforts of life. I answered that I was very sure I liked it passably well; I was not joking. And so

I went home to my bed, and left him to pick his way through the darkness and the mud to Brighton—or Bright-town—which place he would reach some time in the morning.

Any prospect of awakening or coming to life to a dead man makes indifferent all times and places. The place where that may occur is always the same, and indescribably pleasant to all our senses. For the most part we allow only outlying and transient circumstances to make our occasions. They are, in fact, the cause of our distraction. Nearest to all things is that power which fashions their being. Next to us the grandest laws are continually being executed. Next to us is not the workman whom we have hired, with whom we love so well to talk, but the workman whose work we are.

"How vast and profound is the influence of the subtile powers of Heaven and of Earth!"

"We seek to perceive them, and we do not see them; we seek to hear them, and we do not hear them; identified with the substance of things, they cannot be separated from them."

"They cause that in all the universe men purify and sanctify their hearts, and clothe themselves in their holiday garments to offer sacrifices and oblations to their ancestors. It is an ocean of subtile intelligences. They are everywhere, above us, on our left, on our right; they environ us on all sides."

We are the subjects of an experiment which is not a little interesting to me. Can we not do without the society of our gossips a little while under these circumstances—have our own thoughts to cheer us? Confucius says truly, "Virtue does not remain as an abandoned orphan; it must of necessity have neighbors."

With thinking we may be beside ourselves in a sane sense. By a conscious effort of the mind we can stand aloof from actions and their consequences; and all things, good and bad, go by us like a torrent. We are not wholly involved in Nature. I may be either the driftwood in the stream, or Indra in the sky looking down on it. I may be affected by a theatrical exhibition; on the other hand, I may not be affected by an actual event which appears to concern me much more. I only know myself as a human entity; the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections; and am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another. However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it, and that is no more I than it is you. When the play, it may be the tragedy, of life is over, the spectator goes his way. It

was a kind of fiction, a work of the imagination only, so far as he was concerned. This doubleness may easily make us poor neighbors and friends sometimes.

I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and dissipating. I love to be alone. I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude. We are for the most part more lonely when we go abroad among men than when we stay in our chambers. A man thinking or working is always alone, let him be where he will. Solitude is not measured by the miles of space that intervene between a man and his fellows. The really diligent student in one of the crowded hives of Cambridge College is as solitary as a dervish in the desert. The farmer can work alone in the field or the woods all day, hoeing or chopping, and not feel lonesome, because he is employed; but when he comes home at night he cannot sit down in a room alone, at the mercy of his thoughts, but must be where he can "see the folks," and recreate, and, as he thinks, remunerate himself for his day's solitude; and hence he wonders how the student can sit alone in the house all night and most of the day without ennui and "the blues"; but he does not realize that the student, though in the house, is still at work in his field, and chopping in his woods, as the farmer in his, and in turn seeks the same recreation and society that the latter does, though it may be a more condensed form of it.

Society is commonly too cheap. We meet at very short intervals, not having had time to acquire any new value for each other. We meet at meals three times a day, and give each other a new taste of that old musty cheese that we are. We have had to agree on a certain set of rules, called etiquette and politeness, to make this frequent meeting tolerable and that we need not come to open war. We meet at the post-office, and at the sociable, and about the fireside every night; we live thick and are in each other's way, and stumble over one another, and I think that we thus lose some respect for one another. Certainly less frequency would suffice for all important and hearty communications. Consider the girls in a factory—never alone, hardly in their dreams. It would be better if there were but one inhabitant to a square mile, as where I live. The value of a man is not in his skin, that we should touch him.

I have heard of a man lost in the woods and dying of famine and exhaustion at the foot of a tree, whose loneliness was relieved by the grotesque visions with which, owing to bodily weakness, his diseased imagination surrounded him, and which he believed to be real. So also, owing to bodily

and mental health and strength, we may be continually cheered by a like but more normal and natural society, and come to know that we are never alone.

I have a great deal of company in my house; especially in the morning, when nobody calls. Let me suggest a few comparisons, that some one may convey an idea of my situation. I am no more lonely than the loon in the pond that laughs so loud, or than Walden Pond itself. What company has that lonely lake, I pray? And yet it has not the blue devils, but the blue angels in it, in the azure tint of its waters. The sun is alone, except in thick weather, when there sometimes appear to be two, but one is a mock sun. God is alone—but the devil, he is far from being alone; he sees a great deal of company; he is legion. I am no more lonely than a single mullein or dandelion in a pasture, or a bean leaf, or sorrel, or a horse-fly, or a bumblebee. I am no more lonely than the Mill Brook, or a weathercock, or the north star, or the south wind, or an April shower, or a January thaw, or the first spider in a new house.

I have occasional visits in the long winter evenings, when the snow falls fast and the wind howls in the wood, from an old settler and original proprietor, who is reported to have dug Walden Pond, and stoned it, and fringed it with pine woods; who tells me stories of old time and of new eternity; and between us we manage to pass a cheerful evening with social mirth and pleasant views of things, even without apples or cider—a most wise and humorous friend, whom I love much, who keeps himself more secret than ever did Goffe or Whalley; and though he is thought to be dead, none can show where he is buried. An elderly dame, too, dwells in my neighborhood, invisible to most persons, in whose odorous herb garden I love to stroll sometimes, gathering simples and listening to her fables; for she has a genius of unequalled fertility, and her memory runs back farther than mythology, and she can tell me the original of every fable, and on what fact every one is founded, for the incidents occurred when she was young. A ruddy and lusty old dame, who delights in all weathers and seasons, and is likely to outlive all her children yet.

The indescribable innocence and beneficence of Nature—of sun and wind and rain, of summer and winter—such health, such cheer, they afford forever! and such sympathy have they ever with our race, that all Nature would be affected, and the sun's brightness fade, and the winds would sigh humanely, and the clouds rain tears, and the woods shed their leaves and put on mourning in midsummer, if any man should ever for a just cause grieve. Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself?

What is the pill which will keep us well, serene, contented? Not my or thy great-grandfather's, but our great-grandmother Nature's universal, vegetable, botanic medicines, by which she has kept herself young always, outlived so many old Parrs in her day, and fed her health with their decaying fatness. For my panacea, instead of one of those quack vials of a mixture dipped from Acheron and the Dead Sea, which come out of those long shallow black-schooner looking wagons which we sometimes see made to carry bottles, let me have a draught of undiluted morning air. Morning air! If men will not drink of this at the fountainhead of the day, why, then, we must even bottle up some and sell it in the shops, for the benefit of those who have lost their subscription ticket to morning time in this world. But remember, it will not keep quite till noonday even in the coolest cellar, but drive out the stopples long ere that and follow westward the steps of Aurora. I am no worshipper of Hygeia, who was the daughter of that old herb-doctor AEsculapius, and who is represented on monuments holding a serpent in one hand, and in the other a cup out of which the serpent sometimes drinks; but rather of Hebe, cup-bearer to Jupiter, who was the daughter of Juno and wild lettuce, and who had the power of restoring gods and men to the vigor of youth. She was probably the only thoroughly sound-conditioned, healthy, and robust young lady that ever walked the globe, and wherever she came it was spring.

UNIT 8 (C): A BRIEF COMMENTARY ON *WALDEN'S* "SOLITUDE"

In this chapter titled "Solitude," Thoreau describes a "delicious evening" in which he feels at one with nature, "a part of herself." He has seemingly forgotten the railroad incident and is once again in ecstasy. The evening is cool and windy, but nevertheless, the bullfrogs and night animals give it a special charm. His sense of oneness with nature is so great, that he can barely express himself: "Sympathy with the fluttering alder and poplar leaves almost takes my breath."

His belief that the melancholy thoughts stirred by the owls' notes would eventually give way to happiness is confirmed. His present bliss proves that "there can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of Nature, and has his senses still." At this moment of spiritual fulfillment, when "every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy, and befriended me," the narrator recalls an ironic statement of his townsmen: "I should think you would

feel lonesome down there, and want to be nearer to folks, rainy and snowy days and nights especially."

Having been fulfilled by the "sweet and tender" society of nature, the narrator finds this statement to be almost laughable. Since nature offers a contentment not to be found in the human society which the townsmen think so important, he feels justified in giving a sharp response to this idea. What is the sense in living next to the depot, the barroom, the meeting house, or the grocery? What great value is there in rubbing elbows with other men? He has found that "society is commonly too cheap. We meet at very short intervals, not having had time to acquire any new value for each other. We meet at meals three times a day, and give each other a new taste of that old musty cheese that we are." As the willow sends its roots in the direction of nourishment, so does the spiritually minded narrator; and his spiritual nourishment is not to be found in Concord, but in the "perennial source of life," nature.

In the gentle, benevolent, revitalizing company of nature, loneliness is an irrelevant concern. He feels so much a part of nature that to ask him if he is lonely is like asking the loon in the pond, a January thaw, the north star, or Walden Pond itself if they are lonely.

When he returns to his home, he finds that visitors have passed by and left small gifts and tokens. Thoreau remarks that even though his closest neighbor is only a mile away, he may as well be in Asia or Africa, so great is his feeling of solitude. Paradoxically, he is not alone in his solitude, since he is "suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature . . . as made the fancied advantages of human neighborhood insignificant." It is not that he is giving up society, but rather that he is exchanging the "insignificant" society of humans for the superior society of nature. He explains that loneliness can occur even amid companions if one's heart is not open to them. Thoreau meditates on the deep pleasure he feels in escaping the gossips of the town. Instead of their poisonous company, he has the company of an old settler who lives nearby and tells him mystical stories of "old time and new eternity," and the company of an old woman whose "memory runs back farther than mythology." It is unclear whether these companions are real or imaginary. Thoreau again praises the benefits of nature and of his deep communion with it. He maintains that the only medicine he needs in life is a draught of morning air.

“Solitude,” the fifth chapter of Thoreau’s *Walden*, focuses on two central ideas-- solitude and man’s relationship to Nature--developing and redening them throughout the text. From the first paragraph, we see Thoreau’s fondness of nature, and we soon realize that it is his companion, his protection, and his inspiration. It offers “friendship” as well as “sweet and benecent society.” The chapter is titled, “Solitude,” which gives the reader an image of being alone in the world. However, throughout the text, Thoreau complicates the idea of solitude. Thoreau believes that solitude is inevitable for man, saying “a man thinking or working is always alone.” In the third paragraph, he discusses the severe geographical isolation in which he lives, after which he describes that the “innocent and encouraging society” which comes from the natural world. Nature connects “the days of animated life” for Thoreau, which implies that it gives him a way of understanding not only the world, but life itself. He considers the time in which he doubted his ability to live in solitude to be a “slight insanity” and talks about the protection and empathy that Nature provides him.

Essentially, Thoreau’s solitude takes place in Nature although Nature itself is company and society to Thoreau. In Thoreau’s opinion, solitude in a vacuum would make self-realization impossible, for he would have nothing against which to weigh himself. Ordinarily, solitude is an occasional necessity for man and we align it with loneliness. Thoreau separates the two, saying that not only is he not lonely, but he has never found “a companion so companionable as solitude.” Thoreau feels sympathy with Nature, and is at peace there, “like the lake.” Nature provides “sweet, benecent society” and “unaccountable friendliness” to Thoreau, making human society insignificant. In fact, Nature is the most kindred and “humanest” of all elements to Thoreau. When he questions, “Why should I feel lonely? is not our planet in the Milky Way?” he requires his readers to consider their place in this vast universe and shifts.

According to him, solitude is merely a physical state while loneliness is an emotion to be avoided. Nature guards against loneliness because being in nature draws him outside of his own self which allows him the duality that he discusses in paragraph 11--considering one’s self while simultaneously being yourself. Thoreau gives both an argument against loneliness and an argument against the frequent society of mankind. While loneliness and society seem to be contradictory, Thoreau posits that they are actually intricately connected.

Thoreau wrote "Solitude" to persuade his audience that living alone in close communion with nature is good for the body, mind, and soul. Using simile, Thoreau compares his serenity to a lake's calm surface and compares the friendliness he feels from Nature to an atmosphere that sustains him. This reveals a deep connection that Thoreau feels between his own emotions and spirituality and Nature. In paragraph 4, Thoreau uses metaphor to describe visitors to nature who seek understanding of themselves. The visitors come to Walden Pond with dark thoughts and feelings but leave lightened. He also compares the night to a "black kernel". The night represents Thoreau's time alone in Nature, out of which he hopes for a time of growth and life. The personification of Nature is the literary device that Thoreau uses most in "Solitude." The wind "roars," the waves "dash," and animals are "Nature's watchmen." Nature herself is given a clear personality, from the capitalization of her name to the "sweet and benevolent society" and "infinite and unaccountable friendliness" that she provides Thoreau. Even the smallest part of the natural world, the pine needles, "swelled with sympathy and befriended" Thoreau.

Thoreau's use of figurative language aligns him with Nature and makes Nature seem like a real person. By living in close contact with the "person" of Nature, Thoreau does not feel lonely in the least. It also helps the reader understand the ways that living in Nature is good for Thoreau and why he is encouraging others to do the same. While "Solitude" may seem to be an essay of fondness to Nature, Thoreau uses a variety of rhetorical devices to persuade his audience. Men often say that they "should think [Thoreau] would feel lonesome...and want to be nearer to folks." Yet he prefers a life of solitude and self-reliance in his small cabin surrounded by Nature. He uses a combination of ethos, pathos, and logos to achieve his purpose. Thoreau uses ethos in paragraph 6, when he describes the spiritual benefits of living a solitary life in communion with Nature. This ethical appeal reveals Thoreau's belief in a higher being and connects his message to religion and spirituality. Thoreau uses pathos in paragraph 4 when he vividly describes his own emotions when in communion with Nature, saying that even storms are "Æolian music to a healthy and innocent ear" and that "the gentle rain" is good for him, for he enjoys the "friendship of the seasons." In paragraphs 12-13, Thoreau masterfully uses logos to give clear and logical reasons for a life of solitude. He says that "a man thinking or working is always alone" and that "solitude is not measured by the miles of space that intervene between a man and his fellows." He also says that "society is commonly too cheap" and that when we spend too much time with one another we "lose some respect for one another." Through his use of rhetoric, Thoreau expresses his belief that

only through communion with the natural world can one truly understand himself and personal peace and health.

CONCLUSION

In *Walden*, Thoreau offers an example of one possible approach to realizing one's divinity, to fulfilling one's potential for ideal existence in the real world. Like Emerson, he advises his readers to exercise their minds and create an idea of themselves as they might ideally be, and then find the means of making that idea, or dream, come true. Thoreau made this explicit when in chapter 'Economy' he wrote: "When one man has reduced a fact of the imagination to be a fact of his understanding, I foresee that all men will at length establish their lives on that basis." In the 'Conclusion' chapter of *Walden*, Thoreau again makes this point and reassures his readers that based upon his experience at Walden Pond he believes that an ideal mode of life is within everyone's grasp:

"I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in that direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours..... If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put foundations under them."

Walden is the artistic depiction of the quest to realize such a state of life. Unlike Emerson who usually wrote in theory about an experience of the ideal, Thoreau provided his contemporaries and us with a concrete way to attain successfully such a quest for a higher mode of life. In *Walden* we vividly see Thoreau erect the "foundations" under his "castle in air"; we see him create a way of life that enables him to make his dream of self-fulfilment come true.

In 'The American Scholar', Emerson described the three basic stages of a transcendentalists' life: first, he learns all that is of merit in the wisdom of the past; second, he establishes a harmonious relationship with nature through which he is able to discover ethical truths and communicate with the divine. With these two stages, the transcendentalist has developed

his higher faculties; he has cultivated his life and “spiritualized” it. We find Thoreau go through two stages in his progress towards spiritual rebirth in Walden. After thus cultivating his own spirit, the transcendentalist does not selfishly remain content with himself. The third stage he must attempt, after self-renewal, is the renewal of society – at – large. After being nurtured by books and nature, he must attempt to share his spiritual gains with other men who have not yet achieved their perfect spiritual states.

Walden may be viewed as Thoreau’s attempt at this third stage in the transcendental life. In it, we hear the “bragging” narrator reiterating the conviction that all men may achieve the exhilaration that he feels. He vividly shows his life; he brags about his achievement; and he tries by his example to renew “the dead dry life of society”. Thus, when the narrator “brags”, it is not only for him but also for all humanity. Like the other transcendentalists, Thoreau was a moralist also. One of the most distinctive features of *Walden* is the narrator constantly tries to alert his readers to their potential for spiritual growth.

The narrator’s celebration of life and his call for all men to recognize the potential outstanding of life form the core idea or unifying theme of *Walden*. This aspect of *Walden* should not vague the essential core of the book, the process by which Thoreau moves towards spiritual fulfillment. *Walden* is often said to be a nature poetry, a lesson taught to guide human beings towards their ultimate destination – the natural world that is close to their spiritual existence.

