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MATS CENTRE FOR OPEN & DISTANCE EDUCATION

American Literature

**Master of Arts (English)
Semester - 2**



SELF LEARNING MATERIAL



MATS UNIVERSITY

OPEN & DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAM

American Literature

Master of Arts (English)

Semester II

Aarang Kharora Highway, Aarang, Raipur, CG, 493411

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American Literature

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American Literature

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MODULE I***'WHEN LILACS LAST IN THE DOORYARD BLOOM'D'* - WALT WHITMAN****Contents**

1. Objectives
2. Introduction to American Literature and its Major Writers
3. Genres and Principal Themes in American Literature
4. Life and Works of Walt Whitman
5. *'When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd'* (poem) and explanation
6. Questions
7. Book suggested

Objective

The students enrolled in the American literature program will embark on an in-depth exploration of a wide array of literary pieces that encapsulate the multifaceted spectrum of voices, themes, and significant historical milestones that have shaped the intricate tapestry of American culture and identity. Throughout their academic voyage, they will immerse themselves in the seminal works of renowned authors, thereby gaining profound insights into the prevailing literary movements and pressing societal concerns of the era. By engaging in meticulous reading and rigorous analysis, these students will not only uncover the foundational tenets, profound themes, and nuanced expressions that underscore the American literary heritage but also develop a heightened appreciation for the depth and complexity inherent in this rich tradition.

Objectives to study When Lilacs Last in the dooryard Bloom'd

To understand how Whitman mourns Abraham Lincoln's death and expresses national grief and to analyze Whitman's use of free verse, repetition, and imagery to create a meditative and lyrical effect.



UNIT 1

INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN LITERATURE

An in-depth analysis of American literature: innovators, categories, and principal themes. American literature constitutes a diverse and extensive legacy that encompasses centuries and mirrors the intricate history and culture of the United States. Since its colonial inception, American literature has developed to encompass diverse topics, including the pursuit of freedom, self-expression, and the struggles for equality, identity, and social justice. This legacy is centred around pioneering figures whose contributions significantly influenced American literary history, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Eugene O'Neill, Toni Morrison, and Arthur Miller. These authors, each in their own manner, advanced American literature through their individual voices, topic investigations, and stylistic innovations.

Major Writers in American Literature

Ralph Waldo Emerson, born in 1803 and passing away in 1882, is often considered the founding figure of American transcendentalism due to his substantial impact on 19th-century thought and literature. Through his extensive body of work encompassing articles, lectures, and poetry, Emerson profoundly shaped the landscape of American philosophy and writing. His core beliefs are centered on the significance of individuality, the importance of self-reliance, and the interconnectedness between humanity and the natural world. These themes reverberated through his most celebrated writings, such as *Self-Reliance* published in 1841 and *Nature* in 1836, where he expounded on the inherent power of the individual and the divine essence interwoven within nature. The essence of Emerson's transcendentalist ideology lay in transcending the limits of rational thinking to explore the spiritual and intuitive dimensions of human existence, significantly influencing subsequent literary movements like Romanticism and modern American philosophical thought.

Emerson's profound influence is clearly discernible in the works of various authors, with Walt Whitman standing out prominently as one who delved deeper into the essential concepts of individualism and spiritual unity within his poetic expressions. Through Emerson's invaluable contributions, a broader exploration of the facets comprising American essence and the significance of the individual's position amid a

democratic society was made possible, thereby enriching the cultural and intellectual discourse of the time.

Walt Whitman (1819–1892)

Walt Whitman, a pivotal figure in American literature, transformed poetry via his inventive application of free verse and audacious examination of human experience. Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, first published in 1855, is regarded as his magnum opus, a work that subverts conventional literary structures and exalts the uniqueness of the American spirit. Whitman's poetry explores themes of democracy, individuality, and the interrelation of all existence. His most renowned poem, *Song of Myself*, extols human variation and individuality while advocating for unity and equality.

Whitman's distinctive style, marked by its meticulous cataloguing of everyday experiences, utilization of free verse to enhance poetic freedom, and a profound focus on both the tangible and intangible aspects of existence, fostered a genuinely American literary voice that exalted the magnificence of the natural world and delved deep into the complexities of human emotions. His vast body of work serves as a perennial wellspring of inspiration for writers and poets worldwide, especially those striving to break free from traditional literary norms and explore the boundless possibilities of creative expression.

Eugene O'Neill (1888–1953)

Eugene O'Neill is considered as one of the preeminent American playwrights of the 20th century. His writings examine the intricacies of human nature, the weight of history, and the sad conflicts faced by those ensnared in their personal dilemmas. O'Neill's plays frequently examine the themes of loneliness, disillusionment, and the human potential for both redemption and destruction.

O'Neill's significant works include *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956), a groundbreaking semi-autobiographical play that delves deep into the complexities of a dysfunctional family struggling with the stark realities of addiction and illness. Similarly, *The Iceman Cometh* (1946) stands out as a compelling exploration of the bleak existence of despondent alcoholics and dreamers trapped in the shadows of their own illusions. Moreover, *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (1947) shines a poignant light on themes of remorse, longing, and the everlasting pursuit of love. Through his profound



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examination of the darker aspects of human nature and his invaluable contributions to the evolution of dramatic structure, O'Neill undeniably solidified his position as a true pioneer in the realm of American theatre.

Toni Morrison (1931–2019)

Toni Morrison, an esteemed and celebrated American author renowned throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, has garnered widespread acclaim for her in-depth exploration of the African American experience. In her extensive body of work, Morrison delves into the enduring impacts of slavery, the complexities of racial identity, and the nuanced social interactions within Black communities. What distinguishes Morrison's writing is the exquisite quality of her prose, characterized by its poetic and melodic cadence, the rich layers of symbolism that imbue her narratives with depth and complexity, and her unwavering focus on delving into the intricate psychological dimensions of her characters, creating a profound and lasting impact on readers around the world.

Her most renowned book is *Beloved* (1987), which received the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and explores the enduring repercussions of slavery on the lives of African Americans in the post-Civil War era. In *Song of Solomon* (1977), Morrison examines themes of identity, familial relationships, and the quest for self-awareness. Her works frequently explore the intersections of history, memory, and identity, providing incisive critiques of racism and injustice within American culture. Morrison's oeuvre is esteemed for its profundity, intricacy, and perceptiveness regarding the African American experience.

Arthur Miller (1915–2005)

Arthur Miller, the acclaimed playwright, is well-known for his insightful examination of the ethical dilemmas and societal limitations faced by individuals within a conformist society. Through his plays, he delves deeply into the complexities of navigating cultural expectations and the moral struggles associated with them. Miller's sharp critiques often challenge the prevalent American values, particularly exposing the fragility of the American Dream, while also shedding light on the profound impact of societal pressures on one's moral compass and sense of self.

Miller's renowned play, *Death of a Salesman* (1949), explores the melancholy existence of Willy Loman, an elderly salesman disenchanted by his failure to attain the American Dream. Significant works including *The Crucible* (1953), an allegory addressing the perils of McCarthyism and societal disintegration, and *A View from the Bridge* (1955), which examines issues of justice, envy, and treachery among an Italian-American immigrant community. Miller's plays remain pertinent in their examinations of societal pressures, economic inequality, and the shortcomings of American values.

Genres and Principal Themes in American Literature

American literature, which boasts a rich tapestry of literary genres including poetry, theatre, fiction, and essays, has been significantly shaped by a myriad of influential literary movements throughout history. The impactful currents of Transcendentalism, Realism, Modernism, and Postmodernism have all left their indelible mark on the trajectory of American literary expression, contributing to the ever-evolving landscape of creativity and innovation within the realm of literature.

American poetry traces its roots back to the era of early colonial poets like Anne Bradstreet and Philip Freneau, but it truly flourished during the time of Emerson and Whitman, both of whom significantly shaped the landscape of American lyrical expression. Through their profound works, they established a legacy that continues to influence poets and readers alike, contributing to the rich tapestry of American literature. Over time, American poetry has evolved as a powerful medium for exploring themes of self-expression, national identity, and social justice, reflecting the diverse perspectives and experiences of the American people.

American drama, especially in the 20th century, has been influenced by authors like Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller. These authors analysed the psychological and social quandaries of individuals, frequently questioning the ethical values and pressures of American society.

American fiction has a diverse array of themes and styles, spanning from the early writings of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville to the social realism of John Steinbeck and the postmodern experiments of Thomas Pynchon. American fiction frequently addresses themes of identity, race, class, and the quest for the American Dream.

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Essays & Non-Fiction: Emerson's essays established the foundation for American intellectualism and literary critique. American non-fiction has examined themes such as democracy, social justice, and individual rights, with notable contributions from authors such as Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Susan Sontag.

Principal Themes in American Literature

The American Dream has been a recurring theme in the works of various American authors throughout history. From the early Puritans to writers of the 20th century, there has been a consistent exploration of this concept—the belief that hard work, perseverance, and ambition will ultimately lead to achievement. Notable literary figures like Arthur Miller and F. Scott Fitzgerald have delved deep into this notion, shedding light on both the ideals and limitations of the American Dream, offering insights into its complexities and consequences.

The examination of race and identity has been a crucial issue in American literature, especially in the writings of authors such as Toni Morrison, Richard Wright, and Langston Hughes. These scholars analyse the lives of African Americans and the impact of slavery, segregation, and racism on individuals and communities.

Individualism and Self-Reliance have been prominent themes in American literature, with writers drawing inspiration from the ideas of Emerson and Whitman. They have consistently celebrated the virtues of self-sufficiency, personal freedom, and the uniqueness of the individual. This theme is particularly evident in the works of transcendentalist authors who emphasized the importance of self-reliance, as well as in Whitman's poetry, where he passionately praises the distinctiveness and autonomy of each person.

American literature has a rich tradition of delving into the intricate emotional and psychological landscapes that individuals navigate, with notable explorations found in the works of influential writers such as Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, and Walt Whitman. Within their writings, these literary luminaries skillfully illuminate the myriad challenges that confront human beings, shedding light on themes such as inner conflict, existential ambiguity, and the unending pursuit for purpose and meaning in a complex world. Through their profound narratives, these authors provide deep insights into the depths of the human experience and the complexities of the human psyche, offering readers a mirror through which to reflect on their own internal struggles and aspirations.

By intricately weaving together themes of turmoil, uncertainty, and the eternal quest

for significance, American literary giants like O'Neill, Miller, and Whitman craft compelling and timeless reflections on the fundamental aspects of existence that resonate with readers across generations. In their exploration of the multifaceted dimensions of the human condition, these authors engage in a profound dialogue with the audience, inviting them to ponder the universal themes of identity, purpose, and the relentless pursuit of self-discovery that form the essence of the human journey through life.

American authors have always focused on matters of social justice, equality, and civil rights. American literature has served as a conduit for social change, encompassing the abolitionist writings of Frederick Douglass, the feminist works of authors such as Flannery O'Connor, and the civil rights-themed novels of Toni Morrison.

Conclusive Remarks

American literature, encompassing a vast array of genres and styles, continues to evolve, offering a rich tapestry of voices and perspectives that reflect the multifaceted nature of the American experience. Notable literary figures, including Emerson, Whitman, O'Neill, Morrison, and Miller, have made indelible contributions to this literary legacy by delving deep into the complexities of American society and culture. Their works serve as a tribute to the enduring tradition of critical inquiry and introspection that defines American literature. Exploring themes of self-discovery, social justice, racial identity, and the human condition, these authors have crafted narratives that resonate with readers on a profound level. Through poetry, drama, and fiction, they engage in a profound exploration of human emotions and societal structures, shedding light on the intricacies of the human psyche and the challenges of navigating a rapidly changing world.

The enduring relevance of their literary works speaks to the enduring power of storytelling as a means of both reflecting and shaping society. By capturing the essence of American life in all its complexities, these authors have left an indelible mark on the global literary landscape, cementing American literature as a vibrant and essential component of world culture. Their enduring influence serves as a reminder of the transformative power of literature in illuminating the human experience and inspiring change.



UNIT 2

LIFE AND WORKS OF WALT WHITMAN

Walt Whitman is a well known poet of America. He was born on May 31, 1819, in West Hills, located on Long Island, New York. His humble beginnings can be traced back to a working-class family where he was the second of nine children. Growing up in Brooklyn, Whitman's early years were marked by a modest education that he received before embarking on his journey into the world of printing as an apprentice. With a keen interest in literature and writing, Whitman soon transitioned from being a printer's apprentice to fulfilling various roles as an educator, journalist, and editor. These diverse experiences allowed him to explore different facets of communication and storytelling, honing his skills along the way.

As Whitman further delved into journalism, his passion for writing flourished, leading him to contribute to several renowned newspapers of his time. His work as an editor played a crucial role in shaping his perspectives on society, culture, and humanity, which would later resonate in his poetic expressions. The bustling city life of New York provided Whitman with a rich tapestry of experiences and inspirations that would find their way into his later literary works. Despite the limited formal education he received in his youth, Whitman's voracious appetite for learning and self-improvement propelled him to new heights in his writing career.

Overall, Whitman's upbringing and early career choices laid a solid foundation for his eventual emergence as one of America's most influential poets, revered for his innovative style and powerful thematic explorations. The trajectory of his life from a humble apprentice to a celebrated literary figure reflects the essence of his enduring legacy in the world of literature.

In 1855, Whitman independently published *Leaves of Grass*, an innovative poetry anthology that challenged conventional poetic norms. Initially controversial for its unique style and audacious ideas, the book ultimately garnered attention and underwent several changes throughout Whitman's lifetime.

During the American Civil War (1861–1865), Walt Whitman willingly took on the role of a nurse, feeling deeply moved by the suffering and struggles of the wounded soldiers he tended to. These profound encounters left a lasting impact on him, influencing the thematic essence of his subsequent works, most notably the collection titled *Drum-Taps* (1865), in which he beautifully captured the raw emotions and human experiences stemming from the conflict. As he entered the later stages of his life, Whitman settled in Camden, New Jersey, where he dedicated himself to the relentless task of creating and refining his poetic compositions. This commitment to his craft endured until his passing on March 26, 1892, ensuring that his words would continue to resonate and inspire for generations to come.

Walt Whitman's Major Works

Whitman's literary legacy revolves around *Leaves of Grass*, which he perpetually augmented and polished throughout his life. Among his works, most distinguished poems are: *Song of Myself* which is an audacious and comprehensive poetry that exalts the individual, humanity and the natural world. *O Captain! My Captain!* is a renowned elegy lamenting the demise of President Abraham Lincoln, *I Sing the Body Electric* is an homage to the human physique and its spiritual importance, *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry* talks on contemplation on temporality, selfhood, and interpersonal connections, *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd* is an elegy about Lincoln's assassination.

Literary Style and Themes

Whitman's poetry departed from the stringent conventions of traditional verse, innovating free verse, a form that eschews rhyme and exact metre. In his prose, Whitman's distinctive style shines through with its vivid imagery, powerful use of language, and unique perspectives that invite readers to see the world in a new light. His writing is marked by an unparalleled sense of freedom and individuality, giving voice to the human experience in a way that is both unconventional and deeply moving.



A groundbreaking free verse style—Rather of adhering to fixed rhymes, he composed lengthy, fluid lines that emulated natural speech.

Themes of Democracy and Individualism

Walt Whitman is often called the “poet of democracy”. His works are infused with the themes of democracy and individualism, celebrating the interconnectedness of people while also upholding the dignity of the self. In *Leaves of Grass*, particularly in poems like *Song of Myself*, Whitman presents democracy as an inclusive, almost spiritual force that unites individuals into a shared collective experience. He rejects rigid hierarchies and traditional social divisions, instead advocating for equality and self-expression. His use of free verse, a radical departure from structured poetic forms, reflects his democratic ideals—granting each line and phrase the same level of importance, just as democracy values every citizen. At the same time, Whitman elevates individualism, portraying the self as vast, evolving, and capable of containing multitudes. He encourages individuals to embrace their unique identities while remaining part of a larger, unified whole. This paradox—where the individual thrives within the collective—lies at the heart of Whitman’s vision of democracy. He sees democracy not just as a political system but as a way of life, rooted in self-reliance and mutual respect. His poetry exudes a boundless optimism, suggesting that personal freedom and societal harmony are not mutually exclusive but rather deeply intertwined. Moreover, his embrace of the ordinary—celebrating common workers, lovers, and wanderers—reinforces his belief that democracy extends to all, not just the elite. Whitman’s vision is profoundly American, echoing the ideals of the nation’s founding while also pushing its boundaries, advocating for inclusion beyond race, gender, and class. In his works, democracy is not static but an ever-expanding promise, and individualism is not isolation but a means of contributing to the greater whole. Together, these themes create a poetic vision that remains deeply relevant in discussions of freedom, identity, and social unity.

Whitman’s profound impact on American literature stands as an indisputable testament to his pioneering spirit and creative ingenuity. Prior to Whitman’s revolutionary influence, the landscape of American poetry was notably different, echoing the established traditions and rigid structures of European verse. This shift in poetic

paradigms occurred when Whitman boldly introduced a refreshing and distinctly American style characterized by the liberation of free verse and an unfiltered, honest portrayal of life's myriad experiences. The ripple effect of his daring work extended far beyond his own time, serving as a guiding light for subsequent generations of poets who embarked on their artistic journeys influenced by his innovative and fluid approach to the written word. Figures of great literary acclaim like Allen Ginsberg, Langston Hughes, and Ezra Pound all found themselves under Whitman's spell, drawing inspiration from his unorthodox yet mesmerizing techniques that effortlessly captured the essence of the human experience.

Advocating for Democracy and Equality – He ardently articulated themes of American identity, democracy, and the inherent dignity of all individuals, irrespective of race, gender, or socioeconomic status. **Broadened Poetic Themes** — He candidly examined topics of sexuality, corporeality, and the human condition, contesting established conventions. **Influencing the Modernist and Beat Poetry Movements** – His oeuvre inspired 20th-century poets who endeavoured to transcend literary conventions, akin to his approach. Walt Whitman is currently acknowledged as the “father of free verse” and a seminal figure in American poetry. His work persists in resonating with readers, encapsulating the principles of self-expression, oneness, and the limitless potential of human experience.



UNIT 3

POEM AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,

1

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,

And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,

I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.

Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,

Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west,

And thought of him I love.

2

O powerful western fallen star!

O shades of night—O moody, tearful night!

O great star disappear'd—O the black murk that hides the star!

O cruel hands that hold me powerless—O helpless soul of me!

O harsh surrounding cloud that will not free my soul.

3

In the dooryard fronting an old farm-house near the white-wash'd palings,

Stands the lilac-bush tall-growing with heart-shaped leaves of rich green,

With many a pointed blossom rising delicate, with the perfume strong I love,

With every leaf a miracle—and from this bush in the dooryard,

With delicate-color'd blossoms and heart-shaped leaves of rich green,

A sprig with its flower I break.

4

In the swamp in secluded recesses,

A shy and hidden bird is warbling a song.

Solitary the thrush,

The hermit withdrawn to himself, avoiding the settlements,

Sings by himself a song.

Song of the bleeding throat,

Death's outlet song of life, (for well dear brother I know,

If thou wast not granted to sing thou would'st surely die.)

5

Over the breast of the spring, the land, amid cities,

*Amid lanes and through old woods, where lately the violets peep'd from the
ground, spotting the gray debris,*

Amid the grass in the fields each side of the lanes, passing the endless grass,

*Passing the yellow-spear'd wheat, every grain from its shroud in the dark-
brown fields uprisen,*

Passing the apple-tree blows of white and pink in the orchards,

Carrying a corpse to where it shall rest in the grave,

Night and day journeys a coffin.

