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Indira Gandhi National Open University
School of Humanities

BEGE-106
Understanding Poetry
(Revised)

The American Poets-I

6

Understanding Poetry

(Revised)

BEGE 106

VI

The American Poets-I

(The Nineteenth Century)

R.W.Emerson, Walt Whitman, Edgar Allan Poe, H. W. Longfellow, and Emily Dickinson

School of Humanities
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Block

6

THE AMERICAN POETS-I

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INTRODUCTION TO BLOCK VI

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: AMERICAN POETRY IN THE COLONIAL ERA, THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Dear Students, you must have got used to reading the short essays in the Introductions to the blocks providing you perspectives on the period of literary history required to understand the poets and their works in the blocks better. In the present and the next block you will be reading the poetry of the United States of America. Read this essay with a pencil, rubber and sharpner ready at hand. I'm sure you would not forget to keep a good dictionary nearby. Make notes in the margin of the page so that you may be able later to revise more easily in a short span of time. Be ready to answer a few questions based on this 'Introduction' in Unit 31. So, let's start.

Late in the fifteenth century Columbus discovered America for the Spaniards and the Spanish people discovered gold mines there. In 1607 some hundred Englishmen and boys reached what they called Jamestown in present day Virginia. They were allured by the Spanish success but what they discovered was a hostile environment and if it had not been for the resourcefulness of John Smith (1580 - 1631) the colony at Jamestown would have perished. As president of Jamestown colony he oversaw its expansion. However, an injury forced him to return to England in 1609. Smith was keen to explore further in the New World and so he contacted the Plymouth Company and with their help sailed in 1614 to the area he named New England. Smith mapped the coast and wrote about Virginia and New England which inspired others to rediscover these areas for themselves.

William Bradford (1590 – 1651) a Yorkshire man was a member of the **Separatist** movement within puritanism. In 1609 he left England and went to Holland in search of religious freedom. However, there were few economic opportunities for his people there. So in 1620 he organized an expedition of around 100 pilgrims to the New World. He helped draft the Mayflower compact aboard the ship and served as governor of the Plymouth Colony for all but five years from 1621 to 1656.

Among the original inhabitants of the present day United States were the Oneida, Powhatan, Pocahontas the Iroquois and many other tribes with their distinct identities. They had oral literature in the form of folk songs sung in ritual prayers and dance but little of all those have survived.

The earliest in the history of American poetry is that of the **Colonial** period written by the English migrants such as Bradford. A sample from his verse shows how his piety found expression in his poetry:

> From my years young in days of youth,
> God did make known to me his truth,
> And call'd me from his native place
> For to enjoy the means of grace.
> In wilderness he did me guide,
> And in strange lands for me provide.

William Bradford appears to have written these lines in old age for later in the poem he bids farewell to his people:

Farewell, dear children, whom I love,
Your better Father is above;
When I am gone, he can supply;
To him I leave you when I die.

He admonished his people in Plymouth colony to lead a life of piety.

The characteristic feature of American literature in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century was spiritual. **Anne Bradstreet** (1612 – 72) was one of the first poets of the American colony. She came at the age of 18 to Massachusetts Bay from England with her parents and husband along with other puritans. She bore eight children and wrote her poems while rearing them. Her poems were published in 1650 in England without her knowledge with the assistance of her brother-in-law John Woodbridge. The short title of the book was *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America*. It was the first volume of poetry written by a settler in the English colonies. Bradstreet called it an 'ill-formed offspring'. She revised her early works and wrote new poems which were published posthumously in 1678. 'The Author to her Book' is passionate but controlled in sentiments:

Thou ill-formed offspring of my feeble brain,
Who after birth didst by my side remain,
Till snatched from thence by friends, less wise than true,
Who thee abroad, exposed to public view,

Bradstreet called her work 'My rambling brat (in print)':

My rambling brat (in print) should mother call,
I cast thee by as one unfit for light,
Thy visage was so irksome in my sight;
Yet being my own, at length affection would
Thy blemishes amend, if so I could:

Bradstreet wrote in the manner of the English poet Francis Quarles (1592 – 1633) and the French Du Bartas (1544 – 90). Her 'Contemplations' is a long poem by an accomplished artist and her place as a poet remained unchallenged till the appearance of Emily Dickinson in the nineteenth century.

Michael Wigglesworth (1631 – 1705) was born in Yorkshire, England into a nonconformist family. When he was not yet seven his parents came to New England and settled on a farm in Connecticut. In 1653 Wigglesworth had a dream in which he saw God seated on His throne on the 'dreadful day of judgment' seperating the saved from the damned. It changed the course of his life as he decided to become a preacher. He wrote three influential poems: *The Day of Doom*, *Meat out of the Eater* and *God's controversy with New England*. Wigglesworth made literary history with the first work and its popularity was exceeded only by The Bible and Roger Williams's (c. 1603 – 83) *The New England Primer* (1683).

Edward Taylor (1642? – 1729), the most accomplished of the puritan poets, was like Bradstreet and Wigglesworth born in England. He grew up during the Puritan Commonwealth and the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell (1599 – 1653 – 1658). Taylor emigrated to Massachusetts in 1688 and entered Harvard College from where he graduated in 1671. He served as pastor of the church at Westfield, 100 miles west of Boston. He spent 58 years of his life on the edge of a 'vast and roaring wilderness' both as minister and physician. Taylor was largely unknown to his contemporaries as a poet. He did not let his poems get published for he feared that they would he considered too sensual for a clergyman. As a result he

remained forgotten until his manuscripts were discovered in the Yale University Library and finally published in the 1930's.

Taylor had read the Metaphysical poets such as John Donne and George Herbert who influenced his poetry. In his famous 'Huswifery' the spinning wheel is used as a metaphor for his desire to submit to god's will:

> Make me, O Lord, Thy Spinning Wheel complete,
> Thy Holy word my Distaff make for me.
> Make mine Affections Thy Swift Flyers neat
> And make my Soul Thy holy Spool to be.

Taylor's poems were closely connected to his office of a pastor. From 1682 to 1725 he wrote 217 *Preparatory Meditations*, poems that helped him prepare for the Lord's Supper and the sermon he had to deliver on that occasion. By common consent Taylor was the best poet of colonial America. Mention may also be made of Urian Oakes (c.1631 - 81) and her 'Elegy upon the Death of Reverend Mr Thomas', Kathleen Phillips and her 'Matchless Orinda' and Samuel Danforth's 'puzzle poems' (1647-9) among the poets of the Colonial period.

Seventeenth century American literature was pervaded by the spirits of puritanism and Calvinism and the triumphs and tribulations of the new habitation but in England it was the age of prose and reason, Sir Isaac Newton (1643 – 1727) and John Locke (1632 – 1704). Newton's *Principia Mathematica or Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (1687) demonstrated that the universe is not a mysterious toy in the hands of an inscrutable God but a mechanism working on rational principles that could be understood by any person. Locke influenced by the scientific spirit of the age pointed out that 'morality is capable of demonstration as well as mathematics.' The Calvinist belief in the innate depravity of man as a result of the original sin came under increasing attack. Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) called predestination and total depravity as religious fiction. He held that the human being at birth was a *tabula rasa*, a clean slate. It was man's experience of the world that made him good or bad. This scientific spirit found expression in the works and writings of Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin.

Thomas Jefferson (1743 -1826) was governor of Virginia (1779 – 81) and became the third president (1801 - 09) of the U.S. He was the principal author of the Declaration of Independence, of the 13 colonies, from Britain in 1776. In 1785 he succeeded Franklin as US minister in France and from 1797 to 1815 he was the president of the American Philosophical Society.

Benjamin Franklin (1706 – 90) was not only a statesman but also a scientist and technologist, an inventor of the stove named after him, bifocal spectacles and the lightning rod. Franklin advocated the 'reasonable science of virtue'.

Another important figure in eighteenth century America was Thomas Paine (1737 – 1809). He immigrated to America from England in 1774 on the advice of Franklin and in 1776 wrote *Common Sense* a 50-page pamphlet eloquently advocating independence for the British colonies in America. Franklin, Jefferson and Paine were called 'Reasoning unbelievers'. They doubted miracles and scriptural revelations. Men now turned from theism - belief in an omnipresent God of the Puritans – to a deistic god who appeared to have designed the universe according to scientific laws and then withdrawn from intervention in human affairs. God, according to the intellectuals of this age, was a great cosmic mechanic.

The poets of eighteenth century America took their inspiration from the poetries of John Dryden (1631 – 1700) and Alexander Pope (1688 – 1744), the most prominent of the neo-classical poets, who wrote in imitation of ancient writers of Greece and Rome. American authors of the eighteenth century wished to recreate in America not a new Jerusalem or a new Eden but a new Athens and a new Rome. The theology of this age was as propounded by Pope in his *Essay on Man* (1732 - 34):

> Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,
> The proper study of mankind is man.

The *Zeitgeist* of the age of **Enlightenment** imbued the American poets such as Ebenezer Cooke, Philip Freneau and, Joel Barlow.

Ebenezer Cooke (c. 1665 – c.1732) was son of Andrew Cooke, a London merchant, and his wife Anne Bowyer. They had a daughter Anna. Ebenezer was born in England and went up to Cambridge. Andrew had landed property in Maryland and Ebenezer came to the New World to claim his inheritance. Ebenezer Cooke wrote, among other satirical pieces, *The Sot-weed Factor* published in London in 1708. A revised version was published in Annapolis in 1731. While the former is a scalding invective against the people in Maryland the latter shows much more understanding and sympathy for them. A couple of citations from the two texts will illustrate the point:

> This cruel this Inhospitable Shoar;
> But left abandon'd by the World to starve,
> May they sustain the Fate they well deserve;
> May they turn Savage, or as Indians Wild,
> From Trade, converse, and Happiness exil'd;
> Recreant to Heaven, may they adore the Sun,
> And into Pagan Superstitions run
> For Vengeance ripe ————
> May Wrath Divine then Lay those Regions wast
> Where no Man's Faithful, nor a Woman chast.

In place of this scurrility we read Cooke's unctious words in the 1731 version;

> And may that Land where Hospitality,
> Is every Planter's darling Quality,
> Be by each Trader kindly us'd
> And may no trader be abus'd;
> Then each of them shall deal with Pleasure,
> And each encrease the other's Treasure.

It appears that the first version of *The Sot-weed Factor* is that of a haughty young man gone back from Maryland. The second version was written by a person who has come back to live in Maryland and make it his home, sobered down by the vicissitudes of fortune keen to befriend his fellow compatriots.

The Dutch in 1619 were the first to bring African slaves to the American colony of Jamestown, Virginia where they were employed in the production of such lucrative crops as tobacco**.** **Phillis Wheateley** (1754? – 84) was picked by slave traders from her home in Africa when she was seven years of age and sold in the Boston slave market. There she was bought by one John Wheatley, a tailor, for his wife Susannah. She was given the name Phillis Wheatley and treated kindly at the Wheatley home. Under the tutoring of the Wheatley daughters Phillis learned to read and write. She read the Bible and began to write verse at the age of 13. She also read history, geography and astronomy. She read the classical

authors in the original and in translation but her favourite author was Terence (Publius Terentius Afer (born c. 195, Carthage - died 159 BCE in Greece at sea) a Roman comic dramatist born a slave.

In 1773 she accompanied one of the Wheatleys on a trip to England where her collection of 39 poems was published as *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773). It earned her great popularity in London where she was called the 'Sable Muse'. America's colonial agent in Britain, Benjamin Franklin, came to visit her. She gained the attention of even Voltaire who praised her poems as 'very good English verse'. Phillis was freed soon after her return to America where she married John Peters, another free Negro. Her last days were marred by family disruptions, disease and deaths of her children. She died in Boston in obscurity at the early age of thirty.

Phillis Wheatley was the first important Afro-American poet remarkable for her poetry in an age when few women were educated, let alone an African American. She wrote about her blackness:

> Remember,*Christains*, *Negroes* black as *Cain*,
> May be refin'd and join th' angelic train.

Wheatley, well versed in the Bible, used Biblical Illusions quite frequently. Cain was the slayer of Abel (Genesis 4: 1-15) and sometimes seen as the origin of the Negro.

In 'On being brought from Africa to America' (1773) she said that her bringing over to America was a boon:

> 'T was mercy brought me from my Pagan land,
> Taught my benighted soul to understand
> That there's a God, that there' a *Saviour* too:
> Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.

However, she bemoaned,

> Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
> "Their colour is a diabolic dye."

Wheatley wrote in heroic couplet in the eighteenth century on varied subjects. Her poems include ' On imagination', 'To his Excellency George Washington', 'On Virtue', 'To the University of Cambridge in New England', 'An Hymn to Evening' and, 'An hymn to Morning'. She consoled a fellow negro slave painter in Boston with prospects in Heaven:

> But when these shades of time are chased away,
> And dankness ends in everlasting day,
> On what seraphic pinions shall we move,
> And view the landscapes in the realms above?

Wheatley reassures Moorhead the black painter,

> There shall thy tongue in hean'nly murmurs flow,
> And there my muse with heav'nly transport glow;
> No more to tell of Damon's tender sighs;
> Or rising radiance of Aurora's eyes,
> For nobler themes demand a nobler strain,
> And purer language on th' ethereal plain.

Wheatley's poetry is full of classical allusions. Here she alludes to 'Damon', a singer in the *Ecologues* of Virgil (70 – 19 BCE) and, 'Aurora' the Roman goddess of dawn.

Philip Freneau (1752 – 1832), unlike Cooke and Wheatley, was born into a family of French Protestants – Huguenots – in New York. He was the eldest of the five children of Pierre Fresnau and his Scottish wife. Philip entered the college of New Jersey, now Princeton University, as a sophomore in 1768 where James Madison (1751 – 1836) the fourth president of the U.S. was his friend and roommate. Madison soon recognized Freneau as a formidable adversary and wielder of pen on the battlefields of the printed word. Freneau earned the title of the 'Poet of the Revolution' and is widely regarded even today as the 'Father of American Literature'.

Freneau distrusted politics but he wrote satires against the British in 1775 out of sheer patriotism. Next year he set sail for the West Indies where he learnt navigation and wrote on the beauty of nature. Then in 1778 all of sudden he returned to New Jersey and joined the militia and sailed the Atlantic as a captain. He was captured by the British and imprisoned for six weeks on 'The scorpion' a British prison- ship. He was released in an exchange of prisoners. After his release Freneau headed for Philadelphia. There he wrote scathing satires for the *Freeman's Journal* against the British sympathisers of the royalty.

Freneau's literary works are a fusion of neoclassicism and romanticism. On the one hand he used the diction, and poetic forms and deistic thought of the eighteenth century and on the other the sensuous imagery, adulation of nature and primitivism that became the hallmarks of American romanticism in the nineteenth century. 'The Power of Fancy' was written when Freneau was an undergraduate at Princeton. 'The House of Night, (1779) describes the death of 'Death' the last enemy according to the I Corinthians 15:26. The satirical vein in 'The House of Night' reminds us of Lord Byron's lampoon on George the third (1760 – 1815) in his *The Vision of Judgment.* Death in 'The House of Night' avows to leave the world to the care of George III:

> "Blame not on me the ravage to be made;
> Proclaim, - even Death abhors such woe to see;
> I'll quit the world, while decently I can,
> And leave the work to George my deputy." (ll. 69-72)

Byron too later pierced his jibe in George III's side;

> 'He ever warr'd with freedom and the free:
> Nations as men, home subjects, foreign foes,
> So that the utter'd the word liberty'.

Found George the Third their first opponent. (ll. 353 – 356)

Both, Philip Freneau's and Byron's poems borrow their character from the Spanish Francisco de Quevedo Y Villegas' (1580 – 1645) principal poem *Los Suenos* (i.e. the visions). All three consist of morbid and grotesque hell-scenes.

There are many references in Freneau's poetry to personages connected with the American War of Independence. He celebrated Tom Paine's *The Rights of Man* (1791) in his verse:

> Roused by the REASON of his manly page,
> Once more shall PAINE a listening world engage;
> From Reason's source, a bold reform he brings,
> In raising up mankind, he pulls down kings

(On Mr Paine's Rights of man, ll. 11 – 14)

And also wrote an elegy 'On the Death of Dr. Benjanin Franklin':

> When monarchs tumble to the ground,
> Successors easily are found:
> But matchless FRANKLIN! What a few
> Can hope to rival such as YOU,
> Who seized from kings their sceptered pride
> And turned the lightning darts aside.

Besides being a poet of the American Revolution Freneau wrote many poems on the sensuous aspects of nature such as 'The Wild Honey Suckle' (1786) 'The Hurricane' and 'On a Honey Bee drinking form a glass of wine and drowned therein (1809).

Philp Freneau also wrote and epic poem called *The Rising Glory of America* (1772) which like Timothy Dwight's *Greenfield Hill* (1794) and Joel Barlow's *The Vision of Columbus* (1787) later revised as *The Columbiad* (1807) celebrated the future of America unlike traditional epics that celebrate the past of a nation.

Joel Barlow (1754 – 1812) remembered today for 'The Hasty Pudding' (1793) was son of a Connecticut farmer. He went up to Yale College from where he graduated in 1778. Along with David Humphreys and John Trumbull and others, known as **Connecticut Wits** or **Hartford Wits,** Barlour wrote *The Anarchiad* (1786 – 87) a mock–epic poem that warned against the chaos that would ensue if a strong central government, as advocated by the Federalists such as Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay in the 85 essays on the proposed constitution of the United States published in 1787 – 88, was formed. The Connecticut Wits used the British model of the mock epic as a tool to satirize British culture and policies in the United States.

Officially the Revolutionary War against England ended in 1783 and from 1784 until 1865, when the Civil War (1861–'65) ended, the period is known as the **Antebellum** period. 'Ante' in Latin means 'before' and 'Bellum' is 'War'.

The most prominent of The American poets to succeed Philip Freneau was *William Cullen Bryant* (1794 –1878). Bryant's ancestors on both sides came to Massachusetts in the Mayflower. He was born at Cummington, Massachusetts and after receiving his early education at Williams College he went on to study law at Worthington and Bridgewater. He was admitted to the bar in 1815. Bryant was interested in poetry since his childhood and his first book of verse *The Embargo* (1808) was published when Bryant was only fourteen years of age. His most critically acclaimed, long poem was 'Thanatopsis' (1817). It had appeared in the *North American Review.* Some of his frequently anthologized poems are 'Lines to a Waterfowl', 'The Rivulet', 'The West Wind', 'The Forest Hymn' and 'The Fringed Gentian'.

Bryant moved to New York, soon after his marriage, where he began working for *New York Review* and the *New York Evening Post*. Bryant became editor of the latter in 1829 and remained in the post until his death, i.e. for five decades. Bryant wrote poetry throughout his life but James Russell Lowell remembered him 'as quiet, as cool, and as dignified./ As a smooth, silent iceberg, that never is ignified'.

The poets who dominated American poetry till the end of the nineteenth century were in the familiar company of William Cullen Bryant. They were called, the '**Fireside** or '**Schoolroom**' poets. The most prominent of the fireside poets **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's** (1807 – 82) *The Seaside and the Fireside* (1850) gave the school its name. Longfellow's popularity rested on his short

lyrical poems such as ‘The Psalm of Life’ (1838) and ‘The Jewish Cemetery at New Port’ (1854) and his long, and grandiloquent narratives *Evangeline, A Tale of Acadie* (1847) and above all *Hiawatha* (1855). The latter is based on an Ojibwa myth. Fifty thousand copies of the latter sold in two years. *The Courtship of Miles Standish* (1858) was even more successful and sold hugely in England. Longfellow was the first American poet to have been honoured with a bust in the Poet’s Corner in Westminster Abbey.