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ASSIGNMENTS

- 1) What is Transcendentalism? How is the Transcendentalist philosophy reflected in the writings of Emerson and Thoreau?
- 2) How does Emerson's "The American Scholar" offer a reflection of his transcendentalist ideology?
- 3) Make a critical estimate of Emerson's "The American Scholar".
- 4) How is *Walden* an expression of Thoreau's transcendentalist vision?
- 5) After reading the chapter on "Solitude", would you consider Thoreau to be a social recluse?
- 6) Comment on the symbolic aspects of Thoreau's *Walden* with reference to the chapter that you have studied.

BLOCK – III

UNITS: 9-12

AMERICAN POETRY

CONTENT STRUCTURE:

Unit 9 (a): A Brief History of the Rise and Development of the American Poetry

Unit 9 (b): Walt Whitman – The Quintessential American Poet

Unit 9 (c): “One’s Self I Sing” – Text and Critical Analysis of the Poem

Unit 9 (d): “As I Ponder’d in Silence” – Text and Critical Analysis of the Poem

Unit 10 (a): Introduction to the Poetry of Emily Dickinson

Unit 10 (b): “Because I Could not Stop for Death” – Text and Critical Analysis of the Poem

Unit 10 (c): “I Felt a Funeral in My Brain” – Text and Critical Analysis of the Poem

Unit 11 (a): Introduction to the Poetry of Robert Frost

Unit 11 (b): “Mending Wall” – Text and Critical Analysis of the Poem

Unit 11 (c): “After Apple-Picking” – Text and Critical Analysis of the Poem

Unit 12 (a): Introduction to the Poetry of Wallace Stevens

Unit 12 (b): “Sunday Morning” – Text and Critical Analysis of the Poem

UNIT – 9

UNIT 9 (A): A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RISE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE AMERICAN POETRY

Early American literature was oral literature. The existence of poetry in written format first emerges with reference to Anne Bradstreet. She is the major poet in seventeenth century American literature. Her anthology *The Tenth Muse, Lately Sprung up in America* is a remarkable volume of poetry. Michael Wigglesworth, is also a remarkable poet of this century. In 1773 Phillis Wheatley comes into prominence by his anthology titled *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*. The beginning of the nineteenth century witnessed the unprecedented development of the American poetry. 1830-65 is considered the Romantic Age in American literature. During these phase the development of transcendentalism directly influenced the trends in Romantic poetry in America. The transcendentalists focus on serene, beautiful aspects of nature. All these are major features of Romantic Movement. Emerson, Longfellow, Whitman and Emily Dickinson are major poets of the era. Emerson is also a major transcendentalist of the time. His *Poems* appeared in 1847. Longfellow's *Hiawatha* published in 1855. Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and Dickinson's *Poems* (3 volumes) are important works of the age. After the era of Romantic Movement, American literatures witnessed the development of modernist writings in the hands of the poets like Robert Frost, E.E. Cummings, and Wallace Stevens. All of them experimented with the form and style. The rhythm, the theme and poetic diction undergo a radical alteration. 1956-59 this time period is considered as the end of modernism and the beginning of beat generation of writers. Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder are remarkable poets of beat generation writers. 1959-69 this timeframe is considered as the era of postmodernist writing in American literature. Some major feminist poets appear as pathfinders of this new literary movement in American literature. Sylvia Plath, Adrienne Rich, Anne Sexton, John Ashberry are remarkable contributors in the postmodernist movement in American literature. 1940-1970 is also an era of the development of black American aesthetic. Writers like Gwendolyn Brook with his anthologies: *Annie Allen* (1949) and *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945) claim an important position in the development of Black writing in American literature. It is interesting to note that the black American writings are also a major component of modernist movement in

American literature. In later times poets like Agha Shahid Ali and Meena Alexander become major poets of American diasporic literature.

UNIT 9 (B): WALT WHITMAN – THE QUINTESSENTIAL AMERICAN POET

Emerson, in his 1844 essay titled “The Poet,” wrote: “I look in vain for the poet whom I describe. We do not,” he laments, “with sufficient plainness, or sufficient profoundness, address ourselves to life, nor dare we chant our own times, and circumstances...We have yet had no genius in America,” whose eyes could see that “America is the poem” waiting to be written. In his transcendental fervour, Emerson sought a poet for, and of, America – but he could not find one. At least not in 1844. Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* had no table of contents, and its twelve poems were untitled. The work was to be read for what it was, without an introduction, and without a title. As one reviewer wrote of the first edition: “Self-reliant, with haughty eyes, assuming to himself the attributes of his country, steps Walt Whitman into literature, talking like a man unaware that there was ever hitherto such a production as a book, or such a being as a writer... Every word that falls from his mouth shows silent disdain and defiance of the old theories and forms. Every phrase announces new laws.” As it turns out, that reviewer was Whitman himself – writing as a book critic, under a pseudonym, for one of his former newspapers! His penchant for self-promotion was decidedly American. Even with such glowing self-reviews, the original 795 copies of *Leaves of Grass* which he had printed hardly sold. But, undaunted and relentless, Whitman – sensing his own greatness – pressed on. He sent a copy of his work to the preeminent literary critic of the time, Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose earlier essay titled “The Poet” had impressed itself upon Walt.

Emerson, having read the work at his home in Concord, MA, replied in a letter dated 21 July 1855: “DEAR SIR--I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of LEAVES OF GRASS. I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed. ... I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start. I rubbed my eyes a little, to see if this sunbeam were no illusion; but the solid sense of the book is a sober certainty. It has the best merits...” The exuberant young Whitman fully embraced Emerson’s praise, having his letter reprinted in other reviews

of the work, and even highlighting a phrase on the cover of his second, again self-published, edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1856.

In *Leaves of Grass*, Emerson heard the Poet he had hoped for. Whitman sings the song of himself, but in doing so, his voice articulates an epic for the common man. *Leaves of Grass* “is not a book,” declared Whitman; “who touches this, touches a man.” And with his poems, he placed his fingertips on his own arteries, feeling the flow of his own life-blood, but in so doing, he touched all those around him too, both men and women, old and young alike, thus taking the pulse of an entire people, of a nation, of a “kosmos”. In the decade before his *Leaves of Grass* appeared in print, Whitman had been avidly reading and devouring the essays of Emerson, in particular. With the publication of his *Leaves*, Whitman aspired to be the prophet of the new American poetry Emerson had looked for. And indeed, in this collection of poetry, Emerson found Whitman a disciple, like Henry David Thoreau, of his own concept of “Self-Reliance.” Enthusiastic as ever, brimming with energy and self-assurance buttressed by Emersonian praise Whitman printed a second edition of his *Leaves of Grass* within a year of the first, to which original edition he added 20 new poems – all with titles this time: the opening poem of the work now received its iconic and definitive title, “Song of Myself,” and among the new ones, one titled “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” would become the most famous – in part because one senses within it Whitman’s immersion in his surroundings.

An endless flood, tides of people of all sorts crossed on the ferry between Manhattan and Brooklyn, across choppy waters spanned today by the Brooklyn Bridge. In Whitman’s day, in “crossing from shore to shore, countless crowds of passengers” flowed, from the commercial city of Manhattan, to the heights of the Brooklyn suburb where Whitman himself had lived for decades. He haunted the rustic shores of Brooklyn as a “bearded, rough, bohemian” writer, and recalled with affection that he had been held aloft before a raucous crowd in Brooklyn – on July 4, 1825 – and kissed on the cheek by none other than the celebrated Marquis de Lafayette, during a ceremony honouring the revolutionary war hero’s triumphal return to America. That day the body of Whitman bridged two worlds, the Old and the New – spanning the distance between aristocratic France and democratic America, just as the ferry crossing itself, between Manhattan and Brooklyn, bridged two worlds – one, of commercial activity, the hustle and-bustle of economic industry and prosperity; the other, of domestic tranquillity and sub-urban leisure, bursting with intellectual fervour. It was here between these two worlds that Whitman first began writing and finally self-published his *Leaves of Grass* in 1855. The poem can

conjure an image of a Whitmanian perspective on the people and the world around him. The importance Whitman placed in his exuberant verse on embracing strangers, across divides of class, race, gender, geography, and time, finds expression in his camaraderie with the nameless, but not unknown, passengers, crossing on the Brooklyn Ferry: “I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence,” says Whitman – and “Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt.” All those who cross merge into Whitman’s perspective, all are remembered and known – past and future collapse, into a perceptive present moment, where hundreds crossing are equal, man and women, young and old, and all are one.

Whitman sought to capture the rugged individualism and grand sweep of collective action and democratic progress marching triumphantly across generations. He celebrated instead the vitality of the moment and the pulse of the mundane. Whitman found beauty in nature; he embraced with wide opened arms and exuberance everyday experiences and ordinary lives, sensing the democratic greatness and radical depths found there. He did not turn his back on either nature or on civilization, but he revelled with optimism and eagerness in the diversity which manifested itself equally in both – but especially, in America’s cities. Wordsworth and Coleridge longed for a solitude bathed in the simplicity of unmediated and harmonious nature, but Whitman craved the boisterous complexity of urban civilization.

The “great vice of Thoreau,” said Whitman, was “his disdain of cities, companions, civilizations,” which he pretended to abandon for a reclusive life in a rustic cabin on Walden Pond (a retreat made possible by the urban prosperity of his friend Emerson who owned the pond and the woodlands surrounding it). As Whitman wrote later in life, his *Leaves of Grass* arose not from seclusion (as did the poetry of Dickinson) but out of a decades-long absorption in and of the variety all around him in Brooklyn and New York, where he keenly enjoyed all, “going everywhere, seeing everything – the high, the low, and the middling,” absorbing all he encountered through every pore in his body and soul. Out of the experiences of a diverse many, he wrote the song of one, himself, and in himself, his song, all others were to be found; his life and his poetry expressed the motto of 19th century America: *e pluribus unum* – “out of many, one.” But the nation, like his own *Leaves of Grass*, was inevitably a work in progress, an unfinished panorama, its frontiers still unsettled.

In his prose Preface to *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman announced his intention to answer the summons of Emerson’s essay – to be the poet of America whom Emerson looked for, but could not yet find in his midst. Whitman, in his Preface, proclaims that the true poet of America must

be “a bard . . . commensurate with the people.” One who is *of* the people, as well as *for* the people, whose “spirit responds to his country’s spirit,” who “incarnates its geography.” The poet of America absorbs his nation “affectionately,” rejecting none and permitting all, advancing toward the good in every way that the good is present within that nation, but with eyes open to what is not good as well.

In the people of America, Whitman discovers both good and bad, the “unrhymed poetry” of their “self-esteem” and confidence, “the picturesque looseness of their carriage,” and their “deathless attachment to freedom.” “Great is goodness,” but also, “Great is wickedness,” confesses Whitman; and “I find that I often admire it just as much as I admire goodness: Do you call that a paradox? It certainly is a paradox. The eternal equilibrium of things is great, and the eternal overthrow of things is great, and there [too] is another paradox.” Whitman embodied America’s contradictions: “Do I contradict myself? Very well then...I contradict myself; I am large...I contain multitudes.” Whitman’s paradoxes do not result from his contradiction of himself; his contradictions, if indeed that is what they are, result from the manifest complexity of the world, which he heartily embraces. Whitman does not shy away from the contradictions and the paradoxes of life, and of death – for “Great is life,” and “Great is death.” “Sure as life holds all parts together, death holds all parts together . . . death is [as] great as life.” No part or portion of America remains hidden from his eyes. Whitman, in his poetry, roams freely, across both the body and the soul of America, seeing it in full, surveying and mapping its diverse landscape; and from his vantage point, he takes in all, without judgment, and peoples the nation in his poems.

Whitman's rejection of traditional poetic forms and his use of free verse marked a significant departure from established literary conventions of his time. His innovative approach liberated poetry from the constraints of strict rhyme and meter, allowing for a more organic and expressive style. By embracing the rhythms of everyday speech, Whitman's verse reflected the natural cadences of American life, making his poetry accessible and relatable to a broad audience. Whitman's work resonated with the American spirit, evoking a sense of boundless optimism and national identity. His portrayal of America as a land of opportunity, progress, and unlimited potential struck a chord with readers who saw themselves reflected in his verses. Whitman's poems celebrated the vast landscapes, bustling cities, and diverse people of the nation, capturing the essence of American vitality and the belief in limitless possibilities.

Whitman articulates that “The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem.” “Here is not merely a nation – but a teeming nation of nations.” “Here are the roughs and beards, and the space and ruggedness, and the nonchalance that the soul loves.” No one and nothing escapes his gaze, and he bears witness to all. In the nation, as in the body and the soul of himself, Whitman hosts a veritable “kosmos” of diverse places and characters, each of which and whom he charts and celebrates with exuberant pride.

I am the poet of the Body.

And I am the poet of the Soul.

I am the poet of the woman the same as the man,

And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man,

And I say there is nothing greater than the mother of men [the nation herself].

I celebrate myself to celebrate you:

I say the same word for every man and woman,

And I say that the soul is not greater than the body,

And I say that the body is not greater than the soul.

In the death-bed edition of 1891, Whitman concludes his *Leaves of Grass* with a prose epilogue,

“A Backward Glance O’er Travel’d Roads,” and there (perhaps doubting whether his message of decades prior had been forgotten) he makes explicit what was implicit in his poems: “Defiant of ostensible literary and other conventions, I avowedly chant ‘the great pride of man in himself,’ and permit it to be more or less a motif of nearly all my verse. [And] I think this pride is indispensable to an American. [And] I think that it is not inconsistent with obedience, humility, deference, and self-questioning.”

“*Leaves of Grass* indeed (I cannot too often reiterate) has mainly been the outcropping of my own emotional and other personal nature – an attempt, from first to last, to put a Person, a human being (myself, in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century, in America,) freely, fully and truly on record. I could not find any similar personal record in current literature that satisfied me.”

“[And] I say no land or people or circumstances ever existed so needing a race of singers and poems differing from all others, and rigidly their own, as the land and people and circumstances of our United States...”

‘Who, then, am I?’ – you might ask, dear reader; to which inquiry, the Poet replies:

Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos . . .

Disorderly fleshy and sensual . . .

No sentimentalist . . . no stander above men and women or apart from them

no more modest than immodest.

Thus the Poet contains multitudes, and nothing is hidden or kept locked away out of sight; the Poet is open to the whole, and that whole within the Poet is open to all:

Unscrew the locks from the doors!

Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!

I speak the pass-word primeval I give the sign of DEMOCRACY.

Shakespeare furnished the commonwealth of imagination with characters worthy of admiration and study for centuries. Whitman’s song of myself achieves “the sublime of imaginative literature – and not only American literature,” according to Harold Bloom, a true Whitmanian, and perhaps the finest reader and literary critic of the past century. *Leaves of Grass*, in Bloom’s view, like that of Emerson, was a genuinely “spectacular pageant,” displaying all the flourishing talent which a human mind can possess. Those who came later – Melville, Twain, Faulkner, Hemingway – would have to acknowledge the monumental influence of Walt Whitman upon them as American writers. Bloom argues that Whitman is our distinct gift, an American gift, to the world of literature, a gift akin – but not equal – to Shakespeare. And Bloom is not alone in holding this opinion of Whitman. In his introduction to the 150th Anniversary Edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Bloom writes that Walt Whitman, is “the American bard, our Homer and our Milton,” the Poet who blazed a path through the New World with his poetry, and by doing so, stood and still stands at the very heart of the American character. In his battle for self-reliance, Whitman transcended victory and transformed himself with a self-declared apotheosis into a prophet; though he remained always “Shakespearean and High Romantic, as much a Wordsworthian as Emerson himself, but achieving more than Wordsworth or Emerson had achieved...”

Reception and Influence

Walt Whitman's achievement as a poet and prophet is truly monumental. He exercised a deep influence on his immediate successors in American letters, and even on modern poets, although

he himself was a highly individualistic poet. As a symbolist, his influence was felt in Europe, where he was considered the greatest poet America had yet produced. His high style and elevated expression found echoes in Emily Dickinson, Hart Crane, Marianne Moore, and others. Whitman as a stylist is the culmination of the sublime tradition in America, and even Allen Ginsberg, so different from Whitman in so many respects, follows the Whitman tradition of using invocative language. Whitman, though a man of his age, an essentially nineteenth-century poet, exercised a profound influence on twentieth-century poets and modern poetry in the use of language, in the processes of symbol and image-making, in exercising great freedom in meter and form, and in cultivating the individualistic mode. In many ways Whitman is modern because he is prophetic; he is a poet not only of America but of the whole of mankind. He has achieved the Olympian stature and the rare distinction of a world poet.