6

Coffin that passes through lanes and streets,

Through day and night with the great cloud darkening the land,

With the pomp of the inloop'd flags with the cities draped in black,

With the show of the States themselves as of crape-veil'd women standing,



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*With processions long and winding and the flambeaus of the night,
With the countless torches lit, with the silent sea of faces and the unbared
heads,
With the waiting depot, the arriving coffin, and the sombre faces,
With dirges through the night, with the thousand voices rising strong and
solemn,
With all the mournful voices of the dirges pour'd around the coffin,
The dim-lit churches and the shuddering organs—where amid these you
journey,
With the tolling tolling bells' perpetual clang,
Here, coffin that slowly passes,
I give you my sprig of lilac.*

7

*(Nor for you, for one alone,
Blossoms and branches green to coffins all I bring,
For fresh as the morning, thus would I chant a song for you O sane and
sacred death.
All over bouquets of roses,
O death, I cover you over with roses and early lilies,
But mostly and now the lilac that blooms the first,
Copious I break, I break the sprigs from the bushes,
With loaded arms I come, pouring for you,
For you and the coffins all of you O death.)*

8

*O western orb sailing the heaven,
Now I know what you must have meant as a month since I walk'd,*

*As I walk'd in silence the transparent shadowy night,
As I saw you had something to tell as you bent to me night after night,
As my soul in its trouble dissatisfied sank, as where you sad orb,
Concluded, dropt in the night, and was gone.*

9

*Sing on there in the swamp,
O singer bashful and tender, I hear your notes, I hear your call,
I hear, I come presently, I understand you,
But a moment I linger, for the lustrous star has detain'd me,
The star my departing comrade holds and detains me.*

10

*O how shall I warble myself for the dead one there I loved?
And how shall I deck my song for the large sweet soul that has gone?
And what shall my perfume be for the grave of him I love?
Sea-winds blown from east and west,
Blown from the Eastern sea and blown from the Western sea, till there on the
prairies meeting,
These and with these and the breath of my chant,
I'll perfume the grave of him I love.*

11

*O what shall I hang on the chamber walls?
And what shall the pictures be that I hang on the walls,
To adorn the burial-house of him I love?*



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Pictures of growing spring and farms and homes,

*With the fresh sweet herbage under foot, and the pale green leaves of the trees
prolific,*

*In the distance the flowing glaze, the breast of the river, with a wind-dapple
here and there,*

*With ranging hills on the banks, with many a line against the sky, and
shadows,*

And the city at hand with dwellings so dense, and stacks of chimneys,

*And all the scenes of life and the workshops, and the workmen homeward
returning.*

12

Lo, body and soul—this land,

*My own Manhattan with spires, and the sparkling and hurrying tides, and the
ships,*

*The varied and ample land, the South and the North in the light, Ohio's shores
and flashing Missouri,*

And ever the far-spreading prairies cover'd with grass and corn.

Lo, the most excellent sun so calm and haughty,

The violet and purple morn with just-felt breezes,

The gentle soft-born measureless light,

The miracle spreading bathing all, the fulfill'd noon,

The coming eve delicious, the welcome night and the stars,

Over my cities shining all, enveloping man and land.

13

*Sing on, sing on you gray-brown bird,
Sing from the swamps, the recesses, pour your chant from the bushes,
Limitless out of the dusk, out of the cedars and pines.
Sing on dearest brother, warble your reedy song,
Loud human song, with voice of uttermost woe.
O liquid and free and tender!
O wild and loose to my soul—O wondrous singer!
You only I hear—yet the star holds me, (but will soon depart,)
Yet the lilac with mastering odor holds me.*

14

*Now while I sat in the day and look'd forth,
In the close of the day with its light and the fields of spring, and the farmers
preparing their crops,
In the large unconscious scenery of my land with its lakes and forests,
In the heavenly aerial beauty, (after the perturb'd winds and the storms,)
Under the arching heavens of the afternoon swift passing, and the voices of
children and women,
The many-moving sea-tides, and I saw the ships how they sail'd,
And the summer approaching with richness, and the fields all busy with labor,
And the infinite separate houses, how they all went on, each with its meals
and minutia of daily usages,
And the streets how their throbbings throb'd, and the cities pent—lo, then
and there,
Falling upon them all and among them all, enveloping me with the rest,
Appear'd the cloud, appear'd the long black trail,*

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And I knew death, its thought, and the sacred knowledge of death.

Then with the knowledge of death as walking one side of me,

And the thought of death close-walking the other side of me,

And I in the middle as with companions, and as holding the hands of companions,

I fled forth to the hiding receiving night that talks not,

Down to the shores of the water, the path by the swamp in the dimness,

To the solemn shadowy cedars and ghostly pines so still.

And the singer so shy to the rest receiv'd me,

The gray-brown bird I know receiv'd us comrades three,

And he sang the carol of death, and a verse for him I love.

From deep secluded recesses,

From the fragrant cedars and the ghostly pines so still,

Came the carol of the bird.

And the charm of the carol rapt me,

As I held as if by their hands my comrades in the night,

And the voice of my spirit tallied the song of the bird.

Come lovely and soothing death,

Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,

In the day, in the night, to all, to each,

Sooner or later delicate death.

Prais'd be the fathomless universe,

*For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious,
And for love, sweet love—but praise! praise! praise!
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding death.
Dark mother always gliding near with soft feet,
Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome?
Then I chant it for thee, I glorify thee above all,
I bring thee a song that when thou must indeed come, come unfalteringly.
Approach strong deliveress,
When it is so, when thou hast taken them I joyously sing the dead,
Lost in the loving floating ocean of thee,
Laved in the flood of thy bliss O death.
From me to thee glad serenades,
Dances for thee I propose saluting thee, adornments and feastings for thee,
And the sights of the open landscape and the high-spread sky are fitting,
And life and the fields, and the huge and thoughtful night.
The night in silence under many a star,
The ocean shore and the husky whispering wave whose voice I know,
And the soul turning to thee O vast and well-veil'd death,
And the body gratefully nestling close to thee.*

*Over the tree-tops I float thee a song,
Over the rising and sinking waves, over the myriad fields and the prairies
wide,
Over the dense-pack'd cities all and the teeming wharves and ways,
I float this carol with joy, with joy to thee O death.*



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And I with my comrades there in the night.

While my sight that was bound in my eyes unclosed,

As to long panoramas of visions.

And I saw askant the armies,

I saw as in noiseless dreams hundreds of battle-flags,

Borne through the smoke of the battles and pierc'd with missiles I saw them,

And carried hither and yon through the smoke, and torn and bloody,

And at last but a few shreds left on the staffs, (and all in silence,)

And the staffs all splinter'd and broken.

I saw battle-corpses, myriads of them,

And the white skeletons of young men, I saw them,

I saw the debris and debris of all the slain soldiers of the war,

But I saw they were not as was thought,

They themselves were fully at rest, they suffer'd not,

The living remain'd and suffer'd, the mother suffer'd,

And the wife and the child and the musing comrade suffer'd,

And the armies that remain'd suffer'd.

16

Passing the visions, passing the night,

Passing, unloosing the hold of my comrades' hands,

Passing the song of the hermit bird and the tallying song of my soul,

Victorious song, death's outlet song, yet varying ever-altering song,

*As low and wailing, yet clear the notes, rising and falling, flooding the night,
Sadly sinking and fainting, as warning and warning, and yet again bursting
with joy,*

Covering the earth and filling the spread of the heaven,

As that powerful psalm in the night I heard from recesses,

Passing, I leave thee lilac with heart-shaped leaves,

I leave thee there in the door-yard, blooming, returning with spring.

I cease from my song for thee,

From my gaze on thee in the west, fronting the west, communing with thee,

O comrade lustrous with silver face in the night.

Yet each to keep and all, retrievements out of the night,

The song, the wondrous chant of the gray-brown bird,

And the tallying chant, the echo arouses 'd in my soul,

With the lustrous and drooping star with the countenance full of woe,

With the holders holding my hand nearing the call of the bird,

*Comrades mine and I in the midst, and their memory ever to keep, for the
dead I loved so well,*

*For the sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and lands—and this for his dear
sake,*

Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my soul,

There in the fragrant pines and the cedars dusk and dim.



Explanation of the Poem '*When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*'

Walt Whitman's '*When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*' is an elegy mourning the death of President Abraham Lincoln while also exploring themes of grief, nature. As the poem progresses, Whitman moves from personal sorrow to a broader acceptance of death as a natural and necessary cycle. The imagery shifts from mourning to a vision of death as peaceful and inevitable, guided by the thrush's song. In the final sections, Whitman pays tribute to fallen soldiers and expresses a deep connection between humanity and the rhythms of nature. Ultimately, the poem transforms grief into a profound recognition of life's continuity and the enduring power of memory.

The poem not only functions as Whitman's personal lament but also as a poignant meditation on a national scale, encapsulating the profound sorrow and mourning that swept through the country following Lincoln's untimely death. Beyond its immediate context, the poem delves into broader contemplations on the fragility of human existence, the weight of grief, and the eternal cycle of life and death. Through this work, Whitman skillfully weaves together his enduring themes of democracy, individualism, and reverence for the natural world, all while navigating the intricate web of emotions that accompany loss and tragedy.

The poem commences with an allusion to lilacs flourishing in the dooryard. Initially, the lilacs appear to represent the rejuvenation and splendour of spring. In the midst of grieving, Whitman depicts these blossoms as a sign of life's ephemeral quality, especially with the unforeseen and untimely demise of Lincoln. The lilacs, while emblematic of life, flourish in the pervasive shadow of death. The contrast between life and death is fundamental to the poem, as Whitman examines the coexistence of these two forces in the natural world and human experience.

Nature plays an integral role in Whitman's poetry, taking on a significant and poignant presence throughout. This is evident in his masterful personification of various natural elements, such as birds, flowers, and stars, which are portrayed as mourners responding to the tragic event of Lincoln's passing. Interestingly, these representations go beyond mere symbols; they engage actively in the act of mourning and, at times, provide a sense of comfort. For instance, the "hermit thrush," a bird known for its evening songs, embodies a form of grief that transcends ordinary expression, conveying a deep sense of sorrow in response to the

esteemed leader's demise. The bird's melodic lament echoes throughout the environment, infusing it with a somber, elegiac quality that mirrors the collective mourning of the nation. Additionally, Whitman skillfully depicts the stars as witnesses to the great loss, suggesting a profound cosmic awareness of the sorrow that has befallen the nation.

Whitman transitions between the pastoral tradition and the stark realities of the Civil War, particularly in his allusions to the deceased soldiers. Although he recognises the profound sadness of Lincoln's demise, Whitman perceives death within the framework of battle as a means of liberation from anguish. He juxtaposes the tranquil, immutable rhythm of nature with the brutality and anguish of human struggle, specifically the Civil War, which claimed numerous lives. Whitman posits that individuals who perish in conflict may really be the "fortunate ones," since they transcend the anguish and chaos of terrestrial life. This compelling proposition compels the reader to reevaluate conventional views of death, particularly violent and premature death, as an entity to be dreaded. According to Whitman, death is an inherent aspect of the life cycle and, in certain respects, signifies a release from human suffering.

Principal Themes

The predominant focus of the poem is grief, particularly the lamentation of Lincoln's demise. Whitman artfully conveys this profound sorrow not just as an individual's personal loss but as a shared national tragedy that reverberates throughout society. As the poem unfolds, Whitman skillfully draws readers into an introspective journey, beginning with the imagery of blooming lilacs in the dooryard. At first glance, these lilacs symbolize the arrival of spring and the promise of new beginnings. However, within the context of the poem, they take on a deeper significance, serving as a poignant metaphor for the fleeting nature of life, cut short abruptly, mirroring the premature end of Lincoln's impactful presence.

Death and Immortality: Whitman contemplates the essence of death, proposing that it is not a conclusion, but a transition to something more profound. The poet used natural imagery—such as lilacs, the starry night, and the burial ground—to associate death with natural cycles. He states, "The great star disappeared," indicating the demise of a notable individual while also alluding to the cyclical essence of existence, wherein the stars persist in their brilliance despite the absence of one.



The Cycle of Nature in Whitman's poem beautifully conveys the endless cycle of life and death, showcasing how life persists despite the inevitability of death. By employing vivid natural imagery, Whitman skillfully illustrates the stages of grief followed by the renewal of growth. Through the symbolism of "lilacs," the poem poignantly portrays the resilience of life as flowers bloom even amidst the speaker's mourning. Furthermore, the mention of the "song of the hermit thrush," a bird known for its twilight melodies, highlights the enduring beauty of nature in the face of tragedy. This recurring theme in Whitman's works, where nature rejuvenates itself after death, serves as a source of solace in times of personal or national distress.

The poem possesses both personal and national significance, encompassing political and social dimensions. Whitman was a staunch advocate of Lincoln and his ideas, particularly his leadership throughout the Civil War. The poem emphasises the union's endurance and the sacrifices made throughout the conflict, while commemorating the deceased president. Lincoln's death is depicted as a loss not only for his family and friends but for the nation as a whole. This political and social aspect emphasises the relationship between individual lives and the broader society, a concept important to Whitman's overarching lyrical endeavour.

The Style of Whitman

Whitman's distinctive approach in *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd* can be characterized by his unique utilization of free verse, characterized by the elongation of lines and strategic repetition throughout the poem. These carefully chosen stylistic elements work together harmoniously to create a seamless flow of language, mirroring the cyclical patterns and rhythms that Whitman so deeply admires in the natural world. The deliberate artistic decisions made by Whitman serve to reinforce the central themes of the poem, notably emphasizing the perpetual nature of life and the universal presence of grief and mourning.

Free poetry, a hallmark of Whitman's style, enables him to convey intricate emotions unbound by rhyme or metre. The fluidity of free verse reflects the poem's themes of grief, loss, and the passage of time, which elude confinement inside structured verse. The liberty of the form also embodies the American principles of individuality and democracy that Whitman advocated.

Repetition: Whitman used repetition to underscore the cyclical essence of life and death. Expressions like “Come, lovely and soothing death,” along with the recurrent mentions of “lilacs,” “star,” and “burial,” establish a rhythmic structure that underscores the inevitability and constancy of death, whilst imparting a contemplative, ceremonial essence to the poem. Repetition imparts to the poem a dual sense of grief and joy, while recognising sadness and honouring the greater powers of life and death.

The rich tapestry of sensory imagery woven throughout the poem by Whitman captures the essence of the natural world, intertwining elements of tranquility and disquiet seamlessly. Through the intricate portrayal of flora, avifauna, celestial bodies, and the landscapes, Whitman skillfully invites the reader to contemplate their place within the vast web of existence, fostering a profound sense of connection to the cyclical rhythms of life. The lilacs within the poem hold a profound symbolical significance, encapsulating the fleeting nature of life itself while embodying themes of enduring love and poignant remembrance. Additionally, the night sky, with its moon and stars, serves as a poignant metaphor for the infinite and timeless, offering a stark contrast to the fleeting essence of individual human experience. It is through Whitman’s masterful depiction that the poem transcends its original context surrounding Lincoln’s passing, resonating deeply with universal human emotions of sorrow and the enduring spirit of renewal.

Personification and Direct Address: Whitman’s profound poetic expression often revolves around personifying natural elements, establishing a direct and profound engagement with the world around him. This approach fosters a deeply intimate connection between the speaker and the vast universe, showcasing Whitman’s skill in intertwining humanity with the natural realm. Noteworthy examples of this technique include his evocative references to the serene beauty of the “beautiful river” and his poignant acknowledgment of “the memory of the deceased.” Through these interactions, Whitman blurs the boundaries that separate humans from the natural world, emphasizing his belief in the interconnectedness of all beings and entities. By invoking nature in such a reverent manner, the speaker succeeds in creating a powerful sense of unity and belonging with the earth, providing solace and a profound sense of peace even in times of deep sorrow.

The poem’s tone is a delicate balance of sorrow and joy, portraying Whitman’s dual response to Lincoln’s death. As Whitman mourns the loss, he also elevates it, seeing it as an inherent part of the intricate tapestry of life and death. This emotional dichotomy



in the poem showcases a profound mix of sadness and admiration, capturing the complexity of human emotions when faced with mortality. The speaker's sorrow runs deep, intertwined with a profound respect for the mysteries and magnificence that come with the human experience and the inevitable passage of time.

Thus, it can be confidently asserted that "*When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*" is a profound reflection on the fragility of human life and the enduring power of existence, as seen through the expansive and inclusive lens of Whitman's democratic vision. Within this poetic work, we find a dual expression: a mournful acknowledgment of Lincoln's passing alongside a celebration of life's tenacity conveyed through nature's endless cycles. Whitman's skillful use of free verse, vivid imagery, and strategic repetition functions to deepen the exploration of themes such as continuity, sorrow, and remembrance. Through this elegy, Whitman not only conveys the collective grief of a nation but also suggests that amidst loss, there persists a glimmer of hope and the potential for renewal. Thus, the poem stands as a poignant testament to the enduring resilience of individuals and communities alike, echoing Whitman's fundamental belief in the interconnectedness and vitality of all living beings.

Themes in '*When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*'

Sorrow and Bereavement:

Fundamentally, '*When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*' examines the theme of grief. The poem articulates Whitman's expression of both individual and national grief about the demise of Abraham Lincoln, a leader who navigated the nation through its most tumultuous period during the Civil War. Lincoln's assassination plunged the nation into confusion, as many contemplated how to proceed without the leadership of such a monumental figure. Whitman's sorrow is both personal and profoundly national, as he articulates the lament of a nation that has lost its "shepherd." The shepherd metaphor is noteworthy in this context: As president during the war, Lincoln was perceived as a shepherd to the American populace, leading them through the fight towards the prospect of unity. Upon his demise, the nation resembled a flock deserted by its leader.

Whitman's sorrow is articulated through his contemplation of the essence of grieving. He seeks a contemporary method of mourning that recognises the intricate and distressing truths of war and death, while simultaneously honouring the individual's life. In his quest for an adequate means of mourning, Whitman appears to interrogate the suitability of conventional elegiac structures. The pastoral elegy, traditionally honouring the deaths of private individuals via idealised portrayals of nature, is insufficient for contemporary experiences of grief, particularly following Lincoln's assassination and the atrocities of the Civil War. Whitman's sorrow encompasses not only Lincoln's demise but also the extinction of a traditional method of mourning, which appears increasingly unsuitable in the contemporary era characterised by widespread violence and political turmoil.

Whitman's profound reflections on death within his poem delve into the intricacies and multiple dimensions surrounding this inevitable aspect of human existence. In the midst of mourning Lincoln's passing, Whitman masterfully weaves his contemplation of death with a profound acknowledgment of its organic presence in the natural world, drawing upon the interconnectedness of life and death. By illustrating death as an integral part of nature's rhythms, Whitman conveys his deeply-rooted philosophical and spiritual beliefs. Rather than presenting death as a finite endpoint, Whitman encapsulates it as a metamorphosis, an essential component within a broader scheme of life's perpetual cycle that extends beyond human comprehension. Throughout his poetic verses, Whitman consistently emphasizes the enduring nature of life, proposing that death should not be perceived as a mere conclusion but as a pivotal stage in the ongoing process of rejuvenation and resurgence, reflecting his intricate understanding of the intricate dance between life and death.

The poem suggests a form of immortality for the deceased, particularly for those who sacrificed their life for a great cause, as the troops who died in the Civil War. Whitman envisions them as transcending the afflictions of the mortal realm, liberated from anguish and the inequities of human existence. These troops appear to have attained a state of transcendence, integrating into the perpetual cycle of life and death, with their spirits enduring in a more universal context. Whitman implies that death offers a sense of



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tranquilly and fulfilment, particularly for individuals who sacrifice themselves for a noble cause.

The juxtaposition of the natural realm and human existence is another significant element in the poem. Human existence is characterised by violence, suffering, and the turmoil of war, but the natural world is portrayed as perpetual and cyclical, persisting irrespective of human endeavours. Nature laments Lincoln's demise, yet it persists in flourishing and rejuvenating, providing a semblance of comfort to the bereaved orator. The depiction of flowering lilacs, emblematic of life and regeneration, sharply contrasts with the human experiences of grief and loss. Nature, with its subtle endurance, provides a form of healing that humans, ensnared in the anguish of conflict and sorrow, are unable to fully attain.