Longfellow belonged to the distinguished circle of New England’s **Brahmins** – a name derived from the priestly caste of the Hindus - to which also belonged **Oliver Wendell Holmes** (1809 – 94) and **James Russel Lowell** (1819 – 91). All three were professors at Harvard. Holmes was Professor of Anatomy. He gained national attention at twentyone as the author of ‘Old Ironsides’ the poem that saved the US frigate *Constitution* from demolition. It had defeated the British Guerrière in the War of 1812. The poem opens ironically:

Ay, tear the tattered ensign down
Long has it waved on high, to see
And many an eye has danced
That banner in the sky;
Beneath it rung the battle shout,
And burst the cannon’s roar; -
The meteor of the ocean air
Shall sweep the clouds no more,

Holmes was the first to apply the name ‘Brahmin’ to Upper-class New Englanders as the epitome of accomplishment and good taste.

James Russell Lowell, poet essayist and literary critic succeeded Longfellow as professor of literature at Harvard. He was the first editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* and also of the *North American Review*. His rhymed satire crackled with witty comments on the follies of his age. ‘There comes Poe’ wrote Lowell, ‘with his raven, like Barnaby Rudge’ – an allusion to Dickens’s character who owned a raven – ‘Three fifths of him genius and two fifths sheer fudge’, Lowell inveighed in the same vein against Poe:

Who has written some things quite the best of their kind,
But the heart somehow seems all squeezed out by the mind,

Most of the poetry of the **Fireside** poets was refined, civilized and, limited. George Santayna (1863 – 1952), a Spanish born US philosopher, in an article called ‘Genteel American Poetry’, printed in *The New Republic* (III, No. 30, May 29, 1915), succinctly pointed out its merits and limitations:

> It [the Poetry] modulated in obvious ways the honorable conventions of the society in which it arose. It was a simple, sweet, humane Protestant literature, grandmotherly in that sedate spectacled wonder with which it gazed at this terrible world and said how beautiful and how interesting it all was.

The greatest American poets of the nineteenth century were, of course, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Edgar Allan Poe and Emily Dickinson whom you will read in this block.

Amiya Bhushan Sharma

UNIT 26 RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Structure

26.0 Objectives
26.1 Introduction
26.2 Emerson: A Biographical Sketch
26.3 The Snow Storm
  26.3.1 Introduction
  26.3.2 The Text
  26.3.3 An Appreciation
26.4 Hamatreya
  26.4.1 Introduction
  26.4.2 The Text
  26.4.3 An Appreciation
26.5 Let Us Sum Up
26.6 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

26.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- critically analyse Emerson's life and work,
- explain Emerson's poetry against his cultural background,
- comment upon 'The Snow Storm' and
- appreciate the Importance of Indian scriptures in the study of a poem such as 'Hamatreya'.

26.1 INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to this block you read about the various poets writing in America in the Colonial, Enlightenment and the Antebellum periods of American Literature. You must have noticed that the earliest settlers in America were the Puritans and Calvinists, profoundly influenced by the Christian faith. As time passed by they got influenced by neo-classicism on the one hand and reason and commonsense on the other of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century European culture. Late in the eighteenth century the American colonies began to dislike their colonial status and on the continent the French rebelled against the *ancien regime*. In England poets such as William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge were writing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. They were later called the romantic poets. Romanticism began to influence poets in the United States also. However, no poet in America before Emerson had quite an international repute. Emerson's is a distinctly American voice. While reading this unit you should try to explore the uniqueness of Emerson's mind and art. Emerson was a world famous essayist. One of his essays 'The American Scholar' is appended to this block. You may like to read it.

26.2 EMERSON: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Emerson is foremost among the architects of American culture and a great influence on many of his contemporaries and leading later thinkers and poets in the US and Europe. He was born into a family of clergymen in the parsonage of the First Church on Summer Street in Boston, Massachusetts on May 25, 1803. His father Reverend William Emerson (1769 - 1811) was a Unitarian minister of the First Church and mother Ruth Haskins Emerson (1768 – 1853) was daughter of John Haskins Communicant of King's Chapel, Boston. Haskins came from a family of Anglicans, i.e. members of the Church of England. It was through his mother and her family that Anglican writers and thinkers such as Ralph Cudworth (1617 – '88), Robert Leighton, Jeremy Taylor (1613 – '67) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772 - 1834) came to exercise much influence on him.

A few months before John Haskins, Reverend William Emerson died on May 12, 1811, leaving Emerson to the care of Mary Moody Emerson (1774 - 1863), the latter's spinster sister. Emerson's mother and aunt took care of Ralph, the fourth and one of the eight children of Reverend Emerson and Ruth and one of only five to survive to maturity. Ruth later married Ezra Ripley. Mary, a religiously stern but lively person had her bed built in the shape of a coffin to remind her of her mortality. She took her duties seriously and declared that her brother's children 'were born to be educated'. In 1812 Emerson got admitted to the Boston Public Latin School and in 1817 entered Harvard College. He began writing his journals at Harvard. The *Journals* are considered the most remarkable account of moral and intellectual progress to appear in the US. Emerson did not distinguish himself as a student at Harvard, graduating thirtieth in a class of fiftynine. After his graduation in 1821 he began teaching school while preparing for part-time study at the Harvard Divinity School to which he was admitted in 1825. In 1826 he was licensed to preach in the Unitarian community but his strenuous regime and incipient lung disease necessitated his stay in the warm south – Georgia and Florida – and he was ordained three years later in the Unitarian ministry of the Second Church, of Increase (1639 - 1723) and Cotton Mather (1663 - 1728) fame, in Boston in 1829.

In the same year, i.e. 1829, he got married to Ellen Louisa Tucker and had the most vital emotional experience of his life. This marriage was short lived as Ellen died of tuberculosis on February 8, 1831. Her death shook him emotionally and Emerson began to look for support among the Methodists, Quakers and Swedenborgians in Boston. He also meditated in the White Mountains and wrote a hymn called 'Gnothi Seauton', Greek for 'Know thyself', an inscription over the door of the temple of Apollo at Delphi in ancient Greece. At the end of 'Gnothi Seauton' Emerson pointed out at the witness of the oversoul in the heart of man:

> Shall I ask wealth or power of God, who gave
> An image of himself to be my soul?
> As might swilling ocean ask a wave,
> Or the starred firmament a dying coal,
> For that which is in me lives in the whole.

In the wake of his long introspection after his wife's death Emerson's attitude towards Unitarianism changed. In his sermon of September 9, 1832 he pointed out at the anachronism of the Lord's Supper, an admission hated by his laity. It was drawn from Quaker sources. Emerson made his apostasy an excuse for his resignation from the ministry.

On the surface, Emerson's life was eventless. '[L]etters surely were the texture of [Emerson's] history' wrote Henry James (1843-1916) somewhat ironically. 'Passions, alternations, affairs, adventures had absolutely no part in it.' He went on,

> It stretched itself out in enviable quiet – a quiet in which we hear the jotting of the pencil in the notebook. It is a life for literature … fifty years of residence in the home of one's forefathers, pervaded by reading, by walking in the woods and the daily addition of sentence to sentence.

Emerson's Journal was the depository of his daily observations. From it came material for his lectures, poems and essays. Emerson earned his living by giving lectures at lyceums or community education centres in America. He made three lecture tours abroad. According to Ronald A Bosco Emerson delivered around fifteen hundred lectures between the mid-thirties to the 1870's. Later he wrote his essays based on these lectures. 'The American Scholar' which Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809 – '94) called 'our intellectual Declaration of Independence' was originally an address delivered under the aegis of Phi Beta Kappa. 'The logical English train a scholar as they train an engineer. Oxford is a Greek factory, as Wilton mills weave carpet and Sheffield grinds steel.' 'We have listened too long' Emerson said, 'to the courtly muses of Europe.' Emerson assured the American scholar 'if the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts and there abide, the huge world will come round to him.'

Emerson's major contributions to poetry were *Poems* (1846) and *May*-Day (1867). The first volume served as his visiting card on his lecture tour in England in 1846-47. Emerson's poems are gnomic or orphic just as his essays are aphoristic, full of world transforming insights and revelations but not connected by logic and reasoning. We may say that in his writings Emerson cared less for the logical development of his ideas and more for communicating the glimpses of revelations made to him in his encounters with nature. Emerson confessed in 'Each and All',

> Over me soared the eternal sky,
> Full of light and of deity;
> Again I saw again I heard,
> The rolling river the morning bird;
> Beauty through my senses stole;
> I yielded myself to the perfect whole.

Poetry, Emerson believed, helps us 'come out of a cave or cellar into open air.' Man is part of nature and truth and beauty when properly understood are not different entities.

Now that you have read a little bit about Emerson and his writings try to answer the questions in the following exercise. Some of the questions are based on the introduction to this block.

Self-check Exercise I

1) Write the names of three American poets under each category below:

   a) The Colonial Poets

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   ....

b) The Eighteenth Century Poets

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c) The Fireside Poets

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d) New England ‘Brahmins’

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2) Which essay of Emerson was called the declaration of independence of American letters and by whom?

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3) Briefly tell us about Emerson’s family profession.

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26.3 THE SNOW STORM

Now we are going to discuss one of Emerson’s poems. It would be a good idea to read the poem first and then the introduction to this section. Try to read the poem many times.

26.3.1 Introduction

Although Emerson wanted the American scholar to write about the American experience, its land and seasons, flora and fauna, and its people, paradoxically, he himself was profoundly under the influence of his English and European forbears. He remembered them in 'May-Day':

> There is no bard in all the choir,
> Not Homer's self, the poet sire,
> Wise Milton's odes of pensive pleasure,
> Or Shakspeare, whom no mind can measure,
> Nor Collins' verse of tender pain,
> Nor Byron's clarion of disdain,
> Scott, the delight of generous boys,
> Or Wordsworth, Pan's recording voice,—
> Not one of all can put in verse,
> Or to this presence could rehearse,
> The sights and voices ravishing
> The boy knew on the hills in Spring,

It is noticeable that Emerson wrote 'Shakespeare' without the medial 'e'. No matter how felicitous the European and English poets may have been, Emerson says, they did not know the ecstasy the 'boy knew on the hills in Spring.' 'Colleges and books' Emerson said, 'only copy the language which the field and the work-yard made.'

Emerson was akin to Wordsworth in seeing nature as a guide and philosopher. Wordsworth felt that nature, especially river Derwent, took care of him like a nurse. Derwent, he wrote in the first book of *The Prelude*,

> loved
> To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song,
> And, from his alder shades and rocky falls,
> And fords and shallows, sent a voice
> That flowed along my dream?

Wordsworth went on,

> For this, didst thou,
> O Derwent! Winding among grassy holms
> Where I was looking on, a babe in arms,
> Make ceaseless music that composed my thoughts
> To more than infant softness, giving me
> Amid the fretful dwellings of mankind
> A foretaste, a dim earnest, of the calm
> That nature breathes among the hills and groves.

Nature did not only impart sweet murmurs and 'softness' but also 'fear':

> Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
> Fostered alike by beauty and by fear:

Nature used its ministry of 'fear' when he stole the eggs of a raven, or took someone else's boat on Ullswater - an 'act of stealth'. A 'huge peak, … Upreared its head' and the 'grim shape / Towered up between [young Wordsworth] and the stars' and 'strode after [him]'.

In 'History' the first essay in the *First Series* of essays, Emerson pointed out that man's `body and … mind are invigorated by habits of conversation with nature.'

'The humble-bee and the pine warbler' he recorded in his *Journal*, 'seem to me proper objects of attention in these disastrous times.' Edward, Emerson's brother met an untimely death in Puerto Rico where he had gone in search of warmer climate in hope of his recovery from tuberculosis. Three years later, in 1837, Emerson recalled it in the opening lines of 'The Humble-Bee':

Burly dozing humblebee!
Where thou art is clime for me.
Let them sail for Porto Rique,
Far-off heats through seas to seek,
I will follow thee alone,
Thou animated torrid zone!

Emerson tells himself that he need not seek a warmer climate to alleviate his mood for the bumble-bee **is** the 'torrid zone' for him. He calls the bee,

Zig-zag steerer, desert-cheerer,
Let me chase thy waving lines,
Keep me nearer, me thy hearer,
Singing over shrubs and vines.

Emerson beckons the bumble-bee to allow him to come within the ear-shot of its hum because to live away from it is like death to him:

Voyager of light and noon,
Epicurean of June,
Wait I prithee, till I come
Within ear-shot of thy hum,—
All without is martyrdom.

Following the bumble-bee in its zig-zag course and listening to the humming of the bumble-bee soothes Emerson's troubled mind and alleviates him in his hours of despondency and depression,

When the fierce north-western blast
Cools sea and land so far and fast,
Thou already slumberest deep,—
Woe and want thou canst out-sleep,—
Want and woe which torture us,
Thy sleep makes ridiculous.

Emerson draws a lesson for himself from the bumble-bee's slumber. The bumble-bee hybernates when the weather is inclement for it. Emerson must also passively accept the loss of his brother Edward. Emerson and Wordsworth, although significantly different, show a remarkable degree of similarity in their attitude towards nature. Now let's read the text of 'The Snow Storm'.

26.3.2 The Text

Announced by all the trumpets of the sky,
Arrives the snow, and, driving o'er the fields,
Seems nowhere to alight: the whited air
Hides hills and woods, the river, and the heaven,
And veils the farmhouse at the garden's end.
The sled and traveler stopped, the courier's feet

Delayed, all friends shut out, the housemates sit
Around the radiant fireplace, enclosed
In a tumultuous privacy of storm.

Come see the north wind's masonry.
Out of an unseen quarry evermore
Furnished with tile, the fierce artificer
Curves his white bastions with projected roof
Round every windward stake, or tree, or door.
Speeding, the myriad-handed, his wild work
So fanciful, so savage, nought cares he
For number or proportion. Mockingly,
On coop or kennel he hangs Parian wreaths;
A swan-like form invests the hidden thorn;
Fills up the farmer's lane from wall to wall,
Maugre the farmer's sighs; and, at the gate,
A tapering turret overtops the work.
And when his hours are numbered, and the world
Is all his own, retiring, as he were not,
Leaves, when the sun appears, astonished Art
To mimic in slow structures, stone by stone,
Built in an age, the mad wind's night-work,
The frolic architecture of the snow.

26.3.3 An Appreciation

Along with 'The Rhodora', 'Days' and, the witty 'Fable' – 'The mountain and the squirrel' – 'The Snow Storm' is one of Emerson's most prominent nature poems. 'The Rhodora' was subtitled 'On Being Asked, Whence is the Flower?' R. A. Yoder, an Emerson critic, has suggested that 'The Snow Storm' should also have been subtitled 'On Being Asked, Wherefore is the Storm?' The point is that Emerson has a keen didactic purpose if not an overtly religious motif in his nature poems as well. 'The Snow Storm' combines with its love for nature his organic philosophy of art as he does in 'The Problem' and even that sprawling poem 'May-Day'.

'The Snow Storm' is a poem in two stanzas. The first describes the arrival of the storm, 'Announced by all the trumpets of the sky' and the blowing of the storm at high speed against trees and houses. The snow storm is in all its fury 'driving o'er the fields' appearing to stop nowhere. After allowing us to savour the audial and tactile images of the storm the poet goes on to present the vivid visual image,

the whited air
Hides hills and woods, the river, and the heaven,
And veils the farmhouse at the garden's end.

The snow storm is like an invading army under whose sway even the sledge stops as does the traveller and the busy courier. The force of the conqueror stops all; the friends are shut out. Human life comes to a stand still. However, the description of the devastating storm is closed off with an oxymoron – the figure of speech that effectively reconciles a seeming contradiction - in the image of the inmates of a house sitting in apprehensive peace around the 'radiant fireplace, enclosed / In a *tumultuous privacy* of storm'(emphasis added). Emerson's picture in words here reminds us of some of Rembrandt's pictures in colour. Horace (65 – 8 BCE), the Roman lyrist and author of *Ars Poetica* (8th BCE) held that a poem

is a picture in words just as a picture is a poem in colours. The phrase 'the housemates sit', at the end of the seventh enjambed line, without its rejet - word or phrase that completes the syntax – creates tension by the pause at the line-end and the suggestion to continue for the completion of the syntax and the meaning to the next.

At first sight 'The Snow Storm' suggests violence. However, Emerson's images in his poems suggest peace. In his poem on the rhodora, he first describes the flower in the forest spreading its charm upon 'the desert and the sluggish brook'.

In the first stanza of the 'The Rhodora' the images of the petals on the surface of the water in the pool and the birds washing themselves in it evoked by Emerson suggest peace:

> The purple petals, fallen in the pool,
> Made the black water with their beauty gay;
> Here might the red-bird come his plumes to cool,

The second half of 'The Rhodora' tries to explain the *raison d'etre* of the flower just as the second stanza of 'The Snow Storm' portrayed the work of the mighty agent of nature. Emerson's fond conjecture in 'The Rhodora' is 'The self-same Power that brought me there brought you.' Similarly, in the oriental poem 'Days' reminiscent of the mystic medieval Hindi poet Kabir's style of reasoning Emerson portrays 'days' as 'muffled and dumb like barefoot dervishes'. Days offer

> gifts after his will,
> Bread, kingdom, stars, and sky that holds them all.

but the poet in his 'pleached garden', or garden shaded with interwoven branches, took 'a few herbs and apples', i.e. a contemplative life. In a subtle manner Emerson brings the element of peace that passeth understanding in the second part of 'The Snow Storm' where he more elaborately describes the furious and terrifically constructive office of the snow storm as a master artist – painter, sculptor and architect.

In 'History' the opening essay in the *First Series* Emerson wrote,

> The Gothic church plainly originated in a rude adaptation of the forest trees with all their boughs to a festal or solemn arcade, as the bands among the cleft pillars still indicate the green withes that tied them.

Emerson saw Nature as a master artist and man as a copier of Nature's art. A little later in 'History' Emerson went on:

> The Gothic cathedral is a blossoming in stone, subdued by the insatiable demand of harmony in man. The mountain of granite blooms into an eternal flower, with the lightness and delicate finish, as well as the aerial proportions and perspective, of vegetable beauty.

Emerson believed that all arts, including architecture, have their origin in nature. In 'May-Day' Emerson looks at God as an artist with millions of hands,

> The million-handed sculptor moulds
> Quaintest bud and blossom folds,
> The million handed painter pours

Opal hues and purple dye;
Azaleas flush the island floors,
And the tints of heaven reply.

In his monumental works of art such as the Parthenon in Athens and the Pyramids at Giza man joins Nature as an artist. 'Earth proudly wears the Parthenon' and Morning opens her eyes, opines Emerson in 'The Problem' and 'To gaze upon the Pyramids'. Nature gave them, Emerson believed, the same status as she gave to the Andes and the Ararat:

And nature gladly gave them place,
Adopted them into her race,
And granted them an equal date
With Andes and with Ararat.

Ararat comprises two peaks on the Armenian plateau on which according to the Genesis (viii, 4) Noah's ark rested after the flood. The Andes are the mountain system running from north to south on the Pacific coast of South America. Emerson's choice of the mountains is significant. Both would be familiar to his nineteenth century American readers. The Parthenon and the Pyramid are equated with the Andes and the Ararat. However, Emerson believes,

These temples grew as grows the grass;
Art might obey but not surpass.

The long second stanza of 'The Snow Storm' states Emerson's this organic aesthetic in a more elaborate and forceful fashion.