Many renowned poets and other famous figures read and found inspiration in Walt Whitman's poetry. Many American writers cite Whitman as an inspiration for their own work, expressing admiration for his ground-breaking structural innovations as well as the often controversial themes he addressed. Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the founders of the Transcendentalist movement, wrote in a letter to Walt Whitman in 1855, "I greet you at the beginning of a great career." Emerson went on to be a major influence on Whitman's poetry.

Ezra Pound, a well-known poet in the late 19th century and early 20th century, wrote a poem titled "The Pact," the subject of which was Whitman himself. Though Whitman died shortly after Pound was born, his poems had become extremely prominent in the literary community, and Pound had been reading his work from the beginning of his career. Initially, Pound was very vocal about his dislike for Whitman's rugged style of poetry. In "The Pact," though, Pound admits that Whitman had influenced him and paved the way for his own career. In an essay titled "What I Feel About Walt Whitman," Pound declared Whitman "America's Poet," and also wrote that "He *is* America."

Andrew Carnegie, the famous 19th century steel tycoon, also held Whitman high regard. He called him "the great poet of America so far." Later in the 19th century, Gothic novelist Bram Stoker modelled the character of Dracula in his ground-breaking novel, *Dracula*, after Whitman. According to Stoker, he wanted Dracula to represent the quintessential male and in his opinion, this was Whitman. Walt Whitman's poetry also had a great deal of influence on the early work of 20th century beat poet Allen Ginsberg (best known for "Howl"). Ginsberg addressed his poem "A Supermarket in California" to Whitman.

Conclusion

Walt Whitman, arguably America's most influential and innovative poet, he was a part of the transition between transcendentalism and realism, incorporating both views in his works. Whitman is among the most outstanding poets in the American canon, often called the father of free verse. Whitman is a great self-promoter who refers to himself as the "American Bard" at Last. He sees himself as the voice of America. He claims to be a common man who has the same feelings as all Americans. When Walt Whitman sings the Song of Myself, he is singing the song of Americans. Whitman, a free spirit whose writing enthusiastically celebrated the spirit of individualism and democracy, was essentially an optimist. He was a poet with absolute confidence that the men and women of 'America' and of all the world, would finally solve the problem of the unification of all races and peoples. Whitman has long been regarded as the quintessential American bard, the poet who best represents all that is distinctive about life in the United States. The poem 'Leaves of Grass' in both content and technique, is probably the most influential work in the history of American Literature, where he discloses himself to be the sole bard of America.

“ I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
and what I assume you shall assume,
for every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you. “

By celebrating himself, Whitman is celebrating all of us.

According to *The Longman Anthology of Poetry*, “Whitman received little public acclaim for his poems during his lifetime for several reasons: this openness regarding sex, his self-presentation as a rough working man, and his stylistic innovations.” Upon publishing *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman was subsequently fired from his job with the Department of the Interior. Despite his mixed critical reception in the US, he was favourably received in England, with Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Algernon Charles Swinburne among the British writers who celebrated his work. After suffering a serious stroke in 1873, Whitman moved to his brother's home in Camden, New Jersey. While his poetry failed to garner popular attention from his American readership during his lifetime, over 1,000 people came to view his funeral.

In 1920, Van Wyck Brooks wrote that Whitman was the "focal center" of American creative experience and literary expression. The poet combined within him elements of native realism and of New England philosophy which made him a truly national spiritual synthesis. But modern criticism does not view Whitman as the quintessential American poet, or the national norm; other writers, such as Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, and Hawthorne may be equally regarded as national norms. Whitman, undoubtedly, embodied many qualities of the American character — for example, its variousness, diversity, adventurousness, and pioneering spirit. He left an indelible mark on American literature and became a symbol of democratic ideals and the spirit of the nation.

Whitman's impact on American literature cannot be overstated. His bold poetic style, themes of democracy and individualism, and unabashed embrace of the American spirit inspired generations of poets and writers who followed in his footsteps. His influence extended beyond the realm of literature, shaping American culture and identity. Whitman's work resonated with movements for social justice, civil rights, and LGBTQ+ rights, as his poems celebrated the inherent worth and dignity of every individual. In conclusion, Walt Whitman's status as a quintessential and great American poet is rooted in his celebration of democracy, his pioneering approach to free verse, his embodiment of the American spirit, his spiritual explorations, and his enduring influence on American literature and culture. His poetry continues to inspire and challenge readers, embodying the essence of American ideals and the power of poetic expression.

UNIT 9 (C): "ONE'S SELF I SING" – TEXT AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

Text of the Poem

One's-Self I sing, a simple separate person,
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse.

Of physiology from top to toe I sing,
Not physiognomy alone nor brain alone is worthy for the Muse, I say the Form complete is
worthier far,
The Female equally with the Male I sing.

Of Life immense in passion, pulse, and power,

Cheerful, for freest action form'd under the laws divine,
The Modern Man I sing.

Analysis of the Poem

Analysis of the Poem: The very short poem titled “One’s Self I Sing” is a paean. Here the poet appreciates the human body and its complete form as a kind of supreme creation by God. The poet is praising the human body and its complete form as an ultimate creation of God. From the head to the toe of a human body is praiseworthy of the poet. “Not physiognomy alone nor brain is worthy for the Muse” the line implies the fact that not only the cerebral quality or intellect of the humans can be praised but the physical shape of perfect human body should also be praised. Therefore, in this phrase the poet is deliberately eliminates the long standing binary between head and rest part of the body. The head is symbolic of intellectual superiority and the rest part of the body is symbolic of sensuousness. This mind-body binary is something which Whitman does away with. In the next phrase “The Female equally with the Male I sing” in this phrase he has eliminated the gender segregation and tries to appreciate the complete human body as a supreme creation of God. The concept of “En- Masse” is important in this context. It derives from French lexicon. It means mass. The term implies democratic spirit.

UNIT 9 (D): “AS I PONDER’D IN SILENCE” – TEXT AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

Text of the Poem

As I ponder’d in silence,
Returning upon my poems, considering, lingering long,
A Phantom arose before me with distrustful aspect,
Terrible in beauty, age, and power,
The genius of poets of old lands,
As to me directing like flame its eyes,
With finger pointing to many immortal songs,
And menacing voice, *What singest thou?* it said,

*Know'st thou not there is but one theme for ever-enduring bards?
And that is the theme of War, the fortune of battles,
The making of perfect soldiers.*

*Be it so, then I answer'd,
I too haughty Shade also sing war, and a longer and greater one than any,
Waged in my book with varying fortune, with flight, advance and
retreat, victory deferr'd and wavering,
(Yet methinks certain, or as good as certain, at the last,) the field the world,
For life and death, for the Body and for the eternal Soul,
Lo, I too am come, chanting the chant of battles,
I above all promote brave soldiers.*

"As I Ponder'd in Silence" is one of Whitman's introductory poems in *Inscriptions*, the first book in *Leaves of Grass*. It is a thought-provoking poem that invites readers to contemplate the complexities of war, human existence and the interconnectedness of all things past, present and future. Whitman proposes a thematic connection between the subsequent verses in his collection and ancient epic poetry. As the creator of modern-day epic poems, Whitman presents himself as an heir to that great tradition – a contemporary bard and a successor to Homer and Virgil. This poem consists of two free-verse stanzas, made up of eleven and seven lines respectively.

Summary of the Poem

The poem is structured as a series of questions and musings that the speaker ponders in silence. The poem begins with the speaker pondering in silence. The silence represents the stillness of the mind, where one can reflect on the deeper meaning of life. The speaker is not just thinking about his own life but is contemplating the universe as a whole. He is trying to understand the purpose of existence and the meaning of life. The first stanza of the poem sets the tone for the rest of the poem. The speaker is revisiting his own poems and reflecting on his own thoughts. He is trying to understand the meaning behind his own words. As the poet sits meditating silently on his earlier written poetry, thinking about what he wrote and what he would write in future, a phantom which looks beautiful but terrible, appears in front of him. He learns that the phantom is "the genius of poets of old lands" – the muse of ancient poets. He describes the

spectre to be “terrible in beauty, age, and power”. It observes the poet minutely and reflects on his poetry. Then the phantom looks with a glance of disrespect towards him. The eyes of the spirit are blazing with rage and it asks him “what singest thou?” – the themes of his poetry. The apparition says to the narrator that he has a different style of writing than the poets before his time. Poets before his time wrote traditional epics about war and the perfect soldiers who fought. The spirit also asserts that the poet should know the theme which dominated the poetry of the earlier and time-honoured bards was "the theme of War, the fortune of battles, /the making of perfect soldier". It means to say that only the poets who write about war can stand the test of time; their reputation remains unscathed or unforgotten in the future eras. The Phantom that arises before him represents doubt and uncertainty by questioning the validity of his thoughts and ideas.

After hearing this declaration, the poet proudly responds that he, too, writes about the war in his poems, a war that is more horrific and extended than any other war written about. He does write about war, but a much grander and longer war that any other famous poet of has ever attempted to address in their poems. The narrator explains that the war that he writes about is the battle of life. But in Whitman's universe, war is waged for "life and death, for the Body and for the eternal Soul." He does not simply write about the petty wars of political power-struggle. His focus is on the eternal battlefield which encompasses the struggle between life and death, body and soul. And so he, too, promotes the cause of the "brave soldiers" by chanting about their life and death. This is what sets him apart, and what will allow his words to endure. Lastly, at the end of the poem, the narrator says “I above all promote brave soldiers”. A brave soldier is a common man, a man who is fighting the ultimate battle in his everyday life. He promotes the idea of bravery, endurance, and self-sacrifice by the soldiers of this eternal war.

Critical Analysis

This poem is the first in which Whitman writes from a first-person perspective. Although Whitman meant for the ambiguous speaker of the poem to represent himself, the character simultaneously fulfills a broader, more symbolic function. Whitman emphasizes the poet's dual purpose through his interaction with the phantom character. The other-worldly phantom, whom Whitman explicitly describes as representing the genius of his predecessors, adds another dimension to the character of the poet. Whitman portrays himself as both man and myth, poet and prophet. While the phantom means to draw a parallel between Whitman's work and the

ancient epics, Whitman suggests that his poetry carries more significance than the work of the "ever-enduring bards" who came before him. Rather than writing about transient battles, victories, and losses, he writes about an all-encompassing war, a struggle "for life and death, for the Body and for the eternal Soul." He has taken on a much more difficult task than all the poets before him: life and all its trials and tribulations. To conclude his poem, Whitman claims "I above all promote brave soldiers." For Whitman, men and women can prove their worth outside of a literal battlefield, although several of his poems are inspired by Civil War soldiers. For the purposes of this poem, though, a brave soldier is any person, male or female, black or white, facing the struggles of life.

Whitman here attempts to establish a correlation between his poetry and traditional poetry. Whitman, attempts to make a connection between his works and those of the earlier epics by listing the essential elements of an epic and claiming to be the "Phantom" of epic poets that his works rival those of epics. An epic is a long narrative poem about the deeds of a historical, traditional, or legendary hero, with a background of warfare or the supernatural, written in a highly dignified style and following other formal conventions of structure. Whitman's answer to the muse's query makes clear his position. He feels that his poems do satisfy the criteria of the epic, for they deal with the universal problems of man. An epic reflects the main quality of an age, and in this sense Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is an epic poem. Traditional epics deal with war and heroism; Whitman writes about them, but Whitman's wars are eternal and his battlefield is life; the "soldiers" are all of humanity, and their victory is the triumph of the spirit over matter. The poem delves into profound existential themes, inviting readers to contemplate the nature of life, death, and the universe. The poet uses introspection as a vehicle to explore these concepts, prompting readers to question their own existence and purpose. Through the speaker's contemplation, Whitman raises fundamental questions about the human condition and the elusive nature of truth.

But one of the defining features of Whitman's poetry is his departure from traditional poetic forms. "As I Ponder'd in Silence" is no exception, as it adopts a free verse structure. The absence of a strict rhyme scheme and meter allows Whitman to express his ideas with a sense of spontaneity and freedom. This unconventional structure mirrors the poem's exploration of boundless concepts, emphasizing the fluidity and vastness of the human experience. Whitman employs his signature cataloguing technique throughout the poem, listing diverse images and experiences. This technique serves multiple purposes: it emphasizes the interconnectedness of

all things, celebrates the diversity of life, and highlights the speaker's attempt to grasp the ineffable. Through the accumulation of details, Whitman creates a vivid and expansive landscape that invites readers to immerse themselves in the poem's world.

Whitman, a prominent figure of the transcendentalist movement, infuses his philosophical beliefs into "As I Ponder'd in Silence." The poem reflects the transcendentalist notion of the divinity present in nature and the individual's ability to transcend the limitations of society and conventional wisdom. Whitman's reverence for the natural world and his celebration of the self align with the tenets of transcendentalism, making the poem an embodiment of this philosophical movement.

Overall, "As I Pondered in Silence" is a poem that invites readers to reflect on the mysteries of life and the universe, and to consider the relationship between the physical and spiritual aspects of human existence. The poem encourages us to embrace the interconnectedness of all things and to seek deeper meaning in our own lives and experiences. In conclusion, "As I Ponder'd in Silence" is a masterpiece of Walt Whitman. The poem captures the essence of his unique style and reflects his thoughts on life, death, and the universe. The poem is a reflection of Whitman's philosophy of life, which celebrates the individual and the universe as a whole.

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SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Walt Whitman – *Song of Myself*
2. Walt Whitman – *Leaves of Grass*
3. Davis S. Reynolds – *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography*
4. John Mackinson Robertson – *Walt Whitman: Poet and Democrat*
5. Sheila Griffin Llanas – *Walt Whitman*
6. J. R. LeMaster and Donald D, Kummings – *The Routledge Encyclopaedia of Walt Whitman*

UNIT – 10

UNIT 10 (A): INTRODUCTION TO THE POETRY OF EMILY DICKINSON

Emily Dickinson is one of the remarkable poets in Nineteenth Century America. She was born in 1830 in Amherst which is located at Massachusetts. In Massachusetts both Calvinism and Puritanism exist as alternative philosophy of life. Dickinson's father Edward Dickinson was an Attorney who later became a member of congress. The quiet household influenced the psychological development of Dickinson as a person of gentle temperament and she has adopted the habit of living a contemplative life. She has given the nickname "nun of Amherst" because of her habit of staying at home most of the time. She lived a secluded life at Amherst which deeply influenced her poetic vision. Many critics come to the inference that the death consciousness in her poetry is an offshoot of her life as a recluse. She was close to her brother Austin and sister Lavinia. She penned innumerable letters to her friends, all these letters bear close insight to her intellect and contemplative mind. She remains an anonymous figure during her life time. She composed 1,775 poems throughout her life. Her poetry published after her death. Dickinson in her life was greatly influenced by her father Edward Dickinson. Her friendship with Reverend Charles Wadsworth becomes a lifelong tryst. According to Dickinson's acquaintances, the relationship with Reverend Charles Wadsworth turns out to be an unfulfilled love affair which ended up making her a recluse. She never received formal education. But she has deep knowledge about Shakespeare, Bible and mythology. This knowledge is getting reflected in her poetry which abounds in mythological and Biblical allusions. Her poetry is remarkable for expressing the obdurate and indifferent ways of accepting death. Death consciousness is one of the important aspects in her poetry. Her use of Punctuation and upper case is equally a typical style of her own poetic theory.

UNIT 10 (B): “BECAUSE I COULD NOT STOP FOR DEATH” – TEXT AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

Text of the Poem

Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me –
The Carriage held but just Ourselves –
And Immortality.