Through this poignant juxtaposition, Whitman contemplates the fleeting nature of human life juxtaposed with the everlasting essence of the natural world, delving deep into the philosophical intertwining of transience and permanence. With a profound subtlety, he suggests that just as nature endures gracefully through the passage of time and seasons, individuals, too, must reckon with their mortality, embracing the ephemerality of existence while striving to find solace in the face of inevitable loss and change. The unwavering resilience of nature, standing as an emblem of continuity and rebirth, acts as a poignant metaphor that underscores the profound truth that life, in its ceaseless flux, persists undeterred by the looming presence of death. Within this intricate tapestry of life's cycles, grief emerges as a poignant yet indispensable thread, weaving through the fabric of human experience, reminding us of the delicate balance between sorrow and hope, and serving as a poignant harbinger of renewal and interconnectedness in the grand symphony of life, death, and the eternal dance of existence.

Whitman's approach in "*When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*" exemplifies his overarching poetics of free verse, a form he developed and refined. Free verse enables Whitman to articulate his sorrow and philosophical reflections unencumbered by conventional rhyme or metre. This form reflects the fluidity and unpredictability of grief, which cannot be confined inside the strict structure of formal verse. The poem's elongated, fluid lines reflect the breadth of Whitman's perspective, intertwining themes of mortality, nature, leadership, and individual grief.

Whitman's exquisite utilization of repetition plays a pivotal role in enhancing the depth and complexity of his poem. Through the recurring phrases and motifs like lilacs, stars, and the hermit thrush, a mesmerizing and almost spellbinding ambiance is woven throughout the verses. This intentional repetition not only conveys the speaker's struggle to grasp the profound impact of Lincoln's passing but also intricately weaves in the recurring themes of life's perpetual cycle of birth and demise—themes that are recurrent in Whitman's body of work. Moreover, by skillfully integrating these various elements—nature, mourning, turmoil, and the figure of Lincoln—into a cohesive whole through repetition, Whitman underscores the interconnectedness of these seemingly disparate components, ultimately uniting them to form a harmonious and poignant narrative.

When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd as a Pastoral Elegy

Walt Whitman's *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd* is written as a pastoral elegy. It follows the traditional structure of mourning while blending elements of nature, grief, and renewal. A pastoral elegy typically laments the death of an important figure using nature as a backdrop to express sorrow, offer consolation, and reflect on the cycle of life. Whitman's poem, written in response to the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, aligns with this tradition through its deep engagement with the natural world. The lilac, the setting star, and the singing thrush serve as central symbols that guide the speaker's mourning process. The lilac, blooming each spring, represents love and remembrance, reinforcing the idea that nature continues even after loss. The star, associated with Lincoln, suggests his untimely death, while the thrush's melancholic yet soothing song conveys an acceptance of mortality. Unlike conventional pastoral elegies, which often idealize the deceased, Whitman universalizes his grief, expanding it beyond Lincoln to encompass all who have died, particularly the soldiers of the Civil War. The imagery of the countryside, filled with fresh spring blossoms and the cycle of renewal, contrasts with the sorrow of death, illustrating the poem's underlying message: death is not an end but a transition within nature's eternal cycle. The pastoral setting provides solace, as the beauty of the natural world counterbalances human suffering. Additionally, Whitman's approach to death is more transcendental



than mournful—he envisions it as a peaceful passage, not something to be feared. The elegy concludes with a sense of acceptance, as the speaker finds harmony between personal grief and the broader rhythms of nature. Through its pastoral elements, the poem transforms mourning into a meditation on life, death, and rebirth, reinforcing Whitman’s democratic vision of unity between the individual, nature, and the cosmos. In doing so, *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d* redefines the traditional pastoral elegy, making it a powerful and uniquely American expression of collective sorrow and hope.

Contemporary Significance of the Elegy

When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d is firmly entrenched in the tradition of the pastoral elegy, a genre that frequently utilises environmental imagery to lament the demise of a prominent or notable individual. Notable instances of pastoral elegies encompass Virgil’s *Eclogues*, Milton’s *Lycidas*, and Shelley’s *Adonais*. These poems generally portray the poet and the deceased as shepherds, with the mourning process commonly represented as an idealised, tranquil retreat into nature. Although Whitman does not explicitly employ shepherd imagery, he obviously relies upon the pastoral tradition in his examination of nature’s lament for Lincoln. The inclusion of flowers, birds, and stars in the poem invokes the pastoral tradition of nature as a symbol of mourning, albeit in a more unorthodox style by Whitman.

Nonetheless, while older pastoral elegies tend to depict nature in a tranquil and mournful state, Whitman’s contemporary perspective breathes new life into the portrayal of nature, infusing it with dynamic energy and a deep sense of engagement. Unlike the traditional pastoral elegies where nature mourns in a subdued manner, Whitman’s nature reacts actively to the harsh realities of war, expressing both sorrow and resilience in response. By challenging the conventional form of the pastoral elegy, Whitman prompts a reconsideration of how grief is expressed in the modern era. Given the backdrop of civil unrest, widespread death, and political upheaval, the established

forms of the pastoral elegy may fall short in capturing the complexities of loss in contemporary society. Through advocating for a more personalized and fragmented approach to mourning, Whitman acknowledges the chaotic nature of the world today and the individualized experience of grieving that accompanies it.

Thus ‘*When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d*’ is a very intricate elegy that explores the national mourning after President Lincoln’s killing. By integrating environmental imagery, philosophical contemplation, and an examination of death and grief, Whitman crafts a poem that encapsulates both the individual and societal aspects of loss. The poem serves as a contemplation on the essence of grieving in contemporary society, indicating that conventional elegiac forms are insufficient amidst pervasive violence and suffering. Whitman advocates for a symbolic and personal method of mourning, intricately linked to the natural world and the collective experience of mortality.

Democracy as a Lifestyle

Whitman went beyond viewing democracy solely as a political structure; rather, he saw it as a multifaceted way of understanding life and society. During the early 1800s, doubts lingered among many about the potential success of the newly founded United States and the lasting power of democracy itself. To address these uncertainties and advocate for democracy, Whitman took on the challenge of embodying democratic values in his daily life and poetic works. His perspective on democracy emphasized the importance of personal connections and the integration of one’s beliefs into everyday actions. Through his renowned piece, “Song of Myself,” Whitman emphasized the necessity for democracy to be inclusive of all individuals without bias; otherwise, it would inevitably falter.

In his groundbreaking poetry, Whitman revolutionized the traditional boundaries of poetic diction by skillfully weaving in a rich tapestry of slang, colloquialisms, and regional dialects, eschewing the conventional scholarly lexicon prevalent in nineteenth-century verse. This bold stylistic choice not only breathed vibrant life into his works but also bridged the gap between literature and the everyday language of the common people, infusing his poems with a raw, visceral quality that resonated deeply with readers of diverse backgrounds and experiences. Moreover, Whitman’s poetic genius extended



beyond mere linguistic innovation, as he fearlessly explored a diverse array of subjects, delving into the lives and landscapes of various individuals and places. Much like the revered poet William Wordsworth, Whitman extolled the intrinsic beauty and profound significance of ordinary existence, arguing that the mundane aspects of daily life and the unassuming personas of everyday individuals were not only worthy of poetic contemplation but actually formed the very essence of true poetic inspiration.

While Whitman's poetic corpus may not overtly grapple with political themes, his works are profoundly imbued with the spirit of democracy, as he artfully depicts communities coming together in unity and harmony, envisioning a harmonious convergence of myriad voices melding into a cohesive and powerful whole. To Whitman, democracy was not a mere political concept but a transcendent ideal that should permeate every facet of human existence, shaping our thoughts, language, actions, conflicts, and even our artistic expressions, ultimately transforming society itself.

The Cycle of Growth and Decay

Whitman's poetry embodies the vigour and development of the nascent United States. In the nineteenth century, America experienced rapid expansion, and its development and potential appeared boundless. However, sectionalism and the brutality of the Civil War jeopardised the vast potential of the United States. In response to population increase and the significant fatalities during the Civil War, Whitman concentrated on individual life cycles: individuals are born, age, reproduce, and ultimately die. Poems like "*When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*" conceptualise death as an essential component of existence. The speaker of "*When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*" acknowledges that flowers perish in winter yet reemerge in spring, and he pledges to commemorate his deceased companions annually when new blossoms emerge. Whitman contextualised the profound injuries and trauma he observed during the Civil War by elucidating the life cycle of nature, so associating death with life and imbuing the fatalities of numerous men with significance.

The Aesthetic of the Individual

Whitman's emphasis on celebrating the individual within his poems reflects a deep-rooted belief in the founding principles of democracy. He visualized a unified nation where each distinct citizen held equal importance, contributing to the cohesive fabric of society.

At the onset of "Song of Myself," Whitman revels in the exultation of self, proclaiming, "I celebrate myself, and sing myself" (1), setting the stage for a narrative that encapsulates the collective spirit of democracy. As the poem unfolds, the speaker, often identified as Walt Whitman himself, becomes a conduit through which the multitude of voices find expression, symbolizing the inclusive nature of a democratic society. Within this democratic framework, each individual assumes a significant role, collectively forming a singular, unified entity. This multi-faceted approach underscores the democratizing power of Whitman's poetry, where every voice is equally valued and appreciated. Despite the overarching theme of inclusivity, Whitman's poetic tribute extends to specific individuals, such as the revered Abraham Lincoln. Following Lincoln's tragic assassination in 1865, Whitman memorialized the fallen president through poignant elegies like "O Captain! My Captain!" This selective focus on certain figures highlights their exceptional contributions to society and democracy, showcasing the enduring impact of individuals within the broader tapestry of American democracy.

Symbols in 'When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd'

Plants

Throughout Whitman's poetry, plant life symbolizes both growth and multiplicity. Rapid, regular plant growth also stands in for the rapid, regular expansion of the population of the United States. In 'When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd', Whitman uses flowers, bushes, wheat, trees, and other plant life to signify the possibilities of regeneration and re-growth after death. As the speaker mourns the loss of Lincoln, he drops a lilac spray onto the coffin; the act of laying a flower on the coffin not only honors the person who has died but lends death a measure of dignity and respect. The title *Leaves of Grass* highlights another of Whitman's themes: the beauty of the individual. Each leaf or blade of grass possesses its own distinct beauty, and together the blades form a beautiful unified whole, an idea Whitman explores in the sixth section of "Song of Myself." Multiple leaves of grass thus symbolize democracy, another



instance of a beautiful whole composed of individual parts. In 1860, Whitman published an edition of *Leaves of Grass* that included a number of poems celebrating love between men. He titled this section “The Calamus Poems,” after the phallic calamus plant.

The Self

Whitman’s interest in the self ties into his praise of the individual. Whitman links the self to the conception of poetry throughout his work, envisioning the self as the birthplace of poetry. Most of his poems are spoken from the first person, using the pronoun *I*. The speaker of Whitman’s most famous poem, “Song of Myself,” even assumes the name Walt Whitman, but nevertheless the speaker remains a fictional creation employed by the poet Whitman. Although Whitman borrows from his own autobiography for some of the speaker’s experiences, he also borrows many experiences from popular works of art, music, and literature. Repeatedly the speaker of this poem exclaims that he contains everything and everyone, which is a way for Whitman to reimagine the boundary between the self and the world. By imaging a person capable of carrying the entire world within him, Whitman can create an elaborate analogy about the ideal democracy, which would, like the self, be capable of containing the whole world.

Points to Rememeber

1. The poem ‘*When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d*’ is an elegy and it mourns Lincoln’s assassination while reflecting on loss and renewal.
2. Lilacs represent memory and mourning, the star symbolizes Lincoln, and the thrush conveys grief through song.
3. Whitman connects personal sorrow with the cycle of life and nature’s enduring presence.

4. The poem uses long, flowing lines and musical rhythms, characteristic of Whitman's style.
5. While mourning Lincoln, the poem also meditates on how individuals and nations process sorrow and find peace.

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. What major historical event inspired *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*?

- A. The Civil War began
- B. the Declaration of Independence was signed.
- C. Abraham Lincoln was assassinated
- D. Revolutionary War ended.
- C. Abraham Lincoln's assassination

5. Which best represents Whitman's death stance in *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*?

- A) Death is tragic and final.
- B) Death is scary and uncertain
- C) Death is calm and natural.
- D) Death must be fought.

3. Why is the western star in the poem significant?

- A) Represents a future guide
- B) Honours Abraham Lincoln and his passing
- C) It represents the American dream
- D) It references the North Star and freedom.



Notes

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4. The hermit thrush's function in the poem?

- A) It expresses sadness and spiritual transcendence
- B) It symbolizes war violence
- C) It guides the poet through the forest
- D) It symbolizes Lincoln's reinvention

5. Which best represents Whitman's death stance in *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*?

- A) Death is tragic and final.
- B) Death is scary and uncertain
- C) Death is calm and natural.
- D) Death must be fought.

Essay Type Question:

1. Examine how Whitman uses nature to depict death and mourning in the poem. How can he console and transcend loss with natural imagery?

2. Discuss the lilacs, star, and thrush in *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*.

3. How does Whitman mix personal sadness with a greater, universal perspective on death?

4. Explain how Whitman depicts America after Lincoln's assassination and his goal for national regeneration.

5. Write a critical analysis of the poem.

Books suggested:

- a) S. Sen . *Whitman Walt Selected Poems: A Critical Evaluation*. Unique Publishers, India.

MODULE II

‘THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR - RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Contents

1. **Objective**
2. **Introuction of Ralph WaldoEmerson**
3. ***The American Scholar: An Overview***
4. **Explanation of the Essay *The American Scholar***
5. **Themes in *The American Scholar***
6. **Critical Analysis of the Essay**
7. **Questions**
8. **Book suggested**

OBJECTIVES

- To understand Emerson’s call for intellectual independence and self-reliance.
- To analyze the three main influences on a scholar—nature, books, and action.
- To explore the essay’s role in shaping American Transcendentalist thought.



UNIT 4

RALPH WALDO EMERSON – A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) was an American philosopher, essayist, and poet who played a key role in the Transcendentalist movement of the 19th century. Known for his emphasis on individualism, self-reliance, and the spiritual connection between humans and nature, Emerson's work influenced generations of thinkers, writers, and social reformers.

His most famous essays include *Self-Reliance*, *Nature*, and *The American Scholar*, which encouraged people to trust their intuition, break free from societal conventions, and seek truth within them. He was also a mentor to Henry David Thoreau and an advocate for social issues such as abolitionism.

Emerson's ideas continue to inspire discussions on philosophy, literature, and personal development, making him one of the most enduring figures in American intellectual history.

Emerson is regarded as one of the most prominent essayists in American literature. As a prominent figure in the Transcendentalist movement, Emerson transformed American philosophy by promoting self-reliance, individuality, and intellectual autonomy. His works, characterized by poetic language, intellectual profundity, and a compelling rhetorical style, persist in inspiring generations of readers. *The American Scholar* (1837) is a seminal work in American intellectual history, delineating a perspective on scholarship and national identity. This essay examines Emerson's achievements as an essayist, particularly through his influential address, *The American Scholar*.

The American Scholar : An Overview

Emerson delivered *The American Scholar* as a speech to the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard in 1837. In it, he called for American intellectual independence and the development of a unique national identity in scholarship and literature. Emerson begins by addressing the audience and the importance of scholars in society. He describes the scholar as “Man Thinking” rather than a passive recipient of knowledge.

Emerson identifies three key influences that shape a scholar: nature, the books and history for the past reference and the action.

About nature he says that the scholar must learn from nature, as it provides wisdom and universal truths. Nature teaches us about interconnectedness and the laws of the universe. He values books and says that the books are valuable but can be limiting if relied on too heavily. Scholars should use books for inspiration, not blind imitation. True learning involves active thought rather than passive memorization. Experience is essential for learning and growth. Scholars should engage with life, not just study it. Action and thought must be balanced to develop original ideas.

Emerson adds that a scholar must know his duties. He calls for a break from European traditions to create a uniquely American intellectual and literary culture. The scholar should embrace self-reliance and independent thinking. He emphasizes the importance of using one's own mind rather than conforming to societal expectations.

At the end Emerson advises that a scholar must rise above materialism and superficiality. He urges them to inspire others and lead society toward truth and progress. He wishes that in the end the scholar must keep an optimistic vision of his role in shaping America's future. Even at the present time Emerson's speech remains a powerful call for intellectual and cultural independence, influencing American thought and literature for generations.



UNIT 5

DETAILED STUDY OF THE ESSAY *THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR*

Emerson observes that the commencement of the school year signifies an opportunity for “hope, and, perhaps, insufficient effort.” Emerson elucidates that, in contrast to European nations, this speech does not commemorate scientific or physical accomplishments, but rather serves as “a cordial indication of the persistence of literary affection” in a predominantly apathetic community. Emerson presents this address at Harvard in 1837. He promptly highlights the absence of genuine academic or athletic accomplishments to commemorate, aiming to capture the audience’s attention. Emerson, however, reverses his stance by commending them for their enduring “love of letters,” suggesting that he anticipates a future convergence to commemorate a collective literary accomplishment. Emerson articulates his belief that America’s “sluggard intellect” is poised to awaken and generate “something superior to the efforts of mechanical skill.” He contends that America’s “era of reliance” on the intellectual achievements of other nations is approaching its conclusion. Emerson asserts that “poetry will rejuvenate and guide a new era in America,” facilitated by the American Scholar.

Emerson persistently confronts the arrogance of his audience by alluding to America’s “sluggard intellect.” This compels his audience to refute him, potentially by presenting the material he contends will initiate a “new age in America.” He also alludes to America’s ongoing “dependence” to encourage his audience to heed his message, thereby understanding how to truly establish the country as an independent nation.

Emerson recounts an ancient legend on the gods’ division of Man into multiple individuals to enhance his self-sufficiency. He asserts that this signifies the existence of a shared, unifying essence inherent in all individuals. Emerson asserts that one must consider the entirety of society to comprehend the complete individual. Emerson emphasises that individual men and women are interconnected by metaphysical bonds, each contributing uniquely to the collective well of society. Consequently, the scholar who accomplishes something genuinely significant via literature not only garners personal respect but also earns esteem for, and benefits, the entire nation.

Emerson emphasizes that within humanity lies the inherent capacity to undertake all fundamental societal functions. However, historical circumstances have resulted in the partitioning of these duties among individuals. In advocating for a mindset that encourages people to accept and value the contributions of others in various roles, Emerson underscores the significance of unity amidst a society that has become increasingly fragmented. He highlights the prevalent tendency for individuals to primarily engage with those who share similar societal positions, leading to a lack of connection and understanding across different groups or social strata. By urging for a more inclusive approach that embraces a diverse range of talents and professions, Emerson envisions a society where every individual's skills and efforts are respected and appreciated, ultimately fostering a more equitable and harmonious social structure..

The prevalent division hinders individuals from seeing the significance of their labour in relation to others across varying socioeconomic classes. Emerson contends that persons fundamentally transform into the objects they engage with, rather than evolving into fully realised human beings.

Emerson contends that an individual who fails to comprehend the genuine significance of their role in society cannot realise their whole potential. The disunity among societal components hinders the overall functionality of society, preventing it from reaching its optimal potential. Emerson contends that the scholar serves as society's "delegated intellect." Upon attaining the "right state," the American Scholar transforms into Man Thinking. If they have not attained that stage, they become "a mere thinker or, even worse, a parrot of others' thoughts."

"Man Thinking" represents the ideal that Emerson contends all scholars ought to aspire to exemplify. As rational beings, they actively pursue truth, cultivate their own ideas, and disseminate them throughout their society. Moreover, they recognise that their actions benefit everyone due to the profound interconnectedness among all persons in society.