With an opening end-stopped line – 'Come see the north wind's masonry.' - Emerson announces the subject of the second stanza in no uncertain terms. From a description of the fury of the snow storm in the first stanza Emerson now shifts his focus to the 'masonry' of the north wind. The poet presents before our eyes the work of the 'myriad-handed' 'fierce artificer' that brought 'tiles' from an unknown quarry and curved 'his white bastions with projected roof'. The bastion suggests a fortress. The bastion is an irregular pentagon shaped mass of brick- or stone-faced earthwork. The human work-man has to work slowly taking into account measure and proportion but the north wind's work is 'savage' and yet 'fanciful'. '[N]ought cares he / For number or proportion.' As if to mock at human vanity it, the north wind, not only adorns the bastions of the powerful but goes beyond it in covering the abodes of house birds and beasts – here dogs – 'coop or kennel' – with exotic wreaths sculpted from the marble quarried on the Greek island of Paros. Similarly the Hawthorn receives the gift of a 'swan-like form'. Emerson here appears to be in league with Wordsworth who in the 'Preface' of 1800 to the *Lyrical Ballads* had claimed to 'look steadily at [his] subject' but with a sense of the unity of creation and communion with nature. However, John Ruskin (1819-1900) in *Modern Painters* (1856) saw this habit of ascribing human emotions to nature as a kind of morbidity, a **pathetic fallacy**. Referring to Wordsworth's primrose in *Peter Bell* (written 1798, published 1819) Ruskin pointed out that he preferred the 'very plain and leafy fact' of the plant to those for whom 'the primrose is anything else than a primrose'.

After the middle of the second stanza and after having given us a feel of the fury Emerson prepares the reader for a slow-down by presenting before us the picture of the farmer's lane being snow carpeted despite 'the farmer's sigh'. Emerson resumes the picture of the force of the storm by presenting a picture of a 'turret' instead of a 'bastion'. But now the snow storm's work is over and when the sun

appears man witnesses the 'astonished art' of the snow storm and copies it in 'slow structures, stone by stone' which was, the 'mad wind's night-work, / The frolic architecture of the snow.' The last line is in iambic pentameter, the standard speech rhythm of English. It gently resolves the poem and brings us back to normal life after a 'Uriel' like vision. 'The highest art' said Abraham Lincoln (1809 – '65), 'is always the most religious, and the greatest artist is always the most devout person.' He could have been thinking about his compatriot, Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Self-check Exercise II

1) How does Emerson portray God as an artist in 'The Snow Storm'?

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....

2) What is an end stopped line in a poem? Give an example of an end-stopped line in 'The Snow Storm'.

....

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....

26.4 HAMATREYA

Generations of Indians have read 'Hamatreya' with engaging interest. You are familiar now with Emerson's life, thought and also poetry. Let's now engage with this poem 'Hamatreya' .

26.4.1 Introduction

Emerson, as we have seen, came from a family of pastors on both sides of his parents. But he was eclectic in temperament and in the course of his life evolved into a transcendentalist or free thinker or nature worshipper whichsoever way we wish to think of him. We can have a peep into his mind through 'The Bohemian Hymn':

In many forms we try
To utter God's infinity,
But the boundless hath no form,
And the universal Friend
Doth as far transcend
An angel as a worm.

The great Idea baffles wit,
Language falters under it,
It leaves the learned in the lurch;
Nor art, nor power, nor toil can find
The measure of the eternal Mind,
Nor hymn, nor prayer, nor church.

He was most unorthodox in his taste and did not hesitate to acquaint himself with

the world of Islam and Hinduism. He read Persian literature in German and the Hindu scriptures in English translation. The impact of the former can be seen in his poems such as 'From the Persian of Hafiz' in two parts and a long poem called 'Saadi' in which he proclaimed,

> Saadi ! so far thy words shall reach;
> Suns rise and set in Saadi's speech.

Emerson saw Allah opening innumerable doors before Saadi's eyes through which He poured upon him:

> Nor scour the seas, nor sift mankind,
> A poet or a friend to find;
> Behold, He watches at the door,
> Behold His shadow on the floor
> Open innumerable doors.
> The heaven where unveiled Allah pours
> The flood of truth, the flood of good,
> The seraph's and the cherub's food;
> Those doors are men; the pariah kind
> Admits thee to the perfect Mind.

Emerson was always ready to drink the nectar of spiritual enlightenment at whichsoever fount he could get it.

According to a note in his *Journal* in 1845 'Hamatreya' is based on a passage in the Vishnu Puran. 'Earth laughs' Emerson recorded, 'to behold her kings unable to effect the subjugation of themselves.' The poem was first published in his poetry collection entitled *Poems* (1847). The title of the poem 'Hamatreya' appears to be a compound of the 'hamadryad' of Greek mythology and Maitreya in several ancient Indian texts. Hamadryad is a nymph living and dying with the tree she inhabited. Maitreya, an interlocutor in Vishnu and Bhagvat Puranas was a rishi or sage, son of Kusarav and disciple of Parasar. Parasar's hymns are anthologized in the Rg-Ved. According to Yask's *Nirukt* Parasar was son of Vasistha. Parasar received the *Vishnu Puran* from Pulastya and taught it to Maitreya. Now let's read the text of Emerson's 'Hamatreya'.

26.4.2 The Text

> Bulkeley, Hunt, Willard, Hosmer, Meriam, Flint,
> Possessed the land which rendered to their toil
> Hay, corn, roots, hemp, flax, apples, wool, and wood.
> Each of these landlords walked amidst his farm,
> Saying, "'Tis mine, my children's and my name's.
> How sweet the west wind sounds in my own trees!
> How graceful climb those shadows on my hill!
> I fancy these pure waters and the flags
> Know me, as does my dog: we sympathize;
> And, I affirm, my actions smack of the soil."
>
> Where are these men? Asleep beneath their grounds:
> And strangers, fond as they, their furrows plough.
> Earth laughs in flowers, to see her boastful boys
> Earth-proud, proud of the earth which is not theirs;
> Who steer the plough, but cannot steer their feet

Clear of the grave.
They added ridge to valley, brook to pond,
And sighed for all that bounded their domain;
"This suits me for a pasture; that's my park;

We must have clay, lime, gravel, granite-ledge,
And misty lowland, where to go for peat.
The land is well,—lies fairly to the south.
'Tis good, when you have crossed the sea and back,
To find the sitfast acres where you left them."
Ah! the hot owner sees not Death, who adds
Him to his land, a lump of mould the more.
Hear what the Earth say:—

EARTH-SONG

"Mine and yours;
Mine, not yours.
Earth endures;
Stars abide—
Shine down in the old sea;
Old are the shores;
But where are old men?
I who have seen much,
Such have I never seen.

"The lawyer's deed
Ran sure,
In tail,
To them and to their heirs
Who shall succeed,
Without fail,
Forevermore.

"Here is the land,
Shaggy with wood,
With its old valley,
Mound and flood.
But the heritors?—
Fled like the flood's foam.
The lawyer and the laws,
And the kingdom,
Clean swept herefrom.

"They called me theirs,
Who so controlled me;
Yet every one
Wished to stay, and is gone.
How am I theirs,
If they cannot hold me,
But I hold them?"

When I heard the Earth-song

I was no longer brave;
My avarice cooled
Like lust in the chill of the grave.

26.4.3 An Appreciation

The centenary edition of Emerson's *Works* (1904) was edited by Emerson's son Edward Waldo Emerson. In the annotation to the poem Edward erroneously pointed out that 'Hamatreya' was an adaptation of a dialogue between Vishnu and Maitreya in the fourth book of *Vishnu Puran*. There Vishnu tells Maitreya that the kings who mistakenly considered themselves possessors of the earth had disappeared while the earth remained. Vishnu then chants the earth-song in which he laughs at the shortsightedness of the kings who were blind to their mortality. The conversation took place between Parashar the teacher and his disciple Maitreya. Also, it is not Vishnu but the Earth herself who preaches at the end of the fourth book in *Vishnu Puran*. In Tulsi Das's *Ramcharitmanas* the earth goes to Brahma in the form of a cow to complain against the iniquities on earth. In 'Hamatreya' in a familiar and usual conclusion to the narrative it is claimed that the listeners of the song would overcome their greed and ambition and attain peace and enlightenment. Ralph Waldo Emerson took this episode in the *Vishnu Puran* as a model and on its analogy wrote a poem on Yankee acquisitiveness and land greed.

'Hamatreya' has three parts, each in a distinct metre. The first part in 27 lines divided into three verse paragraphs of varying lengths loosely in iambic pentameter describes the vaunt and greed of the early Concord settlers. The second part, i.e. the 'Earth-Song', a counterpoint to the materialism of the previous section is somber in tone, unidentifiable in terms of traditional metre and irregular in rhyme scheme. It can be seen as an early example of free verse. The third part, a submissive admission by the disciple, is in iambic heptameter or lines of seven feet, as usual subdivided into stanzas of four and three feet lines. In the brief third part Emerson follows the convention in giving variety to his verse by introducing trochaic inversions, in the second foot of the first and the third foot of the third lines.

If 'Hamatreya' is read in the light of Indian scriptures such as the *Bhagvad Gita* we can understand it better. However, while the *Gita*, is a song in 700 *sloks* divided into eighteen chapters 'Hamatreya' is a brief lyric. Yet we notice that the latter begins by recalling the early land holders of Concord, Massachusetts:

Bulkeley, Hunt, Willard, Hosmer, Meriam, Flint

as it reads in the *Selected Poems* of 1876 or, as it read originally in 1846,

Minott, Lee, Willard, Hosmer, Meriam, Flint[.]

This reminds us of the litany of names in the early lines of the first chapter in the Gita. Duryodhan, son of Dhritrashtr and the heir apparent to the throne, goes to Guru Dron and wants him to look at the army of their enemy, the Pandavs, arranged by Dhrstdyumn, son of Drupad, king of Panchal. The chief among them are Yuyudhan, Virat, Dhrstketu, Cekitan, Purujit, Kuntibhoj, Saibya, Yudhamanyu, Uttamauja and Abhimanyu. Thereafter Duryodhan recounts the luminaries in their own army apart from the guru himself: Bhism, Karn, Krp, Asvatthama, Vikarn and Somdatti. According to Sanjay's narration of the event to his monarch, Bhism blew his conchshell after this introduction by Duryodhan and the ritual was followed by other generals on both sides.

Emerson called a poet 'the sayer, the namer.' They 'are natural sayers, sent into the world to the end of expression.' Neither in the *Gita* nor in `Hamatreya' is the inventory of names without value. For instance Duryodhan calls his men skilled in war and armed with many kinds of weapons:

nanasastraprahanah sarve yuddhavisardah

So does Emerson introduce his characters as possessors of the land which yielded to their toil

Hay, corn, roots, hemp, flax, apples, wool and wood.

Peter Bulkeley was Emerson's ancestor who helped establish the church at Concord. Incidentally, his third brother was called Robert Bulkeley (1807 – '59) and more often by his second name. Emerson did not decry the work of his ancestors. Emerson held that the poet 'stands among partial men for the complete man, and apprises us not of his wealth, but of the commonwealth' (`The Poet'). While mentioning the names of the earliest settlers of Concord Emerson was speaking like the national poet of America as when he wrote 'The Concord Hymn' on the occasion of the dedication of the monument commemorating the American Revolutionary War battles of Lexington and Concord:

On this green bank, by this soft stream,
We set today a votive stone;
That memory may their deed redeem,
When like our sires, our sons are gone.

Emerson reminds his compatriots of the 'embattled farmers' who 'fired the shots heard round the world' but combines it even in an epideictic poem the *ubi sunt* and *memento mori* motifs. The pride of the ancestors on their land is justified and appropriate just like the pride of kings who were men of action. The west wind sound in the trees growing on the farmer's land, the ascending shadows on his hill, the wild lilies, i.e. flags, looking towards him like his pet are just rewards for their hard work. Emerson not ironically but supportively quotes their words, 'I affirm, my actions smack [or taste] of the soil.' 'Action is with the scholar' said Emerson, 'subordinate, but it is essential. Without it he is not yet man. Without it thought can never ripen into truth.' ('The American Scholar').

Emerson was drawn towards, what he called, the 'organic aesthetic' of the American sculptor Horatio Greenough whose studio in Rome he visited in 1833. He believed like Greenough that we are all connected to one another and to nature at large without necessarily perceiving it and this sense of the whole is necessary to our sense of the beautiful and the good. `All are needed by each one' wrote Emerson, 'Nothing is fair or good alone.' 'Each and All' is a poem about this organic aesthetic:

Little thinks, in the field, yon red-cloaked clown,
Of thee from the hill-top looking down;
The heifer that lows in the upland farm,
Far-heard, lows not thine ear to charm;
The sexton, tolling his bell at noon,
Deems not that great Napoleon
Stops his horse, and lists with delight,
Whilst his files sweep round yon Alpine height;
Nor knowest thou what argument
Thy life to thy neighbor's creed has lent.
All are needed by each one;
Nothing is fair or good alone.

Emerson believed that beauty is a product of the whole and not of the unit. The sparrow's note is best appreciated when its song is heard in its own place in nature:

> I thought the sparrow's note from heaven,
> Singing at dawn on the alder bough;
> I brought him home, in his nest, at even;
> He sings the song, but it pleases not now,
> For I did not bring home the river and sky; —
> He sang to my ear, — they sang to my eye.

In the poem that stands at the head of his essay on 'Wealth' in *The Conduct of Life* Emerson went beyond the natural setting. He meditated upon the enormous canvas of time, of aeon, that produced nature. He wrote,

> And well the primal pioneer
> Knew the strong task to it assigned
> Patient through Heaven's enormous year
> To build in matter home for mind.

Emerson wants us to appreciate from different angles and perspectives the work of nature of which man is a part.

Emerson goes on adding concrete visual details to the expanding canvas of his ancestors in Concord. He gives us an inventory now of the wealth that they possess: clay, lime, gravel, granite and peat. The memorable image of the land remaining secure in their hand even during their absence is a telling and unforgettable image with which the first part nearly ends:

> "Tis good, when you have crossed the sea and back,
> To find the sitfast acres where you left them."

The American colonizers came from Europe where they went frequently. So, this is a typically American image. Historians of American literature affirm that it was with Emerson and his contemporaries that Americans began to write a literature not in imitation of their European ancestors but the literature of a democratic America. The poet gives voice to the ethos of his nation. According to Emerson 'the poet is representative'. 'He stands among partial men for the complete man' and he went on, 'and apprises us not of his wealth, but the commonwealth.'

The anticlimax of the pageant of the deeds of the ancestors in the first part of 'Hamatreya' comes in the last lines.

> Ah! The hot owner sees not Death, who adds
> Him to his land, a lump of mold the more.

Emerson was more eclectic in his sources of knowledge but American literature stems from European literature and, he believed that '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.' In the couple of lines we notice the influence of European culture. Tertullian, the Christian apologist and polemicist against heresy and the father of Latin Christianity gives an account of a slave in his *Apologeticus,* who standing behind his master in the victory parade is tasked to remind his master `remember that you will die' - '*memento mori'*. Emerson must also have been familiar with his seventeenth century compatriot Thomas Smith, a puritan painter who did a portrait of himself on the theme of *memento mori* and

the paintings of the French contemporary Eugène Delacroix (1798 - 1863) on the grave diggers in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

There is yet another variant on the theme often called *ubi sunt* - 'where are …[they]'. The Anglo-Saxon conquerors of Romanized Britain discovered elaborate Celtic stone works and asked themselves ubi nunc (where now). The *ubi sunt* motif can be found in Anglo-Saxon works such as *The Ruin, The Seafarer, Deor,* and *The Wanderer,* all part of the *Exeter Book,* the largest surviving collection of Old English literature. *Ubi sunt* motif pervades even *Beowulf*.

In the kindred motif of *Et in Arcadia Ego* which means 'Even in Arcadia there am I'. The Latin 'Ego' or 'I' refers to `death'. It has its origin in Greek antiquity. Arcadia was a town in the middle of Peloponnese far away from the Greek cities that were close to the Mediterranean. Arcadia represented pure, rural, idyllic life far from the city. The Latin phrase most famously appears as the title of two of Nicolas Poussin's (1594 - 1665) paintings in one of which the Arcadian shepherds discover a tomb on which falls their shadow. In another one two shepherds discover a skull. Emerson may have been influenced by these examples even though the immediate influence could have been Parashar and the Earth's, precepts to Maitreya.

Although the 'Earth-Song' comes at the end and as an extension of the narrative of the first section it is more energetic and vivacious in its staccato beats, omission of particles – those short words in a sentence that are not as important as the nouns, verbs and adjectives – oblique rhymes and use of rhetorical devices. The continuity of rhyme in the third line as in the first two somewhat camouflages the epanaphora or repetition and epanorthosis or correction in the first two lines. We are reminded of President Lincoln's 'Gettysburg Address' and Pandit Nehru's address to the nation on All India Radio after Mahatma Gandhi's assassination on the 30th of January, 1948. Let's first take up 'The Gettysburg Address'. 'We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place' early in his speech says Lincoln and later goes on and emphatically asserts, 'But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate – we can not consecrate – we can not hallow – this ground. The Brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract.' In the same way Pandit Nehru opened his short speech with the words, 'the light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere.' Soon Nehru corrected himself: 'The light has gone out, I said, and yet I was wrong. For the light that shone in this country was no ordinary light…' The Earth like a character in a play opens its speech in the spirit of modesty but soon corrects itself: "Mine and yours; / Mine not yours." The 'Earth-Song' in 'Hamatreya' is cast in the form of a Western rhetorical discourse.

The permanence of nature, - the earth, the stars and the shores - lends grandeur to the Earth's speech. The flickering reflection of the stars 'shining down in the old sea' brings peace to the mind by providing it an image of stability in a world assailed by doubt and despair. Emerson's contemporary in England Matthew Arnold (1822 – '88) sought certitude in the cliffs at Dover Beach 'Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.' But the *ubi sunt* motif appears in the line 'But where are old men?' along with *percontatio* – a question asked in the spirit of amazement. Emerson superimposes *rogatio* – a question that is answered by the speaker himself – in the concluding lines of the first stanza of 'Earth-Song',

I who have seen much,
Such have I never seen.

The institution of 'Law' gives stability to the society just as money does as a store of value, unit of account and medium of exchange. But inflation undermines our confidence in money just as the lawyer's deed can settle an estate on one line of heirs rather than another. W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory and the Protestant Anglo-Irish thought that English institutions gave prosperity and stability to Ireland. But the native Irish Catholics did not share the optimism of the Anglo-Irish. Yeats powerfully expressed the ambiguity regarding the army and the legal institutions established by the English in Ireland in his 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen'. Yeats' portrait of the Irish judiciary as a 'pretty toy':

We too had many pretty toys when young:
A law indifferent to blame or praise;
To bribe or threat; habits that made old wrong
Melt down, as it were wax in the sun's rays;

Yeats goes on to point out that the corrupt practices of the government did not go. His hopes were 'fine thoughts' because the 'rogues and rascals' had not died out:

Public opinion ripening for so long
We thought it would outlive all future days.
O what fine thought we had because we thought
That the worst rogues and rascals had died out.

The Earth's boastful 'Forevermore' in 'Hamatreya' is ambiguous, rather punctured like Yeats's assertions about the benign English government of Ireland.

The third stanza of the 'Earth-Song' reminds us of Lord Krishn's transfiguration in the eleventh chapter of the *Gita*. Sanjay tells the blind Dhritrashtr,

Darsayam asa parthaya parmam rupam aisvaram

'The great lord then revealed to Parth or Arjun, his Supreme and Divine form.' Such instances can be found in other Hindu, Islamic and Christian scriptures also. The Earth ostensively says,

Here is the land,
Shaggy with wood,
With its old valley,
Mound and flood.

The earth goes on to ask – 'But the heritors?'.The lawyer, the laws, the owner of the properties have all been swept away.

The Earth in 'Hamatreya' wonders where all the boastful "owners" and controllers of the earth have gone. They wished to stay but had to go. They are now part of the earth. So the Earth asks a question for the last time in the poem,

How am I theirs,
If they cannot hold me,
But I hold them?

'Earth-Song' is at once rhetorical and spiritual, rhetorical in form but spiritual in its quest just like the eleventh chapter of the *Gita*.