We slowly drove – He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility –

We passed the School, where Children strove
At Recess – in the Ring –
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –
We passed the Setting Sun –

Or rather – He passed Us –
The Dews drew quivering and Chill –
For only Gossamer, my Gown –
My Tippet – only Tulle –

We paused before a House that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground –
The Roof was scarcely visible –
The Cornice – in the Ground –

Since then – 'tis Centuries – and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses' Heads
Were toward Eternity –

Analysis of the Poem

The poem was composed in 1862. It was first published under the title ‘The Chariot’. The poem was composed in 1862. Few critics have pointed out the fact that the immediate context of the poem is death of Olivia Coleman who was a distant cousin of Emily Dickinson. She died of consumption in the year 1847. The poem is divided into six stanzas. The poet personified Death as a gentleman who is courting the gentle, noble lady. The event of death

is being viewed in the poem as a nuptial bonding. Before discussing in detail the important aspects of the poem I must summarize the entire poem for the convenience of the learners. The speaker of the poem is a decent lady. In the first stanza, she is saying that she is not waiting for death. Death, like a courteous gentleman patiently waits for her. Beside the carriage Death was patiently waiting for her. Just the way a gentleman in a courtship patiently waits for his ladylove. They drive slowly. The carriage passed the schools where children were playing during the recess. They passed the fields and passed the horizon which is tinged by the mellow light of the setting sun. The third stanza beautifully represents aspects of fragility and beauty. 'Gossamer' is a fine substance consisting of cobwebs spun by small spiders. The gossamer becomes the down of the lady. The word tippet means a woman's long scarf or shawl. Tulle is a soft, fine silky material. It is used for making veil of a bride. Thus, after describing the garment of the lady the poem shifts its focus on the destination where the carriage ultimately has reached. The carriage reached to a house which looks like a "swelling of ground". The last stanza is a bit ambiguous where the poet perceives the horses' heads of the carriage "were toward Eternity". The horses' heads towards eternity implies the lady with his fiancée Death has travelled to the domain of eternity from a mundane terrain. In Emily Dickinson's poetic endeavor the aspects of death, and eternity are important aspects. To her consciousness, Death appears as a passport to the domain of eternity. Death becomes a liberator which liberates the poetic persona from the mundane existence. In this poem Dickinson perceives death as a kind of marriage which unites the lady with the gentleman Death. This perception of death where it is being treated as a nuptial bond is not only an American phenomenon, but also this concept is latent in Sufism and Baul philosophy. Death is truly a marriage between the event and the eventless. It is a marriage between the fragile and the eternal. It is a marriage between life's strife and sense of peace beyond life. The punctuation technique in the poem is quite interesting. A close reading would reveal that in the poem there is no full stop as such. Sudden use of uppercases and absence of full stop imply the tonal quality of the poem. The tone is effusive and spontaneous. The verse form which is used in the poem is four line stanza with different sense of rhymes.

UNIT 10 (C): “I FELT A FUNERAL IN MY BRAIN” – TEXT AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

Text of the Poem

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
And Mourners to and fro
Kept treading—treading—till it seemed
That Sense was breaking through—

And when they all were seated,
A Service, like a Drum—
Kept beating—beating—till I thought
My Mind was going numb—

And then I heard them lift a Box
And creak across my Soul
With those same Boots of Lead, again,
Then Space—began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,
And I, and Silence, some strange Race
Wrecked, solitary, here—

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
And I dropped down, and down—
And hit a World, at every plunge,
And Finished knowing—then—

Analysis of the Poem

“I felt a Funeral, in my Brain” was first published in 1896. It is the poem number 280 in Emily Dickinson’s *Complete Poems*. Because Emily Dickinson lived a life of great privacy and only published a handful of poems in her lifetime, the exact year of its composition is unknown; most scholars agree that it was written around 1861. The poem is considered to be a brilliant poetic creation which has been a centre of diversified critical attention. It is brimming with powerful thoughts and brilliant imageries. Readers have often found it to be a terrifying poem as they thought that the speaker was exploring the intriguing and chilly idea of what it would feel like to remain conscious even after physical death. However, most of the critics and scholar have opined that the poem is not about physical death, rather the collapse of her sanity and

soundness of her mind. Death has been a recurrent motif in Dickinson's poetry as a huge number of them are about physical death and its myriad symbols. But there are other poems by her which explore the workings of the human mind under stress and attempt to replicate the stages of a mental breakdown through the overall metaphor of a funeral.

It is a haunting and introspective piece that delves into themes of mental anguish, mortality, and the existential experience of suffering. Written in the first person, the poem offers a glimpse into the speaker's internal turmoil and the disintegration of their mental faculties. The poem traces the speaker's descent into psychological disarray, utilizing vivid imagery to depict the breakdown of their mental faculties. The poem unfolds as a gradual progression, beginning with the sense of a funeral and culminating in a feeling of ultimate annihilation. Dickinson employs the metaphor of a funeral to symbolize the death of the speaker's sanity and the disintegration of their mind. The repetition of the line "And then I heard them lift a box" reinforces the imagery of burial and heightens the sense of claustrophobia and confinement. The poet skillfully employs a series of vivid and disorienting images, such as the "beating, beating" drum and the tolling of the bell, creating a disconcerting and ominous atmosphere that mirrors the speaker's mental anguish.

"I felt a funeral in my brain" explores metaphysical and existential themes related to the nature of consciousness, suffering, and the fragility of human existence. The poem delves into the internal struggles of the speaker, confronting the boundaries of their own consciousness and questioning the very essence of their being. The dissonance created by the juxtaposition of the funeral imagery and the internal experience of the speaker conveys a sense of existential crisis. The poem highlights the fragility of the human mind and its susceptibility to fragmentation and collapse. The funeral becomes a metaphor for the speaker's confrontation with their own mortality and the fear of losing one's sense of self.

Dickinson's use of poetic techniques enhances the emotional depth and ambiguity of "I felt a funeral in my brain." The poem is structured as a series of four-line stanzas with a varied meter and irregular rhyme scheme, mirroring the fragmented and disordered state of the speaker's mind. The use of internal rhyme and slant rhyme adds a musical quality to the poem, heightening its poetic resonance. The ambiguity of the poem allows for multiple interpretations, inviting readers to engage with the speaker's experience on a personal and emotional level. The absence of a clear narrative or explicit context lends itself to a universal

understanding of the human condition, allowing each reader to project their own fears, anxieties, and struggles onto the poem.

Emily Dickinson's "I felt a funeral in my brain" is a powerful and introspective poem that explores themes of mental anguish, mortality, and existential crisis. Through vivid imagery, skillful employment of poetic techniques, and a sense of ambiguity, Dickinson captures the internal disintegration and emotional turmoil experienced by the speaker. The poem invites readers to confront their own existential anxieties and contemplate the fragility of the human mind, making it a compelling and enduring piece of poetry.

Lines 1–4

The opening stanza of the poem presents the metaphor of a funeral that is used throughout the poem to convey the sense of mental breakdown to the reader. The speaker of the poem feels as if a funeral is happening inside her brain. *Brain* here refers to both the concrete physical organ and to the abstract idea of the speaker's mind; such dual meanings are used throughout the poem to convey the physical and the mental effects of the collapse. Losing one's mind or rationality is like the burial as well as funeral of a sane human being. Most of her readers have attended funerals in their lives and they can perfectly understand the ambience of gloom, grief and sorrow which she is trying to evoke through the image. She feels like the mourning attendees are walking or pacing inside her head. Their incessant treading feels too heavy on the speaker's head. The speaker describes their to and fro treading. The mourners symbolize the events or ideas that cause the speaker's eventual collapse. Such events or ideas keep coming and continue until the speaker begins to realize what is happening. Consequently, her "sense" (or knowledge) of what is happening to her mind leads towards a culmination where she anticipates her impending devastation. Like the word *brain*, which has two meanings, the word *sense* can also refer to the speaker's physical senses, which are likewise affected by the mourners plaguing her mind.

Lines 5–8

As the first stanza introduces the idea of the funeral as the central metaphor of the poem, subsequent stanzas refer to specific parts of the funeral ritual to further convey the speaker's experience. This stanza dramatizes the speaker's growing fears and mental instability primarily through the use of sound. The mourners stop treading and they finally take their respective

seats for watching the funeral service. Fortunately, the speaker gets a quiet moment as her surrounding finally feels quiet, perhaps marking the end of the speaker's initial panic or mental chaos. However, the respite is short-lived as a repetitive, drum-like beating noise begins a fresh assault on both her physical senses and mind. The sound of the drum, like the tread of the mourners, is another attack on her sanity. It is such an overwhelming attack so fierce that she feels her mind is "going numb." Numbness is a physical sensation that stands as another example of the speaker's struggle to convey her experience in understandable physical terms.

Lines 9–11

The speaker is now in what seems to be a state of shock, stunned and still like a corpse being readied for burial. Now the service ends and the funeral procession begins. The mourners lift a coffin and carry it as they walk across the speaker's soul, which creaks like an old wooden floor. However, in terms of the metaphorical funeral, her senses are still working, and again she uses the sense of hearing to describe the next stage of her breakdown. She hears the pallbearers "lift a Box," the coffin in which, perhaps, her formerly sane self is contained. These men then "creak across" her soul, which calls to mind the previous sounds of "treading—treading" and "beating—beating"; like those sounds, this creaking is unpleasant because it is the result of men with heavy "boots of lead" trampling over her. What is being trampled upon is the speaker's soul; the scope of the breakdown has expanded to include her entire conception of her own existence.

Lines 12–16

These lines describe the moment in the speaker's collapse when she passes from the recognizable world of rationality to a state of mind conveyable only through similes and metaphors, even stranger than those previously offered. In the real, physical world, church bells are sometimes rung as a coffin is carried to a burial plot; these same bells are ringing here but are so loud that the speaker can only describe the sound as if all space is beginning to "toll." Suddenly, there's the sound of a bell ringing, but rather than coming from a single source it seems to be coming from the whole world at once. Even the sky (and possibly Heaven itself) rings like a bell. Note how the sounds of the poem have grown increasingly louder and more menacing. The tolling is so loud; in fact, that "all the heavens" seem to be one great "bell," and the speaker seems to be an "ear," open to the barrage of noise that assaults it. As the speaker now has no hope of shutting out the dreadful tolling of the bells, the speaker's soul has no hope

of shutting out the madness that has possessed it. As funeral bells toll to mark the end of a human life, so the bells toll here for the figurative death of the speaker's reason and sense of self.

The speaker—whose mind has been reduced to a numb silence—feels as though he or she is no longer human but instead has become some strange creature. The speaker is alone in his or her own body and mind, as if shipwrecked there. The speaker then finds herself “wrecked” in some “solitary” place; this place may be physically the inside of her coffin (a most solitary place, indeed) or a figurative mental place, a description of which is too difficult for her to convey. All she can say is that she is “wrecked, solitary” there. The noise that has been growing throughout the poem is still present, so much so that silence seems a part of “some strange race” that she can no longer recognize. The ambiguity of the speaker's physical and mental location in these lines suggests the difficulty of using concrete language to talk about abstract mental processes, a difficulty that will overcome her in the poem's final line.

Lines 17–20

The poem's final stanza concludes both the metaphorical funeral rites and the description of the speaker's breakdown. The mourners have come, the service has been heard, and the pallbearers have carried the casket to the cemetery. The casket being lowered into the burial plot is used to metaphorically describe the final stages of the speaker's ruin; however, while in earthy funerals a casket is rested on planks to support it prior to its being lowered into the earth, here the figurative “Plank in Reason”—the last flimsy bulwark against total insanity and devastation—snaps. The breaking of the final metaphorical floorboard in the speaker's rational mind creates a hole through which the speaker falls further and further down. As a casket is normally gently lowered into its dark earthen plot, here the speaker's mind plummets into the darkness of madness, dropping “down and down” into more indescribable depths.

Each time the speaker thinks she has reached the limits of how much she can withstand, she finds that there is still another world awaiting her further down; with each plunge she is thrown deeper into madness until she has “finished knowing.” Now she can no longer trust her previously held assumptions about her own mind nor can she further describe her own mental processes in suitable terms. The poem's final word, “then,” is ambiguous: either the entire poem is told from the point-of-view of one who has survived the mental “funeral” but who is now “finished knowing” anything for certain or the speaker's ability to continue her story has

(like everything else) been destroyed, and she has moved to a mental place that regular, ordered language cannot describe. While falling, the speaker seems to collide with entire worlds, until the speaker's mind shuts down altogether and the speaker is no longer able to understand anything at all. Just as the speaker is about to say what comes after this state, the poem ends. Either way, the poem depicts the terrors of mental collapse in language that, by its ambiguous nature, reflects the difficulties in conveying the very events that cause and comprise it.

Critical Analysis of the Poem

The literary reputation of Emily Dickinson has only grown stronger since the posthumous discovery of her poems. Most critics would agree with Dickinson's recent biographer Cynthia Griffin Wolff, who (in *Benet's Reader's Encyclopaedia of American Literature*) calls Dickinson "certainly America's greatest woman author and possibly its greatest poet of either gender." Generally, critics are fascinated by Dickinson's ability to present various states of mind through the use of different images that convey complex mental processes to her readers. Writing in the Introduction to *Modern Critical Views: Emily Dickinson*, Harold Bloom, one of the twentieth century's most preeminent critics, states that Dickinson presents her readers with "the most authentic cognitive difficulties" formed in "a mind so original and powerful that we scarcely have begun, even now, to catch up with her." The number of articles and books being written about Dickinson today is a testament to the truth of Bloom's remark.

"I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" has fared equally well among critics. In his important study of Dickinson's tragic poetry, *The Long Shadow*, Clark Griffith praises the poem for its embodiment of "emotional and psychological states in a hard, specific language" and concludes that the poem fore-shadows "the principles and techniques of modern symbolist poetry." In his book *The Art of Emily Dickinson's Early Poetry*, David Porter states, "On the experience of psychic breakdown, perhaps no poetic expression surpasses the aptness of metaphor or the psychological authenticity of the progression of mental collapse" as Dickinson's poem. John Cody, a psychiatrist whose book *After Great Pain: The Inner Life of Emily Dickinson* offers a psychoanalytic reading of the poem, calls it "powerful" and praises Dickinson for her ability to make the reader "feel each tormenting increment of a gathering depression until vitality reaches a nadir, and reason gives way to a numb and psychotic state of reality severance." Finally, the aforementioned Cynthia Griffin Wolff, in her extensive critical biography *Emily Dickinson*, praises the way that the poem "taunts with its invitations and frustrations, and ultimately forces us to ask what we know, how we know—whether 'life' and 'death' are

susceptible to understanding.” These critics and many others thus praise the poem for its sharp insights into what happens to a mind facing its own destruction.

“I felt a Funeral, in my Brain” is a poem that, in part, presents the impending mental collapse of its speaker, a collapse that Dickinson likens to the rituals of a funeral to ultimately explore the figurative “death” of the speaker’s sanity. The poem is a dramatization of mental anguish leading to psychic disintegration and a final sinking into numbness. In this poem, the whole psychological drama is described as it were a funeral. The poem shows no hints about the causes of her suffering. Dickinson’s poem depicts the difficulty of understanding the mysterious thoughts and feelings that happen inside people. Often interpreted as chronicling a nightmarish descent into madness, the poem can be read as depicting the terror and helplessness that accompany losing one’s grip on reality. The word *felt* in the poem’s opening line suggests that the first throbbing of the collapse could be physically perceived; this merging of physical sensation and mental perception is sustained throughout the poem. By comparing the speaker’s mental breakdown to a funeral, Dickinson suggests the horror and finality of such an event.

Throughout the poem, the speaker’s mind seems passive and confused. Indeed, the “Funeral” of the opening line can arguably be read as a reference to the death of the speaker’s reason or sanity. The funeral’s participants and rites can be read as metaphors for the speaker’s impending collapse; as the figurative funeral proceeds through its recognizable stages, the speaker’s sanity becomes more endangered until it finally “dies.” As the funeral’s “Mourners” repetitively tread through the speaker’s mind, their steps seem to wear down whatever is holding “Sense” back. The treading mourners probably represent self-accusation strong enough to drive the speaker towards madness. The mourners that the speaker feels repeatedly “treading—treading” in her brain are like the first recognizable signs (to her) that all is not well with her mind, despite the fact that her sense of what is happening to her is “breaking through” the sounds of the mourners’ footsteps. The speaker waits for “Sense” to come “breaking through”—basically, for meaning and reason to return. Alternatively, “Sense breaking through” could imply the fragility of that sense itself, further reflecting the disordered, easily-shattered nature of the speaker’s mind.

The funeral service here is not a peaceful eulogy or tearful farewell but an unpleasant sound “like a drum” that plagues her mind with its “beating—beating” until she reaches the point where she cannot stand any more of it, and her mind grows numb. This strange simile evokes a sense of maddening, thudding repetition, perhaps representative of the—rather paradoxical—

awareness of the fact that the mind is deteriorating. In other words, the “funeral” hammers home the death of the speaker’s sanity. The speaker can’t escape the knowledge that his or her knowledge is collapsing. At this point, she has no hope of fending off her approaching breakdown. Her mind is described here in physical terms (“numb”) to suggest its nearly incapacitated state. Reason, the ability to think and know breaks down, and she plunges into an abyss. The words she strikes as she descends are her past experiences, both those she would want to hold onto and those that burden her with pain. The mourners carry a “Box”—perhaps a coffin containing the speaker’s reason—as the speaker is left “Wrecked, solitary, here” in a space unfamiliar even to him- or herself. This loss of sanity is thus a painful, isolating experience. Unable to escape from her terrifying consciousness, she feels as if only she and the universe exist. This condition is closed to madness, a loss of self that comes when one’s relationship to people and nature feels broken, and individuality becomes a burden. The carrying of the casket to the gravesite—the next logical step in the funeral rite—is used to convey the increased mental and even spiritual anguish of the speaker, for the pallbearers “creak across” her soul with “boots of lead” as they carry their mournful burden.