Emerson, a prominent figure of his time, eloquently communicates to his audience his intention to delve into the key factors impacting the growth of a scholar, emphasizing nature as the paramount influencer. He argues persuasively that to a scholar, nothing is more captivating than the intricate workings of nature, encompassing both the external



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world and the complex nature of humanity itself. By immersing oneself in the observation of the natural environment, the scholar is able to draw insightful parallels that reflect the cyclical essence of their own inner being. Expanding on this idea, Emerson highlights the interconnectedness shared by all members of society, underscoring the profound relationship they hold with nature. Notably, during the period in which Emerson shares these insightful views, a significant portion of America's vast landscapes remained unexplored and consequently misunderstood, perpetuating misconceptions about the land itself. Drawing a parallel, Emerson suggests that just as the natural landscapes of America were largely uncharted, the true essence of its people, and indeed all Americans, remained largely unexamined and shrouded in misunderstanding.

To comprehend nature, the scholar initiates the classification of their observations. Emerson contends that the "young mind" perceives "everything as individual, existing independently." Emerson asserts that categorizing nature eventually results in identifying relationships among individuals and subsequently larger collectives. He posits that the process of classification signifies the recognition that natural phenomena are not "

chaotic," but rather conform to "a law that also reflects the principles of the human mind," applicable across all scientific disciplines.

The term "young mind" might denote a child's intellect, but it also signifies an inexperienced mind that is in the nascent stages of independent thought. It emphasizes the evident: disparities. As it develops, Emerson posits that recognizing the interrelatedness of nature enables individuals to go deeper and uncover the relationships among ostensibly disparate elements. Moreover, each of these elements serves distinct duties that contribute to the collective, echoing Emerson's claim that every member of a society plays a vital role in its operation.

Emerson eloquently communicates to his audience his intention to delve into the fundamental influences shaping the scholar's growth, prominently highlighting the unparalleled significance of nature in this process. He argues persuasively that nature, inclusive of human nature, holds an irresistibly captivating essence for the scholar, who, through deep engagement with the natural world, comes to realize that its cyclical rhythms serve as a reflection of their inner being. Moreover, Emerson posits that all members of society are intricately interconnected and share a profound bond with the natural environment. A notable aspect of the time when Emerson addressed these ideas was the vast uncharted expanses of America, leading to a widespread

misinterpretation of the country's diverse landscapes. In a similar vein, Emerson boldly suggests that the true identities of Americans largely remain obscured and misunderstood, awaiting deeper contemplation and understanding from within and beyond the society at large.

The second significant effect on the scholar's development is the "mind of the Past," as manifested in literature. Emerson posits that books enable previous scholars to convey their interpretations of the surrounding environment through "immortal thoughts," which, contingent upon "the depth of mind from which it issued," can impact subsequent scholars for decades.

Emerson thinks that only exceptional intellects can produce significant and impactful literature. Their concepts retain relevance beyond generations as they articulate universal truths comprehensible and relatable to everyone from all societal strata, underscoring Emerson's focus on acknowledging the shared connections among humanity. Books familiarize scholars with concepts and philosophies that persistently influence their society, being essential as they embark on writing their own contributions to America's literary canon.

While books exert significant effect, Emerson asserts that "none is quite perfect" as no one can entirely eliminate "the conventional, the local, the perishable" from infiltrating them. Consequently, Emerson contends that every generation "must compose its own literature; or more accurately, each generation for the subsequent one." Every human is shaped by their era and is likely to exhibit some biases and peculiarities characteristic of the time and location in which they reside. Consequently, Emerson concedes that not all works will be pertinent across all eras or locations, despite his belief in universal human connectivity. This indicates that, while Emerson advocates for the unity of all individuals, he simultaneously holds the individual in high regard. Every generation must innovate to perpetuate its distinct ideals and beliefs.

Emerson cautions that a significant detriment occurs when individuals prioritize the book over its author, stating, "as love of the hero corrupts into worship of his statue." Emerson contends that rather than producing fresh and creative works, an increasing number of books will be authored on the original book "by thinkers, not by Man Thinking." Moreover, emerging scholars will dedicate their entire time to libraries,



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examining original texts, and neglect the realization that they possess the ability to compose equally significant works.

Books, as Emerson understands, can excessively influence their readers. This poses significant risks for emerging scholars conditioned to accept the doctrines and writings of a limited number of authorities. By excessively depending on historical intellects, individuals hinder their uniqueness and confine their writing to concepts that are less relevant in the contemporary era than at the time of their inception.

Emerson's cautionary words highlight the dual nature of books, emphasizing their potential as powerful tools for growth when approached with mindfulness and intention. He juxtaposes this positive outlook with a stark warning about the dangers of misusing literature, suggesting that such misuse can have a profoundly negative impact on one's intellectual and spiritual development. Furthermore, Emerson underscores the importance of maintaining a balance between literary consumption and active engagement in the world, cautioning against becoming too engrossed in the past at the expense of forward-thinking innovation and progress. In essence, Emerson encourages readers to approach books with a discerning eye and a proactive spirit, reminding us of the transformative power of a well-nourished and "active soul."

A scholar must acquire the ability to read texts critically to safeguard against becoming a mere "satellite," passively adhering to ideas solely because they originate from a prominent intellect of the past. They achieve this by fostering a "active soul" and developing critical and independent thinking skills to innovate for their community. In doing way, the American scholar can articulate the nation's distinctive identity through their work, rather than simply reiterating the enduring European heritage.

To read books without damaging them, Emerson recommends "periods of solitude, inquiry, and self-restoration" during the reading process. Moreover, he asserts that books have to be designated for the scholar's "leisure periods" when they encounter challenges in their work. In such instances, Emerson thinks that books might stimulate novel and creative concepts that the scholar may subsequently employ to compose their own literature. It is essential for individual researchers to introspect and uncover their distinctive perspectives on various subjects, since "periods of solitude" facilitate this process free from external influences that may hinder their comprehension of their

own thinking. This further illustrates that Emerson prioritises individual intellects independent of their interrelations. Furthermore, Emerson advocates for the examination of other authors' views, as engaging with their writings can assist a researcher grappling with their own work in articulating their thoughts more coherently.

Emerson articulates the joy experienced by the reader after encountering a book in which the author has articulated thoughts or sentiments with which the reader profoundly resonates. Emerson asserts that this sentiment further substantiates the existence of a “pre-established harmony” among all individuals, irrespective of time or location.

Emerson asserts that the bond between individuals and the relationship between humans and nature surpasses temporal boundaries, evidenced by the enduring link to historical literature. Emerson posits that certain thoughts, emotions, and convictions remain intrinsically constant, and uncovering these in historically published works enhances an individual's awareness of their interconnectedness with others and, crucially, their capacity to impact future generations.

Emerson acknowledges that books are significant as they nourish the human intellect. He observes that there have existed “great and heroic men” who relied solely on books for knowledge; but, a proficient reader must possess the ability to generate unique thoughts and would prioritize “the authentic utterances of the oracles” over extraneous facts and concepts.

Emerson has cautioned the scholar from forfeiting their own viewpoints by excessively depending on literature, and he now underscores the critical significance of avoiding fixation on trivial minutiae or authorial prejudices. The scholar must employ their discernment and emotions to ascertain which elements of a work are “authentic” and convey realities about the human experience. Emerson thinks that these “authentic” texts need to encourage scholars and facilitate the advancement of their original ideas.

Moreover, certain disciplines can only be comprehended through literature, including history and “exact sciences.” Colleges can utilize books to impart concepts that will inspire students to produce their own works. According to Emerson, the college's principal obligation is that. While Emerson cautioned against the perils of formal education—specifically, that numerous pupils are not instructed to think critically and autonomously—he reiterates to his audience that this sort of instruction is equally essential for acquiring factual knowledge. A responsible institution imparts foundational knowledge that equips students with the language and motivation to innovate, rather than merely instructing them on how to think.



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Emerson identifies action as the final significant effect on the scholar. He laments that academics—especially clergy—are disparaged by “practical men” who believe “speculative men” are of no value. Emerson thinks that action is a crucial element in a scholar’s development, as it enables them to understand how to produce something beneficial to a diverse populace.

“Practical individuals” focus on achieving concrete outcomes, whereas “speculative individuals” engage with abstract concepts that are intangible and not necessarily instantly applicable. Emerson counsels his audience of “speculative men” to collaborate with “practical men” to enhance their observation and comprehension of them. Emerson posits that profound links exist among all individuals, although the essential means of uncovering these connections lies in transcending the scholar’s comfort zone to participate in “practical” endeavours such as agriculture or engineering. This not only offers the scholar novel experiences for contemplation but also enhances their comprehension of the needs and viewpoints of their fellow American citizens.

Emerson thinks that a scholar’s discourse reflects the extent of their life experience. Active participation in society will expose the scholar to experiences and emotions that foster “eloquence and wisdom.” Emerson asserts that “experience is transformed into thought” through an ongoing process within a scholar. Emerson contends that a scholar who has devoted their entire life to studying antiquated texts in a library will lack the emotional intelligence exhibited by someone who has engaged with real-world experiences. This aligns with Emerson’s prior remark against “meek young men” who confine their study to a college library. A scholar who exclusively engages with the works of others jeopardizes their identity by succumbing to the ideals of previous intellectuals. When a researcher engages with the world and assumes an active societal position, they encounter novel situations that offer substantial opportunities for observations, potentially inspiring their subsequent work. While action is crucial, Emerson asserts that genuine contemplation of it will be challenging until it becomes a matter of the past. This is due to the scholar’s deep immersion in the present, which precludes them from reflecting on it with the same tranquilly as they do with their early recollections. Ultimately, the scholar will reflect on their experiences and draw inspiration from them to innovate.

Emerson says that a scholar must recognize their inability to maintain objectivity on an experience throughout its occurrence. For the scholar, objectivity entails an earnest

examination of their experiences and the insights they provoke, while minimizing the influence of emotion on the truth. Time enables an individual to reflect with greater objectivity than during the actual event, providing the advantage of hindsight and potentially a deeper comprehension of themselves and the significance of their experiences.

According to Emerson, the scholar must not only take action but also invest their utmost self into every endeavour. They must also pursue various behaviours to “replenish their marketable inventory” to avoid depleting resources for generating new ideas.

To the scholar, “merchantable stock” comprises emotions, experiences, and the thoughts they evoke. They are distinctive to the researcher, yet will nevertheless encompass realities that resonate with readers from many segments of society. To derive significance from an event, the scholar must remain receptive and refrain from allowing previous beliefs or biases to constrain their openness to the novel perspectives and ideas they will inevitably meet.

Moreover, diverse encounters expose the scholar to novel vocabulary. Emerson asserts that “frank intercourse” with diverse individuals from various origins will expose the scholar to distinct linguistic forms applicable to articulating their unique experiences. Moreover, Emerson contends that both literature and educational institutions only replicate the vernacular shaped by the agricultural and industrial sectors.

A primary objective of the scholar is to engage a broad audience, necessitating the ability to articulate ideas in a manner comprehensible to individuals across diverse socioeconomic strata and geographical areas. Emerson astutely observes that language emerges from the grassroots, with slang originating in the “field and the work-yard” frequently gaining popularity across various social strata, ultimately permeating the esteemed academic texts housed in college libraries. Consequently, engaging with the language utilised in modern “fields and work environments” enhances the scholar’s relatability to their current audience and to prospective college students who would meet similar terminology in their academic settings.

Emerson asserts that the ultimate significance of action is its capacity to provoke contemplation. Emerson draws parallels to natural cycles, shown by the “ebb and flow of the sea; the alternation of day and night; the variations of heat and cold.”



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When a scholar encounters challenges in reading or articulating concepts for writing, they should resort to “the fundamental essence of experiencing them.”

The scholar’s role is to examine and document the human experience; yet, as Emerson previously contended, this endeavour commences with the study of nature, whose laws mirror the principles governing the human mind and spirit. According to Emerson, the scholar’s intellect inherently inclines towards the observation of human behaviour, which can only be genuinely achieved by active participation in society. Nonetheless, the scholar gets detached from engagement during the processes of reading and writing, prompting Emerson to advocate for a return to action when this detachment impedes

their productivity. The existence of a prosperous academic parallels the “ebb and flow of the sea.” According to Emerson, the scholar had to withdraw inwards during their labour and subsequently reengage with society and communal endeavours to acquire further “merchantable stock.” By concentrating on their personal intellectual growth, the scholar can more adeptly engage with

Emerson asserts that it is the “unrefined savage nature” that generates new ideas and cultures, rather than formal instruction. Emerson asserts that primitive work is advantageous for all citizens; yet, he contends that individuals should not abandon their authentic beliefs and thoughts merely for the pursuit of new experiences. According to Emerson, the fewer constraints a someone faces from social etiquette, the more authentic their thoughts and behaviours will become. By engaging in rudimentary activities such as agriculture, the scholar can re-establish a connection with their intrinsic “unrefined savage essence,” as it entails direct interaction with nature devoid of social conventions. Consequently, it enables the scholar—and their collaborators—to engage in more authentic behaviour and thought processes. Emerson proceeds to delineate the responsibilities of scholars, asserting that they “are those befitting Man Thinking.”

The scholar’s principal responsibility, he asserts, is to “encourage, elevate, and direct” those in their vicinity. Nevertheless, he asserts that scholars will not attain the same level of immediate renown as astronomers, as the examination of human behaviour and ideas necessitates a greater investment of time. Furthermore, the academic may be regarded with disdain by others in society for lacking familiarity with the “popular arts.” Consequently, while producing their creative works, the scholar may need to endure “poverty and solitude.”

Emerson reiterates that society predominantly favours the “practical man,” whose profession produces quick, utilitarian outcomes, over the “speculative man,” who engages with abstract concepts and emotions. Emerson cautions that, due to the scholar’s potential unpopularity throughout society, they may never attain renown or acclaim during their lifetime.

Emerson asserts that rather than revelling in societal advantages, the scholar derives solace from the understanding that they are “exercising the highest functions of human nature.” Their role is fundamentally humanitarian, offering society literary masterpieces imbued with “heroic sentiments” and any “new verdict of Reason” they have uncovered. Emerson’s concept of societal unity posits that an individual’s contributions benefit the entire community, and that one person’s capabilities mirror those of all individuals. Consequently, the scholar’s achievements and competencies epitomise the full potential of humanity. Moreover, the outcomes of the scholar’s intellectual endeavours will facilitate the advancement of future academics, as Emerson previously asserted, books are composed for the advantage of subsequent generations.

Due to the significance of their role, Emerson counsels the scholar to possess complete trust in oneself as one of the few individuals who genuinely comprehend the globe. He implores the scholar to resist distractions from transient matters, regardless of their perceived significance to society (“a governmental obsession, a fleeting commerce”), and to concentrate on essential truths. The scholar will experience satisfaction at the day’s conclusion if they have “perceived something authentically.”

This passage reflects Emerson’s previous admonitions against the isolation stemming from scholars’ disinterest in the “popular arts.” This seclusion, however, aids the scholar in preserving intellectual independence, so allowing them to perceive “something truly,” such as the fundamental truths about humanity that the “popular arts” or contemporary social movements genuinely express. This indicates that Emerson does not perceive individual thought and communal unity as mutually exclusive. Emerson advocates for introspection among scholars, contending that self-awareness is crucial for comprehending humanity. He exemplifies his argument by stating that certain poets document their “spontaneous thoughts” and subsequently discover that they have, in fact, “captured what resonates as true for individuals in densely populated urban areas.” Emerson elucidates that many individuals may have insecurity regarding their thoughts, particularly their private and intimate reflections, yet will ultimately realize



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that these views serve as a “complement to their listeners.” Spontaneous thoughts reveal an individual’s true essence; thus, in accordance with Emerson’s belief in human interconnectedness, these thoughts are most relatable and comprehensible to others, as they resonate with the intrinsic nature of all individuals. This reinforces Emerson’s prior assertion that numerous exceptional ideas and cultures originate from “savage nature” rather than from confining oneself to the examination of others’ thoughts and creations.

Self-confidence is essential for the scholar, who must consistently embody qualities of freedom and courage. Emerson contends that scholars must transcend their fear, as fear originates from ignorance, which scholars do not possess. Upon encountering a fear, the scholar confronts it directly, examining it thoroughly until comprehension is achieved, enabling progression. Similarly, the scholar transcends the world’s “pretence” and discerns human truths from falsehoods.

Emerson says that the scholar must transcend the superficial and ephemeral aspects of society (its “pretension”) and their own internal fears. Underlying each of these elements is the potential for the scholar to enhance their comprehension of the human psyche. Moreover, it is a scholar’s responsibility to confront and transcend these challenges for themselves, while also assisting others in navigating them.

Emerson condemns the idea that “the world was completed long ago.” The researcher acknowledges that improvement is perpetual and learning is continuous, asserting that “great” individuals are those capable of “altering” the perspectives of others. Moreover, the esteemed scholar will conduct themselves in a manner that enables others to recognise the significance of their endeavours, so allowing society to reap the benefits of their contributions.

Emerson’s critiques parallel his previous assertion that each generation need to compose for the subsequent one, suggesting that there exists a continual transmission and enhancement of knowledge. A successful scholar will have aided their civilisation in recognising that the universe was never “finished,” thus rendering the scholar’s labour perpetually significant.

Emerson asserts that “man has been wronged; he has wronged himself.” Emerson thinks that individuals have grown excessively complacent, content to join a “herd”

and permit only a select few to attain genuine greatness. Emerson asserts that rather than striving for self-improvement and genuine fulfilment, several individuals are “satisfied to be swatted away like flies from the trajectory of a remarkable individual.” Moreover, rather than pursuing their own lives and recognising their own significance, Emerson asserts that numerous individuals prefer to “live in” their heroes.

This reflects Emerson’s prior claim that humanity has become excessively fragmented, a condition it has regrettably inflicted upon itself. Individuals have persuaded themselves that they occupy a specific position in society and that they are compelled to confine themselves to that function. They have resigned themselves to “inhabiting” their idols, believing that this is their only option. Emerson maintains that the scholar can assist their audience in recognising that all individuals possess the potential for greatness, irrespective of their position within the existing social system.

Emerson observes that individuals tend to prioritise the acquisition of wealth or authority, perceiving it as the pinnacle of achievement. Emerson asserts that these elements represent a “false good” and contends that it is the “gradual domestication of the idea of Culture” that will instigate a revolution in America. Consequently, the scholar will discover that comprehending human nature holds greater significance than “any kingdom in history.”

The “domestication of the idea of Culture” signifies that art and literature will predominantly address domestic concerns, which are more relevant and possess a stronger ability to transmit truth than implausible romances or elevated poetry composed in language comprehensible only to the highly educated. Emerson contends that monetary wealth and authority are subordinate to the capacity for mutual understanding. By fostering understanding, the scholar can attain a more enduring and advantageous outcome: the unification of a fractured community.

Emerson asserts that society has “thoroughly depleted” the once-great literature, necessitating the emergence of new works. Emerson asserts that no individual or concept can perpetually sustain humanity, as the “human mind” resembles a “central fire” or light that radiates from myriad stars. It cannot be constrained, and it is the scholar’s responsibility to sustain it throughout various epochs and locales.



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The antiquated concepts present in the texts commonly examined by scholars no longer provide the same level of inspiration due to their over utilisation. Each generation must build upon, adapt, or even deny these concepts to ensure the continuity of learning, understanding, and creation. Emerson asserts that only scholars possessing critical thinking skills and intellectual autonomy can sustain the “central fire” over generations. Emerson asserts that time has been segmented by the prevailing concepts of the Classic, Romantic, and contemporary Reflective ages. He contends, however, that based on his concept of “oneness” in humanity, individuals traverse all three states during their lifespan. Emerson posits that humanity’s initial enquiries into thought and emotion, as depicted in Classical literature, transitioned to an awareness of humanity’s unity with nature in Romantic literature, which he contends has evolved into the introspection characteristic of the present Reflective age. The individual’s comprehension of human nature evolves in a consistent manner, commencing in childhood (Classic) and culminating in maturity (Reflective). This illustrates the cyclical essence of knowledge, both socially and personally, and underscores Emerson’s focus on transmitting wisdom to subsequent generations.