Arjun in *Bhagvad Gita* is shocked by the fact that on the battle field of Kurukshetr he will have to kill his revered teachers, elders and kinsmen. When the war is about to begin he lays down his bow (Gandeev) and takes a back seat on the chariot. Then Krishn tells him that after having come to the battlefield he cannot run away from it. His enemies, the Kauravas would not spare him. It would be a most ignominious defeat, bestower neither of fame on this earth nor of Heaven on the other side of death. Krishn's precepts and revelations open Arjun's eyes and he says,

> Nasto mohah, smrtir labdha tvatprasadan maya 'cyuta
> Sthito 'smi gatasamdehah karisye vacanam tava

Arjun says, 'O! Krishn, your words have dispelled my delusion and restored my recognition. Now I have overcome my doubt. I will do as you wish.' The last lines of 'Hamatreya' remind us of such passages in Hindu scriptures with some of which such as the *Bhagvad Gita* and the *Vishnu Puran*, we know from his journals that Emerson had read:

> When I heard the Earth-song
> I was no longer brave;
> My avarice cooled
> Like lust in the chill of the grave.

Self-check Exercise III

1) What influence did Persian literature have on Emerson?

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2) How did Hindu scriptures influence Emerson?

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26.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you recalled,

a) the predecessors of Emerson in the history of American Poetry,

b) understood the making of the mind and art of Emerson with special reference to 'The Snow Storm' and 'Hamatreya' and

c) evaluated Emerson's interest in world literature.

26.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

1) Re-read the introduction to the block and see if you can improve upon your answers.

2) Oliver Wendell Holmes, Professor of Anatomy at Harvard called 'The American Scholar' declaration of independence of American letters from the tutelage of British Literature.

3) Reread the biographical account of Emerson if necessary. You will notice that Emerson's forbears and in-laws were related to the church.

Self-check Exercise II

1) Emerson in 'May-Day' calls god 'The million–handed sculptor'.

2) 'Come see the north wind's masonry:'

   Contrast this with lines ' so fanciful, so savage…Mockingly' in which the first line is a run-on line.

Self-check Exercise III

1) Emerson read Persian Literature in German translation. He specially like Hafiz and Saadi.

2) Emerson read Hindu scriptures originally in Sanskrit in English translation: 'Hamatreya ' is a testimony of his interest in Hindu classics.

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UNIT 27 WALT WHITMAN

Structure

27.0 Objectives
27.1 Introduction
27.2 Walt Whitman
27.3 Passage to India
 27.3.1 Exposé
 27.3.2 The Text
 27.3.3 Analysis
27.4 Let Us Sum Up
27.5 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

27.0 OBJECTIVES

After a study of this unit you will be able to:

- Narrate some of the main events in the life of Whitman;
- Describe his importance in the tradition of American Poetry,
- Explain the influence of Emerson on Whitman, and
- Appreciate Whitman's 'Passage to India'

27.1 INTRODUCTION

Whitman is not only the most important poet in nineteenth century America but quintessentially an American poet who embodies the aspiration and ethos of his nation, while reading this unit you should try to understand the significance of Whitman for his culture as much as him as an expression of it.

The brief account of Whitman's life will enable you to look at him in his iterations with the society in which he lived and how his people looked at him in his time.

'Passage to India' is a long poem. You may first read the poem aloud a couple of times then read the expose and the analysis provided in the unit.

Students have asked me if they may consult material on the internet. I have used the material on the internet and I would encourage them to do so. However, remember that you must not get carried away and spend too much time on one poet or poem to the neglect of others.

For students who do not have access to the internet or good libraries I have appended a couple of poems by Whitman to this block. Read them if you wish to. No questions would be asked based on the essay and the poems for supplementary reading.

27.2 WALT WHITMAN

Walt Whitman, christened Walter at his birth on May 31, 1819, was the second of the nine children of Walter and Louisa Van Velsor Whitman. Three of Walt's brothers were named after American politicians – Andrew Jackson, George

Washington and Thomas Jefferson – the eldest was named Jesse and the youngest Edward. One of the brothers died unnamed at the age of six months. Walter Whitman, Sr. was a carpenter and farmer at West Hills, Long Island. Owing to his failure to eke a living there the family moved to Brooklyn in 1823. There also he was financially not very successful with the result that Walt had formal schooling only for five years - from 1825 to 1830. In order to augment his family income Walt became an office boy for two lawyers and an apprentice to the Long Island weekly *The Patriot*. In 1835 he became a journeyman printer, i.e. a qualified printer working for an employer. Next year he became a teacher and in 1838 edited the *Long Islander,* a weekly published in Huntington. In 1840 presidential campaign he worked for Martin van Buren. Later he taught for a while and from 1842 to 1844 edited the *Aurora,* a daily newspaper and, the *Evening Tattler*. He returned to Brooklyn in 1845 and wrote for the *Long Island Star*. Thereafter he edited the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (1846 – '48) and the *Brooklyn Weekly Freeman* (1848 – '49). For four months in 1848 he worked in New Orleans for the *Crescent*. From 1850 to '54 he as a carpenter built houses, speculated in real estate and also ran a printing office and a stationery store.

Whitman appears to have been leading a precarious existence spending his time loafing, walking around Long Island and New York doing whatever appeared to have been of interest to him. However, he was watching the plays of Shakespeare in the theatre and also developed a love for music, especially the opera. He read Homer, the Bible, Tom Paine, the plays of Shakespeare, the poems of Coleridge, the novels of Sir Walter Scott and, Macpherson's Ossianic poems. He also read Emerson's essays which inspired him to write. Whitman later confessed, 'I was simmering, simmering, simmering, Emerson brought me to a boil.'

Self-check Exercise I

1) What did young Whitman do for a living?

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2) What did Whitman like to read?

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27.3 PASSAGE TO INDIA

You are now familiar with Whitman's life. Let's now read one of his most well known poems, 'Passage to India'.

27.3.1 Exposé

The immediate occasion for the writing of 'Passage to India' (1871) was to celebrate three feats of contemporary technology. In the first place was the Suez Canal joining the Mediterranean and Red seas. Work on the project began in April 1859 and completed in 1867 and formally opened by Empress Eugenie, wife of Napoleon III, on November 17, 1869. In the second place, in the United States the Union Pacific and Central Pacific transcontinental railways were joined at Promontory, Utah on May 10, 1869. The third achievement was the laying of the Atlantic and Pacific cables in 1866. Whitman celebrated these events not only for their own sake but because they strengthened the unity of mankind. Whitman went still further; he saw in this unification a spiritual realization symbolized by India and the venturing of the soul to Godliness.

27.3.2 The Text

SINGING my days, 1
Singing the great achievements of the present,
Singing the strong, light works of engineers,
Our modern wonders, (the antique ponderous Seven[1] outvied,)
In the Old World, the east, the Suez canal, 5
The New by its mighty railroad spann'd,
The seas inlaid with eloquent, gentle wires,
I sound, to commence, the cry, with thee, O soul,
The Past! the Past! the Past!

The Past! the dark, unfathom'd retrospect! *10*
The teeming gulf! the sleepers and the shadows!
The past! the infinite greatness of the past!

For what is the present, after all, but a growth out of the past?
(As a projectile, form'd, impell'd, passing a certain line, still keeps on,

So the present, utterly form'd, impell'd by the past.) *15*

2

Passage, O soul, to India!
Eclaircise[2] the myths Asiatic—the primitive fables.

Not you alone, proud truths of the world!
Nor you alone, ye facts of modern science!
But myths and fables of eld[3] —Asia's, Africa's fables! *20*
The far-darting beams of the spirit!—the unloos'd dreams!
The deep diving bibles and legends;
The daring plots of the poets—the elder religions;
—O you temples fairer than lilies, pour'd over by the rising sun!
O you fables, spurning the known, eluding the hold of the known,
mounting to heaven! *25*
You lofty and dazzling towers, pinnacled, red as roses, burnish'd with gold!

Towers of fables immortal, fashion'd from mortal dreams!
You too I welcome, and fully, the same as the rest;
You too with joy I sing.

Passage to India! *30*
Lo, soul! seest thou not God's purpose from the first?
The earth to be spann'd, connected by net-work,
The people to become brothers and sisters,
The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage,
The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near, *35*
The lands to be welded together.

A worship new, I sing;
You captains, voyagers, explorers, yours!
You engineers! you architects, machinists, your!
You, not for trade or transportation only, *40*
But in God's name, and for thy sake, O soul.

3

Passage to India!
Lo, soul, for thee, of tableaus twain,
I see, in one, the Suez canal initiated, open'd,
I see the procession of steamships, the Empress Eugenie's leading the van; *45*
I mark, from on deck, the strange landscape, the pure sky, the level sand in the distance;
I pass swiftly the picturesque groups, the workmen gather'd,
The gigantic dredging machines,
In one, again, different, (yet thine, all thine, O soul, the same,)
I see over my own continent the Pacific Railroad[4], surmounting every barrier; *50*
I see continual trains of cars winding along the Platte, carrying freight and passengers;
I hear the locomotives rushing and roaring, and the shrill steam-whistle,
I hear the echoes reverberate through the grandest scenery in the world;
I cross the Laramie plains—I note the rocks in grotesque shapes—the buttes;
I see the plentiful larkspur and wild onions—the barren, colorless, sage-deserts; *55*
I see in glimpses afar, or towering immediately above me, the great mountains—I see the Wind River and the Wahsatch mountains;
I see the Monument mountain and the Eagle's Nest—I pass the Promontory—I ascend the Nevadas;
I scan the noble Elk mountain, and wind around its base;
I see the Humboldt range—I thread the valley and cross the river,
I see the clear waters of Lake Tahoe—I see forests of majestic pines, *60*
Or, crossing the great desert, the alkaline plains, I behold enchanting mirages of waters and meadows;
Marking through these, and after all, in duplicate slender lines,
Bridging the three or four thousand miles of land travel,
Tying the Eastern to the Western sea,
The road between Europe and Asia. *65*

(Ah Genoese[5], thy dream! thy dream!
Centuries after thou art laid in thy grave,
The shore thou foundest verifies thy dream!)

4

Passage to India!
Struggles of many a captain—tales of many a sailor dead! *70*
Over my mood, stealing and spreading they come,
Like clouds and cloudlets in the unreach'd sky.

Along all history, down the slopes,
As a rivulet running, sinking now, and now again to the surface rising,
A ceaseless thought, a varied train—Lo, soul! to thee, thy sight, they rise, *75*
The plans, the voyages again, the expeditions:
Again Vasco de Gama[6] sails forth;
Again the knowledge gain'd, the mariner's compass,
Lands found, and nations born—thou born, America, (a hemisphere unborn,)
For purpose vast, man's long probation fill'd, *80*
Thou, rondure[7] of the world, at last accomplish'd.

5

O, vast Rondure, swimming in space!
Cover'd all over with visible power and beauty!
Alternate light and day, and the teeming, spiritual darkness;
Unspeakable, high processions of sun and moon, and countless stars, above; *85*
Below, the manifold grass and waters, animals, mountains, trees;
With inscrutable[8] purpose—some hidden, prophetic intention;
Now, first, it seems, my thought begins to span thee.

Down from the gardens of Asia, descending, radiating,
Adam and Eve appear, then their myriad progeny after them, *90*
Wandering, yearning, curious—with restless explorations,
With questionings, baffled, formless, feverish—with never-happy hearts,

With that sad, incessant refrain, *Wherefore, unsatisfied Soul?* and *Whither, O mocking Life?*

Ah, who shall soothe these feverish children?
Who justify these restless explorations? *95*
Who speak the secret of impassive[9] Earth?
Who bind it to us? What is this separate Nature, so unnatural?
What is this Earth, to our affections? (unloving earth, without a throb to answer ours;
Cold earth, the place of graves.)

Yet, soul, be sure the first intent remains—and shall be carried out; *100*
(Perhaps even now the time has arrived.)

After the seas are all cross'd, (as they seem already cross'd,)
After the great captains and engineers have accomplish'd their work,
After the noble inventors—after the scientists, the chemist, the geologist, ethnologist,
Finally shall come the Poet, worthy that name; *105*
The true son of God shall come, singing his songs.

Then, not your deeds only, O voyagers, O scientists and inventors, shall be justified,
All these hearts, as of fretted children, shall be sooth'd,
All affection shall be fully responded to—the secret shall be told;
All these separations and gaps shall be taken up, and hook'd and link'd together; *110*
The whole Earth—this cold, impassive, voiceless Earth, shall be completely justified;
Trinitas[10] divine shall be gloriously accomplish'd and compacted by the son of God, the poet,

(He shall indeed pass the straits and conquer the mountains,
He shall double the Cape of Good Hope to some purpose;)
Nature and Man shall be disjoin'd and diffused no more, *115*
The true son of God shall absolutely fuse them.

6

Year at whose open'd, wide-flung door I sing!
Year of the purpose accomplish'd!
Year of the marriage of continents, climates and oceans!
(No mere Doge of Venice[11] now, wedding the Adriatic;) *120*
I see, O year, in you, the vast terraqueous[12] globe, given, and giving all,
Europe to Asia, Africa join'd, and they to the New World;
The lands, geographies, dancing before you, holding a festival garland,
As brides and bridegrooms hand in hand.

Passage to India! *125*
Cooling airs from Caucasus[13] far, soothing cradle of man,
The river Euphrates[14] flowing, the past lit up again.

Lo, soul, the retrospect, brought forward;
The old, most populous, wealthiest of Earth's lands,
The streams of the Indus and the Ganges, and their many affluents[15]; *130*
(I, my shores of America walking to-day, behold, resuming all,)
The tale of Alexander[16], on his warlike marches, suddenly dying,
On one side China, and on the other side Persia and Arabia,
To the south the great seas, and the Bay of Bengal;
The flowing literatures, tremendous epics, religions, castes, *135*
Old occult Brahma, interminably far back—the tender and junior Buddha,

Central and southern empires, and all their belongings, possessors,
The wars of Tamerlane[17], the reign of Aurungzebe[18],
The traders, rulers, explorers, Moslems, Venetians, Byzantium, the Arabs, Portuguese,
The first travelers, famous yet, Marco Polo[19], Batouta[20] the Moor, *140*
Doubts to be solv'd, the map incognita, blanks to be fill'd,
The foot of man unstay'd, the hands never at rest,
Thyself, O soul, that will not brook a challenge.

The medieval navigators rise before me,
The world of 1492, with its awaken'd enterprise; *145*
Something swelling in humanity now like the sap of the earth in spring,

The sunset splendor of chivalry declining.

And who art thou, sad shade?
Gigantic, visionary, thyself a visionary,
With majestic limbs, and pious, beaming eyes, *150*
Spreading around, with every look of thine, a golden world,
Enhuing it with gorgeous hues.

As the chief histrion[21],
Down to the footlights walks, in some great scena[22],
Dominating the rest, I see the Admiral[23] himself, *155*
(History's type of courage, action, faith;)

Behold him sail from Palos[24], leading his little fleet;
His voyage behold—his return—his great fame,
His misfortunes, calumniators—behold him a prisoner, chain'd,
Behold his dejection, poverty, death. *160*

(Curious, in time, I stand, noting the efforts of heroes;
Is the deferment long? bitter the slander, poverty, death?
Lies the seed unreck'd[25] for centuries in the ground? Lo! to God's due occasion,

Uprising in the night, it sprouts, blooms,
And fills the earth with use and beauty.) *165*

7

Passage indeed, O soul, to primal thought!
Not lands and seas alone—thy own clear freshness,
The young maturity of brood and bloom;
To realms of budding bibles.

O soul, repressless, I with thee, and thou with me, *170*
Thy circumnavigation of the world begin;
Of man, the voyage of his mind's return,
To reason's early paradise,
Back, back to wisdom's birth, to innocent intuitions,
Again with fair creation. *175*

8

O we can wait no longer!
We too take ship, O soul!
Joyous, we too launch out on trackless seas!
Fearless, for unknown shores, on waves of ecstasy to sail,
Amid the wafting winds, (thou pressing me to thee, I thee to me, O soul,) *180*
Caroling free—singing our song of God,
Chanting our chant of pleasant exploration.

With laugh, and many a kiss,
(Let others deprecate—let others weep for sin, remorse, humiliation;)
O soul, thou pleasest me—I thee. *185*

Ah, more than any priest, O soul, we too believe in God;
But with the mystery of God we dare not dally.

O soul, thou pleasest me—I thee;
Sailing these seas, or on the hills, or waking in the night,
Thoughts, silent thoughts, of Time, and Space, and Death, like waters flowing,
190
Bear me, indeed, as through the regions infinite,
Whose air I breathe, whose ripples hear—lave[26] me all over;
Bathe me, O God, in thee—mounting to thee,
I and my soul to range in range of thee.

O Thou transcendant! *195*
Nameless—the fibre and the breath!
Light of the light—shedding forth universes—thou centre of them!

Thou mightier centre of the true, the good, the loving!
Thou moral, spiritual fountain! affection's source! thou reservoir!
(O pensive soul of me! O thirst unsatisfied! waitest not there? *200*
Waitest not haply for us, somewhere there, the Comrade perfect?)
Thou pulse! thou motive of the stars, suns, systems,
That, circling, move in order, safe, harmonious,
Athwart[27] the shapeless vastnesses of space!

How should I think—how breathe a single breath—how speak—if, out of myself,
205
I could not launch, to those, superior universes?

Swiftly I shrivel[28] at the thought of God,
At Nature and its wonders, Time and Space and Death,
But that I, turning, call to thee, O soul, thou actual Me,
And lo! thou gently masterest the orbs, *210*
Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death,
And fillest, swellest full, the vastnesses of Space.

Greater than stars or suns,
Bounding, O soul, thou journeyest forth;
—What love, than thine and ours could wider amplify? *215*
What aspirations, wishes, outvie thine and ours, O soul?
What dreams of the ideal? what plans of purity, perfection, strength?
What cheerful willingness, for others' sake, to give up all?
For others' sake to suffer all?

Reckoning ahead, O soul, when thou, the time achiev'd, *220*
(The seas all cross'd, weather'd the capes, the voyage done,)
Surrounded, copest, frontest God, yieldest, the aim attain'd,
As, fill'd with friendship, love complete, the Elder Brother found,
The Younger melts in fondness in his arms.

9

Passage to more than India! *225*
Are thy wings plumed indeed for such far flights?
O Soul, voyagest thou indeed on voyages like these?
Disportest thou on waters such as these?
Soundest below the Sanscrit and the Vedas?
Then have thy bent[29] unleash'd. *230*

Passage to you, your shores, ye aged fierce enigmas!
Passage to you, to mastership of you, ye strangling problems!
You, strew'd with the wrecks of skeletons, that, living, never reach'd you.

Passage to more than India!
O secret of the earth and sky! *235*
Of you, O waters of the sea! O winding creeks and rivers!
Of you, O woods and fields! Of you, strong mountains of my land!
Of you, O prairies[30]! Of you, gray rocks!
O morning red! O clouds! O rain and snows!
O day and night, passage to you! *240*

O sun and moon, and all you stars! Sirius and Jupiter[31]!
Passage to you!

Passage—immediate passage! the blood burns in my veins!
Away, O soul! hoist instantly the anchor!
Cut the hawsers—haul out—shake out every sail! *245*
Have we not stood here like trees in the ground long enough?
Have we not grovell'd here long enough, eating and drinking like mere brutes?

Have we not darken'd and dazed ourselves with books long enough?

Sail forth! steer for the deep waters only!
Reckless, O soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me; *250*
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.

O my brave soul!
O farther, farther sail!
O daring joy, but safe! Are they not all the seas of God? *255*
O farther, farther, farther sail!