Indeed, the poem’s initial conceit, of a funeral in the brain, summons an elaborate vision of the mind’s structure as being full of mysterious, inaccessible elements. For instance, the first stanza basically asks readers to imagine the speaker’s mind as a two-floor structure. The speaker only has partial access to this structure, listening from below to the funeral on the second floor. Additionally, the proceedings of the funeral itself are secret and hard to perceive. They are “felt” and “heard” rather than seen. And again, the service doesn’t contain words, but rather beats “like a Drum.” Because of all this secrecy, the speaker almost becomes a stranger in his or her own mind. These metaphorical events have taken on a life of their own, reflecting an increasing sense of psychological dislocation; in other words, the speaker becomes ever more isolated from his or her own thoughts.

The tolling of the church bells is presented as a nearly indescribable source of pain: “all the heavens” are like one great “bell,” and her entire being is like a single “ear.” At this point, the speaker’s trauma has become so intense that she is “wrecked, solitary, here” in a place where her ability to describe her own mind has become almost totally diminished. The lowering of the casket into the ground is compared to the final onslaught of insanity; the poem ends with the speaker being “finished knowing” anything for certain. All of her previously held assumptions about her own mind and soul have been metaphorically buried, like the remains

of her sanity. In the last stanza, “Reason” breaks and the speaker plunges “down and down” into—well, it’s unclear, which is part of the point! The image of falling that dominates this stanza shows how the speaker’s mind has finally lost all control. Finally, the speaker is “Finished knowing.” The “then -” that ends the poem represents an ultimate unknowability: the speaker can’t even say what comes next. The rational mind, in effect, has shut down. Ultimately, the poem evokes a sense of wonder and terror as it traces out a path that leads to inner destruction and, finally, a total absence of rational awareness altogether.

Appropriately enough, the final stanza uses the last part of the funeral ritual to dramatize the final stages of the speaker’s breakdown. Caskets are often laid upon wooden planks before being lowered into the earth, but the casket in the speaker’s brain proves too heavy for such supports. In terms of the physical metaphor, the speaker’s mind has “broke”—its last vestiges of mental support have proven no match for the weight of the breakdown. The casket’s dropping “down and down” is like the speaker’s descent into madness where she hits a “World, at every plunge.” In terms of a conventional funeral, a dropping casket would eventually hit the world after falling the proverbial six feet, but this is no conventional funeral. Instead, the casket keeps “hitting bottom” only to find that there is another world beneath it. Just when the speaker thinks she has reached the limits of mental endurance, she learns that her casket can still drop another few feet. Thus, the problem of depicting the stages of derangement or mental collapse is sidestepped by Dickinson’s use of physical imagery and sensation.

The poem’s final line, however, presents an ambiguity (mentioned earlier) that demands examination. The speaker ends by stating that she “finished knowing—then—” a remark fraught with ambiguity. Either she “finished knowing” anything for sure and now lives as one who will never again assume anything about her own brain, or mind, to be certain or her breakdown has brought her to the point where she can no longer use conventional (or poetic) language to describe her experience. The first alternative is somewhat more comforting than the second since it implies that the speaker has had some sort of epiphany about her own mind and is now mentally strong enough to convey her experience in rational, ordered language. However, the second alternative is more in keeping with the overall problem of portraying consciousness: physical metaphors and sensations might be used to describe the onset of one’s collapse, but even Dickinson herself seems to be defeated by the challenge of depicting a mind that has already dropped “down, and down.” (Had she used a period instead of a dash after the last word, the problem would be solved.) As the poem stands, a reader must be satisfied with

Dickinson's evocation of "powerful feelings" rather than powerful thoughts to (in Wordsworth's terms) "gradually produce" in the reader some understanding of what a funeral in the brain would be like. The impossibility of Dickinson's truly replicating the breakdown in Wordsworth's terms, however, should be regarded as somewhat of a blessing since no reader would want to read a poem capable of truly inciting a breakdown similar to the one experienced by its speaker.

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John Robinson – *Emily Dickinson*

Wendy Martin – *All Things Dickinson: An Encyclopaedia of Emily Dickinson's World*

Nicole Panizza – *The Language of Emily Dickinson*

L. Wagner-Martin – *Emily Dickinson: A Literary Life*

Vivian R. Pollak – *A Historical Guide to Emily Dickinson*

UNIT – 11

UNIT 11 (A): INTRODUCTION TO THE POETRY OF ROBERT FROST

Robert Frost is considered by critics as a pre-modernist. Frost was born in 1874 in the city of San Francisco, but his juvenile days were spent at a farm. His experiences of living close to nature and natural ambience left a far-reaching impact in his poetry. Frost's father died in the year 1884, when the poet was only ten years old. The sudden death of his father compelled young Frost to encounter the hurdles of life in an obdurate way. Frost was admitted at Dartmouth College for a brief period of time, but due to financial crisis he was forced to leave the college. He started to earn by doing various jobs. Frost has a happy family life with his beloved Elinor Miriam. His most important poetical works are: *A Boy's Will* (1913), *North of Boston* (1914), *West Running Brook* (1928), *A Witness Tree* (1942). He had been awarded Pulitzer Prize for four times. The Irish Poet Paul Muldoon, talks about Frost to be "the greatest American Poet of the twentieth Century". Frost died in 1963. Frost's poem deals with simple diction. At a cursory glance, Frost's poem appears very simple, but this simplicity is deception. Beneath the veneer of simple diction, a philosophical thought is nascent. It is the realization on part of the readers that makes Frost's poem all the more difficult to comprehend. Frost's poem needs a cerebral engagement from readers to unpack all those latent meanings in the narrative. Frost was a keen observer of nature; natural beauty, plants and even nature with all its uncanny and fearsome aspects take shape of poem in Frost's poetic endeavor. To Frost, the natural world serves as a backdrop for some contemplation. Loneliness is one of the important aspects in Frost's poem. Human beings are represented in his poetry as a recluse. Their isolation has been exhibited as a major existential ailment with which all of Frost's human characters are grappling with. The myth of benevolent protector is demystified by Frost. He placed his characters in an abysmal world where lonely humans are struggling to overcome the hindrances. Frost employs quite simple imagery in his poetic endeavor. Frost in his poetry articulates a more theoretical formulation of the connection between sound and meaning. In his most famous critical formulation, Frost advocated what he called the "sound of sense". Through the term he means, poetry must communicate through its sound even before we grasp its semantic meaning. To his friend John Barlett in 1913 Frost wrote that the best way to hear the sound of sense is to listen to "voices behind a door that cut off the words". If a poet can succeed in capturing this abstract vitality of speech", this

specific denotation of the words is less important than the way the language moves to the “mind’s ear”. Frost employs the “sound of Sense” to the use of poetic meter. For Frost, poetry in a line comes not from fitting words into the preexisting metrical structure, but from “skillfully breaking the sound of sense with all their irregularity of accent across the regular beat of the meter.” For this method, a poem can be made to sound natural and simultaneously it achieves the heightened musical quality of lyric. Frost’s theory of poetry allowed him to introduce a rural New England dialect that had never been used in poetry before. It equally permits to use flexible rhythms within a regular metrical structure. Frost was never an ardent supporter of Modernist Movement in poetry, rather he was supportive of more traditional forms of poetry. He ridiculed the route of modernist experimentation followed by Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot and e.e. Cummings. During his stay in England Frost rejected the basic principles of Imagism. Frost’s theory of poetry does not adhere to Modernist Movements in several aspects. First of all, Frost’s close adherence to traditional forms of poetry does not support modernist claims of a radical innovation in the form of poetry. Secondly, simplicity is one of the chief characteristics of Frost’s poetry. He chooses ordinary life and simplicity of rustic people as suitable subject matter of his poetry. He uses plain and idiomatic language marked by a lack of polysyllabic words. Indeed, Frost’s poetry captures the very essence of rustic life of New England. Thirdly, in Frost poetry, the transformative quality of the poetic imagination is strikingly absent. It is one of the defining features of modernist poetry.

UNIT 11 (B): “MENDING WALL” – TEXT OF THE POEM AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Text of the Poem

Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,

To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.

I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;

And on a day we meet to walk the line

And set the wall between us once again.

We keep the wall between us as we go.

To each the boulders that have fallen to each.

And some are loaves and some so nearly balls

We have to use a spell to make them balance:

'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'

We wear our fingers rough with handling them.

Oh, just another kind of out-door game,

One on a side. It comes to little more:

There where it is we do not need the wall:

He is all pine and I am apple orchard.

My apple trees will never get across

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

He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'

Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder

If I could put a notion in his head:

'*Why* do they make good neighbors? Isn't it

Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.

Before I built a wall I'd ask to know

What I was walling in or walling out,

And to whom I was like to give offense.

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,

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

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

He said it for himself. I see him there

Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top

In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.

He moves in darkness as it seems to me,

Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'

Analysis of the Poem

The poem 'Mending Wall' was published in the second anthology of Frost titled *North of Boston* in 1914. The speaker in the poem joins his neighbour in every year to mend a wall that exists between their houses. Apparently it looks like a civil activity but the speaker does not like the wall. The wall here is symbolic of separation and detachment. The poem is written in blank verse which is symbolic of the tumultuous time when life desperately lacks rhythm. First five lines of the poem talk about the elements which disturb the wall. It can be frost or dislodging of rocks. The gap in the wall can let a hunter pass. The next five lines talk about the mending process of the wall. Now, the wall is protected. The gaps in the wall are created by nature, so it becomes an occasion where both the speaker and his neighbour can have an opportunity to talk to each other. The speaker describes how difficult is the process of mending a wall. The speaker in line no 30-45 asks valid questions on the necessity of the wall. These lines are giving the sense of debate on the matter whether to keep the wall or not. The doubt about necessity of the wall is resolved by the firm answer of the neighbour. He replies, "Good fences make good neighbour". The poet and his neighbour both are engaged to the task of mending the wall. To the poet's neighbour the act of mending the wall is a ritual which needs to be performed solemnly at the beginning of the year. To the speaker, the act of mending the wall gives him a chance to let loose his imagination. The narrator mends the wall but he is sympathetic to the reasons that disturb the wall. The neighbour of the speaker can be called dull, primitive person as he wants to mend the wall mechanically and thoughtlessly. He adheres to the old proverb "Good fences make good neighbours". The poem is an allegory which talks about the poetic process. As a poet Frost needs to encounter all the experiences of life. The wall in the poem is metaphor. It signifies a barrier or a hindrance which ruptures the communication between two humans. It is symbolic of the hindrances that disrupts human bonding and unity. Simplicity is one of the dominant features in Frost's poetry. A close reading of the poem like "Mending Wall", one of Frost's famous lyrics, will bear testimony to the fact of Frosteian use of simple diction in poetry. It is a very colloquial form of diction which he uses in the poem. The poem is replete with concrete descriptive

words that provide a simple and easily comprehensible picture of the scene being presented. Nouns like wall, trees, cows, woods, shade, hunters, none of the nouns presents any difficulty for readers to comprehend the meaning of the poem. On the level of word length there is a remarkable preponderance of monosyllabic words and a total absence of words more than two syllables. Frost's use of syntax also gives the idea of simplicity. In the beginning line of the poem the use of contraction "doesn't" gives a sense of colloquialism. In "Mending Wall" Frost skilfully juxtaposes the relationship between form and content. Frost employs imagery and symbols which are largely drawn from pastoral world. For example, in the poem "Mending Wall" the reference to wall or fence is such an example.

UNIT 11 (C): "AFTER APPLE-PICKING" – TEXT OF THE POEM AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Text of the Poem

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

Stem end and blossom end,
And every fleck of russet showing clear.
My instep arch not only keeps the ache,
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.
And I keep hearing from the cellar bin
The rumbling sound
Of load on load of apples coming in.
For I have had too much
Of apple-picking: I am overtired
Of the great harvest I myself desired.
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.
For all
That struck the earth,
No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,
Went surely to the cider-apple heap
As of no worth.
One can see what will trouble
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.
Were he not gone,
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep.

Analysis of the Poem

“After Apple Picking” first published in Frost’s second anthology titled *North of Boston* in 1914. The poem was written in England and subtitled “After the Fall”. The poem is metaphorical in essence. Apparently the I- narrator in the poem is a harvester. He placed the ladder through a tree to pick apples. This year his harvest is not good, therefore he is unable to fill in his barrels with apples. After apple picking the speaker is fatigued. In such a weary state he enjoys his winter sleep. In a sleep he envisions happy dreams. The sleep gives him a vision a memory as well assensation, to appreciate life. The poem is replete with biblical

imagery. Apple is the fruit of the tree of knowledge according to Biblical allusion. Therefore, the phraseology “After Apple Picking” which has been used as a title of the poem itself is densely symbolic. The phraseology “after apple picking” refers to the event of man’s Fall from divine grace. The reference to the ladder at the beginning of the poem is an allusion to Jacob’s ladder. The act of apple picking is done in the poem. The act of finishing apple picking is a metaphoric way of expressing closure of an event. The fragrance of apples, which is the ‘essence of winter-sleep’, causes drowsiness to him, and he begins to drowse off. While falling asleep he recollects the sense of strangeness that was experienced by him at the night he saw in the morning by looking through a sheet of ice which he had picked up from his drinking vessel (trough). He looked at ‘the world of hoary grass’ or (grass covered with snow) through this sheet. It seems as if the speaker were in a confused state of mind because of the onslaught of sleep on him that sent him into a trance in which everything seemed to have been blurred or made indistinct to view. The poem is replete with symbols. The apples, act of apple picking, ladder and winter sleep are all potent symbols in the poem.

UNIT – 12

UNIT 12 (A): INTRODUCTION TO THE POETRY OF WALLACE STEVENS

Wallace Stevens was born on 2 October, 1879. He is one of the important poets of American Modernist Movement in poetry. He was born in Pennsylvania. In 1923, his first anthology was published. It is titled *Harmonium*. It went for second edition and appeared in 1930. His remarkable anthologies are *The Man with the Blue Guitar*, *Parts of the World*. His well-known poems are “Anecdote of the Jar”, “Disillusionment of Ten O’Clock”, “Sunday Morning”, “The Snow Man”, “and The Emperor of Ice Cream”. He died in 1955.

Text of the Poem

I

Complacencies of the peignoir, and late
Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair,
And the green freedom of a cockatoo

Upon a rug mingle to dissipate
The holy hush of ancient sacrifice.
She dreams a little, and she feels the dark
Encroachment of that old catastrophe,
As a calm darkens among water-lights.
The pungent oranges and bright, green wings
Seem things in some procession of the dead,
Winding across wide water, without sound.
The day is like wide water, without sound,
Stilled for the passing of her dreaming feet
Over the seas, to silent Palestine,
Dominion of the blood and sepulchre.

II

Why should she give her bounty to the dead?
What is divinity if it can come
Only in silent shadows and in dreams?
Shall she not find in comforts of the sun,
In pungent fruit and bright, green wings, or else
In any balm or beauty of the earth,
Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?
Divinity must live within herself:
Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;
Grievings in loneliness, or unsubdued
Elations when the forest blooms; gusty
Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights;
All pleasures and all pains, remembering
The bough of summer and the winter branch.
These are the measures destined for her soul.

III

Jove in the clouds had his inhuman birth.
No mother suckled him, no sweet land gave

Large-mannered motions to his mythy mind.
He moved among us, as a muttering king,
Magnificent, would move among his hinds,
Until our blood, commingling, virginal,
With heaven, brought such requital to desire
The very hinds discerned it, in a star.
Shall our blood fail? Or shall it come to be
The blood of paradise? And shall the earth
Seem all of paradise that we shall know?
The sky will be much friendlier then than now,
A part of labor and a part of pain,
And next in glory to enduring love,
Not this dividing and indifferent blue.

IV

She says, "I am content when wakened birds,
Before they fly, test the reality
Of misty fields, by their sweet questionings;
But when the birds are gone, and their warm fields
Return no more, where, then, is paradise?"
There is not any haunt of prophecy,
Nor any old chimera of the grave,
Neither the golden underground, nor isle
Melodious, where spirits gat them home,
Nor visionary south, nor cloudy palm
Remote on heaven's hill, that has endured
As April's green endures; or will endure
Like her remembrance of awakened birds,
Or her desire for June and evening, tipped
By the consummation of the swallow's wings.

V

She says, "But in contentment I still feel
The need of some imperishable bliss."

Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her,
Alone, shall come fulfilment to our dreams
And our desires. Although she strews the leaves
Of sure obliteration on our paths,
The path sick sorrow took, the many paths
Where triumph rang its brassy phrase, or love
Whispered a little out of tenderness,
She makes the willow shiver in the sun
For maidens who were wont to sit and gaze
Upon the grass, relinquished to their feet.
She causes boys to pile new plums and pears
On disregarded plate. The maidens taste
And stray impassioned in the littering leaves.