In response to those who lamented the era as “the age of Introversion,” Emerson questions why this should be seen negatively. Emerson asserts that society’s anguish stemming from its insatiable quest for knowledge and understanding arises from the fact that individuals “find themselves not in the state of mind of their fathers,” resulting in a deficiency of guidance. Emerson perceives this as an indication that American society is prepared for a revolution.

Emerson reiterates his conviction regarding the inevitability of an American artistic revolution. Following the Revolutionary War, American civilisation successfully established a functional government and made significant contributions to global scientific and natural understanding. Nevertheless, Americans were devoid of a literary voice capable of articulating the essence of American identity and assisting society in establishing a foundation for progress.

Emerson acknowledges indications that revolution has commenced and is hopeful regarding their implications. Emerson specifically endorses the literary approach that embraces “the near, the low, the common,” as these subjects have been overlooked for an extended period. He believes that literature depicting the daily life of many

social classes will offer insights into both historical and future societies. This genre of literature highlights the “sublime presence of the supreme spiritual cause” that invigorates all of humanity. The United States was established on the principle that all individuals are created equal, with no one possessing inherent superiority over another. Literature that exclusively addresses the affluent and privileged fails to represent the human experience, as it omits a significant portion of mankind. Emerson commends literature that resonates with “the near, the low, the common” as it conveys the most truth to the largest audience, hence fostering national unity more effectively than literature concerning “the remote” affluent.

Emerson asserts that the concepts drawn from quotidian existence and individuals endowed talent to Goldsmith, Burns, and Cowper in a previous era, and presently motivates poets such as Goethe, Wordsworth, and Carlyle. Through the examination of these authors’ works, both researchers and general readers discern that “local phenomena are equally beautiful and remarkable as distant ones,” and, crucially, that comprehending these ostensibly trivial subjects can facilitate a comprehension of those that appear more spectacular and “remote.”

Emerson underscores the significance of literature that depicts “things near” rather than “things remote,” as it possesses a superior ability to unify. The “genius” of the writers cited by Emerson lies in their adept use of the vernacular of the middle and lower classes, as opposed to the language comprehensible solely to the educated elite. They composed poetry and literature that were more accessible to all societal members, and by emulating their approach, the American scholar could generate works that would foster unity among their American readership.

Emerson identifies Emanuel Swedenborg as an individual who was largely undervalued during his era. Emerson asserts that Swedenborg significantly contributed to this philosophy, especially in linking nature with “the affections of the soul.” Swedenborg, akin to Emerson, posited that a genuine connection exists among us, nature, and the divine. This unity implied that the study of natural sciences may enhance humanity’s self-understanding and foster spiritual development.

Emerson’s observation about an imminent revolution that can be discerned through the “increased significance attributed to the individual” resonates deeply with his belief in the transformative power of recognizing the inherent worth and self-governance



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capacity of individuals within a society. He argues that such a society, where individuals embrace their intrinsic value and operate as self-aware entities, stands on a higher ground of cohesion and unity compared to one plagued by divisive class distinctions. Emerson's perspective underscores the essence of a harmonious social fabric built upon the mutual acknowledgment of individual contributions and responsibilities.

In line with his view, Emerson emphasizes the scholar's pivotal role as a guide and repository of diverse forms of knowledge, serving like a beacon of enlightenment in a world rife with complexities. Describing the scholar as a "university of knowledges," Emerson stresses the duty of intellectuals to facilitate societal comprehension of a

profound truth: that amidst the vastness of the world lies the paramount importance of individual human beings. In Emerson's eyes, the essence of existence revolves around the individual, making it imperative for society to recognize and cherish the profound potential residing within each person.

Overall, Emerson's insights invite contemplation on the transformative power embedded in the recognition and nurturing of individual worth and self-directed governance, encouraging a society that transcends divisions and embraces the unity found in acknowledging the intrinsic value of every individual.

Earlier in the discourse, Emerson recognises that individuals often strive for power or wealth, as these facilitate their ascent in the social hierarchy. Although the aspiration for the luxuries of affluence and the esteem associated with authority is inherent, Emerson posits that the American scholar will assist society in recognising that striving for societal progress is paramount compared to pursuing the "world" (i.e., reputation, fortune, or social status).

Emerson asserts that the American Scholar will instigate a revolution that unifies the nation. He contends that the US has "listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe," resulting in a perception of Americans as "timid, imitative, tame" by the rest of the world.

Emerson revisits certain sentiments expressed in the initial portions of his lecture. The American Scholar's excessive attention to Europe's "courtly muses" has hindered America's attainment of genuine cultural independence. America accomplished a

significant feat by attaining political independence from England; nevertheless, without cultural autonomy, the nation would fail to garner the respect of other global powers.

Moreover, the American “mind” “consumes itself” due to its conviction that it can alone “aspire to trivial pursuits.” Emerson laments that young Americans, aspiring to effect significant change, become disheartened and perceive themselves as “hindered from action by the revulsion inspired by the principles governing business management.” Emerson emphasises that a single individual adhering to their values might inspire others to do the same.

Emerson contends that American civilisation has overemphasised industrialisation and innovation while neglecting intellectual advancement. This illustrates Emerson’s prior observation that the “practical” individuals of society disdain the “speculative” ones for ostensibly failing to contribute to societal advancement. The intellectual capacity of America is deteriorating due to complacency, as it increasingly embraces the ideals and traditions of other nations instead of striving for innovation and originality. However, if one academic achieves a breakthrough, others will undoubtedly follow.

Emerson, in his critical examination of the prevailing notion that individuals should be evaluated collectively, emphasizes the importance of recognizing each person as a distinct entity rather than simply a part of a larger group. He argues against the practice of lumping people “in the gross, in the hundred, or the thousand” and advocates for viewing individuals as complete “units” with their own unique thoughts and experiences. According to Emerson, instead of being categorized based on geographical factors such as the north or the south, Americans should strive towards self-reliance and independence, both intellectually and physically. By encouraging people to trust in their own abilities and intellect, he believes that the pursuit of knowledge, particularly through the “study of letters,” will be elevated and respected, fostering a sense of common understanding and solidarity among Americans. Ultimately, Emerson envisions a future where a new kind of society emerges, one in which each individual acknowledges their own connection to the Divine Soul that encompasses all of humanity. In this harmonious community, a “nation of men” will come into existence for the first time, united in their shared inspiration and inherent spirituality, heralding a transformative and enlightened era of human existence.

Emerson posited that America, as a nascent republic, possessed the capacity to evolve into the first genuinely unified nation. The European nations that several Americans



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opted to abandon were marked by profound and intractable social stratifications, chiefly due to their commitment to the principles of aristocracy and primogeniture, which hindered the lower classes from ascending to the higher echelons. Emerson thinks that America's grandeur will not stem from scientific discoveries or innovations, but rather from literature and art. The American Scholar will reconcile societal disparities by demonstrating that no one is intrinsically superior to another only due to their birth into a "noble" lineage, but rather that all individuals are rendered equal by a "Divine Soul" that is universally shared.

Emerson as an Essayist

Emerson's articles are distinguished for their originality, profundity, and poetic elegance. His works frequently consist of philosophical contemplations, merging personal experiences with extensive observations on nature, society, and human potential. Emerson's style, marked by aphoristic clarity, metaphorical depth, and a poetic cadence, engages readers in a realm of intellectual and spiritual exploration. His works are not merely logical arguments but also artistic compositions that encapsulate the tenets of Transcendentalism.

A hallmark of Emerson's essays is their dependence on intuition rather than empirical evidence. Instead of formulating systematic arguments, Emerson presents insights that promote self-exploration. His articles serve as intellectual provocations, compelling readers to seek truth within themselves. This methodology, prioritising inspiration over formal reasoning, corresponds with his conviction in the preeminence of the individual intellect. "The American Scholar": An Appeal for Intellectual Autonomy Presented as a speech at Harvard University in 1837, The American Scholar is frequently considered America's "Intellectual Declaration of Independence." In this article, Emerson reinterprets the function of the scholar in American society, promoting a departure from European intellectual traditions and the development of an original, self-sufficient American philosophy.

I. Emerson eloquently describes the Scholar's Sources of Knowledge in a way that resonates deeply with those striving for intellectual growth. He skillfully outlines three primary wellsprings of wisdom that shape the American scholar's understanding and worldview. Among these fountains of enlightenment, nature stands out as the foremost teacher in Emerson's eyes. He emphatically asserts that by immersing oneself in the

study of the natural world, the scholar uncovers profound and timeless truths that transcend the limitations of human perception. Nature, for Emerson, serves as a mirror reflecting the very essence of the human soul, encapsulating both the boundless potential and the intricate orderliness of the universe.

In addition to nature, Emerson also extols the invaluable role of books as repositories of wisdom accumulated over generations. However, he issues a cautionary note against blind adherence to conventional wisdom, stressing the importance of viewing books as catalysts for fresh thinking rather than as rigid, immutable doctrines. According to

Emerson, scholars must wield books as tools to ignite innovation and stimulate independent thought, steering clear of falling into the trap of passive acceptance of established knowledge. In essence, Emerson's profound insights underscore the need for a balanced approach to learning, one that draws inspiration from the lessons of nature while embracing the transformative power of critical engagement with written texts. Through this nuanced interplay between the natural world and the written word, the scholar embarks on a journey of self-discovery and intellectual growth that transcends the boundaries of mere academia, paving the way for a deeper understanding of the universal truths that underpin existence.

Emerson firmly argues that authentic education requires hands-on experience, emphasizing the importance of practical applications in understanding concepts thoroughly. He believed that knowledge must be tested and proven through direct observation and interaction with the physical world to be deemed valuable. This implies that scholars shouldn't confine themselves solely to academic settings but should actively engage with real-world scenarios, applying their intellectual capabilities in practical ways to make a positive impact on society. By venturing beyond the confines of libraries and lecture halls, academics can bridge the gap between theory and reality, thus enhancing the practical relevance of their academic pursuits. In essence, Emerson encourages scholars to break free from the confines of traditional learning environments and embrace experiential learning as a means to foster a deeper understanding of concepts and their implications. Through this integration of theory and practice, academics can harness their expertise to drive positive societal change, drawing on their knowledge and skills to address real-world challenges



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with innovation and effectiveness. As such, Emerson's philosophy underscores the transformative potential of experiential learning in shaping well-rounded, socially conscious intellectuals who are not only well-versed in theory but also grounded in practical wisdom.

II. Responsibilities of the American Scholar Emerson asserts that the scholar must foster autonomous reasoning and ethical purity. He urges academics to liberate themselves from European influence and cultivate a distinctly American voice. According to Emerson, the scholar's responsibility is to serve as a visionary and leader, directing society towards advancement via wisdom and self-expression. The American Scholar embodies a very democratic ethos. Emerson contests the elitist belief that intellectual pursuits are the sole domain of academics. He contends that every human, irrespective of socioeconomic standing, have the capacity to be a scholar. This conviction corresponds with America's democratic principles, promoting intellectual and creative empowerment for everyone.

The Impact and Enduring Legacy of Emerson Emerson's *The American Scholar* significantly impacted American literature and philosophy. It inspired authors like Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman, who adopted his advocacy for individuality and self-expression. His focus on self-reliance established the basis for American literary and intellectual identity, motivating artists and philosophers to create their own trajectories instead of conforming to European norms.

Furthermore, Emerson's concepts remain pertinent in modern discourse regarding education, creativity, and personal development. His claim that researchers should actively engage with the world is pertinent in contemporary academia, when multidisciplinary methods and experiential learning are increasingly esteemed.

Ralph Waldo Emerson's accomplishments as an essayist are unmatched in American literature. In *The American Scholar*, he presents a persuasive vision of intellectual autonomy, advocating for researchers to extract wisdom from nature, question established norms, and actively participate in the world. His eloquent style, profound philosophical insights, and steadfast conviction in individual empowerment render his works perpetually impactful. Emerson redefined the position of the American scholar,

shaping the intellectual environment of his era and establishing the foundation for the development of American thinking and literature.

UNIT 6

THEMES IN EMERSON'S "THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR"

Ralph Waldo Emerson's renowned work, *The American Scholar* (1837), stands as a pivotal piece in advocating for intellectual autonomy, self-sufficiency, and the indispensable role of scholars within American society. Delivered as an impassioned address to the esteemed Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard University, this influential text calls for a decisive break from prevailing European intellectual paradigms and champions the nurturing of a unique American intellectual and cultural ethos. Through a comprehensive exploration of Emerson's seminal work, a number of essential themes emerge, including the enduring principles of self-reliance, the profound impact of nature on human thought and creativity, the transformative power of literature, the advocacy for learning through real-world experiences and active engagement, and the moral and communal responsibilities incumbent upon those individuals who occupy the esteemed position of the scholar within society.

1. Autonomy and Cognitive Independence

A key theme that resonates throughout *The American Scholar* revolves around the principle of self-reliance. Emerson fervently argues that American intellectuals should not merely duplicate the established philosophical doctrines of Europe; instead, they should cultivate innovative and original concepts. He vehemently denounces the passive acceptance of information and urges scholars to actively engage in independent thinking and reasoning. This principle aligns seamlessly with Emerson's broader transcendentalist beliefs, emphasizing the significance of personal intuition and self-dependence. By fostering a climate that encourages scholars to explore their own thoughts and perspectives, Emerson lays the groundwork for a distinctly American intellectual landscape that is free from external influences and limitations.

2. The Influence of Nature on the Development of the Scholar



Emerson's profound reverence for nature, evident across his discourse, deeply shapes his philosophical insights and intellectual growth. Throughout his works, nature emerges as a cornerstone of his ideology, driving his exploration of human consciousness and spiritual interconnectedness in the natural world. By portraying nature as a dynamic realm of wisdom and beauty, Emerson not only underscores its influence on his own thinking but also encourages readers to reflect on its intrinsic essence. He illustrates how nature embodies fundamental truths that extend beyond mere observation, urging individuals to engage with its teachings on a profound level. Through his writings, Emerson seeks to convey the transformative power of nature on the human mind and spirit, advocating for a symbiotic relationship between individuals and the environment. In emphasizing the intrinsic unity between humans and the natural world, Emerson imparts a message of interconnectedness and harmony that resonates throughout his transcendentalist philosophy. Furthermore, he highlights the reciprocal exchange of knowledge and inspiration that occurs when one immerses themselves in nature, enriching both personal growth and intellectual endeavors. Ultimately, Emerson's celebration of nature as a conduit for spiritual fulfillment and intellectual enlightenment positions it as a catalyst for profound self-discovery and holistic understanding of the universe.

3. The Significance of Books and Their Constraints

Emerson recognizes the significance of books as reservoirs of knowledge but cautions against overreliance on them. He critiques the propensity of intellectuals to become insular, passively assimilating material without engaging in innovative thought. Although books offer historical wisdom, Emerson asserts that researchers must transcend them to generate novel concepts. This subject underscores the necessity of balancing traditional learning with the promotion of innovation.

4. Action as a Method of Learning

Emerson emphasises the significance of activity in the intellectual growth of the scholar. He contends that genuine comprehension arises from experiential involvement with the world rather than only from academic knowledge. Through action, individuals enhance their intelligence and implement their concepts in practical scenarios. This subject underscores his exhortation for scholars to engage actively in life instead of remaining aloof observers.

5. The Scholar's Obligation to Society

Emerson's exploration of the scholar's ethical and societal duty in his renowned work *The American Scholar* delves deeply into the transformative role intellectuals play in shaping society. Central to his argument is the idea that scholars should not only be repositories of knowledge but also active leaders who inspire positive change in their communities. By emphasizing the necessity of scholars engaging with the public sphere, Emerson highlights the crucial link between intellectual pursuit and social progress. He advocates for a model of scholarship that goes beyond mere intellectualism to embrace a form of leadership that empowers and uplifts society as a whole.

Emerson's vision of the scholar as a moral guide and catalyst for societal advancement underscores the importance of active participation in the public sphere. Rather than existing in isolation, scholars should actively seek to bridge the gap between academia and the broader community, fostering a culture of mutual learning and growth. In aligning intellectual pursuits with democratic principles, Emerson argues for a form of scholarship that is deeply ingrained in the fabric of society, driving cultural and social evolution forward.

By viewing intellectual empowerment as a tool for social betterment, Emerson's thematic exploration in *The American Scholar* serves as a call to action for scholars to become more than just thinkers but also agents of positive change. The scholar, in Emerson's eyes, is not just an individual pursuing knowledge but a beacon of enlightenment and progress, guiding society towards a brighter future through active engagement and contribution. This overarching democratic principle underpinning Emerson's work emphasizes the transformative potential of scholarly endeavors in effecting meaningful societal change.

Emerson's *The American Scholar* articulates a compelling vision of intellectual autonomy, advocating for scholars to adopt self-reliance, engage with nature, take action, and fulfil societal responsibilities. His appeal for uniqueness and invention persists in its relevance, as it motivates individuals to engage in independent thought and make significant contributions to society. By advocating these principles, Emerson established the groundwork for a genuine American intellectual and cultural identity that continues to motivate successive generations of intellectuals.

Critical Analysis

The American Scholar, a discourse delivered by Ralph Waldo Emerson to the Phi Beta Kappa Society, elucidates the essential qualities required to be a scholar and



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engage in intellectual thought. Emerson addresses three primary themes: nature, history, and agency. Emerson elaborates on each of these concepts comprehensively, providing historical instances and illustrating their significance to an intelligent mind. Emerson commences with the concept of nature. He asserts that while we currently perceive nature and humanity as distinct entities, the advent of intellectual and critical thought renders these classifications obsolete, necessitating a renewal of humanity's relationship with nature over time.

Emerson firmly asserts that a scholar must possess a profound comprehension of historical contexts and literary works to truly excel in their academic pursuits. Simultaneously, he emphasizes that one cannot repeatedly engage with the same classic literary works, underscoring the dynamic nature of scholarly exploration. Instead, he advocated for the use of those texts as sources of inspiration, asserting that they should not be “glorified and endlessly replicated” but rather serve as catalysts for innovative thinking and fresh perspectives. Ultimately, Emerson addresses the concept of action, recognizing its significance in the scholarly journey. While it may be viewed as the least prominent theme among the three - nature, the past, and action - it remains a crucial component that cannot be overlooked. Emerson and other like-minded thinkers believed that action is essential for individuals, especially scholars, as it allows for the application of knowledge and the realization of informed and rational conclusions. Hence, scholars are expected to draw insights from historical experiences, both personal and shared, to enrich their scholarly discourse and contribute meaningfully to their respective fields. In essence, these three interconnected themes - nature, the past, and action - form the cornerstone of scholarly pursuits, guiding scholars towards a deeper understanding of the world and fostering intellectual growth.

Although the three issues Emerson addresses in *The American Scholar* are incomplete when considered separately, the most significant of the three is nature. Based on the frequency of its references, one might conclude that Emerson regarded this as the most significant of the three. Emerson's perspective on nature, as articulated in the speech, can be succinctly summarized as follows: To be a scholar, one must prioritize the linkages between humanity and nature over their classifications and separations. Emerson asserts that a separation exists between a Man Thinking and a mere thinker, emphasizing the significant role of nature in this differentiation. “Nature entreats him

with her serene and cautionary images; the past educates him; the future beckons him.” Emerson 57 It is crucial to note that Emerson addresses an audience of men who perceive themselves as Man Thinking rather than as a thinking man. With Emerson establishing the criteria for what constitutes a scholar and their contemplations, the audience is compelled to reconsider. They must reassess their intellectual capacity and ensure that their level of reasoning aligns with that of a genuine scholar.

Emerson, a prominent philosopher, believed firmly in the scholar’s essential connection with nature, which he elaborated on extensively. On page 58 of his work, he passionately describes nature as a dynamic and unstoppable force, constantly in motion through rolling, folding, turning, and evolving. This depiction conveys the idea that nature operates independently of human influence, emphasizing its vastness and untamed beauty. Emerson highlights that even the most powerful individuals are unable to obstruct nature’s course, highlighting its supremacy and universal accessibility. Despite its vast reach, he emphasizes that nature cannot be owned by any individual, underlining its inherent freedom and autonomy. To truly embody the essence of a scholar, Emerson stresses the importance of deep reflection and contemplation of nature, implying that this profound connection is vital for intellectual and spiritual growth. Through his compelling arguments and vivid descriptions, Emerson paints a picture of nature as a boundless entity that transcends human limitations and invites scholars to immerse themselves in its infinite wisdom and beauty, thereby facilitating personal and intellectual growth.