Annotation:

1. Seven: this is a reference to the Seven Wonders of the World in ancient times among which were the pyramids of Egypt, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon the statue of Zeus at Olympia and the light house at Alexandria.
2. Eclaircise: explain, clarify
3. Eld: antiquity
4. Railroad: lines 49-63 describe the railway from Omaha to San Francisco.
5. Genoese: This is a reference to Christopher Columbus
6. Correctly: Vasco da Gama who in 1497 – 98 found the sea route to India by navigating around Cape of Good Hope in South Africa
7. Rondure: encirclement, circumnavigation
8. Inscrutable: (of people and their acts) whose meaning is hidden or hard to find out; mysterious
9. Impassive: (sometimes derogatory, of people) showing or having no feeling, unusually calm
10. Trinitas: The Holy Trinity of Christian faith. In order to symbolize the union of Venice with the sea
11. Doge of Venice: the chief magistrate of the city state of Venice (697 – 1797), performed the annual ritual of throwing a gold ring into the Adriatic
12. Terraqueous: consisting or formed of land and water, as the earth
13. Caucasus: The region between the Bland and The Caspian seas, home to the Caucasus mountains.
14. Euphrates: River flowing from Turkey to the Persian gulf. Its valley is according to tradition, the cradle of Western Civilization. It is also associated with Noah's flood.
15. Affluent: Tributaries
16. Alexander: He died in 323 BCE his way back from India.
17. Tamerlane: Taimur (1336? – 1405) 'Prince of Destruction' led wars of conquest in Turkey, Persia, India and Russia.
18. Aurungzebe: The last great Mughal emperor of India who ruled from 1618 to 1707.
19. Marco Polo: (1254 - 1324) famous Venetian traveller
20. Batouta: Ibn Batouta (1303 - 1377) Moroccan Traveller
21. Histrion: actor
22. Scena: scene
23. Admiral: Columbus
24. Palos: The Spanish seaport from which Columbus sailed in 1492.

25. Unreck'd: unnoticed
26. Leve: to flow softly along or against
27. Athwart: in a sloping position
28. Shrivel: to (cause to) dry out and become smaller by twisting into small folds
29. Bent: force, energy
30. Prairie: A type of grassland with very few trees, in North America

27.3.3 Analysis

'Passage to India' begins by celebrating three technological feats of Whitman's time. The first was the digging of the Suez Canal which made intercourse of Europe with India easier. In Whitman's eyes it also joined Europe with Asia and Africa. The Suez Canal in the West and the rail roads across the US joined the Atlantic with the Pacific which connected Europe and Africa with Asia via the United States. Lastly the laying of the Atlantic and Pacific cables –'The seas inlaid with eloquent gentle wires' – made communication with the people on the globe easier and faster. Whitman expanded upon the first two events in the 'tableaus twain' in third section of the poem but made no further reference to the third technological event in any succeeding section of the 'Passage'.

'Passage to India' is not a song in praise of the technological achievements of the latter half of the nineteenth century but a hymn in praise of 'God's purpose from the first':

> The earth to be spann'd Connected by net-work
> The people to become brothers and sisters
> The races, neighbours, to marry and be given in marriage,
> The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near,
> The lands to be welded together. (ll 31 – 35)

Whitman believed that the captains such as Columbus and Vasco da Gama, the voyagers, explorers, the engineers, architects and machinists while facilitating material betterment trade and 'transportation' were unbeknown to themselves fulfilling God's design of building world fraternity and sorority.

E.M. Forster took the cue for his most famous novel *A Passage to India* (1924) from Whitman. Forster used the title somewhat ironically as in the second part of the novel Aziz, the central character organizes a visit of Adela Quested, fiancée of Ronny Heaslop, the city magistrate, to the Marabar caves where a contretemps brings about a conflict between the British ruling class and Indians but it led to a Hindu–Muslim entente. Whitman foresaw that the path to Globalization would not be a smooth process, as suggested by the image of a rivulet, 'a ceaseless thought, a varied train':

> As a rivulet running, sinking now and now again to the surface rising.

Whitman also recalled that the agents of change would not necessarily be rewarded.

Christopher Columbus (e. 1445 – 1506) was born in Geneva, Italy. Once while on a voyage to England, his vessel was attacked by pirates and he found safety in Lisbon where he returned after the completion of his mission. It was in Lisbon that in 1478 he married the daughter of a seasoned navigator. Columbus consulted his father-in-law's charts and maps that helped him form an idea of westward approach to India. After failing to persuade King John II of Portugal to subsidies his voyage he turned to the Spanish King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella for support.

On August 3, 1492 Columbus set sail with three small ships – the Santa Maria which he commanded, the Nina and the Pinta – and eighty-eight men to India. Columbus held to his West-ward course but his men lost faith in his project and grew mutinous. On October 12 they landed at an island in the Bahamas. Columbus named it San Salvador and claimed it for Spain.

Columbus made three more voyages to the New World but he was victimized by intrigue and harassed by disputes among the colonists and his life was assailed by bitterness and discouragement. On his second trip he discovered Trinidad and the mainland of what is now Brazil. From this trip he returned home in chains, victim of scheming perjurers. Whitman refers to Columbus, as 'the Admiral himself' in section 6 of the 'Passage'. Columbus was the prime actor or histrion'.

> As the chief histrion,
> Down to the footlights walks, in some great scena,
> Dominating the rest, I see the Admiral himself,
> (History's type of courage, action, faith;)
> Behold him sail from Palos, leading his little fleet;
> His voyage behold—his return—his great fame,
> His misfortunes, calumniators—behold him a prisoner, chain'd,
> Behold his dejection, poverty, death.

Whitman's reference to Columbus's 'misfortunes, calumniators' and his portrait as a prisoner in chains, in 'dejection, poverty and death' remind us of Samuel Johnson:

> This mournful truth is everywhere confessed,
> SLOW RISES WORTH BY POVERTY DEPRESSED (II 176 - 77)

in *London* (1738). Both poets gave vent to their own life's bitter experiences. Columbus, after his release from prison in 1502 made one more visit to cape Honduras and Puerto Bello. He returned home on November 7, 1502 to stay, broken in health, impoverished and betrayed. He died at Valladolid on May 20, 1506 believing till his last day that he had reached India.

Columbus may have held India as a land of wealth and prosperity but for Whitman it was not only a land of wealth but also of wisdom and spirituality – 'realms of budding bibles' – land of 'wisdom's birth' and 'innocent intuitions'. 'Passage' in this poem means transition from one state into another. So passage to India is transition from a worldly to a spiritual life, a life of wisdom and gnosis. India is the land of 'elder religions' of 'Sanscrit and the Vedas', of 'temples fairer than lilies, pour'd over by the rising sun', and of 'Old occult Brahma, interminably far back – the tender and junior Buddha'.

However, Whitman wished to go beyond the geographical or physical India to more than India, to union with god. In the last two sections Whitman sounds like Kabir the mystic – 'O we can wait no longer!'

> Singing our song of God
>
> Chanting our chant of pleasant exploration.

And again,

> Lave me all over
> Bathe me O god, in thee – mounting to thee,
> I and my soul to range in range of thee.

And yet again,

> Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,
> At Nature and its wonders, time and Space and Death
> But that I, turning, call to thee, O soul, thou actual me.

This is Whitman's 'Passage to more than India'. Whitman says, 'For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go / And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.'

Whitman identified himself with his soul and the soul with God. In the *Song of Myself* he wrote: "Divine and I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touched from." Whitman sprawls far beyond his lines. His poetry can be understood only against the backdrop of his aspirations.

Self-check Exercise II

1) Briefly state the three events celebrated by Whitman in 'Passage to India'.

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2) What does 'ponderous Seven' in the poem refer to?

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3) Comment briefly on 'India' as a symbol in Whitman's poem.

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27.4 LET US SUM UP

- In this unit you became familiar with Whitman's life and the times in which he lived.
- Thereafter you read one of Whitman's great poems 'Passage to India' and tried to understand his symbolism.

27.5 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

It would be a good idea to re–read the writeup on Walt Whitman after answering the questions in Exercise I and reading the poem and the analysis of it once again after writing the answers to questions in Exercise II.

UNIT 28 EDGAR ALLAN POE

Structure

28.0 Objectives
28.1 Introduction
28.2 Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)
28.3 The Raven
28.3.1 The Background of the Poem
28.3.2 The Text
28.3.3 Stanza Form and Sound Pattern
28.3.4 A Discussion
28.4 Let Us Sum Up
28.5 Suggested Activity
28.6 Suggested Reading
28.7 Answers to Self-check Exercises

28.0 OBJECTIVES

After having read this unit you will be able to:

- Talk about Poe the poet
- Acquire ideas about the structure and meaning of "The Raven"
- Appreciate the unique sound patterns of Poe's poem

28.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit focuses on a well-known poem in American literary history, a poem that is read by countless Americans at the middle school, high school and university levels. "The Raven", published in 1845, was immensely popular and made the author famous. The musicality of the poem, its melancholy and quaint atmosphere, became an instant hit with readers. The poem gained acceptance not only in America but was received enthusiastically In England and France. It was translated into a number of European languages and went on to influence the French symbolist poets like Mallarme, Rimbaud and Baudelaire. For Poe this poem marks a turning point in his career and a critical success which he was not able to repeat in any subsequent poetical work. The poem has generated many imitations, parodies and adaptations. It is safe to say that "The Raven" is part of the cultural baggage that most Americans carry and by now, has travelled to many other countries either in its original English form or in a translated avatar.

28.2 EDGAR ALLAN POE (1809-1849)

Edgar Allan Poe was born in Boston, second child to David and Elizabeth Poe, professional actors in a theatrical company, on January 19,1809. He lost his mother when he was two and half years old. He, along with his older brother and young sister, became orphans because the father had deserted the family earlier. All Poe children got separated thereafter. Edgar was taken into the Allan family from Richmond, Virginia without getting legally adopted and was renamed Edgar

Allan Poe. His foster father John Allan was a prosperous tobacco merchant and he ensured proper education for his ward.

When the Allans moved to Scotland in 1815 (and later to London) young Edgar accompanied them. He spent five years abroad enrolled in private academies as a student. Later, the Allan family returned to Richmond in July 1820 where Edgar continued his school education showing aptitude in Latin and amateur theatricals. It was during this phase Edgar was attracted to one Jane Stannard, mother of a schoolboy friend who inspired in the young admirer a sense of ideal love.(She is the inspiration behind Poe's famous 1831 lyric "To Helen".) Poe started displaying his talent for versification as a schoolboy. In 1825 his foster father acquired a legacy after the death of a rich uncle boosting the fortunes of the Allan family which moved into better accommodation.

In February 1826 Poe joined the newly-established University of Virginia and enrolled himself for ancient and modern languages. But from this point onwards Poe's relation with his foster father became strained and his life got subjected to prolonged spells of financial insecurity. Allan did not take kindly to the young man's poetic aspirations and dissolute ways. Moreover, Poe incurred a gambling debt of $2000 which made Allan furious. The young man had already aggravated matters by getting engaged to his childhood sweetheart Elmira Royster despite objections from both families. Poe's university career was interrupted soon after and he returned to Richmond to find his engagement with Elmira quashed by her parents.

Hereafter, Poe struggled to establish himself as a writer and gain a minimum of financial security without depending on his estranged foster father. As it turned out, he found it difficult to attain financial stability and success although these adverse material conditions did not prevent him from producing a number of poems, tales and critical essays in the pages of American magazines with which he got sporadically associated. In March 1827 Poe left the Allan household despite foster mother Frances's efforts to patch up differences. Edgar's next stop was Boston where he enlisted in the US Army under the name Edgar A. Perry. The same year he published his first collection of verse, *Tamerlane and Other Poems* which was scarcely noticed by critics. Within a year Poe was promoted to sergeant-major and with John Allan's conciliatory help entered US Military Academy at West Point later.

But events piled up in a way that triggered a final split between Edgar and his foster father who remarried after the death of his wife in February in 1829. Meanwhile, Poe joined his relatives in Baltimore – his paternal aunt Maria Clemm, her eight-year old daughter Virginia, older brother Henry and grandmother Elizabeth Cairnes Poe. A publisher in Baltimore printed his second book, *Aaraaf, Taamerlane and Minor Poems,* a revised and expanded edition of his first collection. Subsequently, a third volume entitled *Poems: Second Edition* was brought out by a New York publisher in 1831 after Poe had obtained release from the West Point Academy. The next decade and a half of Poe's life was distributed among five Eastern cities – Boston, Baltimore, Richmond, Philadelphia and New York. The events that influenced his personal life in this phase included the death of his brother William Henry and his marriage with cousin Virginia Clemm (age thirteen) at the age of twenty-seven.

Professionally, this period saw the growth of Poe as a writer through regular contributions to different magazines although the money he received for his efforts was never sufficient to meet his family obligations and the concurrent

habit of drinking and gambling. It is difficult to say – and Poe biographers do not agree on this point – whether his singularly tragic and insecure life pushed him into developing wrong kind of habits. But the fact remains that Poe never stuck to one job or place for long and he moved from one editorial position to another in different magazines, never succeeding in consolidating his professional clout in the literary marketplace despite making a name for himself both inside and outside America.

In 1832 Poe submitted five tales to a contest sponsored by to the Philadelphia *Saturday Courier* which published all five. In October 1833 he won the first prize of $50 from the *Baltimore Saturday Visiter* for his story "MS. Found in a Bottle". In 1835 Poe was hired by the *Southern Literary Messenger* in an editorial capacity and contributed a number reviews, essays and stories which introduced him a nationwide audience. Poe's resignation from the *Messenger* two years later took him to New York to seek employment without any success. He was forced to relocate his family to Philadelphia where he got associated with *Burton's Gentlemen's Magazine* and *Graham's* magazine. In June 1843 his tale "The Gold-Bug" won a $100 prize from the Philadelphia *Dollar Newspaper.* Moving to New York in 1844 Poe obtained employment with the *New York Evening Mirror* which published a number of his tales. It was in the January 1845 issue of *Evening Mirror* that "The Raven" first appeared which created a sensation.

Poe went on to join the *Broadway Journal* which saw the publication of many of his late stories. Meanwhile, he gave public lectures and readings. In 1847 he lost his wife Virginia after prolonged sickness. On a trip to Richmond two years later he became engaged to Elmira, now a widow. But in the course of travel connected to wedding preparations he was discovered in a delirious and semi-conscious state in Baltimore succumbing to "congestion of the brains" a few days later on October 7,1849.

Self-check Exercise I

Do the following exercises in the space provided:

i) Mention the place and year of Poe's birth.

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ii) Who was Poe's foster father and what was he?

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iii) What led to Poe's break-up with his foster father?

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iv) Mention three important persons who died in the course of the poet's life.

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v) Name a prize winning story by Poe.

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vi) In which American city did Poe die?

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28.3 THE RAVEN

28.3.1 The Background of the Poem

"The Raven" is Poe's most famous poem. It first appeared in the January 29, 1845 issue of the New York *Evening Mirror*. It was reprinted a month later in the February 1845 issue of the *American Whig Review.* Many critics have attempted to recreate the circumstances behind the composition of the poem which brought instant fame to its author. A few have suggested that Poe had contemplated introducing an owl or a parrot before finalizing the raven. Poe himself wrote an essay a year later in 1846 entitled "The Philosophy of Composition" where he mentioned the parrot as the predecessor of the raven in the history of composition and dwelt at length on the deliberate artistry involved in the creation of the poem. In the same essay he mentioned that he wrote the segment of third to last stanza first and then retraced his plot to the beginning of the poem. He was aiming at the unity of effect and wanted to give readers a reading experience that could be completed in a single sitting. One possible source for the raven's presence could be Charles Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge* which was reviewed by Poe in 1841 and 1842. Poe had commented on the prophetic role of the bird in Dickens's narrative. He must have pondered over a more fitting use of the bird in another aesthetic situation which led him to harness its symbolic potential in the poem he was to produce. Of course, in Poe's poem the bird undergoes a unique transformation in keeping with the demands of his theme and setting. The thematic focus of "The Raven" is the loss of a loved one and the interminable sorrow that follows. Poe had experienced death in his immediate family in the case of his mother, brother and later, his wife. In between other figures representing the ideal of feminine love such as his friend's mother and foster mother died. He lost his childhood sweetheart to marriage. And three years

before the composition of “The Raven” his wife Virginia was diagnosed with tuberculosis to which she ultimately succumbed in early 1847. Loss and mourning was integral to Poe’s life experience and he indicated in the essay cited above that the raven stood for “Mournful and never-ending Remembrance”.

28.3.2 The Text

The Raven

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary
Over many a quaint* and curious volume of forgotten lore —
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
“ ‘T is some visiter, “ I muttered, “tapping at my chamber door— 5
Only this and nothing more.”

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.
Eagerly I wished the morrow; — vainly I had sought to borrow
From my books surcease* of sorrow — sorrow for the lost Lenore— 10
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore—
Nameless *here* for evermore.

And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me — filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating 15
“ ‘T is some visiter entreating entrance at my chamber door—
Some late visiter entreating entrance at my chamber door;—
That it is and nothing more.”

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,
“Sir, “ said I, “or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore; 20
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,
That I scarce was sure I heard you”— here I opened wide the door;—
Darkness there and nothing more.

Deep into the darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing, 25
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before;
But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token,
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, “Lenore!”
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word “Lenore!”—
Merely this and nothing more. 28

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.
“Surely,” said I, “surely that is something at my window lattice;
Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore—
Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore;— 35
‘T is the wind an nothing more!”

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore.
Not the least obeisance* made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door— 40
Perched upon a bust of Pallas* just above my chamber door—

Perched, and sat, and nothing more.
Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,
"Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou," I said, "art sure no craven*, 45
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore—
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!*"
Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,
Though its answer little meaning — little relevancy bore; 50
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door—
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
With such name as "Nevermore."

But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only 55
That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.
Nothing farther then he uttered, not a feather then he fluttered—
Till I scarcely more then muttered "Other friends have flown before —
On the morrow *he* will leave me, as my hopes have flown before."
Then the bird said, "Nevermore." 60

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,
"Doubtless," said I, "what it utters is its only stock and store
Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore —
Till the dirges of his Hope the melancholy burden bore 65
Of 'Never -- nevermore.'"

But the Raven still beguiling all my fancy into smiling,
Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird and bust and door;
Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking
Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore— 70
What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt*, and ominous* bird of yore
Meant in croaking "Nevermore."

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing
To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom's core;
This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining 75
On the cushion's velvet lining that the lamp-light gloated o'er
But whose velvet violet lining with lamp-light gloating o'er
She shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer
Swung by Seraphim* whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted* floor. 80
"Wretch," I cried, "thy God has lent thee — by these angels he hath sent thee
Respite – respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore!
Quaff, oh, quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!"
Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil! prophet still, if bird or devil! 85
Whether Tempter* sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted —
On this home by Horror haunted — tell me truly, I implore —
Is there — *is* there balm in Gilead*? — tell me — tell me, I implore!"

Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore." 90
"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil! — prophet still, if bird or devil!
By that Heaven that bends above us — by that God we both adore—
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn*,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore —
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore." 95
Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

"Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!" I shrieked, upstarting —
"Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!
Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!
Leave my loneliness unbroken! — quit the bust above my door! 100
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!"
Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, *still* is sitting
On the pallid* bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming, 105
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted — nevermore!

Glossary:

Quaint : attractively unusual and old-fashioned

Surcease : relief

Obeisance : deferential respect

Pallas : Pallas Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, scholarship and enlightenment

Craven : A cowardly knight sometimes had his shaved as a sign of his disgrace

Night's Plutonian shore : related to Pluto, the god of the underworld, associated with night and darkness

Gaunt : lean and haggard

Ominous : giving the impression that something bad is going to happen

Seraphim : angels

Tufted : carpeted

Nepenthe : a legendary drink supposed to soothe the bereaved

Quaff : drink

Tempter : Satan, embodiment of evil

Gilead : allusion to the Bible – "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of my daughter of my people recovered?"[Jeremiah 8:22]. Also, there was a commercial pain balm in Poe's days called "Balm in Gilead".