VI

Is there no change of death in paradise?
Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs
Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,
Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth,
With rivers like our own that seek for seas
They never find, the same receding shores
That never touch with inarticulate pang?
Why set the pear upon those river-banks
Or spice the shores with odors of the plum?
Alas, that they should wear our colors there,
The silken weavings of our afternoons,
And pick the strings of our insipid lutes!
Death is the mother of beauty, mystical,
Within whose burning bosom we devise
Our earthly mothers waiting, sleeplessly.

VII

Supple and turbulent, a ring of men
Shall chant in orgy on a summer morn

Their boisterous devotion to the sun,
 Not as a god, but as a god might be,
Naked among them, like a savage source.
 Their chant shall be a chant of paradise,
 Out of their blood, returning to the sky;
And in their chant shall enter, voice by voice,
 The windy lake wherein their lord delights,
 The trees, like serafin, and echoing hills,
That choir among themselves long afterward.
They shall know well the heavenly fellowship
 Of men that perish and of summer morn.
And whence they came and whither they shall go
 The dew upon their feet shall manifest.

VIII

She hears, upon that water without sound,
A voice that cries, “The tomb in Palestine
 Is not the porch of spirits lingering.
 It is the grave of Jesus, where he lay.”
 We live in an old chaos of the sun,
 Or old dependency of day and night,
 Or island solitude, unsponsored, free,
 Of that wide water, inescapable.
Deer walk upon our mountains, and the quail
 Whistle about us their spontaneous cries;
 Sweet berries ripen in the wilderness;
 And, in the isolation of the sky,
At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make
 Ambiguous undulations as they sink,
Downward to darkness, on extended wings.

Analysis of the Poem

The poem “Sunday Morning” is an ambiguous poem to some extent. The entire poem is

divided into eight stanzas. The first stanza of the poem describes the leisure of a woman belonging to the sophisticated class in a Sunday morning. Under the sunny sky she is having her breakfast. In the calm weather the cockatoo is singing. The bird's song, the pleasant weather and carefree hours of the Sunday morning create a drowsy effect on the woman. She dozes off. In her sleep she has a dream about death. Significantly, in the dream she mentions about water. "The day is like wide water, without sound,/ Stilled for the passing of her dreaming feet/ over the seas, to silent Palestine,/ Dominion of the blood and sepulchre."

The references to water and sea are densely symbolic in the poem. Indeed, water is an ambiguous symbol. It implies both life and death. The woman is having a dream which is about death. The solemn contemplation on death makes her feel liberated; as it is through the event of death she has been able to touch the sacred land Palestine. In a feminist thought, water is symbolic of rebirth and liberation. In the mother's womb, the foetus is surrounded by water. This is called amniotic fluid which protects the foetus from perils of outer world. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, the two eminent feminist critics, in their epoch-making book *Madwoman in The Attic* focuses on the tropes of water and claustrophobic objects as a predominant objects occur recurrently in a Feminist thought. According to Gilbert and Gubar, the claustrophobic objects are symbolic of the hindrances. These obstacles are imposed on women by the patriarchal societal structure. The reference to water is an ardent desire on part of the imprisoned feminine self to be liberated from this rigid social customs. In "Sunday Morning" the dream of the woman about water in an oblique way implies her thought on death. To her, death appears to be a liberator which transcends her from an indolent hour of a Sunday to the sacred land of Palestine. The second stanza of the poem deals with a sudden change in thought pattern. The speaker becomes sceptical about the essence of divinity. The woman contemplates on the variegated beauty of the world. The sunny sky, the beautiful birds, the fragrance and colour of the natural objects make her attracted to the earthly life. Like an ardent admirer of nature, she savours the beauty. The thought of sacrificing these beautiful aspects of nature in order to perceive divinity is something that repels her. In the third stanza, the woman contemplates on Jove or God. Her tone is sympathetic towards Jove. She believes, Jove has an inhuman birth and he has never been part of all these earthly beauties and pleasure. He does not have mother who suckled him. Thus, he is bereft of any fond ties. In the fourth stanza the poet talks about the variegated beauty of nature and the power of death. In five stanza onwards the poet goes on contemplating on the aspect of beauty and death. The sixth stanza, deals with the nature of heaven: "Is there no change of death in paradise? Does ripe fruit never fall?" If rivers flow but

never reach the ocean, if fruits become ripe but never fall, if things are born but never die, if there is only 'bliss' and no contrary to give it any meaning, then such a heaven is not a desirable place. It must be impossible, and even if it actually existed, it would not be desirable, interesting or worthwhile to seek for it. Religions have construed a vision of a paradise similar to the earthly paradise but unchanging and eternal. Such a concept of the paradise is tedious.

The seventh stanza describes the religion of the future, a new paganism in which men will worship the physical universe. They will believe in the brotherhood of man and they will be aware that the lives of all men are temporary. The final stanza states that Jesus (God) is dead and that man must live alone, on a transitory but lovely planet. The woman's recognition that Jesus is a historical figure and that she is alone, only as a part of "unsponsored" nature, frees her from the prison in which her traditional beliefs had locked her. The conclusion, which is a merging of the woman's perception with that of the other voice, is a picture of the sweet earth and a statement of the Everyman's need to recognize it and come to terms with the inevitable reality of death, that gives real meaning of life. The poem revolves around a duality. The death consciousness and the immediate necessity to savour the beauty of natural world both constitute the narrative drive in the poem. The phrase "Sunday Morning" which is used as a title of the poem is densely symbolic and ironical. Sunday morning, according to the belief of devout Christians, is a sacred hour when all the pious Christians go to the church for the Sunday prayer. It is holy hour where all the Christians must follow the sacred ritual of prayer in order to achieve divine blessing. Ironically, it is the same sacred hour of the day when the anonymous woman in the play is having a dream on death. Indeed, it is the dream which makes her doubtful about the true essence of divinity. In the very hour of offering prayer to God, the woman nurtures the doubtful attitude to the existence of the Divine. The act of offering prayer to God is a submissive gesture; but when the devotee becomes doubtful about the existence of the Deity it becomes a crucial moment. It is the moment of rupture where the unflinching loyalty of the devotee and the firm belief on the omnipotence of the Deity get questioned by the skeptic mind. The poem takes its genesis from that moment of dilemma and confusion.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Comment on the aspect of individuality and self-reliance found in the poetry

of Walt Whitman with reference to the poems in your syllabus.

2. Write a critical analysis of the poem “As I Ponder’d in Silence”.
3. Would you consider Walt Whitman to be a representative poet of America?
4. Comment on the concept of death in the poetry of Emily Dickinson.
5. Examine the themes of sanity, madness, mental collapse in “I Felt a Funeral in My Brain”.
6. Evaluate Robert Frost as a modernist poet with reference to “After Apple Picking”.
7. Critically analyze the poem “Sunday Morning” by Wallace Stevens.

SUGGESTED READINGS

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10. Malcolm Bradbury. *The Modern American Novel*. London and New York: Penguin, 1983.

BLOCK – IV

UNITS: 13-16

DEATH OF A SALESMAN

BY

ARTHUR MILLER

CONTENT STRUCTURE:

Unit 13 (a): Introduction to Arthur Miller – Life and Works

Unit 13 (b): The ‘American Dream’

Unit 13 (c): Inspiration for the Play

Unit 14 (a): Storyline of the Play

Unit 14 (b): *Death of a Salesman* as a Modern Tragedy

Unit 15 (a): Illusion of the ‘American Dream’

Unit 15 (b): Flashback Technique

Unit 16 (a): Symbols and Motifs

Unit 16 (b): Willy Loman as a Tragic Hero

UNIT – 13

UNIT 13 (A): INTRODUCTION TO ARTHUR MILLER – LIFE AND WORKS

Arthur Miller was born in Harlem on October 17, 1915. His parents, Isidore and Augusta Miller were Polish immigrants. Miller's father had established a successful clothing store in America, so the family enjoyed wealth and prosperity until the Wall Street Crash of 1929. Financial hardship compelled the Miller family to move to Brooklyn in 1929.

Miller graduated from high school in New York in 1933. He was rejected by both Cornell University and the University of Michigan, and worked a variety of odd jobs—including as a host of a radio program—before the University of Michigan accepted him. He studied journalism at school and became the night editor of the Michigan Daily. Later, he began experimenting with theatre. He wrote plays for the Federal Theatre in 1939, after he left the University of Michigan. The Federal Theatre provided work for unemployed writers, actors, directors, and designers. But it was closed by the Congress late in 1939.

Miller's prolific writing career spans a period of over 60 years. During this time, Miller has written 26 plays, a novel entitled *Focus* (1945), several travel journals, a collection of short stories entitled *I Don't Need You Anymore* (1967), and an autobiography entitled *Timebends: A Life* (1987). Miller's play usually focusses on social issues and centres around an individual in a social dilemma or an individual at the mercy of society. Miller's first play, *No Villain*, produced in 1936, explores Marxist theory and inner conflicts through an individual facing ruin as a result of a strike. *Honors at Dawn* (1937) also centres around a strike and contrasting views of the economy but focuses on an individual's inability to express himself. *The Great Disobedience* (1938) makes a connection between the prison system and capitalism. *The Golden Years* (1940) tells the story of Cortes despoiling Mexico, as well as the effects of capitalism and fate on the individual. Miller produced two radio plays in 1941: *The Pussycat and the Expert Plumber Who Was a Man*, and *William Ireland's Confession*. Miller's third radio play, *The Four Freedoms*, was produced in 1942.

The Man Who Had All the Luck (1944) revolves around a person who believes he has no control over his life but is instead the victim of chance. *All My Sons* (1947) explores the effect of past

decisions on the present and future of the individual. *Death of a Salesman* (1949) addresses the loss of identity, as well as a man's inability to accept change within himself and society. *The Crucible* (1953) re-creates the Salem witch trials, focusing on paranoid hysteria as well as the individual's struggle to remain true to ideals and convictions. *A View from the Bridge* (1955) details three people and their experiences in crime. *After the Fall* (1964) focuses on betrayal as a trait of humanity. *Incident at Vichy* (1964) confronts a person's struggle with guilt and responsibility. *The Price* (1968) tells the story of an individual confronted with free will and the burden of responsibility. *Fame* (1970) tells the story of a famous playwright who is confronted but not recognized. *The American Clock* (1980) focuses on the Depression and its effects on the individual, while *Elegy for a Lady* (1982) addresses death and its effects on relationships. *Some Kind of Love Story* (1982) centres on society and the corruption of justice. *The Ride Down Mountain Morgan* (1991) centres around a man who believes he can obtain everything he wants. *The Last Yankee* (1993) explores the changing needs of individuals and the resulting tension that arises within a marriage. *Broken Glass* (1994) tells the story of individuals using denial as a tool to escape pain. Miller also wrote the screenplay for the movie version of *The Crucible*, which was produced in 1996.

Miller has received numerous honours and awards throughout his career. Miller's accolades include the Michigan's Avery Hopwood Award, 1936 and 1937; the Theatre Guild's Bureau of New Plays Award, 1937; the New York Drama Critic's Circle Award, 1947; the Pulitzer Prize, 1949; the New York Drama Critic's Circle Award, 1949; the Antoinette Perry and Donaldson Awards, 1953; and the Gold Medal for Drama by the National Institutes of Arts and Letters, 1959. Miller was also elected president of PEN (Poets, Essayists, and Novelists) in 1965.

UNIT 13 (B): THE 'AMERICAN DREAM'

The term "American Dream" is generally defined as the opportunity to achieve success in America through hard work. American Dream gives every citizen an opportunity and the chance to live a life with some decency, some dignity and a chance for some self-respect. American Dream forms its base on the history of the immigrants from Europe, when the Puritan Fathers came to America in 1630. The Puritans who took root in the New World were open to the visions that humanity could be reformed in a way that would display God's work in man-

this faith in reform became the central legacy of American Protestantism in New World and the foundation of the American Dream. Most importantly, American life was reformed by the conceptions of community and morality central to the Puritan worldview.

The American Dream is rooted in the *U.S. Declaration of Independence*, where Thomas Jefferson wrote “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” The living dream, that is the Declaration, couples life and liberty with happiness, against the notion of materialism, seemingly, because pursuing physical possessions are momentary and do not support the true definition of freedom and opportunity to better one’s character. The term ‘American Dream’ was coined by historian James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America* (1931) and in an article published in the New York Times. He defines the American Dream as the dream of an individual to get a better, deeper, richer life. However, the American Dream soon took a materialistic turn and it was believed that everyone has the opportunity to achieve the American Dream depending on how much effort they put in to make more wealth and how fortunate they are.

UNIT 13 (C): INSPIRATION FOR THE PLAY

In his autobiography *Timebends*, Miller related that he found inspiration for the play in his own life. Miller based Willy Loman largely on his own uncle, Manny Newman. Miller described Newman as a man who was a competitor at all times, in all things, and at every moment. Miller said that his uncle “saw my brother and I running neck and neck with his two sons [Buddy and Abby] in some horse race [for success] that never stopped in his mind.”

Manny’s son Buddy, like Biff in Miller’s play, was a sports hero, and like Happy Loman, popular with the girls. And like Biff, Buddy never made it to college because he failed to study in high school. In addition, Miller’s relationship with his cousins was similar to Bernard’s relationship with Biff and Happy in *Salesman*. As Miller stated: “As fanatic as I was about sports, my ability was not to be compared to [Manny’s] sons. Since I was gangly and unhandsome, I lacked their promise. When I stopped by I always had to expect some kind of insinuation of my entire life’s probable failure, even before I was sixteen.” In *Timebends*, Miller described Manny’s wife as the one who bore the cross for them all. One can easily see this woman honoured in the character of Linda Loman.

In fact, Miller stated that the writing of the play began in the winter of 1947 after a chance meeting he had with his uncle outside the Colonial Theatre in Boston, where his *All My Sons* was having its pre-Broadway preview. Miller described that meeting in this way: “I could see his grim hotel room behind him, the long trip up from New York in his little car, the hopeless hope of the day’s business. Without so much as acknowledging my greeting he said, “Buddy is doing very well.” Because he was so deeply involved in the production of *All My Sons*, Miller did not give the meeting with his uncle more than a passing thought, but its memory hung in his mind. In fact, Miller described the event as the spark that brought him back to an idea for a play about a salesman that he had ten years previously - an idea that he had written as a short story. In April 1948, he drove up to his Connecticut farm and began to write the play that would become *Death of a Salesman*. From those humble beginnings, one of American theatre’s most famous plays took shape.

UNIT – 14

UNIT 14 (A): STORYLINE OF THE PLAY

Death of a Salesman is a play in “two acts and a requiem” by Arthur Miller, written in 1948 and produced in 1949. Miller won a Pulitzer Prize for the work, which he described as “the tragedy of a man who gave his life, or sold it” in pursuit of the American Dream.

The play addresses loss of identity and a man’s inability to accept change within himself and society. The play is a montage of memories, dreams, confrontations, and arguments, all of which make up the last 24 hours of Willy Loman’s life. The play concludes with Willy’s suicide and subsequent funeral.

The play takes place in New York and Boston. The action begins in the home of Willy Loman, an aging salesman who has just returned from a road trip. Willy is having difficulty remembering events, as well as distinguishing the present from his memories of the past. His wife, Linda, suggests that he request a job in New York rather than travel each week. Linda and Willy argue about their oldest son Biff.

Biff and his brother, Happy, overhear Willy talking to himself. Biff learns that Willy is usually talking to him (Biff) during these private reveries. Biff and Happy discuss women and the

future. Both are dissatisfied with their jobs: Biff is discontent working for someone else, and Happy cannot be promoted until the merchandise manager dies. They contemplate buying a ranch and working together.

Willy remembers a conversation with Linda in which he inflates his earnings but is then forced to admit he has exaggerated when Linda calculates his commission. Willy recalls complaining about his appearance and remembers Linda assuring him that he is attractive. At this point, Willy's memories begin to blend together. While he is reliving his conversation with Linda, he begins to remember his conversation with the Woman (a woman with whom he had an affair). He is unable to separate memories of Linda from the Woman.

The play continues in the present with his neighbour Charley coming over to play cards. However, Uncle Ben appears to Willy while he is playing cards with Charley, and Willy relives an old conversation with Ben while simultaneously talking to Charley. As a result, Willy becomes confused by the two different "discussions" he is having—one in the present, one in the past—and he accuses Charley of cheating. After Charley leaves, Willy relives Ben's visit and asks Ben for advice because he feels insecure since he did not really know his own father. Willy also remembers instructing Biff and Happy to steal some supplies from the construction site in order to remodel the porch so that he can impress Ben.