The relationship between humanity and nature as both unified and distinct. Nature is the foundation of all life, and our existence is an integral component of it. As we gain greater self-awareness, we commence the mastery of nature, as elucidated by Emerson. “Ultimately, the ancient adage, ‘Know thyself,’ and the contemporary principle, ‘Study nature,’ converge into a singular maxim.” In this quotation, Emerson juxtaposes the old concept of self-awareness with the understanding of nature, so linking humanity with the natural world.

Emerson posits a clear correlation between self-awareness and understanding of nature. In the paragraph before the aforementioned remark that equates self-awareness with understanding nature, Emerson assertively posits the contrary: that ignorance of nature signifies ignorance of oneself. Despite being audacious and potentially implausible, Emerson articulates a significant overarching argument on thought and thinkers. He posits that failing to wholly commit to a certain line of thought equates to a lack of commitment to any line of thought. To get Man Thinking, an ordinary thinker must commence interrogating all concepts with the same intensity previously applied to a singular thought.



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One must engage in profound contemplation on all matters consistently, while simultaneously preserving mental clarity. Emerson likens a schoolboy seated outside in the sun to the journey every thinker must undertake to attain a genuine comprehension of nature. Recognising that nature is interconnected and that the essence of humanity and the philosophy of nature constitute a singular, overarching concept is merely the commencement of understanding. These insights from the schoolboy merely represent the surface of the “gigantic hand” that is nature. To nature’s colossal hand, we are but an infant. A child requiring support to steady himself while learning to walk, or a thinker needing guidance to establish connections that transform the thinker into Man Thinking.

Points to Remember

1. The American Scholar was originally a speech titled “An Oration Delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Cambridge,” on August 31, 1837.
2. It encourages scholars to learn from nature, books, and personal experience.
3. The essay criticizes reliance on European traditions, urging American originality.
4. It promotes action and engagement over passive learning.
5. ‘The American Scholar’ laid the foundation for Transcendentalist thought in American literature.

QUESTIONS

Multiple choice questions:

1. What is the central idea of Emerson’s The American Scholar?
 - A. The significance of financial prosperity
 - B. The function of the scholar within society
 - C. The advantages of technical progress
 - D. The imperative for political reform



2. According to Emerson, which of the following does NOT constitute an impact on the scholar?

- A. Nature
- B. Books
- C. Action
- D. Wealth

3. To which institution did Emerson deliver The American Scholar address?

- A. Harvard University
- B. Yale University
- C. Princeton University
- D. Dartmouth College

4. The American Scholar, Emerson underscores the significance of individuality among scholars.

- A. Conformity
- B. Imitation
- C. Originality
- D. Obedience

5. What term does Emerson employ to characterise the quintessential scholar?

- A. “Contemplative Individual”
- B. “Erudite Person”

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C. “Cognitive Colossus”

D. “Scholarly Authority”

Essay Type Questions

1. In what manner does Emerson’s conception of the scholar contradict conventional academic institutions?
2. Is Emerson’s concept of self-reliance in *The American Scholar* applicable in today’s globalised society?
3. In what manner does *The American Scholar* confront the dichotomy between intellectualism and action?
4. What are the limitations or criticisms of Emerson’s concepts in *The American Scholar*?
5. In what ways has Emerson’s *The American Scholar* impacted contemporary American literature and intellectual discourse?

Book suggested:

- a) Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *The American Scholar* (1848), Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016
- b) Khandelwal, K.N. *The American Scholar*. Laxmi Narayan Agrawal Publications.

MODULE III

***MOBY DICK* - HERMAN MELVELLI**

Contents

- 1. Objectives**
- 2. Introduction**
- 3. Summary of *Moby Dick***
- 4. Critical Analysis of *Moby- Dick***
- 5. Themes in *Moby Dick***
- 6. Narrative Technique in *Moby Dick***
- 7. Character Analysis**
- 8. Questions**
- 9. Book suggested**

Objectives

- To examine Captain Ahab's obsession with Moby Dick and its symbolic meaning.
- To explore themes of fate, revenge, and the limits of human knowledge.
- To analyze the novel's narrative style, symbolism, and philosophical depth.



UNIT 7

INTRODUCTION OF THE AUTHOR, HERMAN MELVILLE

Early Life

Herman Melville, the acclaimed author of “Moby Dick,” entered the world on August 1, 1819, in the bustling metropolis of New York City. He hailed from a once prosperous family that had seen its economic standing decline due to financial woes faced by his father, Allan Melvill, who later altered the family name by adding an “e.” Tragically, the passing of his father in 1832 drastically impacted young Melville’s academic pursuits, cutting short his formal education. Left to navigate the challenges of life, he ventured into various professions, including trying his hand as a teacher and a clerk, before ultimately finding his calling as a writer.

Experience and Literary Origins

In 1839, the esteemed author Herman Melville embarked on a commerce vessel to set sail on a remarkable journey, which later led him to board the whaling ship *Acushnet* in 1841. This decision to voyage aboard the *Acushnet* was a pivotal moment in Melville’s life, shaping the course of his future literary endeavors in a profound manner. During his time at sea, Melville found himself dwelling among cannibals in the Marquesas Islands, an experience that left an indelible mark on his creative spirit. Drawing inspiration from this unconventional sojourn, Melville skillfully weaved a narrative in his inaugural novel, *Typee*, published in 1846, which vividly captured the essence of his encounters with the island’s inhabitants. The success of *Typee* prompted Melville to pen its sequel, *Omoo*, in 1847, further solidifying his reputation as a skilled storyteller with a penchant for travel-adventure tales that resonated with readers far and wide.

Stylistic Elements and Literary Motifs

Melville’s writing style underwent considerable evolution throughout his lifetime.

He imbued his plots with profound meanings. His novel *Moby Dick* is replete with biblical and philosophical symbolism. His works frequently examine existential topics,



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ethics, and the essence of humanity. Intricate and multifaceted in his approach to storytelling, he skillfully employed a variety of techniques to captivate his audience. These techniques included the strategic use of changing viewpoints, enigmatic narrators that often led readers astray, and a non-linear storytelling style that challenged conventional narrative structures. Within the realm of Dark Romanticism, he delved deeply into themes of morality and the eternal struggle between good and evil, drawing inspiration from esteemed literary figures like Hawthorne. Tragically, his legacy remains somewhat obscured, as he passed away on September 28, 1891, without receiving the recognition he truly deserved. Among his notable works, “Typee” (1846) and “Omoo” (1847) stand out as adventurous and romanticised accounts of his time in the exotic landscapes of the South Pacific. Additionally, “Mardi” (1849) emerged as a profound and symbolic work, exploring complex philosophical themes that marked a transition towards deeper contemplations within his literary career. Redburn (1849) and White-Jacket (1850) — Semi-autobiographical maritime novels that critique naval existence.



UNIT 8

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF *MOBY DICK*

Herman Melville's novel *Moby Dick*, which was first published in 1851, is widely regarded as one of the most influential novels written in the United States and a masterpiece of literature that will endure for generations to come. Because of its convoluted storyline, profound philosophical ideas, and abundant symbolic content, the novel is a piece of literature that is both significant and hard. There is no denying that *Moby Dick* is primarily a marine adventure; but, it also serves as a profound exploration of human existence, ethics, and the persistent pursuit of knowledge. The obsession that Captain Ahab has with the white whale is the vehicle through which Melville weaves together concepts such as predestination, free will, vengeance, and the boundaries of human cognition.

The narrative of *Moby Dick* begins with the timeless words: "Call me Ishmael." Ishmael, the protagonist and narrator of this iconic tale, finds himself yearning for a sense of liberation from the bustling streets of New York City. Motivated by a desire for adventure and purpose, he sets his sights on the coastal town of New Bedford, Massachusetts, where the promise of employment aboard a whaling ship beckons. It is amidst the rustic charm of the Spouter Inn that Ishmael crosses paths with Queequeg, an enigmatic figure hailing from the distant shores of Kokovoko in the Pacific. Queequeg's expertise as a harpooner, his prowess in whaling, and his fearless spirit immediately capture Ishmael's attention. Despite initial reservations stemming from their stark differences, a bond of camaraderie quickly forms between the two men, prompting them to pledge a joint venture aboard a whaling vessel of Ishmael's choice bound for the seafaring haven of Nantucket. This fateful meeting marks the beginning of an enduring friendship that will be tested and transformed by the trials and tribulations awaiting them on the wild and unforgiving seas.

Ishmael encounters a vessel named the *Pequod* and, upon conversing with its owners, Peleg and Bildad, discerns that the captain, Ahab, is an eccentric individual, potentially unhinged, who refrains from socializing with others. Ishmael subsequently discovers that Ahab lost his leg to a formidable whale, which severed it; this whale, known as

Moby Dick, is renowned for its pallor, ferocity, and elusiveness. Notwithstanding apprehensions over Ahab and the ominous predictions of a man named Elijah, who cautions Ishmael and Queequeg about the captain, the two individuals resolve to embark aboard the Pequod. The vessel departs from Nantucket on Christmas Day.

Upon embarking at sea, Ishmael delineates the specifics of the vessel and the practice of whaling, frequently interjecting observations to the reader concerning the historical, scientific, theological, and philosophical aspects of whale-fishing. Ishmael presents Starbuck, the pragmatic and circumspect first mate; Stubb, the audacious and skilled whale-fisher, serving as the second mate; and Flask, the unremarkable third mate. Ahab ultimately emerges on the deck of the Pequod and informs the crew that, while they are a conventional whaling vessel, they possess a unique objective—to locate and eradicate Moby Dick. Ahab pledges a one-ounce gold doubloon to the first anyone who sights the “white whale.”

During this significant phase of the narrative, the Pequod, under Captain Ahab’s determined leadership, partakes in a series of interactive encounters known as “gams” with various other sea vessels, each of which carries distinct tales of fortune or misfortune. These maritime meetings provide intricate glimpses into the diverse experiences of seafaring life, ranging from victorious ventures to harrowing incidents involving the elusive and vengeful Moby Dick. One notable instance involves the Town-Ho, wherein a dramatic retelling unravels a rebellion thwarted by the infamous white whale, underscoring the dangers lurking in the vast ocean expanse. Conversely, aboard the Rose-Bud, a sense of despondency envelops the crew as they grapple with the sight of sick whales entangled alongside their ship, serving as a stark reminder of the unpredictable and often brutal nature of their trade. Amidst these engagements,

as the Pequod traverses across the expansive realms of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the relentless pursuit of Moby Dick consumes Captain Ahab’s psyche, propelling him towards a singular obsession with the creature’s ultimate destruction. Meanwhile, Stubb’s skilled expertise in the art of whaling is showcased through his successful capture of a whale, with the meticulous process of skinning and extracting its oil vividly detailed by Ishmael, offering readers a captivating insight into the practicalities of their perilous yet lucrative profession.



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Ahab commissions the ship's carpenter to construct a new ivory leg after his previous one splinters, while Queequeg, convinced he is succumbing to fever, requests a casket from the craftsman, which later serves as a life-buoy for the ship upon Queequeg's recovery. Ahab requests the ship's blacksmith, Perth, to forge a new harpoon, which Ahab then "baptizes" with the blood of Tashtego, Daggoo, and Queequeg, the vessel's three "heathen" harpooners. This middle section discloses that Ahab has clandestinely brought aboard the Pequod five men, including one named Fedallah, all hailing from an unspecified Asian country, to assist him in locating and exterminating Moby Dick. Stubb and Flask are certain that Fedallah is the "embodiment of evil," believing that Ahab has bartered his soul to the devil in pursuit of the white whale.

Ultimately, as the Pequod draws closer to Japan, Ahab's certainty about the presence of Moby Dick grows stronger, fueled by the accounts of fellow vessels that have caught sight of the infamous white whale. It is during one of these encounters that Ahab first lays eyes on Moby Dick, setting off a relentless pursuit that spans three intense days. In a daring attempt to strike the whale with his harpoon, Ahab's initial effort is thwarted when his small whaleboat is capsized, miraculously leaving the crew unscathed. Undeterred, Ahab's determination is only heightened on their second confrontation with Moby Dick, successfully landing a harpoon in the leviathan. Tragically, the precarious nature of the sea claims a price, as Fedallah meets his end entangled in the harpoon line when Moby Dick takes a final, fateful dive into the ocean's depths.

On the third encounter, despite Starbuck's admonition for Ahab to abandon the pursuit, Ahab once more confronts Moby Dick and casts his harpoon; however, this time, Ahab becomes ensnared in the line, resulting in his hanging and drowning by his own rope. Moby Dick subsequently collides with the Pequod, resulting in the ship's sinking and the demise of all onboard, except for Ishmael, who survives "to tell the tale" by adrift on Queequeg's coffin. Ishmael is rescued by the Rachel, a vessel that earlier engaged in a gam with the Pequod.

UNIT 9

THEMES AND CHARACTER ANALYSIS IN *MOBY DICK*

The concept of Fixation and Retribution in *Moby Dick* focuses mostly on Captain Ahab's obsession with the white whale, which he interprets as a symbol of malevolence, destiny, or divine unfairness. This is the central theme of the story. Ahab's uncompromising pursuit of vengeance against Moby Dick completely consumes him, leading him to disregard good sense, morality, and the well-being of his crew. Because of his fixation, he becomes a tragic figure, as his inability to let go of his previous affliction ultimately leads to his demise. An example of a cautionary tale that demonstrates the destructive repercussions of obsession and the risks that are inherent in an unfettered desire for retribution is provided by the character of Ahab. There is a resemblance between his tragic destiny and that of traditional literary characters, such as King Lear from Shakespeare and Satan from Milton. Both of these characters are examples of the consequences that can result from having unreasonable ambition and hubris.

Autonomy and the Will of God

Moby Dick is a tale that explores the tension that exists between free will and predestination. There is no doubt in Ahab's mind that he is destined to kill Moby Dick. He sees the whale as a symbol of destiny that he must overcome. His statements regularly contain references to predetermined outcomes and the will of a higher power, which suggests that he believes he is confined to a course of conduct that cannot be changed. Characters such as Starbuck, on the other hand, represent an opposing viewpoint, advocating for the concept of free will and individual responsibility. In light of the fact that Starbuck considers Ahab's pursuit of vengeance to be both irresponsible and futile, he warns Ahab that exacting revenge on a mere creature is beyond the realm of rationality. The piece concludes with a question that is not definitively answered: Is Ahab only a victim of fate, or does he actively choose his own path to ruin?



The Magnificence of Nature and the Power of Nature

Melville's depiction of the sea and the whale exemplifies the Romantic concept of the sublime, which describes nature as a phenomena that is both beautiful and terrifying at the same time. In the world of Moby Dick, the ocean is enormous, mysterious, and uninterested in doing anything that humans do. The perplexing and the limits of human comprehension are both represented by it. Similarly, Moby Dick is a representation of the power and mystery that nature possesses. His depiction in mythological and reverent terminology is indicative of the fact that he is not only a typical whale but rather an almost supernatural being. Through the use of these pictures, Melville emphasises the insignificance of humans in comparison to the terrible power of nature.

Separation and Alienation from Others

Ahab is a solitary person who is cut off from members of his crew, his family, and even his own identity. His preoccupation with Moby Dick causes him to withdraw from major human relationships, which ultimately transforms him into a tragic individual who is destined to destroy himself. Despite the fact that he is the narrator of the story, Ishmael experiences loneliness in a manner that is separate from other people. It is clear from his philosophical speculations that he is experiencing a severe sense of existential alone, which he is attempting to overcome through the use of narrative and observation. The concept of isolation extends beyond the characteristics of individual people and encompasses the Pequod, which functions as a miniature representation of human society that is adrift in the vast and uncaring ocean.

The relationship that exists between humankind and the divine

A great number of philosophical and religious enquiries are included in the narrative, particularly those about the nature of God and the will of God. One interpretation of the fight between Ahab and Moby Dick is that it is an uprising against a god who is uncaring or that is malicious. His perception of the whale is that it is a manifestation of an unfair fate, and the fact that he feels the need to destroy it is a manifestation of his defiance against the apathy of the cosmos. Ishmael, on the other hand, adopts a more introspective and agnostic point of view, recognising the limitations of human cognition

with regard to matters concerning heaven. However, it raises significant questions about faith, destiny, and the need for meaning that is shared by all people. The book does not present any concrete solutions.

The Limits of One's Capacity to Understand

It is possible to interpret *Moby Dick* as rumination on the limits of human comprehension in a number of different circumstances. Ishmael's narrative includes extensive ramblings on topics such as whaling, biology, history, and philosophy. These ramblings illustrate an attempt to explain the cosmos through the use of empirical observation and analysis. Furthermore, in spite of the fact that there is a wealth of information available, the novel suggests that many aspects of reality continue to be incomprehensible. As a symbol, *Moby Dick* defies any explanation that can be considered definitive. As a creature that defies perfect explanation or dominion, he is the embodiment of the incomprehensible nature of existence.

Narrative Technique in *Moby Dick*

Utilising Ishmael as a first-person narrator in *Moby Dick* serves as a transformative technique employed by Melville, enabling the narrative to delve into profound introspection and philosophical depth. Through Ishmael's perspective, the story transcends a mere tale of a whaling expedition, evolving into a contemplation that encompasses diverse themes ranging from the scientific intricacies of the journey to the existential ponderings of spirituality. Ishmael's narrative style, characterized by its meandering nature, aptly mirrors the novel's overarching themes of ambiguity and the perennial quest for significance.

Symbolic meaning

The narrative of *Moby Dick* is filled with a wealth of symbolism, with *Moby Dick* himself serving as the most puzzling metaphor in the story. He is the embodiment of a number of different ideas, including the power of nature, fate, the mysterious, and divinity. The *Pequod*, which was a whaling vessel, is a symbol of human strive and aspiration, but the ocean is a representation of the enormous and uncontrollable forces that are associated with life.



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Style and Linguistics Together

The writing of Melville is rich and varied, drawing inspiration from a variety of sources, including the Bible, Shakespeare, and other works of classical literature. The language that he uses is frequently complex and beautiful, and it is full of in-depth observations and philosophical insights. The composition of the novel, which is distinguished by a combination of narrative, dramatic monologues, and encyclopaedic digressions, is what gives it its original and inventive qualities.

Moby Dick is a story that explores topics such as obsession, fate, nature, knowledge, and the human condition. It is an important and ambitious piece of writing. Through the terrible journey that Captain Ahab takes in search of the white whale, Melville examines the dangers of unbridled ambition as well as the limits of human comprehension. The novel is a timeless masterpiece because of its profound symbolism, intellectual complexity, and distinctive narrative approach. It is constantly being analysed and interpreted by readers as well as by academics. In spite of the fact that Moby Dick is seemingly a story about an adventure that takes place on the high seas, it is also a profound philosophical investigation into the mysteries of existence and the ongoing fight that exists between humanity and the cosmos.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

1. Captain Ahab

Captain Ahab is the singularly focused captain of the Pequod, fixated on avenging himself against the white whale, Moby Dick, which severed his leg. He is portrayed as a sad character whose unyielding quest for retribution culminates in his demise.

Personality & Traits: Obsessive & Vengeful: Ahab's paramount trait is his fixation with Moby Dick, which obscures his judgement and ethical considerations. He associates the whale with a profound, terrible entity: "All visible objects, man, are merely pasteboard masks." In every occurrence—in the tangible act, the undeniable action—an enigmatic yet rational entity reveals the contours of its characteristics from behind the irrational facade. Chapter 36

Ahab is both charismatic and manipulative, possessing a commanding presence that sways his crew, especially Starbuck. He persuades them to partake in his personal vendetta: “Aye, aye!” It was that horrible white whale that destroyed me; transformed me into what I am!” Chapter 36

Tragic Hero: Ahab’s fatal fault is his inability to relinquish his need for vengeance, culminating in his downfall. His last moments exemplify his resolute character:

“From the depths of my fury, I strike at you; for the sake of hatred, I expel my final breath at you.” Submerge all coffins and hearses into a one collective reservoir! Chapter 135

2. Ishmael : Ishmael serves as the narrator of the narrative and is the sole survivor of the Pequod. He is contemplative, reflective, and intrigued by the enigmas of the ocean.