Aidenn : Arabic word for Eden, meaning heaven or paradise

pallid : pale

28.3.3 Stanza Form and Sound Pattern

Much of the poem's popular success can be attributed to its rhythm which makes it eminently worthy of reading aloud. Generations of readers have attested to the spell of its incantatory rhythm. In his lifetime Poe gave repeated readings in which lights were dimmed when he came onstage and he recreated the sad and mysterious atmosphere inside the poem through a dramatic rendering. This is how a local magazine editor John M Daniel summarized the poet's last recitation at Exchange Hotel in Richmond, Virginia on 24 September 1849: "It is stamped with the image of true genius – and genius in its happiest hour. It is one of those things an author never does but once."

Poe borrowed the metrical model from Elizabeth Barrett's(subsequently wife of the famous Robert Browning) poem "Lady Geraldine's Courtship". In Poe's poem the form achieves a rare excellence which even Barrett commended later.

"The Raven" consists of 18 stanzas, each stanza a six-line unit. The rhyme scheme is ABCBBB. Poe introduces variation with the help of internal rhyme which helps generate an echo effect in the general march of the verse. When the internal rhyme is counted the scheme turns out to be AA,B,CC,CB,B,B. The meter is trochaic octameter – eight trochaic feet per line, with each foot having one stressed syllable followed by one unstressed syllable. The sixth line in each stanza is in trochaic tetrameter. Mostly, the first and third lines of each stanza have an internal rhyme but other lines do as well. For example, in the first stanza 'dreary' and 'weary' in the first line and 'napping' and 'tapping' in the third line rhyme. Moreover, the second, fourth, fifth and sixth lines of each stanza rhyme. Another interesting pattern is the repetition of identical words/phrases at the end of the fourth and fifth lines of each stanza, as for instance, 'at my chamber door' in the first and third stanzas and 'Lenore' in second and fifth stanzas. Such a brief account of the form of the poem shows the careful planning that went into versification in this case.

Poe's mastery of technique in this poem is best seen in versatile use of other sound devices to create the required atmosphere. Alliteration, assonance, auxesis, repetition and onomatopoeia can be teased out in a rhetorical analysis of the poem. The overall effect of sound contributes to the sense. More specifically, it enhances the sense of gloom in the lyric.

Self-check Exercise II

The following are examples of phrases/lines using rhetorical devices used in "The Raven". Specify the device in the space provided.

i) "weak and weary"; "nearly napping"..

ii) "the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain" ....

iii) "faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door" ....

iv) "Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing, Doubting,dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before." ....

v) "a stately raven of saintly days" ....

28.3.4 A Discussion

"The Raven" begins with a variation of fairy tale opening – "Once upon a midnight dreary…" which is further specified as "in the bleak December" in the

second stanza and plunges directly into the experience of the narrator in that melancholy December midnight. The language, the atmosphere and the situation progressively heighten a keen sense of the exotic and the mysterious. But the plotline is simple and centres round a common literary theme, the death of a beloved and the unrelieved gloom of bereavement. The success of the poem lies in the evocation of a paranormal feeling and outlook growing out of the repetition and accumulation of unusual details in ordinary circumstances. What lends urgency to the little piece of action is the first person report of a curious encounter.

Stanzas 1 to 3 function as a false cue to lure the reader into the narrative. The dramatic speaker remembers his predicament in the late hours of a fateful December night when half dozing in his chamber after poring over arcane books he thinks he hears gentle tapping sound at the door. He goes on to say that he has been engaged, without any success, in a diversionary act of reading books so that he could get over his sorrow for the loss of Lenore, “the rare and radiant maiden”. Admittedly he is very sad and confused. He surmises that someone is knocking at his door to gain entry. Although he has been paralysed in his somnolent state with “fantastic terrors” by any movement or noise he musters courage. Half talking to himself and addressing “Sir…or Madam” purportedly present outside he throws open the door. But he finds nothing except darkness. He is transfixed in a state of fear and doubt for some time before whispering the word Lenore, which comes back to him in an unsettling echo. The whole experience embarrasses him as he finds his complacent assumptions about the causes of “rapping” completely unfounded. But as soon as he steps back into the chamber the tapping sound is repeated, this time a little louder and at the window. For the narrator the mystery deepens and he steels his nerves to open the window.

The opening of the window in stanza 7 introduces the second character into the situation. It is “a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore”. This raven - no ordinary bird, the stuff of myths and legends- majestically flutters into the room, settles on a bust of Pallas above the chamber door. This is the beginning of a curious exchange between the bereaved lover and the “ebony bird” in which the narrator moves from an initial bemused state of tolerant scorn for the bird to a final cry of enraged despair. Immersed as he is in the sorrow of losing his beloved the student treats the bird playfully, to start with. Imagining the visitor to have arrived from the infernal world of death and darkness the narrator seeks to know the name of the intruder. This allows the poet to introduce a well-known refrain in the poem – Quoth the Raven,”Nevermore”. In a tone of ominous irony the narrator speculates on the meaning of that answer, Nevermore, understood as the name of the bird. While as a name it is meaningless it acquires some meaning when one takes it to be the only rote word the raven has learnt from the previous master. In his agitated state the speaker imagines the bird’s owner dogged by misfortunes, given to muttering a melancholy “nevermore”, which is picked up by the pet bird.

But matters do not stop there in the poem. The narrator, having decided to indulge in his fancies, seats himself on a cushion in front the bird, with the lamplight streaming over him. This naturally rekindles the memory of the lost beloved who was associated with the same cushioned seat and the lamplight. While the “fiery eyes” of the bird offer no consoling answer, the narrator imagines a changed atmosphere in the chamber induced by censer-wielding angels. He assumes that the bird is there at God’s behest and that the whole visit

is meant as a palliative for his intense mourning. He imagines the whole experience as a relief from the tormenting memories of Lenore which persist unabated. But strangely enough, the bird's single word of utterance, Nevermore, runs counter to the narrator's desire for forgetfulness. As the poem progresses, the bird's repeated word of negation assumes the dimension of an ominous prophesy. The narrator, in rising frenzy, blurts out two questions to the bird. The first one demands to know some balm or cure for his festering sorrow. The second one probes the possibility of a reunion with Lenore in some future paradise. To both these impassioned but desperate queries the bird's response is "Nevermore".

The last two stanzas bring the narrator's emotions to a crescendo dramatizing the irrevocability of lost love. At the same time, the bird acquires a strong symbolic significance in relation to the unresolved sorrow of the speaker. When the narrator cries out in the penultimate stanza, "Take thy beak from out my heart", he has converted the accidental visitor to his chamber, dumb but for one devastatingly uttered appropriate word, into a fiendish presence of negation. In the opening stanzas, a word that appears repeatedly is "Lenore", radiating love's promised bliss. In the progress of the narrative right up to the climax the recurring word is "Nevermore", caught up in images of darkness and death. Not only do these two words rhyme but joined together as in "Lenore nevermore" they underline the impossible hopes of bereavement and the frail, transient nature of human love. Poe's poetic performance has succeeded in matching sound with sense in a profoundly original way. That, in part, accounts for the poem's critical success in his time and its continued popularity now.

In "The Philosophy of Composition" Poe offers a deceptively simple description of the dramatic action of the poem: "A raven, having learnt by rote a single word 'Nevermore,' and having escaped from the custody of its owner, is driven at midnight, through the violence of a storm, to seek admission at a window from which a light still gleams – the chamber-window of a student, occupied half in poring over a volume, half in dreaming of a beloved mistress deceased." But this bare-bones summary hardly does justice to the finished poem as we have it. The finished poem, with its archaic, allusive and rhythmic language, is a rare blend of well-crafted narration and mysterious evocation.

Self-check Exercise III

i) How does the poem open and where?

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ii) Who is the speaker in the poem? Is he different from the poet?

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iii) What does the narrator presume when he opens his chamber door?

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iv) How does the raven behave after he gains entry into the student's chamber?

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v) How does the narrator explain the bird's repetition of the word "nevermore" in stanza 11?

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vi) Why is the speaker not sure whether bird is an ordinary bird or devil?

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vii) Comment on the last two stanzas of the poem.

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28.4 LET US SUM UP

"The Raven", published in January 1845, is Poe's most famous poem. Poe borrowed the six-line stanza form from Elizabeth Barrett but used his own cultural experience and poetic skills to produce a critically acclaimed poem. Poe's use of the trochaic meter is suited to the exotic language and theme of the poem.

The theme of the poem is the loss of a beautiful maiden and its impact on the bereaved lover. By a careful manipulation of the sound pattern in the verse Poe succeeds in investing a simple narrative with a lot of suggestive mystery. The details and the setting are deliberately archaic to trigger in the reader a fitting sense of anticipation and mystery. There are allusions to myths and the Bible.

28.5 SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

You are advised to use web resources to help you understand Poe's well-known poem better. A few suggestions:

a) Visit the website of The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore at www.eapoe.org. It contains a lot of useful material

b) Two recitations of "The Raven" are very good. i) by Christopher Lee at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BefliMlEzZ8 and ii) by Basil Rathbone at http://www.npr.org/ramfiles/me/20020114.raven.rathbone.ram . These two excellent renderings available online will give you access to the sound pattern of the poem.

c) Poe's famous poem has occasioned a number of parodies, imitations and jokes. For an anonymous parody, see "The End of the Raven" at http://www.jokeindex.com/joke.asp?Joke=319

28.6 SUGGESTED READING

A companion piece for an understanding of the poem is Poe's essay "The Philosophy of Composition" available at The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore website. In addition, the following articles are helpful:

Kopley, Richard and Kevin J Hayes. "Two verse masterworks: 'The Raven' and 'Ulalume'" in *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*. Ed. Hayes.

Cambridge: Cambridge UP,2002. 191- 204.

Richards,Eliza. "Outsourcing 'The Raven': Retroactive Origins" *Victorian Poetry* 43.2(Summer 2005):205-221.

28.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

i) Boston, 1809

ii) John Allan, a tobacco merchant

iii) His interest in writing as a profession and his drinking as well as gambling alienated Poe from his foster father.

iv) Poe's mother, Poe's brother and Poe's wife

v) "MS. Found in a Bottle" or "The Gold-Bug"

vi) Baltimore

Self-check Exercise II

i) alliteration ii) onomatopoeia iii) repetition iv) auxesis v) assonance

Self-check Exercise III

i) It has a fairytale-like opening . It opens in a bleak December midnight inside a student's chamber.

ii) The speaker of the poem is a student poring over an ancient volume in the late hours of a December night. He is not be confused with Poe the poet although the poem begins with a subject speaking in the first person singular.

iii) The speaker thinks that there is a late-night visitor seeking permission to enter into his chamber.

iv) As perceived by the narrator the raven behaves in a majestic way without paying attention to the human presence. Moreover, to all queries the bird has one answer, "nevermore".

v) The narrator thinks that the raven has picked up the word "nevermore" from its owner who may have repeated it often in a life marked by a series of misfortunes.

vi) The mental state of narrator is fluctuating between lucidity and frenzy. So he sees the bird in two different dimensions.

vii) In spite of all that is reported the narrator is unable to find relief from the gloom induced by the loss of his beloved. In the last two stanzas his disintegration is near total.

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UNIT 29 HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

Structure

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29.1 Introduction
29.2 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
29.3 A Psalm of Life
29.3.1 Background of the Poem
29.3.2 The Text
29.3.3 Analysis
29.4 From The Song of Hiawatha
29.4.1 Background of the Poem
29.4.2 The Text
29.4.3 Analysis
29.5 Let Us Sum Up
29.6 Suggested Reading
29.7 Answers to Self-check Exercises

29.0 OBJECTIVES

After having read this unit you will be able to:

- Know and tell about H.W. Longfellow as a poet
- Appreciate ' A Psalm of Life' and
- From 'The Song of Hiawatha'

29.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit we have discussed H.W. Longfellow's life and his poetic career in brief so that his poems which are prescribed here may be analyzed, understood and enjoyed properly.

The first poem 'A Psalm of Life' is a religious lyric and didactic in tone. There are eight stanzas, each containing four lines and the first line rhymes with the third and the second with the fourth line. The poem has been critically analyzed to make the message of the poet clear.

The second poem 'Haiwatha's Childhood' is from Longfellow's 'The Song of Hiawatha', a long episodic poem arranged in twenty-three cantos. It tells of the triumphs and sorrows of Hiawatha of the Ojibway, a tribe of Indians living along the Lake Superior shoreline in what is now Michigan. Here only a small portion of second Canto entitled 'Hiawatha's Childhood' has been discussed and analysed. However, a brief detail of the plot and major characters is given below for your attentive reading which will help in understanding the prescribed extract in more effective manner.

'The Song of Hiawatha' is a long poem arranged in twenty-three cantos. It tells of the triumphs and sorrows of Hiawatha of the Ojibway, a tribe of Indians living

along the Lake Superior shoreline in what is now Michigan. Hiawatha's coming is foretold by Gitche Manito, the mighty spirit who gathers his people together and tells them a peacekeeper will be born who will bring wisdom to the warring tribes and stop their fighting.

Hiawatha is born to the virgin Wenonah, who is made pregnant by the west-wind god, Mudjekeewis. But when Mudjekeewis abandons her, Wenonah dies and young Hiawatha is brought up by his grandmother, Nokomis. Nokomis and the animals of the woods educate Hiawatha, who grows up to be a great hunter. One day, Nokomis tells Hiawatha of his father and how his mother died. Angered, Hiawatha seeks revenge, but is unable to kill his father, who is an immortal god. Mudjekeewis is nonetheless both impressed by and proud of his son, and tells Hiawatha to return to his people and become a great leader, promising that when it is time for Hiawatha to die, he will become the ruler of the northwest wind.

Hiawatha goes on to perform many great deeds: he wrestles and kills the Corn Spirit, Mondamin, and is rewarded with the gift of corn, which he presents to his hungry people; he defeats the King of Fishes, Nahma, with the help of some seagulls, and receives the fish's oil as a trophy; and he defeats the magician Pearl-Feather, who had brought disease to the people, and takes his shirt of wampum, a symbol of wealth and strength, as a reward. Hiawatha's thoughts then turn to Minnehaha, the young maid whom he first saw in the land of the Dakotahs. Against Nokomis's advice, Hiawatha goes to Minnehaha's family and requests her hand in marriage, proposing that their union would unify the Dakotah and Ojibway tribes. Minnehaha consents to be his wife.

Hiawatha teaches his people the virtues of kindness, wisdom, and strength. He also shows them the art of picture writing, so that their ancestors' histories can be recorded and not forgotten. When his friend Chibiabos the singer drowns, Hiawatha becomes sick with grief, but is healed by the priests and medicine men; afterwards, Hiawatha is able to go forth and instruct people in the art of healing.

Hiawatha's final episodic adventure tells of the coming of the white people to the Ojibways. However, rather than fearing and fighting the white priest who soon arrives, Hiawatha welcomes him as a sign of things to come and is not troubled by the visions he has had of the native tribes being scattered to the West. He welcomes the change, bidding his people farewell as he departs to the land of the northwest-wind that his father has promised him.

29.2 HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was born on February 27, 1807 in Portland, to Stephen and Zillah Wadsworth Longfellow.. His ancestors had come to America in 1676 from Yorkshire, England and settled there. His father was a famous lawyer while his mother's father was a general in the Revolutionary War. At the time of his birth, the Longfellows were staying with Stephen's sister in a three-story, Federal style house on the corner of Fore and Hancock Streets while her husband, Captain Samuel Stephenson, was at sea. Several months later they moved into Zillah's father's house on Congress Street. Longfellow spent his childhood there, and returned to the Congress Street home where he spent most of his life.

Longfellow was the second child in what was soon to be a family of eight children. The children remembered the order of their births with a rhyme. All

who knew him found Henry to have a "lively imagination" as well as a thirst for learning. At three he was already well on his way to learning the alphabet. When he was five, his parents sent him to the Portland Academy, a private institution where his elder brother, Stephen, was also enrolled. As was the custom for the time, the two brothers focused most of their studies on languages and literature. Always a writer at heart, when Henry was not in school he and his childhood friend, William Browne, planned elaborate writing projects.

He did not take much interest in schoolwork as his brother Samuel wrote, "In truth he was a very lively and merry boy, though of refined and quiet tastes. He did not like the 'rough and tumble' to which some of his schoolmates were given. But he joined in the ball games, kite-flying, swimming in summer; snowballing, coasting, and skating in winter." He also enjoyed visiting his paternal grandparents at their farm in Gorham, and his maternal grandparents at their farm in Hiram.

Longfellow was very young when the War of 1812 devastated Portland's economy, but the war affected him in ways both immediate and long lasting. In 1814 he wrote to his father, who was in the state Legislature in Boston, asking for a Bible for his sister and a drum for himself. Stephen Longfellow found his son "a very pretty drum, with an eagle painted on it" that cost two dollars. However, he was not able to ship it, as "They do not let any vessels go from Boston to Portland now." Many years later, in his poem "My Lost Youth" (1858), Longfellow recalls a battle that took place off the coast of Maine in 1813 between the British ship Boxer and the American Enterprise. Although the Americans were the victors, the young captains of both ships died and were buried in Portland's Eastern Cemetery, just up the street from Longfellow's house.

At 13 Longfellow published his first poem in the "Portland Gazette," signing it simply "HENRY." The poem, "The Battle of Lovell's Pond," was a heroic tale of battle between colonists and Indians; it appeared on the front page of the "Gazette." There was no praise forthcoming, for no one in the family (except his sister Anne with whom he had shared his secret) realized that their Henry had written the poem. Later that evening while at a friend's house, he overheard the father say to another friend how terrible the poem was. Young Henry was devastated but it did not put a stop to his literary aspirations.

He was a bright child and was drawn to writing and sounds of words even during his schooling at Portland Academy. He graduated from Bowdoin College in 1825 and was immediately recommended to join the chair of modern languages. This proved an adventurous beginning of his highly successful career and he travelled in the year to come including Spain, Italy, France, Germany and England. He became a popular teacher and was known in almost every country of Europe and America. Due to his distinguished career and hardworking nature, he was appointed as Professor of modern languages at Harvard University in 1834 and was later associated with the University of Cambridge. He resigned from Harvard in1854 in order to embrace writing as his full time career.

Longfellow enjoyed very happy family life though it was not without a tragedy. His romantic spirit was always the flavor of his handsome personality; he was rightly tempted by the beauty of Mary Store Potter (his school classmate) when he saw her at church after his return to Portland in 1829 and married her. But their happy married life came to an abrupt end when she died in1834 during their Europe tour. The lonely Longfellow once again devoted himself to his scholarly

work and rented the Craigie House situated on the Charles River. Later on, the house passed on into the possessions of Nathan Appleton who gifted it to him when he married his daughter Francis Appleton in 1843. For seventeen years, Longfellow led a happy family life with five children but tragedy knocked him out again when Francis died of severe burns she received while she was sealing her children's curls with matches and wax in 1861. Longfellow's great success as a poet was tarnished by the death of his wife Fanny in a fire at Craigie House in 1861. His last years, however, were serene. He received honorary degrees from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge in 1869. Between 1867 and 1869, he translated Dante's Da Divina Commedia (c. 1320, The Divine Comedy, 1802), although he did not write many new or important poems. He died in Cambridge in 1882.

He was the first American writer to be honoured in the poets' corner of Westminster Abbey in London. His best known poems are "A Psalm of Life" (1838), "Voices of the Night" (1839) "Excelsior" (1841 "The Wreck of the Hesperus" (1842), "Evangeline" (1847), "The Song of Hiawatha" (1855), "The Courtship of Miles Standish" (1858), "The Sermon of St. Francis" (1858), "The Children's Hour" (1860), "Paul Revere's Ride" (1860), "The Saga of King Olaf" (1863), Tales of a Wayside Inn (1863) and "Christmas Bells" (1864).