The play once again returns to the present, in which Biff and Happy talk with Linda about Willy. Biff and Happy learn that Willy is on straight commission and has been borrowing money from Charley in order to pay bills. Linda criticizes her sons for abandoning their father in order to pursue their own selfish desires, and she gives Biff a choice: "Respect your father or do not come home." Biff decides to stay in New York, but he reminds Linda that Willy threw him out of the house. He also tells Linda that Willy is a "fake." It is at this point that Linda informs her sons that Willy is suicidal. Willy overhears his wife and sons talking, and he and Biff argue. When Happy describes Biff's plan to open his own business, Willy directs Biff on what to do during his interview with Bill Oliver. Willy remembers Biff's football games. Before Linda and Willy go to bed, Linda questions Willy: She wants to know what Biff is holding against him, but Willy refuses to answer. Biff removes the rubber tubing Willy hid behind the heater.

The next morning Willy prepares to visit his boss Howard to ask him for a job in New York. During the meeting, Howard informs Willy that there are no positions available in New York. Willy reminds Howard that he named him, and he was a very successful salesman when he

worked for Howard's father. Howard remains impassive and instead fires him. Upon being fired, Willy begins freefalling into his memories of the past. Willy recalls Ben's visit once again. This time, Willy asks for advice because things are not going as he planned. He remembers Ben offering him a job in Alaska. He accepts, but Linda intervenes and reminds him of Dave Singleman. Willy shifts from his memory of Ben to Biff's last football game. Willy recalls Charley pretending he is unaware of Biff's game, and this infuriates Willy. Willy's daydream ends when he arrives at Charley's office.

Bernard is waiting for Charley in his office. Willy and Bernard discuss Biff and consider possible reasons for his lack of motivation and success. Bernard says Biff changed right after high school when he visited Willy in Boston. Bernard questions Willy about what happened when Biff went to visit him. Willy becomes defensive. Bernard is on his way to present a case before the Supreme Court. Bernard's success both pleases and upsets Willy. Charley gives Willy money for his insurance payment and offers him a job, an offer that Willy refuses.

At a restaurant where Willy, Biff, and Happy are to meet, Happy flirts with a young prostitute, and Biff is upset because Oliver did not remember him. Then Biff realizes that he was never a salesman for Oliver; instead, he was a shipping clerk. Willy tells his sons that he has been fired. Biff attempts to explain what happened with Oliver (after seeing Oliver, Biff sneaked back into his office and stole Oliver's pen); however, Willy is reliving the past, recalling Bernard informing Linda that Biff has failed math and will not graduate. Willy then remembers Bernard telling her Biff has taken a train to Boston.

Willy relives the time when Biff finds out about Willy's affair with the Woman: Biff comes to Willy's hotel room in Boston to tell Willy that he will not graduate unless Willy can convince Mr. Birnbaum to pass him. Willy recalls his own desperate attempts to hide the Woman in the bathroom. When the Woman comes out of the bathroom with Biff in the room, Willy's plan to conceal the affair is ruined. Willy's final memory is of Biff calling him a "fake" before walking out the door.

The play continues in the present when Stanley reappears, and Willy realizes he is actually still in the restaurant. Willy returns home and begins building a garden, even though it is night. Linda throws Happy and Biff out of the house. Ben appears to Willy while he is planting seeds. At this point, Willy does not remember a previous conversation with Ben, as he does several times earlier in the play. Instead, he and Ben discuss his plan to commit suicide. Willy and Ben

converse in the present, but they are talking about the future. Ben warns Willy that the insurance company might refuse to pay a settlement and Biff might never forgive him.

Biff approaches Willy in the garden to tell him he is leaving home for good. Biff and Willy argue, and Biff confronts Willy with the rubber hose, saying he will not pity him if he commits suicide. According to Biff, the Lomans have never been truthful with one another or themselves. Biff believes that he and Willy are ordinary people who can easily be replaced. Biff and Willy reconcile. Ben reappears to Willy and reminds him of the insurance policy. Willy drives away. The Lomans, Charley, and Bernard gather at Willy's grave. The family reacts in different ways – Happy is angry; Charley believes that the job has destroyed Willy. Biff knows that he has had the “wrong dream”. The scene ends with Linda who cannot understand why he has done it when they have just made the final payment on the house and are “free and clear.”

Death of a Salesman is considered an artistic masterpiece and became a turning point in Arthur Miller’s career as a writer. Willy Loman, the protagonist of the play, has become a symbol of the common man throughout the world. Even today, after the play’s first production, audiences see themselves or someone they know in the character of Willy, as he tries but fails to achieve the American Dream of material success and prosperity. The play has been structured “expressionistically”, in that, Miller broke down conventional constraints of time and place traditionally observed in theatre, and moved the audience in and out of Willy’s past and then into the present and then back in the past again, as Willy shuttles between the dreams and promises of his past and the harsh reality of the present. The play carries the audience into Willy’s mind, to expose his loneliness, his needs, and his struggle to establish his significance in the world.

UNIT 14 (B): *DEATH OF A SALESMAN* AS A MODERN TRAGEDY

“Unlike the drama by Sophocles, Shakespeare and Lorca, Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* is a tragedy set in our characters who, however, we regard that quality of their thought speak in our own languages and with our own peculiar accents.” These lines from Beirman, Hart and Johnson, define Arthur Miller’s tragedy *Death of a Salesman* in a beautiful way. It is a tragedy which is different from Aristotelian concept. In his masterpiece, *The Poetics*, Aristotle defines

tragedy as imitation of an action. It must have a beginning, middle and end. The function of tragedy is to arouse the emotions of pity and fear. The best tragic plot is one which shows a good man suffering as a consequence of some error or Hamartia, on his own part. The plot must have three unities of time, place and action. But *Death of a Salesman* is a tragedy, different from the classical and Elizabethan tragedies as its hero Willy Loman does not belong to a noble family. He is an everyman caught within the whirlpool of American myth of success.

Willy Loman is the protagonist of the play. But he is not as Aristotle defines his tragic hero. The character of Willy Loman is not from high rank. But Willy is a common man. He is a modern American salesman who is suffering from economic and social insecurity. He nurses the illusion that in his old age, he will become a famous salesman. And in the image of his illusions and false beliefs, he brings up his children. He never allows his sons to face reality. His admiration Dave Singleman's prolonged success illustrates his obsession with being successful. He says,

“And when I saw that, I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want. ‘cause what could be more satisfying than to be able to go at the age of eighty four, into twenty or thirty different cities, and pick up a phone, and be remembered and loved and helped by so many different people?”

Yet he wins our admiration because he knows his course of action. He is a representative of the whole mass of the American civilization. He is the symbol of increasing urbanization at the cost of man's mental peace. He represents what civilization, artificiality and the blind chase for success is doing to every sensitive soul. His ideals and dreams are constantly being stepped on. His massive dreams and his achievement form a ridiculous contrast. Willy has failed at a business as well as a father. Willy imagines and always boasts of his being well-liked by a lot of people. Ironically his funeral is attended by nobody except his friend Charley and his son Bernard. Miller writes, “I did not write *Death of a Salesman* to announce some new American man or an old American man, Willy Loman is, we think, a person who embodies in himself some of the most terrible conflicts running through the streets of America today.”

Aristotle says, “tragic hero is a person who must evoke a sense of pity and fear.” He is considered a man of misfortune that comes to him through error of judgement or *hamartia*. This play arouses pity but no fear. Willy Loman is too little and passive to play the tragic hero. Some critics agree that catharsis reconciles or persuades to disregard, precisely those material

conditions which the play calls our attention to. Miller believes that the common man is apt as a subject for tragedy. The whole concern of the play is competition, success and money in the materialistic sense. Willy is a man of flaws. His problems are basic and are faced by the common people. He makes false choices in life and prepares his own destruction. “Attention, attention must be paid such a person”, says his wife Linda to her sons when she recognizes the depth of his anguish. The play persuades to pay attention to the tragedy of this victim of the American social set up. Miller’s depiction of the truth of the individual psyche and also of the world around the individual is certainly noticeable. He writes, “I hope I have made one thing clear to this point- and it is that society is inside of man and man is inside of society, and you cannot even create a truth fully drawn psychological entity on the stage until you understand his social relations and their power to make him what he is and to prevent him from being what he is not.”

Miller adopts the structure in which an explosive situation is both explained and brought to a crisis by the gradual revelation of something which has happened in the past. Willy makes one false move one after another in pursuit of success. Willy, Biff, Happy and Linda –all characters are unable to cope with the competition. When Biff makes him realize that Willy himself has been the cause of his son’s failure, destroy the strongest value in Will’s life and he commits suicide by smashing his car.

Unlike Shakespearean or Greek tragedies which begin with the hero’s ignorance but end with the hero’s achievement of self-knowledge, Willy does not achieve any self-knowledge and he remains the same. He has lofty dreams and ambitions, but does nothing to fulfil them. He wants so many things but all he manages to do is to suffer. His failure is not only due to the pressure of competitive system, but also due to his inability to tell the truth even to himself. He brings his sons up on false principles and ruins them also. He is too weak to face the harsh realities of life. He remains in utter ignorance throughout his life and dies with his illusions. M.W. Steinberg writes,

“While we may be prepared to accept the argument that a common man, that is one without rank, may achieve heroic stature, the tragic nature of *Death of a Salesman* does not stem from this possibility. Willy Loman fails to gain this size. He falls a victim of the society. His moments of clear self knowledge are few...”

There is also a conflict between man and his family, between man and his society, between man and god, between man and his dreams as well as within man himself. It is through his dialectics of intra family and social interactions that Miller has unveiled the illusive layers of the success along with Loman's subconscious and unconscious guilt and fear, as Linda explains,

“He drives seven hundred miles, and when he gets there, no one knows him and what goes through a man's mind driving seven hundred miles home without having earned a cent?” *Death of a Salesman* is a powerful diagnoses and a ruthless exposure of materialism, Industrialized America through the character of Willy Loman's inevitably choosing a path full of disastrous consequences. Any comparison between Willy and any other Greek tragic hero is highly debatable. Willy is here too weak to play tragic hero. It is a tragedy in the light of Miller's own views which is different from the classical and Elizabethan tragedies as its hero does not belong to a noble family and he is a common man who is representing the blind pursuit of American dream of success.

UNIT – 15

UNIT 15 (A): ILLUSION OF THE ‘AMERICAN DREAM’

Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* provides a vivid commentary on the American Dream. In the play, Miller criticizes the American materialism, and the self-delusion that people were afflicted with. His critique is not directed at the American Dream as such; rather it targets the greed that some people show in demonstrating their dreams for wealth and health. This is essentially provided through the character of Willy Loman, whose failure was mainly because of his illusion and pursuit of perfection.

Death of a Salesman narrates the story of Willy Loman, a salesman who, as a common man, has his dreams for prosperity and wealth. However, in having his own deluded version of the American Dream, Willy fails to cope with the changes in the business atmosphere after World War Two. Rather than coping with these changes, Loman sticks to traditional models represented in his father, who presents the ideals of tradition business. In this sense, Willy tries

to apply the principles that his father holds to a modern environment that no longer believes in these principles.

Prior to the time of *Death of a Salesman*, the American society was characterized by a strong sense of individualism. As Jim Cullen (2003) argues, the American society celebrated people “who, with nothing but pluck and ingenuity, created financial empires that towered over the national imagination” (60). However, by the time the play was published, and in the wake of the industrial progress that was witnessed, America was witnessing a radical shift in social and economic values. There was a considerable level of shift from individualism to social conformity. However, some groups, who lived in the frontier, clung to the old model, stressing the values of individualism on the expense of conformity.

As William Whyte (1951) explained, some Americans continued to “affirm the old faith as if nothing had really changed at all” (5). Willy Loman is an example of these people who were so orthodox in their view. He is unable to live his day. He lives in the past. He has succeeded in his business in the past; however, in the current time, he is unable to meet the parameters of success. He admits this conflict that he witnesses as he addresses his wife, Linda, saying: “You know, the trouble is, Linda, people don’t seem to take to me...I don’t know the reason for it, but they just pass me by” (Act-I. 732-733).

The major problem that Willy seems to suffer from and makes him out of context in his life is his adherence to the idea that one can succeed in business by imposing his personal perspective without heeding other concerns. He puts this clearly as he says: “The man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead” (Act -I. 646-8). This idea represents his traditionalism and taking his father as a model for him. In this regard, Ben tells Willy how their father used to sell the homemade flutes all over the country as a travelling salesman. He complains that: “We would start in Boston, and he’d toss the whole family into the wagon, and then drive the team right across the country” (Act-I. 1061-3).

In other words, Willy still clings to the model of the traditional frontier salesman whose idea of success relied on leaving the house for a long time and coming back with a large amount of money “riding on a smile and a shoeshine” (Requiem, 38). Interestingly enough, Miller employs some symbols that contribute to conveying the message of the play. For example, the car is used as a symbol for familial solidarity. That is why, once he sees his misery, Willy starts

to perceive that he is losing control over both his car and life. That is why, in an act of unconscious self-defence, Willy chooses to commit suicide by the car. It is as if he is trying to prove to himself that his life would end with a last act of control; control over his car. Ironically, realizing the failure of his father, Biff considers all Willy's teachings as lies. He proclaims, "we never told the truth for ten minutes in this house" (Act-II, 1588-9). However, Willy does not have the potential to confront the dilemma. So, he has no solution but to commit suicide. Steven Centola (1993) reprimands Willy's acts arguing that he "convinces himself that only his death can restore his prominence in his family's eyes and retrieve for him his lost sense of honor" (41). This concurs with Fred Ribkoff's (2000) idea in which he states that, "Driven by shame, (Willy) kills himself in order to preserve his dream of being 'well liked' and a successful father and salesman"(48). In the same vein, Louis Stagg (1994) dwells on the cowardice of Willy exhibited in his suicide, arguing that "Willy appears to see death as a means of avoiding the consequences of actions with which he can no longer cope" (53). The crux of Miller's point regarding the American Dream is that success and prosperity are better attained by facing the challenging situations of the reality of American life rather than romanticizing on fanciful dreams. In this regard, the play provides two models for success that contrast with the example of Willy; they are namely Ben and Charlie's. What is peculiar about Ben is that his personality combines elements of the past values as well as manifestations of modern tendency. This makes Ben quite capable of success within the industrial environment. Ben's understanding of the futility of rejecting modern requirements of life is reflected in his advice to Biff as he says: "Never fight fair with a stranger, boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way" (Act- 1. 1085- 6). In contrast, Willy is never able to understand this point. He sticks to the belief in strict individualism and quick success. Charlie, on the other hand, is the symbol of reason and logic. He keeps advising Willy for the benefit of his children, but, again and again, Willy is so stubborn. On the other hand, his rejection of Charlie's advice comes as part of the competition that he feels between them. As Gardner (1965) puts it, "(Willy's) acceptance would have been tantamount to admitting that Charlie's philosophy had proved to be the right one, and Willy simply isn't big enough a man to make such an admission" (320). In this sense, Miller beautifully provides different versions of the American dream represented in different characters.

The American Dream can be roughly viewed as the belief in the ability to attain whatever success wanted through hard work and dedication. This concept has many versions, which are represented in the play through several characters. Willy, for example, is an example on the

idealistic version of the dream that is based on fantasy and blind adherence to outdated principles of success. Ben, on the other hand, is a man who is able to combine elements of orthodox as well as modern values to attain success. In the same vein, Dave Singleman and Charlie are representative of modern business ideals of success. Willy is unable to follow the example of any of these men. Even his suicide is seen as a continuation for his dream and a need to see this actualized in his son, Biff. However, the ending of the play emphasizes the failure of Willy and his dreams. He has always been dreaming of having a big funeral when he dies. Ironically, nobody comes to his funeral as Linda has indicated.

Miller shows this failure of Willy not only in his clinging to past models, but even in his reference to mythological figures. In his advice to Biff and Happy, Willy says: "Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand, but when he gets out in the business world, y'understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him. That's why I thank Almighty God you're both built like Adonises" (Act -I. 642-6). This reference to Adonis is meant to show that all Willy's beliefs are based on unrealistic bases.

It should be noted that Miller's criticism of the American dream comes as part of his larger commentary on societal changes. As far as this play is concerned, Miller provides a perspective on the change in social values. In more particular terms, he shows how technology, advancement and capitalism may change human values. The American Dream is part of these values that changed because of development in life. Willy is unable to meet the changes, resulting in contradiction between individuals' values and social values. As Helene Koon (1983) says, "The clash between the old agrarian ideal and capitalistic enterprise is well documented in *Death of Salesman*" (82). To sum up, Miller's play does not criticize the American Dream as such. Rather, Miller directs his criticism at the dehumanization of people. He goes against the idea that advancement of human life changes human values. In the same vein, Miller is against the idea of greed. Willy's greedy version of American Dream makes him collapse. If he had a better vision of it, he might have succeeded. Ultimately, Miller is saying that the problem is not in the American Dream, rather, it is in our version of it; it is in the way we apply it.