Personality & Traits: Observant & Thoughtful: Ishmael offers comprehensive insights on whaling, philosophy, and human nature, demonstrating his profound curiosity.

“Whenever I feel despondent; whenever my spirit experiences a bleak, damp November... I deem it imperative to set sail at the earliest opportunity.” Chapter 1
Open-minded and **Accepting:** He welcomes varied viewpoints, particularly shown in his friendship with **Queequeg:** “Better sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian.” Chapter 3
Survivor and Narrator: His survival enables him to contemplate the occurrences within the narrative: “And I only am escaped alone to tell thee.” Chapter 135

3. Starbuck : Starbuck is the first mate of the Pequod, a pious and pragmatic Quaker who embodies the voice of reason in opposition to Ahab’s insanity.

Personality and Traits: Ethical and Logical: He critiques Ahab’s wild pursuit, perceiving it as sacrilegious. “To be infuriated by a trivial matter, Captain Ahab, appears sacrilegious.” Chapter 36
Valiant But Prudent: In spite of his ethical position, he eventually does not succeed in thwarting Ahab: “Great God!” “But for a fleeting moment reveal thyself...” Chapter 132
Devoted yet Powerless: He contemplates insurrection but is unable to confront his captain.



4. Queequeg : Queequeg is a harpooner and the closest companion of Ishmael. He embodies the archetype of the noble savage, exhibiting both ferocity and benevolence.

Personality traits: Loyal and Courageous: He establishes a profound connection with Ishmael and jeopardises his life for his fellow crew members. Spiritual and Philosophical: Although he identifies as a pagan, he demonstrates wisdom and tranquilly: “It’s a collaborative, shared world across all meridians.” We, the cannibals, must assist these Christians. Chapter 13 Symbol of Destiny: He constructs a casket that finally rescues Ishmael.

5. Stubb Overview: The second mate of the Pequod, Stubb is jovial, unconcerned, and somewhat resigned to fate.

Disposition & Characteristics: Untroubled & Sardonic: He frequently employs humour, even in grave circumstances: “I am unaware of what may lie ahead, but regardless of its nature, I shall face it with laughter.” Chapter 39

Valiant yet Impulsive: He possesses proficiency in whaling but is deficient in profound self-reflection.

6. Flask Overview: Flask, the third mate, is a straightforward and combative whaler who perceives whales just as targets. Personality and Characteristics: Assertive and Daring: He possesses less fear of whales and is enthusiastic about engaging in combat.

Flask is devoid of philosophical depth, in contrast to Starbuck and Stubb.

7. Moby Dick (The Albino Cetacean): Moby Dick transcends the mere identity of a whale; he embodies fate, nature, and the enigmatic.

Symbolism: Nature’s Indifference: Moby Dick embodies neither virtue nor vice, but rather represents an elemental force of nature. Ahab perceives him as the personification of malevolence.

Mystery & Power: “He assigns me tasks; he burdens me; I perceive in him formidable strength, accompanied by an enigmatic malevolence.” Chapter 36 Every character in Moby Dick is essential for examining themes of obsession, fate, and human nature.

Ahab's sad demise, Ishmael's contemplative endurance, and the varied characters of the crew.

Points to Remember

1. Ishmael narrates Captain Ahab's obsessive quest for the white whale, Moby Dick.
2. Fate, revenge, and the limits of human knowledge are the main themes in *Moby Dick*
3. The Pequod's diverse crew symbolizes a microcosm of humanity.
4. It is rich in symbolism—Moby Dick represents nature's mystery and power.
5. The story ends with Ahab's downfall and the destruction of the ship, leaving only Ishmael alive.

QUESTIONS**Multiple choice questions**

1. Who serves as the narrator of Moby Dick?

A. Captain Ahab

B. Queequeg

C. Ishmael

D. Starbuck
2. What is the name of the vessel commanded by Captain Ahab?

A. The Pequod

B. The Rachel

C. The Essex



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D. The Beagle

3. Which bodily part did Captain Ahab sacrifice to Moby Dick?

A. Right arm

B. Left leg

C. Right leg

D. Left arm

4. What thing does Ahab affix to the mast as a motivation for the crew?

A. A gold coin

B. A silver harpoon

C. A map

D. A painting of Moby Dick

5. Who is Ahab's first mate?

A. Stubb,

B. Flask,

C. Starbuck,

D. Queequeg

Essay type Questions

1. In what manner does Moby Dick integrate adventure, philosophy, and tragedy into a cohesive narrative?

2. Examine the importance of the Pequod as a symbol of human society.



3. How does Melville's work embody the influences of Transcendentalism and Romanticism?
4. In what manner does *Moby Dick* examine the struggle between humanity and the natural world?
5. Conduct a critical analysis of *Moby Dick*.

Book Suggested

Melville, Herman, *Moby Dick*. Ramesh Publishing House, 2024.



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MODULE IV

***THE EMPEROR JONES*- EUGENE O NEIL**

Contents

1. **Objectives**
2. **Introduction of the Author**
3. **Explanation of *The Emperor Jones***
4. **Critical Analysis of *The Emperor Jones***
5. **Character Analysis**
6. **Symbolism in *The Emperor Jones***
7. **Conclusion**
8. **Questions**
9. **Book suggested**

Objectives

- To study how Brutus Jones's hallucinations reveal his guilt and fears.
- To analyze the use of expressionism in portraying psychological descent.
- To examine themes of power, race, and colonialism in the play.

UNIT 10

INTRODUCTION TO THE AUTHOR EUGENE O' NEILL

Eugene Gladstone O' Neill was born on October 16, 1888, in the bustling metropolis of New York City. His father James O'Neill, was a celebrated Irish-American actor renowned for his mesmerizing portrayal of The Count of Monte Cristo. Standing in stark contrast to his father's fame and accolades, Eugene's mother, Ella O'Neill, struggled with a harrowing morphine addiction that cast a shadow over their family, leaving young Eugene to navigate a tumultuous upbringing defined by instability, frequent relocations, and the ever-looming specter of familial discord. These formative experiences indelibly shaped Eugene's artistic sensibilities, infusing his later works with a pervasive sense of somber melancholy that echoes the themes of his own turbulent past.

After briefly studying at Princeton University, where he was met with academic challenges that eventually led to his facing expulsion, he found himself at a crossroads. This pivotal moment prompted him to embark on a journey as a sailor and experience transient living arrangements in flophouses. It was amidst the year of 1912, characterized by tumult and uncertainty, that fate dealt him another blow – a diagnosis of tuberculosis. Despite the stark reality of this health crisis, he harnessed his admiration for literary luminaries such as August Strindberg, Henrik Ibsen, and Anton Chekhov. Drawing profound inspiration from these literary giants, he dedicated his time of convalescence to the art of writing, utilizing this period as a canvas for channeling his emotions and creative energies into a newfound form of artistic expression.

Professional Journey and Significant Contributions

O'Neill achieved prominence when his initial one-act plays were staged by the Provincetown Players in 1916. His principal works comprise:

Beyond the Horizon (1920) — His inaugural full-length play, which garnered the Pulitzer Prize and established his distinctive tragic style.



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The Emperor Jones (1920) — A seminal play with an African-American lead character.

Anna Christie (1921) – Secured his second Pulitzer Prize, examining themes of atonement and the challenges faced by a former prostitute.

The Hairy Ape (1922) — A potent expressionist condemnation of industrialization and isolation.

Desire Under the Elms (1924) — A tragic play inspired by Greek theatrical and Freudian psychology.

The Great God Brown (1926) — An avant-garde play employing masks to examine dual identities.

Mourning Becomes Electra (1931) — A trilogy that reinterprets Aeschylus's *Oresteia* within the context of the American Civil War.

The Iceman Cometh (1946) — A sombre, existential examination of self-deception within a tavern populated by disillusioned individuals.

Long Day's Journey Into Night (1956, posthumously published) — A semi-autobiographical magnum opus exploring familial dysfunction, addiction, and despondency. It received the Pulitzer Prize and is regarded as his most significant work.

A Moon for the Misbegotten (1947) — A continuation of *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, exploring themes of culpability and salvation.

Subsequent Life and Demise

O'Neill had despair, drunkenness, and several health complications. In his later years, he suffered from tremors resembling those of Parkinson's, which hindered his ability to write. He passed away on November 27, 1953, in a hotel room in Boston.

Notwithstanding personal tragedy, O'Neill revolutionised American theatre, receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1936. He is considered America's preeminent writer, impacting Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Edward Albee.

Eugene O'Neill: Themes and Style Themes in O'Neill's Works Tragic Destiny and Familial Dysfunction

Numerous plays by O'Neill concentrate on familial conflicts, frequently reflecting his own tumultuous existence.

Long Day's Journey Into Night depicts a family plagued by addiction, remorse, and shattered aspirations.

Psychological Complexity and Freudian Impact

O'Neill examines subliminal cravings, suppressed trauma, and Oedipal tensions in Desire Under the Elms.

Existentialism and the Human Experience

His subsequent works embody sorrow, self-deception, and existential solitude, as illustrated in

The Iceman Cometh.

Realism versus Expressionism

Certain plays, such as Long Day's Journey Into Night, exhibit profound realism. Works such as

The Hairy Ape employ expressionism to illustrate alienation.

Greek Tragedy and Classical Influence

O'Neill applied Greek tragic frameworks to contemporary American contexts (Mourning Becomes Electra). Illusions against Actuality

His characters frequently pursue illusions, only to face stark realities (The Iceman Cometh).

O'Neill's Literary Style Autobiographical Aspects



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He extensively utilised his familial adversities, personal anguish, and difficulties with addiction.

Long Day's Journey Into Night is a precise representation of his existence.

Naturalism and Gritty Realism

Influenced by Ibsen, O'Neill portrayed unrefined, imperfect characters contending with their surroundings.

Expressionist Methodologies

He employed masks, monologues, and dream sequences to illustrate the psychological states of characters (The Emperor Jones, The Great God Brown).

Experimental Framework and Discourse

He frequently disregarded conventional theatrical standards, employing extended monologues, overlapping dialogue, and disjointed plots.

Sombre, Cynical Demeanour

His plays seldom provide pleasant conclusions; rather, they examine tragic inevitability and human anguish. Final Assessment Eugene O'Neill transformed contemporary American play by integrating psychological reality, tragic motifs, and innovative methodologies. His legacy persists via his unwavering examination of human suffering, existential anguish, and familial misfortune, establishing him as one of the most significant playwrights of the 20th century.

UNIT 11

EXPLANATION OF THE PLAY *THE EMPEROR JONES*

Scene 1 The play begins in the throne room of the emperor Brutus Jones of an unidentified island in the West Indies. It is late afternoon, and Henry Smithers, a white Cockney (person from London's East End) trader, catches an old native woman sneaking around the room. On being enquired, the woman informs Smithers that the natives are planning an uprising. After she runs off, Brutus Jones, the emperor, enters the room. Smithers informs Jones of the uprising, but Jones does not seem all too worried. Jones scoffs at the idea that his illiterate, uneducated, and superstitious subjects are capable of outsmarting him. He confesses that he knew this day would arrive when he took the throne, since he has been stealing from the island and hiding a fortune in a foreign bank account. He tells Smithers that the natives believe that only a silver bullet can kill him. Jones states that he has saved money and can escape the island. He has a gun, loaded with lead bullets and one silver one, in case he has to commit suicide. As Jones sets off to escape from the revolutionaries, his mental state gradually collapses in the darkness of the forest. Jones is overconfident due in part to the fact that he has convinced the islanders that he possesses magical powers. After an earlier attempted assassination, Jones successfully constructed the myth that he can only be killed with silver bullets. A drumbeat starts, sounding like a heartbeat. Smithers warns Jones of haunts, meaning evil spirits, he may encounter. The drum continues to beat as Jones travels through the forest throughout the next six scenes.

In Scene 2, Jones has embarked on a solitary journey into the dense forest, feeling disoriented and ravenous with hunger gnawing at his stomach. Despite his efforts, he struggles to locate the carefully concealed provisions he had stashed away, leading him to frantically overturn countless white stones in search of sustenance. It is within this despairing moment that the eerie presence of the Little Formless Fears emerges, taking the shape of insect larvae illuminated by their mesmerizing, sparkling eyes. In a swift reaction driven by his primal instincts, Jones reacts by aiming his firearm and firing the very first of the lead bullets, unleashing a cascade of unforeseen consequences in the heart of the mysterious woods.



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Scene 3 At moonrise, Jones is in the forest. He sees a vision of Jeff, the black man he killed years before. He panics and shoots at him, using a second bullet. 3

Scene 4 The moon is high when the audience next sees Jones. He sees an apparition of a chain gang on which he once worked and the white prison guard he killed. The prison guard motions for Jones to take his place on the chain gang, and he obeys. He tries to kill the guard, using the third bullet.

Scene 5 It is later, during the early morning hours of darkness. Jones appears in a clearing. He is in a panic. He sees apparitions of slaves, planters, and an auctioneer. The auctioneer tells Jones to stand on the tree stump, the auction block. Then he sells Jones to a Southern planter. Jones, terrified and enraged, shoots both men, using two more bullets. He begins seeing hallucinations of his innermost fears, in spite of being alone. As he encounters each hallucination, he fires a bullet from his gun that has the rather counterintuitive effect of alerting his pursuers to his whereabouts.

Scene 6 When Jones next appears, only his silver bullet remains in his gun. He sees apparitions of two rows of black men, similarly dressed, on a ship at sea. The men on the ship wail, and Jones joins them. He runs into the forest, wailing too.

Scene 7 Immediately after, Jones runs onstage to the foot of a gigantic tree by a river. It is almost dawn. There is a rough stone altar, and Jones kneels by it, very frightened. A witch doctor appears and begins to dance. He points to the river, and Jones senses that he is being offered for sacrifice. Jones begs for mercy as a huge crocodile head materializes. Jones shoots the Crocodile God with his last bullet, the silver bullet. The drumbeat increases as Jones lies on the ground.

Scene 8 Back where the forest meets the plain, Smithers and Lem, a native man, are looking for Jones. Smithers tells Lem that the natives wasted their time, beating their drums and casting spells. Lem insists that his soldiers caught Jones, but Smithers does not believe him. Lem says they shot him with silver bullets, which they made by melting down money. Soldiers come in, bearing Jones's body.

Critical View of the Play *The Emperor Jones*

Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* (1920) is a seminal work in American theatre, distinguished by its employment of expressionism, psychological realism, and racial motifs. The drama depicts Brutus Jones, an African American ex-convict who ascends to become the despotic leader of a Caribbean island, ultimately facing overthrow and pursuit by the indigenous populace he subjugated.

O'Neill examines issues of power, race, guilt, and the inescapability of the past through Jones's psychological decline into lunacy and dread.

CHARACTERS ANALYSIS

Brutus Jones: The titular emperor of an unidentified West Indies island spent ten years working as a train porter in the United States before a game of dice spiraled wildly out of control. He killed a man named Jeff over a dispute during a game of craps. After getting thrown in jail, Brutus then killed a prison guard and escaped America as a stowaway on a ship bound for the Indies. Once on the island, he recognized how impressive he was to the natives and exploited their gullibility to become ruler. The play picks up at the exact moment that Jones' subjects begin to grow tired of him and start staging a revolt. Jones is depicted as greedy and prideful, without thinking of the ethical implications of his misdeeds. His misdeeds begin to catch up with him, however, when he enters the dark forest, and is attended by haunting hallucinations about his sordid past. He ends up becoming his own worst enemy, panicking in the face of his own conscience and making his way back to the very place where he entered the forest, where the revolutionaries are waiting to kill him.

Smithers

Smithers, who pretends to be a friend of Jones, is actually a deeply bigoted white Cockney trader. He harbors a strong animosity towards Jones, barely concealing his true feelings. Despite his untrustworthy nature, Smithers plays a crucial role in warning Jones about the impending revolution. His disbelief is palpable when he witnesses the 4 natives successfully crafting silver bullets to assassinate their emperor. Smithers exemplifies treachery and malevolence,



consistently aligning himself with those in positions of power, showcasing his morally bankrupt character.

Lem

Lem, the initial leader before Jones' unexpected arrival, found himself entangled in a web of deceit and intrigue as he spearheaded the insurrection that eventually brought down the ill-fated emperor. It was under Lem's direction that a failed attempt on Jones' life occurred, when a bullet fired by Lem missed its mark. In a twist of fate, Jones, cunning and resourceful, capitalized on the incident to elevate his status among his followers, convincing them of his supposed possession of mystical abilities that could only be countered by a particular type of ammunition - a silver bullet. Exploiting this newfound belief, Lem orchestrated a daring scheme, launching a full-fledged revolution and resorting to the extreme measure of melting down numerous coins to create the very silver bullets that ultimately led to Jones' demise.

Old Native Woman

The old woman is in and out of the story by the end of the first scene, but plays a significant role in the narrative. The play opens with Smithers arriving to an empty palace. When he finds the old woman, she tells him that a rebellion is underway and Jones is in danger. The Witch-Doctor: The witch-doctor is merely a figment of the emperor's fevered imagination, appearing in a weird hallucinatory sequence near the end of the story. He is an image of Africa, a spiritual shaman who wants to make Jones into a human sacrifice to a god-like crocodile lying in wait in a nearby river.

Jeff

An apparition, believed to have been conjured by the native people living in the region, represents a ghostly manifestation reminiscent of the black man whom Jones had tragically murdered in the United States. The spectral entity serves as a haunting reminder of Jones's dark past, harkening back to the unfortunate incident where he took the life of Jeff, a former acquaintance who had incurred Jones's wrath by cheating him in a malicious act that ultimately led to tragic consequences for both individuals involved.

UNIT 12

THEMES AND SYMBOLISM IN *THE EMPEROR JONES*

Conscience, Trauma, and the Past:

Brutus Jones is confident that he will be able to navigate the forests of the island without a hitch, but once he enters the forest, he is visited by hallucinations and manifestations of his own compromised conscience. At first, he hears the laughter of his “Formless Fears,” an emotional state that has taken on a physical form in the forest. As he progresses further into the darkness, he encounters visions of his traumatic past, of the men he killed, and then of the American slave trade. A major theme in the play is the ways that the past visits us in our solitude, and the forms that manifestations of trauma and the past can take. Slavery: At first, Jones’ hallucinations seem to have to do only with his personal sins, but as he gets deeper and deeper into the forest, he encounters a broader historical memory that extends beyond simply his personal experience. After witnessing his own traumatic misdeeds in the form of hallucinations—his murder of two men—Jones hallucinates that he is getting auctioned off into slavery, that he is trapped on a slave ship, and then that he is back in the Congo. His hallucinatory journey is a journey backward in the more collectively held history of slavery, exposing its horrors and subjecting him to its dehumanizing effects. The legacy of American slavery and its horrors is thus a central theme in the play, shown as a kind of original sin from which no one can escape. Autocracy: When we first meet Brutus Jones, he has assumed the role of emperor on a small unnamed island in the West Indies. He sits on a scarlet throne and has ultimate authority over his subjects, whom he looks down upon and regularly calls the n word. In the wake of his mistreatment in America, Jones becomes a hegemonic monster himself, an autocrat who extracts what he needs from a vulnerable community without remorse and claims power for himself avariciously.