Self-check Exercise I

a) When and where was H.W. Longfellow born? Who were his parents?

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b) How many children were in the family Longfellow spent his childhood?

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c) Which poem did the poet write when he was only 13 years?

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d) What sort of boy Henry was when he was in school?

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e) Who was his school classmate? when did he marry her?

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f) Name any four poems composed by H.W. Longfellow.

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29.3 A PSALM OF LIFE

29.3.1 Background of the Poem

'A Psalm of Life', a religious lyric, was published in October of 1838. It is contained in Longfellow's first volume of poems entitled "Voices of the Night" (1839). A 'psalm' is a sacred song, an invocation to mankind to follow the path of righteousness. The poet encourages his readers not to waste their time because life is very short and is going to end soon. The poem highlights the views of the poet about how to live a meaningful life as there is only one life and, therefore, we should make a good use of it. In this didactic poem, the poet presents a noble idea before the youth of the nation.

29.3.2 Text

Tell me not, in mournful **numbers,**
Life is but an empty dream!
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.

Life is **real**! Life is earnest!
And the **grave** is not its goal;
Dust **thou** art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Not **enjoymen**t, and not **sorrow**,
Is our **destined** end or way;
But to act, that each to-morrow
Find us farther than to-day.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

In the world's broad field of battle,
In the **bivouac** of Life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the **strife**!

Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act, — act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead!

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives **sublime**,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's **solemn main**,
A **forlorn** and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still **achieving**, still **pursuing**,
Learn to labor and **to wait.**

Glossary:

Numbers	:	verse
Real	:	meaningful
Earnest	:	sincere
Grave	:	death
Goal	:	aim
Dust	:	useless
Thou	:	you
Enjoyment	:	pleasure
Sorrow	:	grief
Destined	:	fated
Aim	:	target
Broad	:	vast

Bivouac : Temporary encampment of any army

Dumb : speechless

Strife : struggle

Achieving : obtaining

Pursuing : keeping busy in work

To wait : have patience

29.3.3 Analysis

The poem consists of nine stanzas, each containing four lines. The poet begins the poem by asking us not to tell him in sorrowful verses that life is an empty, meaningless dream. According to Longfellow, a person who spends his life in sleeping is already dead. Such a worthless life misguides other human beings as well. In fact, irresponsibility does not represent the true human nature.

The second stanza begins with two phrases, 'Life is real! Life is earnest!' The poet uses an encouraging tone to say that life is real and serious. Life should not be treated lightly. Moreover, the poet says that death is not the ultimate goal; life does not end with death. "Dust thou art, to dust returnest" is not applicable to the soul, this is applicable only to the body.

The third stanza is about the way of living. The poet tells us that our way of living should be based on enjoyment, not on mourning. The aim of life is to act wisely each day so that we can make a better future.

The stanza four is about the work assigned to us and about the time which is flying. "Art is long, and Time is fleeting" means that the work given to us is too vast and time-consuming. The poet encourages that under such situations, our hearts still remain stout and brave and are beating funeral marches to the grave, like the drums covered with cloth. The message that the poet wants to convey through this stanza is that one should not lose courage under any circumstance.

In the fifth stanza, the poet compares the world to a battlefield as well as a temporary camp for troops. The humans are compared with troops. He asks all the people to live and fight their battles within the given period of time. The poet asks us not to be like the dumb cattle which are driven by others because of their lack of direction and determination.

The poet asks us not to trust on the future even if it seems pleasant in the sixth stanza. The past incidents must be forgotten away. The aim in life should be to act courageously at present and not to lose faith in God.

Lives of great men remind us that we can make our own lives noble and elevated that is we can reach great heights. Finally when we die, we can leave behind us our footprints (noble deeds) for others to follow our path.

The noble deeds which we leave behind should be such that an unhappy and shipwrecked man, sailing over the sea of life, would be confident and take courage, following our example.

In the final stanza of the poem the poet asks us to begin at once with courage without thinking about the consequences of the actions. He asks us to achieve our aim and learn to work hard and wait patiently for rewards.

Comments

The poem opens on an optimistic note and it inspires us to act and shun the myth that life is nothing more than an empty dream. The poet appeals to accept life as the real battlefield to achieve our goals before meeting its ultimate end—death. The mission of life should not be lost either in a lot of enjoyment or even in the heavy clouds of pain because the road of life leads us beyond the limits of pain and pleasure. Every new day should bring a new success and should add glory to our life. In such a fast life, a man has to travel very fast and he should be dynamic enough to face the odds of life bravely and boldly. It is no use sitting idle in the battlefield and to be led anywhere like a lost cattle. He should set 'the direction' in a well-defined manner to become a hero at last. He should not live on the glory of the past and should not rely on the dreamy hopes of future. He should carve out his 'present' worth living with dedication and hard work. Even the lives of great heroes give us the same message and remind weak and lost people to put up a brave front against all unfavourable circumstances. They should be prepared to face any misfortune so that they could pursue their goals upto the last breathe of life with courage and patience. Thus, the poet gives a message of hope and victory on account of hard work and devotion. The poet says that life is not an empty dream. It is real and eventful. Life is full of ups and downs. We should work hard to achieve our aim of life. We should not care for any remuneration. Work is its own reward.

Self-check Exercise II

Answer the following questions given below:

a) Do you think life is an empty dream? What's the poet's opinion about it?

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b) What is the significance of great men's lives ?

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c) Explain the meaning in the line "footprints on the sands of time".

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d) Who are referred to as ‘dumb driven cattle’ in the poem?

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e) What does the poet mean by saying ‘Life is real, life is earnest’?

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f) What should be the real aim of life?

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g) How should we behave on the battlefield of life?

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h) Which words in the fourth stanza rhyme?

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29.4 FROM THE SONG OF HIAWATHA: HIAWATHA'S CHILDHOOD

29.4.1 Background of the Poem

Set along the Southern shores of Lake Superior in the years before the arrival of European colonists, a time and place completely unfamiliar to Longfellow, *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855) draws largely on the stories of native tribes recorded and compiled by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft in his *Algic Researches* (1836). Longfellow also gained from the travel accounts of George Caitlin, who wished to record the ways of Indian life before they disappeared, and the work of John Heckewelder, a missionary whose writings about the Delaware and Huron tribes inspired James Fenimore Cooper. The name 'Hiawatha' is actually derived from a historical Indian chief who helped form the Iroquois Confederacy; but other than sharing the same name, Longfellow's Hiawatha is unrelated. Instead, he is patterned after a legendary figure known among the Iroquois as Tarenyawago, and among the Algonquin as Manabazho. Utilizing both tribal legend and imaginative storytelling, Longfellow used trochaic tetrameter, after the Finnish's *Kalevala,* and created an epic poem.

29.4.2 The Text

HIAWATHA's CHILDHOOD

Downward through the evening twilight,
In the days that are forgotten,
In the **unremembered** ages,
From the full moon fell Nokomis,
Fell the beautiful Nokomis,
She a wife, but not a mother.
She was **sporting** with her women,
Swinging in a swing of grape-vines,
When her rival, the rejected,
Full of jealousy and hatred,
Cut the leafy swing **asunde**r,
Cut in twain the twisted grape-vines,
And Nokomis fell **affrighted**
Downward through the evening twilight,
On the Muskoday, the meadow,
On the **prairie** full of blossoms.
"See! a star falls!" said the people;
"From the sky a star is falling!"
There among the ferns and mosses,
There among the prairie lilies,
On the Muskday, the **meadow**,
In the moonlight and the starlight,
Fair Nokomis bore a daughter.
And she called her name Wenonah,
As the first-born of her daughters.
And the daughter of Nokomis
Grew up like the prairie lilies,
Grew a tall and **slender** maiden,
With the beauty of the moonlight,
With the beauty of the starlight.

And Nokomis warned her often,
Saying oft, and oft repeating,
"Oh, beware of Mudjekeewis,
Of the West-Wind, Mudjekeewis;
Listen not to what he tells you;
Lie not down upon the meadow,
Stoop not down among the lilies,
Lest the West-Wind come and harm you!"
But she heeded not the warning,
Heeded not those words of wisdom,
And the West-Wind came at evening,
Walking lightly o'er the prairie,
Whispering to the leaves and blossoms,
Bending low the flowers and grasses,
Found the beautiful Wenonah,
Lying there among the lilies,
Wooed her with his words of sweetness,
Wooed her with his soft caresses,
Till she bore a son in sorrow,
Bore a son of love and sorrow.
Thus was born my Hiawatha,
Thus was born the child of wonder;
But the daughter of Nokomis,
Hiawatha's gentle mother,
In her **anguish** died deserted.

Glossary:

Unremembered : forgotten

Sporting : entertaining, enjoying

Asunder : to put things apart

Affrighted : feeling of fear

Prairie : wide area of flat land without trees

Meadow : field with grass and often wild flowers

Slender : thin and delicate

Stoop : to bend the top half of the body forward and down

Heeded : paying attention

Wooed : to win somebody's heart by persuasion

Anguish : extreme unhappiness caused by physical or mental suffering

29.4.3 Analysis

Nokomis was the daughter of the Moon. She was a wife, but had not yet given birth to her child. One day a jealous rival cut the grapevine on which she was swinging. Nokomis fell from the full moon, plunged downward, and landed on the prairie. People thought it was a meteor.

On the prairie, she gave birth to a daughter named Wenonah. As she grew, she developed into a beautiful maiden. Nokomis warned Wenonah to beware of Mudjekeewis, the West Wind. He told her not to lie down on the prairie, lest she

suffer harm. Wenonah did not heed her mother's warning. Mudjekeewis saw her lying among the lilies. He wooed her with sweet words and soft caresses, till she bore a son in sorrow. Wenonah died, deserted by the West Wind.

Nokomis took care of Hiawatha, Wenonah's child, in her wigwam, which was situated on the shores of Gitche Gumee (Lake Superior). She taught him many things, showing him Ishkoodah, the comet, and the death-dance of the spirits, which we know as the Aurora Borealis, and the pathway of the ghosts, which we call the Milky Way.

Hiawatha was an inquisitive child. He asked Nokomis why there were spots on the moon. Nokomis replied that it was the body of a woman who had been thrown up there by her angry grandson. Hiawatha noticed a rainbow and wondered what it was. Nokomis said that they were flowers. She said that when the lilies on the prairie fade and perish, they blossom in the heavens above. As Hiawatha matured, he learnt the languages of all the birds and other animals. He became thoroughly acquainted with them and learnt all their secrets.

Self-check Questions

a) Who was Nokomis?

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b) Who was Hiawatha's mother? How did she die?

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c) Who was Hiawatha brought up by?

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d) What type of child Hiawatha was?

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e) What did Hiawatha learn during his childhood from Nokomis?

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29.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have read about H.W. Longfellow as a man and poet .We also gone through his two pieces of poetry namely A *Psalm of Life* and *Hiawatha's Childhood.* Now you should be able to examine, appreciate and discuss Longfellow's poetry in general and the two poems in particular. We hope you will read some more poems of H.W. Longfellow.

29.6 SUGGESTED READING

'The Song of Hiawatha' (1855)

29.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

a) See first paragraph of 29.2

b) See the second paragraph of 29.2

c) 'Portland Gazette'

d) See third paragraph of 29.2

e) Mary Store Potter was his school classmate. He married her in 1829.

f) See last paragraph of 29.2

Self-check Exercise II

a) See first paragraph of 29.3.2

b) See eighth paragraph of 29.3.2

c) Noble deeds being done by great men and women.

d) See fifth paragraph of 29.3.2

e) See second paragraph of 29.3.2

f) 'Fleeting' rhymes with 'beating' and 'brave' with 'grave'

Self-check Exercise III

a) See first paragraph of 29.4.2

b) Wenonah was Hiawatha's mother and she died while giving birth to him.

c) Hiawatha was brought up by Nokomis, his grandmother.

d) Hiawatha was an inquisitive child.

e) See the last paragraph of 29.4.2

UNIT 30 EMILY DICKINSON

Structure

30.0 Objectives

30.1 Introduction

30.2 Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

30.3 Because I could not Stop for Death

- 30.3.1 Introduction
- 30.3.2 The Text
- 30.3.3 Glossary
- 30.3.4 A Critical Appreciation
- 30.3.5 Themes/ Questions for Discussion

30.4 A Thought Went up My Mind Today

- 30.4.1 Introduction
- 30.4.2 The Text
- 30.4.3 An Analysis of the Poem
- 30.4.4 Themes/ Questions for Discussion

30.5 Death Sets a Thing Significant

- 30.5.1 Introduction
- 30.5.2 The Text
- 30.5.3 Glossary
- 30.5.3 A Critical Evaluation of the Poem
- 30.5.4 Themes/Questions for Discussion

30.6 Let Us Sum Up

30.7 Answers to Self-check Exercises

30.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- write about Emily Dickinson's life and work
- critically evaluate Dickinson's poetry in detail with reference to:
  - i) Because I could not Stop for Death
  - ii) A Thought Went up my Mind
  - iii) Death Sets a Thing Significant

30.1 INTRODUCTION

Emily Dickinson is a remarkably singular American poet. Her favourite themes include love, death, immortality, friendship and nature. Her poems are noted for her terse style and deft use of symbols and images. She published only seven poems during her life time, that too, anonymously. However, she attained widespread popularity and an ever increasing acceptance among critics. Her unconventional use of the mechanics of language like the frequent use of dashes, ungrammatical phrasing, strange and stunning images, and, aphoristic wit have influenced many of the 20th century poets.

As one of the foremost women writers of the 19th century America too, Dickinson gains significance. But she didn't associate with the simmering feminist ideals

and struggles. She led a life of solitude and kept away from the society as far as possible. Feminist critics read in her poems the feelings and frustrations of a typical 'caged' nineteenth century woman writer for whom poetry was an outlet for suppressed emotions. You would see more about her almost reclusive life in the next section where her biographical details are given.

30.2 EMILY DICKINSON (1830-1886)

Emily Dickinson was born on 10th December 1830 at Amherst, Massachusetts. Her father, Edward Dickinson was a respected state legislator, Congressman and judge. We know very little of her early life. Most of her lifetime was spent in Amherst itself except for a few brief visits to Boston, Philadelphia and Washington. She spent a few years at a primary school and later attended Amherst Academy and Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. Even in childhood she used to withdraw from the world outside her home. This tendency became more evident as she grew up and in her youth she became a total recluse who never left her parental house and garden. It is said that she was reluctant to receive visitors, stopped attending church services, and dressed in white clothes alone.

Nevertheless, she managed to keep her friendship with many through her correspondence. *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* published in 1958 is the source of her biographical details. The letters also delineate her emotional and aesthetic life, though in a rather veiled manner. We may assume from the letters she wrote to someone whom she addressed as 'Master' that she went through several emotional crises in her twenties. In the poems written during this period she gives vent to her frustrated hopes and transitory delights. Her poetic output during 1862 was prolific writing about three hundred and fifty poems. They reveal a desperate soul's poignant attempts to seek meaning in a steadily shrinking personal world.

The same year she sent some of her poems to the critic, Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Despite his positive response, the poems didn't get published. By the time of her death on 15th May 1886, she wrote about 1775 poems which assured her posthumous reputation as a poet of rare charm. After her death, her sister Lavinia found her manuscript in her room. The first collection of Dickinson's poems, edited by Higginson and Mabel L. Todd was published in 1890. Six more volumes of her poems were published in between 1914 and 1937 and they were edited by Dickinson's niece, Martha Dickinson Binachi and Alfred L. Hampson.

Self-check Exercise I

1) Where did Emily Dickinson spend most of her life?

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2) What is peculiar about the poet's life?

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3) What is the source of Emily Dickinson's biographical details?

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4) Was Dickinson famous as a poet during her lifetime?

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5) Who edited the first collection of Dickinson's poems?

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30.3 BECAUSE I COULD NOT STOP FOR DEATH

30.3.1 Introduction

Have you ever read a poem or short story dealing with death? How is death usually presented in folklore and literature? Isn't death often picturised as something grave, somber, painful or formidable? Well, here is a poem that looks at death from a different angle.

The poem deals with death and immortality in a manner that is quite singular. It is often referred to as "The Chariot," a title that evokes its central image of the chariot ride with death, the amiable gentleman caller who comes to take the poet out on a ride. The poem presents the coming of Death as a casual event. It begins rather abruptly, calling attention to the unexpected arrival of death personified as a polite gentleman. There is one more traveller, Immortality. Since the soul is immortal it may be regarded as a journey towards eternity.

Now read the poem and refer to the glossary.

30.3.2 The Text

Because I could not stop for Death–
He kindly stopped for me–
The carriage held just ourselves
And Immortality.

We slowly drove – he knew no haste 5
And I had put away
My labour and my leisure too,
For his civility–

We passed the school, where children strove
At recess in the ring– 10
We passed the fields of gazing grain–
We passed the setting sun–

Or rather– he passed us–
The dews grew quivering and chill–
For only gossamer, my gown 15
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– 20

Since then– 'tis centuries– and yet
Feels shorter than a day
I first surmised the horses' heads
Were toward eternity–

30.3.3 Glossary

Line 6 *put away*: given up

7 labour and leisure encompass all her worldly interests and activities she abandons for Death

8 *civility*: polite behaviour

9 *strove*: (here) played

10 at *recess*: during leisure time

ring: open space

15 *gossamer*: transparent thin fabric

16 *tippet*: scarf

tulle: soft fine cloth made of silk or nylon used especially for making veils

20 *cornice*: a decorative border around the top of the walls in a room or on the outside walls of a building

23 *surmised*: guessed

Self-check Exercise II

Now see if you can answer these questions briefly.

1) Who are the travellers in the carriage?

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2) What is the figure of speech employed in the first stanza?

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3) How is death presented in the poem?

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4) Why did the chariot move slowly?

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5) Why had she given up her labour and leisure?

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6) What do the school, the gazing grain and the setting sun signify?

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7) Where did the chariot stop?

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8) Why does the house seem to be a swelling of the ground?

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9) Why does the poet feel that the centuries seem shorter than the day?

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10) What was the destination of the chariot?

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You must have answered most of the questions. Read the next section carefully and see if you need to modify your answers. The next section is followed by a few more questions which should be answered in detail.

30.3.4 A Critical Appreciation

"Because I could not Stop for Death", as Allen Tate calls it, is "one of the perfect and greatest poems in the English language." The poem deals with Death and Immortality, two recurring themes in Emily Dickinson's poetry. The poem conceives of death in terms of routine life, not as something alien and sublime. The poet has a clear perception which manifests in the precision of images chosen by her.

Death is presented as a gentleman who has kindly stopped to take the poet out on a drive in his carriage. The world "kindly" (line 2) defines the sort of relationship between the poet and death. The loneliness of the journey with Death is dispelled by the presence of Immortality, the companion of Death. It also brings in a religious element since death is the gateway to immortality in religious thought. However, the terror of Death is diminished by presenting it as a kind gentleman suitor taking a lady out for a ride. He has the compassionate mission of taking her out of the woes of the world.

The relationship between the poet and Death is further defined in the second stanza. It is a smooth, unstrained relationship. Death is in no hurry; the poet affirms that he "knew no haste" (line 5). Death shows an easy familiar intimacy that is reassuring for the poet. The poet bids farewell to the world. Though too preoccupied with life like most human beings to wait for death she leaves her labour and leisure, that is, her worldly interests and possessions. The unhurried movement the carriage also hints at the slow–paced hearse heading on to the burial ground.