UNIT 15 (B): THE FLASHBACK TECHNIQUE

In *Death of a Salesman*, Arthur Miller redefines flashbacks as a “mobile concurrency of the past and present.” Willy's memories are fragmented, being both real and imaginary since he has “destroyed boundaries between now and then.” By melding in the ghosts of the past (Ben) with the current ghosts of the present (Howard), Willy constructs new anecdotes of his life in order to give purpose and hope for the future.

Willy's memories reveal the source behind the mentality of being “well liked” as well as the origins of his insecurities. As a child, Willy grew up being part of a family whose father symbolised the true American Dream, of being both an innovator and a salesman during a pre-industrial age. Yet, his dream to strike gold causes Willy's father to abandon his family. Consequently, Ben follows in pursuit of him on a never-ending trip to Alaska. Furthermore, Willy adopts Ben as a role model in order to replace his father as a dominant male figure. By incorporating Ben into his life, Willy lives under the illusion that he has a mentor who provides advice during his moments of insecurity. He lives in a chasm of doubt with metaphors such as “how should I teach them?” and “I never had a chance to talk to him” dominating his thoughts. Therefore, these memories provide an escape for distressing events like his dismissal from the Wagner Company. He alleviates his distress and anxiety by making Ben an ally, someone who he can confide in and trusts deeply since Ben is regarded as a “success incarnate.” However, this is just a hyperbole because Willy is reductionist in analysing Ben's success. He only views Ben's success through his wealth and fame, ignoring any other elements like family as part of his achievements. Therefore, when Ben plants the suggestion that the “jungle is dark but full of diamonds”, ultimately this becomes an extended metaphor for suicide. Willy relies on Ben to guide him through the unknown and finally reach the place where “opportunity is tremendous.” Unfortunately, Ben is just a fantasy within his mind. Consequently, Willy's memories trigger him to follow Ben's advice, where suicide represents opportunity as well as a new lease on life.

From an expressionist perspective, Willy's memories are a fabrication of reality. He embellishes the truth with his own desires, the focal point being Biff and Happy. Initially, he achieves the title of a popular role model where his sons desire to be like him. Biff compliments Willy and exclaims “I'd love to go with you Dad”, suggesting that Willy not only has a stable

job but an admirable one. Gradually, Willy's sense of self disintegrates as he becomes too overconfident with his expertise. Instead of exposing his sons to reality, he keeps them in ignorance by constantly exaggerating their charms and minimising their flaws. Miller alludes to Greek mythology where Biff and Happy are "built like Adonises" to emphasise their attractiveness within society. Biff returns to reality by stating "I never got anywhere because you blew me with hot air", an extended metaphor displaying his realisation that appearances alone do not amount to success. Willy instils pride into the boys, to the point that they exceed society's laws. He euphemises Biff's theft of the football as 'initiative' and condones his 'borrowing' because he is captain of the team. Ironically, when Biff gets arrested by the watchman for stealing sand, he says 'I never taught that boy anything but good' which correlates to this flawed thinking that Biff's upbringing is standard of society. In fact, Biff lacks morals and a sense of virtue because he is disillusioned by the idea that he is above and beyond control. As a result, this dream abruptly comes to an end when the affair surfaces. Here, the affair becomes a prominent tragedy in Willy's life since it is the first time where Biff genuinely loses faith in Willy. Biff originally asserts that "if he saw the kind of man you are... I'm sure he'd come through", which assures Willy of his fatherly position. This is quickly juxtaposed with the disappointed tone of 'he wouldn't listen to you" since he is now aware that Willy's advice is just as fake as his loyalty to Linda. As a result, Willy's memories bring him closer to reality, making him aware that dismal events of the present are due to his mistakes in the past.

From a psychodynamic view, Willy's memories arise as a result of justifying the failure within his life. Willy's perspective of success is defined for him, where a true measure of a man is through wealth and reputation. Unconsciously, his memories become a defence mechanism to protect his ego from the reality that the American Dream is unattainable. The American Dream is a product of capitalism, achievable by only a few members of society. As a result, Willy overlooks his personal achievements like raising a family and being good in carpentry, ignoring the fact that he has achieved great things in his life. By not achieving the American standard of success, Willy pins the blame on himself via believing that he did not work hard enough to improve his life. However, he transfers the blame onto other people saying that "competition is maddening" and "population is out of control". This acts as euphemism, excusing his own inability to accept mistakes and improve on them, since he never confesses to the affair leading to Biff retaining a negative outlook on him. In reality, the population influx is composed of men just like him, striving to achieve success. Willy has always had 'competition' in life since he aspired to be "bigger than Uncle Charley". This shows that Willy does not base his success

on his own achievements, rather by comparing his success to others. Dreams for Willy, convince him that he is an essential part of society, being needed and useful within the community.

Overall, Willy utilises memories as a means of escape. Dreams provide solace for his deteriorating life, and create an illusion to preserve his ego. More importantly, the dreams refresh his will to live until Ben's last advice motivates him to end his life.

UNIT – 16

UNIT 16 (A): SYMBOLS AND MOTIFS

Symbolism is a device that uses symbols to represent something beyond the literal meaning. In *Death of a Salesman*, Miller uses symbols with great subtlety and effect. They are recurrent and thus help to structure the play. The play opens with references to cars. Cars are an American symbol of individual mobility, freedom, and social status. But Miller uses the positive American suggestions of this symbol in a negative and ironic manner. For Willy Loman a car offers geographical mobility but little freedom. At the beginning of the play he has come home, exhausted with driving the car. He has been driving himself off the road; his life has been a long competitive progression of futility and now, in his desperate tiredness, the car is going out of control and, like his life, is about to be wrecked. In the past, the car had been a status symbol and a centre of interest absorbing the activities of the male members of the family: Biff and Happy, under their father's boyish eagerness, had cleaned and polished the car in a manner which took on the proportions of a Sunday ritual. This past association of the car with family happiness and eager activity contrasts with the symbol of the car in the present, when its implications include mental and physical exhaustion, a means of committing suicide, and death. The symbol achieves its final intensity in the climax to the play when Willy drives his car out of the house into darkness and death.

The seeds exemplify Willy Loman's failure as a father to achieve success and wealth for his children to inherit. The temporary optimism at the beginning of Act II is conveyed partly by references to seeds and tools. Willy imagines that he can make seeds grow in his garden. Linda, with her womanly practicality, says: "That'd be wonderful. But not enough sun gets back there.

Nothing'll grow anymore." Seeds represent for Willy the opportunity to prove the worth of his labor, both as a salesman and a father. His desperate, nocturnal attempt to grow vegetables signifies his shame about barely being able to put food on the table and having nothing to leave his children when he passes. Willy feels that he has worked hard but fears that he will not be able to help his offspring any more than his own abandoning father helped him. The seeds also symbolize Willy's sense of failure with Biff. Despite the American Dream's formula for success, which Willy considers infallible, Willy's efforts to cultivate and nurture Biff went awry. Realizing that his all-American football star has turned into a lazy bum, Willy takes Biff's failure and lack of ambition as a reflection of his abilities as a father.

Diamonds signify wealth and prosperity, which justifies one's dedication and determination to succeed. To Willy, diamonds represent tangible wealth and, hence, both validation of one's labor (and life) and the ability to pass material goods on to one's offspring, two things that Willy desperately craves. Correlatively, diamonds, the discovery of which made Ben a fortune, symbolize Willy's failure as a salesman. Despite Willy's belief in the American Dream, a belief unwavering to the extent that he passed up the opportunity to go with Ben to Alaska, the Dream's promise of financial security has eluded Willy. At the end of the play, Ben encourages Willy to enter the "jungle" finally and retrieve this elusive diamond—that is, to kill himself for insurance money in order to make his life meaningful.

Willy's strange obsession with the condition of Linda's stockings foreshadows his later flashback to Biff's discovery of him and The Woman in their Boston hotel room. The stockings symbolize Willy's guilt and past mistakes that have haunted his hopes and dreams for a better future for his family. The stockings act as psychological torture for Willy, as they remind him of how he betrayed his family by having an affair with another woman. The teenage Biff accuses Willy of giving away Linda's stockings to The Woman. Stockings assume a metaphorical weight as the symbol of betrayal and sexual infidelity. New stockings are important for both Willy's pride in being financially successful and thus able to provide for his family and for Willy's ability to ease his guilt about, and suppress the memory of, his betrayal of Linda and Biff.

The rubber hose is a stage prop that reminds the audience of Willy's desperate attempts at suicide. He has apparently attempted to kill himself by inhaling gas, which is, ironically, the very substance essential to one of the most basic elements with which he must equip his home

for his family's health and comfort—heat. Literal death by inhaling gas parallels the metaphorical death that Willy feels in his struggle to afford such a basic necessity.

The play begins and ends with the melody of a flute, and music reappears many times throughout the story. Willy's father, who deserted Willy as a child, was a flute maker and salesman. The instrument, which is "small and fine, telling of grass and trees and the horizon" symbolizes the past for Willy—a connection to nature as well as his sense of abandonment and longing for a deep connection with family. The flute also serves as a signal to the audience that Willy's memories are near and that the past is about to overtake the present.

Willy's tendency to mythologize people contributes to his deluded understanding of the world. He speaks of Dave Singleman as a legend and imagines that his death must have been beautifully noble. Willy compares Biff and Happy to the mythic Greek figures Adonis and Hercules because he believes that his sons are pinnacles of "personal attractiveness" and power through "well liked"-ness; to him, they seem the very incarnation of the American Dream. Willy's mythologizing proves quite near-sighted, however. Willy fails to realize the hopelessness of Singleman's lonely, on-the-job, on-the-road death. Trying to achieve what he considers to be Singleman's heroic status, Willy commits himself to a pathetic death and meaningless legacy (even if Willy's life insurance policy ends up paying off, Biff wants nothing to do with Willy's ambition for him). Similarly, neither Biff nor Happy ends up leading an ideal, godlike life; while Happy does believe in the American Dream, it seems likely that he will end up no better off than the decidedly ungodlike Willy.

UNIT 16 (B): WILLY LOMAN AS A TRAGIC HERO

Arthur Miller in his play *Death of a Salesman* questions the validity of the classical concepts of tragedy or tragic hero, derived from Aristotle, as the fall of a man of high rank or a man of great importance in the world. In fact, the play raises counter example to Aristotle's characterization of tragedy as the downfall of a great man. However, Willy Loman is not of "noble birth", quite the contrary he is a common man, though certainly has Hamartia, a tragic flaw or error in judgment, his downfall is that of an ordinary man (a "low man"). Loman's flaw comes down to a lack of self-knowledge like Sophocles's Oedipus in *Oedipus the King*.

However, Loman's downfall threatens not a city unlike Oedipus, but only a single family, the Lomans.

“In this age few tragedies are written. [...] For one reason or another, we are often held to be below tragedy, or tragedy above us. The inevitable conclusion is, of course, that the tragic mode is archaic, fit only for the very highly placed, the kings or the kingly, and where this admission is not made in so many words it is most often implied.” (Miller, 1949, pp. 3-7) Miller begins his essay *Tragedy and the Common Man* by asserting that there are no more tragedies and the modern man could not fit the archaic tragic mode, although he strongly believes that “the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were” (Miller, 1949, p. 3) by referring to modern psychiatry which bases its analysis upon classic formulations, such as Oedipus and Orestes complexes. Miller also claims that the tragic feeling is evoked when we are presented with a character that is even ready to give up his own life to secure personal dignity or his rightful position in the society.

In the 1930s the Great Depression, economics dominated politics and the American Dream turned into a nightmare. What once was the land of opportunity and hope became a land of desperation. In other words, the land of hope, optimism, and the symbol of prosperity became the land of despair. By the emergence of the World War II, the situation deteriorated, which inevitably influenced the lives of ordinary American people in a negative way. The situation of those people may be observed as a representative everyman, Willy Loman and his family. Miller being the best-known American playwrights after WWII draws reader's attention to the devastating effects of the economics and politics of the era on a fictional character that mostly represents a member of an ordinary American family with an American Dream/Nightmare. Loman was repressed and ignored in the capitalistic society. He tries to survive and be “noticed” like the other ordinary men in the society. . Linda tries to protect her husband from the negative effects of the system of Capitalism that enslaves and exploits Willy. As Willy is the victim of the system, Linda expresses her humanity protesting its outcome on the lives and psychology of ordinary people. Still, Willy runs after his ideals for reaching his goal as Uncle Ben, who is a representative of his ideals and fantasy, and who realized the American Dream. Willy likes to be respected and wants to become a star. He wants to get rid of his position as a “common man” and be rich. Miller observes the process of materialism, capitalism, and false success policies which bring disillusionment, isolation, and alienation.

Willy's sense of dignity is found in his family most notably in his son Biff. Willy transfers his dreams of being great onto Biff. Unfortunately, Biff proves to be a failure in the world. To regain this personal dignity, Willy commits suicide with a belief that his insurance money will make Biff "magnificent". In this sense, Miller (1974) defines tragedy as: "the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly" (894) and "his destruction in the attempt posits a wrong or an evil in his environment" (895). In fact, Willy's death becomes a "family drama", not a means of reaching the so-called success for the rest. Miller's play represents a democratization of the ancient form of tragedy; the play's protagonist is himself obsessed with the question of greatness, and his downfall arises directly from his misconception of himself as someone capable of greatness. Loman says; ". . .[b]ecause the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want". (Act 1, 25-6) In other words, Loman's major tragic flaw was that he was not true to himself. Loman coverts the wrong dream. He believes that the American Dream is to be rich. He thinks that the way to get rich is obtained either by having a good personality or "being liked", but not through hard work. In fact, as Biff recurrently reminds the audience the fact that Loman "is liked, but he's not well liked" (Act 1, 25) and in the Requiem, Biff states that Loman "had the wrong dreams. . . . He never knew who he was" (1949, 111).

Willy does not actually have one tragic flaw, but he has many (disloyal, head, strong, short tempered, proud, false etc). He has an unwillingness to submit passively to the established order and values. As Aristotle declares; the tragic hero learns from his mistake leading him to self-awareness. This is not the case with Willy. He is unable to see the path to full awareness and self-realization. He is unable to learn from his mistake. The audience do not feel "pity and fear" for this character as Aristotle defined the case as one of the characteristics of a tragedy. Willy commits suicide even though they are free of debt for the mortgage they have been paying for years. Linda says, "I can't understand it. At this time especially. First time in thirty-five years we were just about free and clear. He only needed a little salary. He was even finished with the dentist" (Miller, 1949, 110). Willy excites pity only in the sense of his defeat and his inability to become a success or teach his children how to make their lives successful.

Willy dies for the cause of his so-called "American ideal". In this sense, as Leech argues that Willie's concern is sociological rather than universal: "he is the victim of the American dream rather than of the human condition" (Leech, 1969, p. 38) Happy, who is not as realistic as his brother Biff, draws attention to Willy's dreams that never came true: ". . . I'm gonna show you and everybody else that Willy Loman did not die in vain. He had a good dream. It's only dream

you can have – to come out number-one man. He fought it out here, and this is where I'm gonna win it for him.” (Miller, 1949, p. 111) Miller discusses “the concept of the ‘Tragic victory’, and “although a man’s death is a terrifying thing, it can be an assertion of bravery”, as well. Bigsby (1987) interprets Loman’s suicide as “designed to liberate the next generation” (p. 167). As Miller points out a man who sacrifices himself for a cause should make the audience “feel some kind of elation” (Miller, 1982, p. Xxi) Miller points out “the possibility of victory” in tragedy. “Where pathos rules, where pathos is finally derived, a character has fought a battle he could not possibly have won”. The tragic hero is “the indestructible will of man to achieve his humanity” (Miller, 1974, p. 896) as demonstrated by Willy.

Arthur Miller emphasizes his character Willy Loman not as a tragic hero in classical tragedy, but as a modern day tragic hero and a pathetic tragic hero in 1940’s America who quests for self identity because of the harsh outcome of the commercialized world. Miller creates a hero of modernism with an influence from the social movements in his era. Thus, he revises both the classical tragedy and tragic hero to create his favourite subject of the modern-day tragedy. Lewis states that “Aristotelian concepts weigh heavily on an altered world” (1970, 47).

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ASSIGNMENTS

1. Write an essay explaining Willy's philosophy "Be liked and you will never want." How does this statement apply to Willy?
2. Analyze *Death of a Salesman* as a modern tragedy.
3. How does the play criticise the illusion of the American Dream?
4. Comment on the importance of the use of symbols in *Death of a Salesman*.
5. What influence does Willy Loman have on Happy and Biff?