The third stanza presents the poet's intensely conscious leave taking of the world. Dickinson renders it through a fine economy of words. The poet presents three images: playing school children, fields of grain and the setting sun. They seem to represent the three stages in human life, childhood, maturity and old age. The labour and leisure of the second stanza are made concrete in the in the joyous activity of the children at play. And it is contrasted with the passivity of nature (the gazing grain). The indifference of nature to the death of human beings is highlighted by transferring the final stare in the dead traveller's eyes to the gazing grain. The setting sun brings in the eternal darkness associated with death. The sequence of images can also be explained as the natural route of a funeral procession, passing the school, the outlaying cornfields of the village and moving on to the remote cemetery.

When the poet says that the carriage passed the setting sun she has not come to terms with the unknown realms into which she has now entered. But soon she realises her mistake and comprehends that she is out of the bounds human time. Eternity is a world of boundless time and so she corrects herself by saying that the sun passed them. Sun, the assured mark of the passage of time for life on earth is no longer valid for the poet. She speaks of the bitter cold she experienced in the fourth stanza. As the dews descent "quivering and chill" she realises what it feels to come to rest in the cold damp ground. The gown and scarf she wore were so thin and could not protect her from cold. According to some critics gossamer and tippet are the common funeral dress of women. Moreover, Death is traditionally associated with chillness and cold.

The carriage stops at a house that seems "a swelling of the ground." Evidently it is suggestive of the mound over a grave. Moreover the roof of the house was too low to be easily visible. Besides, its cornice is in the ground. Such details of her

description of the house identify it with the grave. But the tomb's horror is alleviated by the fact that the journey has not ended there. They are merely pausing there as though it is a hospice form where the journey will resume.

The final stanza of the poem seems to project the last sensations before her world fades out. She refers to a single visible object, the horses' heads, recalled in a flash of memory. That was the first object on which her eyes were fixed throughout the journey with death. Moreover the reference to the horses' heads brings to our mind the carriage in the opening stanza. The chariot reaches the limits of mortality when it stops at the house of death. It is not her real destination. The poet says that centuries have passed. It shows the transition from time to eternity. Yet she feels it to be shorter than a day. Human dimension of time is irrelevant in the timeless world of eternity.

The poem is flawless in employing precise and discrete images which enhance the central image of the chariot ride with Death. But the chariot relentlessly moves on to the mysterious world of eternity. By civilizing death and by familiarising herself with it, it is made tolerable. Throughout the poem Death is viewed from diverse perspectives. It is a welcome relief from life's tension and so the poet is ready for a calm ride with it. It heightens one's satisfaction with life and so the poet is ready to discard her labour and leisure. It leads one to a finer world beyond the temporal devoid of the trials and tribulations of everyday existence. Thus the poet portrays death as a solemn guide that leads man to immortality.

30.3.5 Themes/Questions for Discussion

1) What is the central theme of the poem?
2) How does Dickinson portray death?
3) What symbols does the poet employ?
4) The role of Immortality in the poem.
5) Is there a central image in the poem? How does it unify the thematic and structural elements in the poem?

30.4 A THOUGHT WENT UP MY MIND TODAY

30.4.1 Introduction

Isn't it quite usual for all of us to have recurring thoughts? What have you felt when a thought or recollection comes to your mind unexpectedly after an interval of time? Do such thoughts trouble you? Or do you just ignore them as irrelevant? Well, a poet's response to such things which we think as trivial may lead to significant ideas and insight into life. Even shapeless ideas can lead to something worthwhile.

Read this short poem by Emily Dickinson and try to make sense of it.

30.4.2 The Text

A thought went up my mind today
That I have had before,
But did not finish,—some way back,
I could not fix the year,

Nor where it went, nor why it came
The second time to me,
Nor definitely what it was,
Have I the art to say.

But somewhere in my soul, I know
I've met the thing before;
It just reminded me—'t was all—
And came my way no more.

Self-check Exercise III

Now that you have read the poem try to answer the following questions:

1) Was it the first time that the thought occurred to the poet?

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2) Was the thought a clearly defined one?

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3) Does the poet specify when she had the thought before?

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4) Does the poet say why it is repeated?

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5) Why does the poet keep the nature of the thought a mystery?

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Now read the analysis of the poem in the next section and try to have a deeper understanding of the poem

30.4.4 An Analysis of the Poem

On the surface level the poem is quite simple though what the poet says about is rather vague. She thought of something on a day that she hadn't thought of for a long time. She doesn't know why she stopped thinking about it back then. Also, she cannot say why she thought about it again, after so long. In fact, she couldn't even say for sure what the thought was. All she knows is that the thought gave her a brief moment of realization and then disappeared. Thus at the centre of the poem is a paradox as the poet is describing something which she cannot clearly define.

The poem begins by referring to a very commonplace occurrence. A thought props up in the poet's mind. It is a thought that she had had before. But then the thought was not a finished, clearly defined one. She does not remember how long before she had this thought first. She cannot remember the exact time of its pervious occurrence. So the description is rather vague. But the poet is not telling us about something concrete, which registers through the senses. The poet is attempting to convey something – a thought – which is abstract. Therefore, the vague description suits the theme of the poem. Furthermore thoughts spring from the mind which too, cannot be defined in concrete terms.

The poet cannot remember where the thought went to or why such a thought occurred to her. That is, the occasion of the thought or the source which inspired it is also kept in the dark. Why it recurred too, is unknown. The poet says in clear terms that she cannot say definitely what it was, thus emphasizing its shapeless and elusive nature. The poet says that she lacks the skill to describe it in specific clear cut terms. Despite the fact that the poet is unable to say precisely what the thought is, it is not totally unknown to her. Deep within her soul she knows that it is familiar to her. That is why she is able to realise that it has occurred to her in the past. The reappearance of the thought was just a reminder and it never comes to the poet again.

The poet is unable to give a precise expression to the thought. But a thought exists when we can say what it is. An author can express any thought that crosses her mind, at least approximately. The poet insists on keeping us in the dark about the nature and reason behind the thought. Therefore, it is obvious that thought itself does not form the subject matter of the poem. The thought becomes a metaphor for the mysteries of human existence. It may allude to life it self which we cannot define in precise terms in spite of the fact that we have an awareness about it. Again, the inexpressibility of the thought may also refer to the mysterious working of the human mind. The working of the mind is as unpredictable as the appearance and vanishing of the thought and is as

indescribable as the elusive thought that defies explanation in specific terms. It may also refer to the creation of art. A work of art emanates from the creative mind of an artist but how it evolves or why it came into being remains a mystery. Thus Emily Dickinson looks into the many mysteries that hover over our existence which elude exact description even though we are conscious of them.

30.4.5 Themes/Questions for Discussion

1) How do you account for the characteristic vagueness of the poem?
2) What does the poet say about the thought she had?
3) The possible metaphorical dimensions of the mysterious thought.

30.5 DEATH SETS A THING SIGNIFICANT

30.5.1 Introduction

Doesn't an insignificant thing become valuable when it is given to you by someone dear to you? Don't you prize little things that someone beloved gave you? This common experience of humanity forms the background of this poem which discusses how death transforms things that we regard too commonplace to take notice of, things we usually take for granted. Dickinson thinks over the effect of death on commonplace things of little relevance. For all of us little things become significant for their emotional value.

This is true of artifacts too. Artifacts are valued more after the death of the person who made them. That is, Death endows them with an emotional value. Last works are often valued as memorials of the departed. Commonplace and insignificant things are prized especially for the reason that they are souvenirs of our loved ones.

Now read on the poem carefully and try to answer the questions that follow

30.5.2 The Text

Death sets a thing significant
The eye had hurried by,
Except a perished creature
Entreat us tenderly

To ponder little workmanships 5
In crayon or in wool,
With "This was last her fingers did,"
Industrious until

The thimble weighed too heavy,
The stitches stopped themselves, 10
And then't was put among the dust
Upon the closet shelves.

A book I have, a friend gave,
Whose pencil, here and there,
Had notched the place that pleased him, — 15
At rest his fingers are.

Now, when I read, I read not,
For interrupting tears
Obliterate the etchings
Too costly for repairs. 20

30.5.3 Glossary

Line 3 *a perished creature*: some dear departed

Line 5 *workmanships*: skilled works of art or craft

Line 8 *Industrious*: hardworking; making too much effort

Line 9 *thimble*: a small metal or plastic object you wear on your finger to protect it when sewing

Line 15 *notched*: made markings

Self-check Exercise IV

1) What does the poet mean by the phrase "Death sets a thing significant"?

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2) How do we usually regard commonplace things?

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3) What change does death bring in our perception of ordinary little things?

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4) Why do we find little things significant after the death of a dear one?

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5) What is special about the book the poet's friend gave her?

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6) Why does the poet say that her fingers are at rest?

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7) Why does the poet find it difficult to read the book?

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30.5.4 A Critical Evaluation of the Poem

The poem opens with a statement of its theme, which is that death makes things more significant. We usually overlook things that are part of our day-to-day life and the little things that belong to or made by our dear ones. The poet goes on to describe finding a friend's writing and sketches- things which "the eye had hurried by" previously that have now become meaningful after the death of the friend.

In the second stanza Dickinson evokes a common feeling experienced after the loss of a dear one: the desire to think over the traces left by the dear departed. Now the trivial "workmanships" in crayon or wool are strangely transformed. They become almost as significant as the person who died. They gain importance and become valuable as the things in which the beloved was last engaged in. They are the things that our loved ones created last and as they are now dead their selves seem to be ingrained in what they have left behind.

The industrious work of the departed must have been put to a sudden halt by death. The last work of the poet's friend had the same fate as her life. Her work continued until her body could no longer function and the sewing stopped. So the thimble weighted too heavy for her fingers and the stitches automatically stopped. Her work was "put among the dust; upon the closet shelves" just as her body was buried in the grave.

Then the poet speaks about a book her friend gave her. There are markings in pencil inside the book. But the fingers that made those marks are at rest now. Her

friend's etchings in the pages of the book are insignificant as such. But they become invaluable as they remind a dear friend who has passed away. As she attempts to read the book now it becomes impossible to continue reading. Tears fill her eyes and blur her sight. Teardrops may fall on the pages and obliterate the markings made by the friend which are invaluable and too costly for repairs. Dickinson narrates how insignificant things become unique and precious after the death of a dear one.

30.5.5 Themes/Questions for Discussion

1) How does death transform insignificant things?
2) The novelty of Dickinson's perspective on death.
3) What aspect of death does the poet highlight in the poem?

30.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you read about one of the most significant American women poets, Emily Dickinson. You read about her strange life, and the features of her poetry that make her poems uniquely attractive. Finally you studied three of her lyrics in detail. You should now be able to appreciate, analyse and discuss Dickinson's poetry in general and the three poems in depth.

30.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise I

1) In her native town of Amherst.
2) She withdrew from the outside world and became a recluse. Practically, she never left her parental house.
3) *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*
4) No. She gained reputation as a poet posthumously.
5) Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Mabel L. Todd

Self-Check Exercise II

1) Death, Immortality and the Poet are the travellers in the carriage.
2) Personification.
3) Death is presented as a gentleman who has kindly stopped to take the poet out on a drive in the carriage.
4) Death is in no hurry. So they drove slowly. Moreover, a funeral procession usually moves in a slow pace.
5) The poet had given up her labour and leisure as a sign of politeness to Death. She had to give up her worldly interests and pleasures to accompany Death.
6) They represent the three stages in human life. The school, the gazing grain and the setting sun symbolise childhood, maturity and old age respectively.
7) The chariot stopped before a house that seemed a swelling of the ground, that is, the grave.
8) The house where they reach is the grave itself. The phrase 'a swelling of the ground' is suggestive of the mound of earth over a grave.

9) Death has taken the poet to the world of eternity where the human notion of time is irrelevant. So the poet feels that though centuries have passed it is shorter than a day.

10) The destination of the chariot was eternity. Thought it stopped at the grave, the chariot of Death leads the poet into the world of immortality.

Self-Check Exercise III

1) No. the thought has occurred to the poet before.

2) No, it was rather a vague thought. She cannot say exactly what the thought was.

3) The poet does not specify when she had the thought before. She cannot remember how long before it occurred to her. But she knows that it is recurring now.

4) The poet does not know why the thought is repeating. She is unaware of the occasion or the source of inspiration for such a repetitive thought.

5) The poet is trying to covey something that is abstract. So she keeps the nature of the thought a mystery. The thought is shapeless and elusive as it is a metaphor for the mystery of human existence.

Self-Check Exercise IV

1) The poet refers to the strange power of death to make commonplace things significant and valuable.

2) We usually overlook things that are part of our everyday life. We ignore commonplace things that belong to or made by our dear ones.

3) After the death of our dear ones we regard the ordinary little things that belong to them precious and significant.

4) The little things become almost as significant as the person who died. They gain importance and become valuable as things that belonged to the dear departed.

5) Inside the book there are markings in pencil made by the friend. They are the last markings the dear friend made and so they are precious.

6. The poet says that her fingers are at rest because the friend is dead.

7) The poet finds it difficult to read the book because it reminds her of the dead friend. Tears fill her eyes and blur her sight. So it is difficult for her to continue reading.

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Supplementary Reading

The American Scholar

Ralph Waldo Emerson

An Oration delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society, at Cambridge, August 31, 1837

Mr. President and Gentlemen,

I greet you on the re-commencement 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 cotemporaries 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 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 light new days and events have thrown on his character, 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 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 parcelled 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 a ship.

In this distribution of functions, the scholar is the delegated intellect. In the right state, he is, *Man 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 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 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.

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 is he of all men whom this spectacle most engages. 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 centre, 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, every thing 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 for ever to animate the last fibre 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, 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.

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 cotemporaries, 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 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. The sluggish and perverted mind of the multitude, 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 the soul. Hence, the restorers of readings, the emendators, the bibliomaniacs of all degrees.

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 active soul. 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 looks forward: the eyes of man are set in his forehead, not in his hindhead: man hopes: genius creates. 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 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 Shakspearized 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 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 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 wellnigh thought and said. But for the evidence thence afforded to the philosophical doctrine of the identity of all minds, we should suppose some preestablished 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 Shakspeare, 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 Shakspeare’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.

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 run 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 instructers in eloquence and wisdom. The true scholar grudges every opportunity of action past by, as a loss of power.

It is the raw material out of which the intellect moulds 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, 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 truths? 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 Berserkirs, come at last Alfred and Shakspeare.

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.

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 fetish 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 crowded cities 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 fulfils 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 tranquillity, 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. Linnaeus 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 millennium, 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 strown 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 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 any thing 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 joy some 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 Provencal 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 plough, and the leger, 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 connection 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 isanity, 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. Every thing 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, which 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 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. The study of letters shall 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 defence 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.

A Child Said, What Is The Grass?

A child said, What is the grass? fetching it to me with full hands;
How could I answer the child?. . . .I do not know what it is any more than he.

I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven.

Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropped,
Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that we
may see and remark, and say Whose?

Or I guess the grass is itself a child. . . .the produced babe of the vegetation.

Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,
And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones,
Growing among black folks as among white,
Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them the same, I receive them the same.

And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves.

Tenderly will I use you curling grass,
It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men,
It may be if I had known them I would have loved them;
It may be you are from old people and from women, and
from offspring taken soon out of their mother's laps,
And here you are the mother's laps.

This grass is very dark to be from the white heads of old mothers,
Darker than the colorless beards of old men,
Dark to come from under the faint red roofs of mouths.

O I perceive after all so many uttering tongues!
And I perceive they do not come from the roofs of mouths for nothing.

I wish I could translate the hints about the dead young men and women,
And the hints about old men and mothers, and the offspring taken soon out of their laps.

What do you think has become of the young and old men?
What do you think has become of the women and children?

They are alive and well somewhere;
The smallest sprouts show there is really no death,
And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it,
And ceased the moment life appeared.

All goes onward and outward. . . .and nothing collapses,
And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier.

Walt Whitman

Prayer of Columbus

IT was near the close of his indomitable and pious life—on his last voyage when nearly 70 years of age—that Columbus, to save his two remaining ships from foundering in the Caribbean Sea in a terrible storm, had to run them ashore on the Island of Jamaica—where, laid up for a long and miserable year—1503—he was taken very sick, had several relapses, his men revolted, and death seem'd daily imminent; though he was eventually rescued, and sent home to Spain to die, unrecognized, neglected and in want......It is only ask'd, as preparation and atmosphere for the following lines, that the bare authentic facts be recall'd and realized, and nothing contributed by the fancy. See, the Antillean Island, with its florid skies and rich foliage and scenery, the waves beating the solitary sands, and the hulls of the ships in the distance. See, the figure of the great Admiral, walking the beach, as a stage, in this sublimest tragedy—for what tragedy, what poem, so piteous and majestic as the real scene?—and hear him uttering—as his mystical and religious soul surely utter'd, the ideas following—perhaps, in their equivalents, the very words.

A BATTER'D, wreck'd old man,
Thrown on this savage shore, far, far from home,
Pent by the sea, and dark rebellious brows, twelve dreary months,
Sore, stiff with many toils, sicken'd, and nigh to death,
I take my way along the island's edge,
Venting a heavy heart.

I am too full of woe!
Haply, I may not live another day;
I can not rest, O God—I can not eat or drink or sleep,
Till I put forth myself, my prayer, once more to Thee,
Breathe, bathe myself once more in Thee—commune with Thee,
Report myself once more to Thee.

Thou knowest my years entire, my life,
(My long and crowded life of active work—not adoration merely;)

Thou knowest the prayers and vigils of my youth;
Thou knowest my manhood's solemn and visionary meditations;
Thou knowest how, before I commenced, I devoted all to come to Thee;
Thou knowest I have in age ratified all those vows, and strictly kept them;
Thou knowest I have not once lost nor faith nor ecstasy in Thee;
(In shackles, prison'd, in disgrace, repining not,
Accepting all from Thee—as duly come from Thee.)

All my emprises have been fill'd with Thee,
My speculations, plans, begun and carried on in thoughts of Thee,
Sailing the deep, or journeying the land for Thee;
Intentions, purports, aspirations mine—leaving results to Thee.

O I am sure they really come from Thee!
The urge, the ardor, the unconquerable will,
The potent, felt, interior command, stronger than words,
A message from the Heavens, whispering to me even in sleep,
These sped me on.

By me, and these, the work so far accomplish'd (for what has been,
has been;)
By me Earth's elder, cloy'd and stifled lands, uncloy'd, unloos'd;
By me the hemispheres rounded and tied—the unknown to the known.

The end I know not—it is all in Thee;
Or small, or great, I know not—haply, what broad fields, what lands;
Haply, the brutish, measureless human undergrowth I know,
Transplanted there, may rise to stature, knowledge worthy Thee;
Haply the swords I know may there indeed be turn'd to reaping-tools;
Haply the lifeless cross I know—Europe's dead cross—may bud and
blossom there.

One effort more—my altar this bleak sand:
That Thou, O God, my life hast lighted,
With ray of light, steady, ineffable, vouchsafed of Thee,
(Light rare, untellable—lighting the very light!
Beyond all signs, descriptions, languages!)
For that, O God—be it my latest word—here on my knees,
Old, poor, and paralyzed—I thank Thee.

My terminus near,
The clouds already closing in upon me,
The voyage balk'd—the course disputed, lost,
I yield my ships to Thee.

Steersman unseen! henceforth the helms are Thine;
Take Thou command—(what to my petty skill Thy navigation?)
My hands, my limbs grow nerveless;
My brain feels rack'd, bewilder'd; Let the old timbers part—I will not part!
I will cling fast to Thee, O God, though the waves buffet me;
Thee, Thee, at least, I know.

Is it the prophet's thought I speak, or am I raving?
What do I know of life? what of myself?

I know not even my own work, past or present;
Dim, ever-shifting guesses of it spread before me,
Of newer, better worlds, their mighty parturition,
Mocking, perplexing me.

And these things I see suddenly—what mean they?
As if some miracle, some hand divine unseal'd my eyes,
Shadowy, vast shapes, smile through the air and sky,
And on the distant waves sail countless ships,
And anthems in new tongues I hear saluting me.

Walt Whitman