Gullibility and Spirituality:

One of the main ways that Jones is able to ascend the throne and achieve power on the island is by exploiting the gullibility and spiritual beliefs of the islanders. An



American, Jones is irreverent towards their customs and beliefs, seeing them as backward and inferior to modern logic. When an assassin is unable to kill him with a gun, Jones tells the subjects that he can only be killed by silver bullets, a lie that exploits their belief in magic and in his invincibility. Jones' irreverence towards the islanders' gullibility ultimately ends up hurting him, however, as he succumbs to some kind of magical and self-defeating forces in the jungle, and is killed by a number of silver bullets that the islanders have made from melting down coins. 5 What Jones sees as gullibility and foolishness ends up mobilizing the islanders and even the island itself, leading to Jones' ruin.

Racism

A major theme in the play is racism. Jones is a black American man who has come to the West Indies only to turn the racism he has faced in a white community against the black islanders over whom he rules. He uses the n word, thinks of his subjects as inferior, and employs other strategies typical to racist belief systems, in spite of being of the same race as the people over whom he rules. Additionally, the character of Smithers represents the racist white man, a manipulative and slippery character. The theme of racist attitudes and beliefs toward others runs throughout *The Emperor Jones*. The play is the story of a black man who occupies an island in the West Indies and oppresses the natives in much the same way that white British and American people have. First, the character of Henry Smithers, the only white character in the play, represents the white man's attitude toward black people. Smithers is ostensibly Jones's friend, preferring him over other black people. This is likely because Jones, having learned from white men, acts more like a white person than the natives around him. However, even though they are friends, Smithers refers to Jones as "the stinkin' nigger" and says it serves him right when the natives rebel. Before coming to the island, Jones was a Pullman porter, working on Pullman trains and serving white people. In this way, he was able to observe white men and their ways. He learned that "big stealin'" earns a person success. Jones puts this advice into practice, oppressing the black natives of the island. The natives speak in an accent and don't wear the type of clothes that white men do. In this way Jones represents the white oppressor, while the natives are the oppressed blacks. Jones thinks of himself as above them, more like a white man. He refers to the natives as "bush niggers." Jones's attitude toward the black people on the island shows self-loathing. He would rather identify with the white oppressors than identify with black people, whom he considers to be beneath him. Both Jones and Smithers underestimate the island people to their peril. In Scene 1, Smithers assumes the natives are lazy or thieves when, in fact, they are coming up with a detailed plan to overthrow Jones. Jones assumes he will easily be able to escape the island, not realizing that the natives are smart and know the forest. He gloats about having fooled the natives with the silver bullet story. However, this has just made Lem angry enough to have a personal vendetta against him. The visions Jones sees in the forest reflect the treatment based on race that black men have suffered in the United States. Jones sees himself sold at a slave auction and a captive

on a slave ship, horrors that his ancestors faced. In this way, O'Neill shows that slavery is part of the collective unconscious of people, especially black Americans. Future generations may suffer from slavery because it is part of their ancestral memory.

Occupation and Oppression

Eugene O'Neill stated that his influences for writing *The Emperor Jones* included the United States's occupation of Haiti. O'Neill states that the setting of the play is an island in the West Indies "as yet not self-determined by White Marines." By this he means that the setting is an unoccupied island similar to Haiti. Brutus Jones, while black, occupies the island in the same way the white Marines occupied Haiti. Jones is there, similar to the U.S. occupiers, to grab as much money as he can. In Scene 1, he tells Smithers, "You didn't s'pose I was holdin' down dis Emperor job for de glory in it?" He goes on to say that he had allowed his friends, including Smithers, to steal from the natives and break laws. "Ain't I pertected you and winked at all de crooked tradin' you been doin'?" he asks Smithers. Then he chuckles, saying he has made laws against it at the same time. However, the laws he has set do not apply to Jones or his friends. Additionally, Jones overtaxes the natives, much as occupiers overtax the natives of the countries they occupied. Jones squirrels money away in foreign banks and plans to escape when the natives realize he is conning them. Occupying, overtaxing, and stealing from the natives is one form of oppression portrayed in *The Emperor Jones*. The other is slavery. Jones's visions in the forest are portrayals of slavery. In one illusion, Jones sees himself sold in a slave auction. In another, he is in a slave ship, crossing the ocean. Before he became the oppressor, Jones himself experienced oppression as a black man in the United States. Although his age at the time of the play makes it unlikely that he was a slave, he was oppressed just the same. He worked as a Pullman porter, a position that required subservient conduct. Pullman porter was one of the few jobs available to black men in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, periods during Jones's lifetime. Later, in prison, Jones worked on a chain gang, a form of pseudo-slavery in which men were sentenced to hard labor. Thus Jones, the occupier and oppressor, was also once the oppressed. Through the visions he sees in the forest, Jones becomes the oppressed again and, with the audience, fully experiences what oppression is like whether in Haiti or the United States.

Godlike versus Human: Brutus Jones became emperor of the island by convincing the natives that he was godlike and only a silver bullet could kill him. He is so committed to this falsehood that he even had a silver bullet made so that if he ever needed to kill himself, he could use it. Jones, however, does not believe his time will come. He has convinced himself that he is invincible and almost as godlike as the natives see him. Having squirreled away funds in a foreign bank, earned through his oppression of the natives, he plans to make his escape, use the supplies he has hidden in the forest, and easily beat a path off the island where he can enjoy retirement. However, Jones is far less godly than he believes. In Greek tragedies, many heroes are defeated because of their hubris, which the gods deem offensive. Because Greek heroes believe their abilities were equal to those of the gods, the



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gods punish them for their presumption. Jones casts himself in the role of a god by claiming that only a silver bullet can kill him. He also wears regalia—a colorful uniform with brass and gold accents, patent leather boots, and brass spurs—that puts him above the people of the island. Throughout the play, the audience witnesses Jones being brought back down to earth. First, his uniform rips. Then he loses his hat. Eventually his shoes become worn out and uncomfortable. Finally, he is wearing merely a loincloth, the dress of the native men, to face the island's Crocodile God. Many of the discomforts he experiences are because of the humility Jones does not wish to own. He must discard his shoes because they have become uncomfortable. Plus, his shoes are likely not made for long treks in the woods. His clothing, which consists of a decorated coat, is not the type of dress that keeps a person cool in the heat. He is generally unable to carry out his plan due to hunger and thirst. Moreover, he discards his defenses. Jones starts his journey with six bullets, one silver, in his pistol. However, in the course of six scenes of the play, Jones uses all five lead bullets, as very human fears plague him. The reader also learns that Jones abandoned his Christian religion, Baptist, when he came to the island. However, he expects God's protection when he needs saving from the ghosts in the forest, apparitions that manifest likely because of charms cast by the natives. However, since he has abandoned his Baptist beliefs, his religion is not there for him when he needs it. Thus, the theme of godliness versus humanity is portrayed here, as Jones is brought down to human level by his conduct. Eventually, with no god to help him and no godlike trappings, Jones is vulnerable so that the natives can kill him.

Fall from Power: The play's plot follows the trajectory of a ruler falling from power when his subjects turn against him. Jones starts the play on the brink of a revolution against him. He has assumed power without any credentials and now his subjects are revolting against him. As he tries to escape through the forest, he becomes more and more disoriented, his royal clothes become ragged, and he loses his mind, until the final scene when he gets shot by Lem's soldiers.

Godliness, Humanity and Power When Brutus Jones crowns himself emperor of the Caribbean island, he elevates himself to the level of a god. His subjects are forced to worship and serve him without question, and he conceptualizes himself as far superior to them in every way. As a final touch, Jones plays into the natives' superstitions by telling them that he can only be killed by a silver bullet. However, after the natives revolt against him and Jones journeys through the forest to escape the uprising, he slowly

sheds the things that mark him as a powerful, godlike figure and must then accept his own humanity. Ultimately he must face his death, as all humans must. When we first meet Jones, he's storming through his white palace and is dressed in an ostentatious military uniform. Both the colour of the palace and his uniform are intended to convey the fact that he's a powerful figure who is above being treated like any other man. The myth surrounding his ability to be killed only by a silver bullet supports this façade, as it implies that he's not truly a human man and is instead something above and beyond humanity. Further, Jones sees the fact that he was able to convince the natives that this is true as proof that he is truly superior, suggesting in turn that his godliness comes in part from his ability to hoodwink his subjects by using their beliefs to his advantage. Though Jones believes that an eventual native uprising is inevitable, he's entirely confident in his escape plan, which will allow him to escape unscathed, rich, and able to move on and continue living in luxury elsewhere. With fear, or the lack of it, established as the one thing that separates Jones from his subjects, the apparitions that the natives send to torment Jones through his night in the forest can be seen as an attempt, first and foremost, to reintroduce fear into his understanding and consequently to reconnect him with his humanity. 7 When Jones first sets off, he's jaunty, cocky, and confident in his escape. He's prepared with sturdy boots, his pistol loaded with five lead bullets and one silver bullet (in case he needs to commit suicide to keep up the charade with the natives), and enough food stashed at the edge of the forest to last him through the night. He believes both that his plan is too airtight to fail, and that the natives are too dumb to be able to successfully give chase. The natives, however, are prepared to return Jones to a human state by reintroducing fear into his emotional vocabulary. At the same time, they've also found a way to reduce Jones from his godlike state by treating it in a pragmatic way: since Jones has convinced the natives that he can only be killed by a silver bullet, they spend the night fabricating silver bullets to kill him. As Jones travels through the woods, he becomes progressively more dishevelled and sheds his uniform, ending the play wearing little more than a loincloth. This is a physical representation of his loss of his sense of his own godliness and a return to his own humanity—in the end, his body is all he has. Similarly, as Jones encounters the natives' apparitions, he becomes increasingly more fearful. He uses his lead bullets to destroy each apparition, and finally, uses his silver bullet to destroy the crocodile god summoned by the witch doctor—a symbolic representation of the death of Jones's own sense of



godliness. By the time Jones completes his circular journey and returns to the edge of the woods where he began, mostly naked and without bullets, Jones is truly human, terrified of what he's created in the natives and scared for his own life. The natives promptly take his life, using their own silver bullets. Though Smithers mocks the natives' use of silver bullets as ridiculous (he is fully aware that Jones can absolutely be killed with lead bullets), there is a symbolic power to it. In using silver bullets to kill Jones, the natives simultaneously kill Jones the man and the idea of Jones the god. Jones's death, then, truly brings Jones down to earth by asserting his humanity and mortality as inarguable facts. The fact of his death exemplifies the cost of believing oneself to be above death and other worldly consequences, and exposes his initial belief in his own godliness—or, more broadly, the thought that anyone is superior to others in such a way as to act as a god over them—as the foolish and dangerous thought that it always was.

Greed & Pride: In many ways, Jones is a tragic hero, even if he is not particularly heroic. He is a man who is able to escape an unpleasant home country and acquire power abroad. However, his tragic flaw is his extreme greed and sense of pride, which ends up undermining him in the end. He sees nothing wrong with his actions and feels remorseless about having assumed the role of emperor and stolen large sums of money from the islanders, which he keeps in a foreign bank account. As he escapes, he begins to doubt himself, but never fully confronts his own sense of remorse, opting instead to muster a sense of pridefulness. It is his greed and his pride that cause him to lose his mind and fall prey to his pursuers. He never truly repents for his misdeeds, which ends up costing him his life.

SYMBOLISM IN *THE EMPEROR JONES*

The Silver Bullet, representing both Jones's overbearing pride and his inescapable fate, serves as a pivotal element in his story. Initially dismissing the idea of its purpose turning against him, he is later confronted with its power, which ultimately seals his tragic downfall. The resounding drumbeats echo the relentless march of time, mirroring the cadence of Jones's own heart and emphasizing the weight of his mounting anxieties. Moreover, the hallucinatory visions experienced by Jones carry profound symbolic weight, each delusion delving into a unique layer of historical guilt and enduring subjugation.

Symbolic Environment (The Jungle as a Psychological Realm)

The jungle symbolizes Jones's subconscious; as he ventures further, he relinquishes control over reality. The atmosphere is bleak, stifling, and progressively surreal, reflecting his spiral into insanity.

Hallucinations and Recollections

Jones's visions are both personal and historical, compelling him to confront the spectres of his forebears. The configuration of these hallucinations regresses temporally, from his own homicides to depictions of slavery, therefore strengthening the motif of an inevitable past.

Rhythmic Percussion as a Psychological Instrument

Throughout the play, drumbeats signify Jones's expedition through the jungle.

The tempo begins gradually then accelerates and intensifies, representing his escalating panic and diminishing control. The distant pulsation of the tom-tom slightly intensifies in volume and maintains that elevated tempo. The stage directions highlight the escalating psychological pressure on Jones.

Conclusion

The Emperor Jones is a profound examination of authority, ethnicity, culpability, and destiny. The play, via its expressionist tactics, psychological profundity, and inventive staging, remains a notable and a timeless thought-provoking play. It is currently acknowledged for its audacious ideas, innovative style, and critique of authority and subjugation.

The Emperor Jones takes place on an unspecified Caribbean island where Brutus Jones, a self-styled emperor, governs by coercion and deceit. Jones claims that only a silver bullet can terminate him, a belief he employs to evoke terror. A mutiny ensues, compelling him to escape into the bush. While he runs, he is plagued by harrowing hallucinations that mirror his previous transgressions and ancestral grief. Ultimately, the rebels locate and eliminate him using silver bullets, therefore realising the prophecy he previously derided.



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Jones, an African American guy, ascends to prominence by employing tactics reminiscent of white colonial tyrants, utilising coercion and deceit. The oppressed locals, his subjects, topple him in a manner akin to the resistance of colonised peoples against European domination. The drama critiques both the colonisers and the newly empowered oppressors, illustrating the cyclical nature of power dynamics.

As Jones ventures further into the bush, he encounters progressively harrowing visions.

These hallucinations propel him on a retrospective voyage through history, encompassing his own transgressions, slavery, and the Middle Passage. His ultimate vision of a slave auction indicates his inability to transcend the profound racial trauma and guilt of his history. “Feet, fulfil your duty!” - Jones’s anguished entreaty as he strives to escape his past, yet eventually succumbs.

The drama implies that Jones’s demise was unavoidable. His conviction that only a silver bullet can terminate him evolves into a self-fulfilling prophecy. His journey reflects the trajectory of a tragic hero, wherein hubris precipitates his demise. O’Neill utilises expressionism to illustrate Jones’s psychological disintegration.

Points to Remember

1. *The Emperor Jones* is a psychological drama about Brutus Jones, a former convict who becomes a dictator.
2. The play uses **expressionist techniques** to depict Jones’s descent into madness.
3. It explores themes of power, guilt, and racial oppression.
4. The play takes place in one night, showing Jones’s hallucinations and fears.
5. The story ends with Jones’s death, highlighting the inevitability of downfall through tyranny.

Multiple Choice Questions

1. What is the setting of The Emperor Jones?
 - A) A diminutive municipality in the United States
 - B) A secluded isle in the West Indies
 - C) A European monarchy
 - D) A plantation in the Southern region

2. In what manner did Emperor Jones acquire authority initially?
 - A) He is elected by the populace.
 - B) He usurps the former sovereign and proclaims himself emperor.
 - C) He is designated by a foreign authority.
 - D) He ascends to the throne through paternal inheritance.

3. What is the importance of the silver bullet in the play?
 - A) It represents the demise and final destiny of Emperor Jones.
 - B) It signifies his authority over his subjects.
 - C) It serves as a talisman that safeguards him from danger.
 - D) It is employed in a ceremony to invoke spirits.

4. What prompts Emperor Jones to escape into the forest?
 - A) His subjects are revolting against him.
 - B) He seeks to uncover concealed wealth.



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- C) He is in pursuit of spiritual enlightenment.
- D) He is foraging for sustenance.

5. What psychological conflict does Emperor Jones encounter in the forest?

- A) He is plagued by hallucinations and his past transgressions.
- B) He battles ferocious beasts.
- C) He endeavours to retrieve his lost memories.
- D) He grapples with navigating his way back to the palace.

Essay Type Questions

1. In what manner does *The Emperor Jones* employ expressionist techniques to illustrate psychological and racial themes?

2. In what manner do O'Neill's personal conflicts with racism, addiction, and tragedy shape the themes of power and demise in *The Emperor Jones*?

3. In what manner does O'Neill's employment of rhythm, dialect, and hallucinations establish a dreamy, nightmarish ambiance in the play?

4. In what ways does the ascent and decline of Emperor Jones illustrate both individual and historical dimensions of colonialism and racial dynamics?

5. Does *The Emperor Jones* encourage or critique racial stereotypes, and how has its reception evolved over time?

Book suggested

O'Neill, Eugene. *The Emperor Jones*. Penguin Books.

MODULE V

***THE BLUEST EYE-* TONI MORRISON**

Contents

1. **Objectives**
2. **Introduction of the Author**
3. **Summary of *The Bluest Eye***
4. **Critical Study of *The Bluest Eye***
5. **Thematic Analysis**
6. **Major Themes**
7. **Character Analysis**
8. **Conclusion**
9. **Questions**
10. **Book suggested**

OBJECTIVES

- To explore the impact of racism and beauty standards on Pecola Breedlove's identity.
- To analyze Morrison's use of multiple narrators and shifting perspectives.
- To examine themes of self-hatred, trauma, and internalized oppression.



UNIT 13

INTRODUCTION OF THE AUTHOR TONI MORRISON

Toni Morrison, originally named Chloe Ardelia Wofford, was born in 1931 in Lorain, Ohio. She is renowned as a Nobel Prize-winning novelist, mainly celebrated for her profound exploration of the Black experience, especially focusing on the unique perspective of Black women. Hailing from the Midwest, Morrison developed a profound passion for storytelling and folklore during her formative years. She often attributed her strong affinity for Black culture to the nurturing environment fostered by her family and upbringing. After completing her undergraduate studies at Howard University in 1953 and obtaining her master's degree from Cornell University in 1955, Morrison faced a challenging and somewhat isolating period in her life. It was during this time that she embarked on her literary journey by penning her debut novel, entitled "*The Bluest Eye*," which eventually saw its publication in 1970.

Morrison is known for her insightful analysis of the Black. She frequently addressed topics of injustice, oppression, racism, and identity through her compelling, poetic prose. Morrison's oeuvre is broad, comprising eleven novels, seven nonfiction pieces, two plays, and three children's stories. *Sula*, published in 1973, succeeded *The Bluest Eye* and earned her a nomination for the National Book Award. In 1977, Morrison received the National Book Critics Circle Award for her work, *Song of Solomon*. Her most renowned and arguably finest work, *Beloved*, was published in 1987 and received the Pulitzer Prize in 1988. The novel, regarded by numerous critics as her finest work, received the Pulitzer Prize in 1988. In the year 1993. In 1993, she became the first African American woman to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature, the same year that *Beloved* was turned into a film with Oprah Winfrey. Morrison's other works comprise *Tar Baby* (1981), her sole short ta

The Bluest Eye incorporates some autobiographical themes. The narrative is situated in the town of Morrison's upbringing and is conveyed from the perspective of a nine-year-old, the age Morrison would have been in the year the novel is set (1941). Similar to the MacTeer family, Morrison's family faced difficulties in achieving financial stability during the Great Depression. Morrison was raised in an environment where her mother sang and her grandfather played the violin, akin to Claudia's experience.

In the afterword of the novel, Morrison elucidates that the narrative originated from a conversation she had in elementary school with a young girl who yearned for blue eyes. She continued to contemplate this conversation during the 1960s, a period when the Black is Beautiful movement sought to reclaim Black-American beauty, coinciding with the inception of her first novel.

The historical context of *The Bluest Eye* is unequivocal, although its literary context is more intricate. Faulkner and Woolf, whose works Morrison was well-acquainted with, inspired her stylistic approach. She employs modernist techniques such as stream-of-consciousness, different perspectives, and intentional fragmentation. Morrison perceives her work as profoundly rooted in a Black cultural tradition and aspires to produce a uniquely Black literature. Her language is imbued with Black musical traditions, including spirituals, gospel, jazz, and blues. She employs a Black vernacular, rich in idiomatic expressions and rhetorical devices exclusive to her culture, seeking to convey that her authentic experience will resonate universally. In this manner, she strives to produce what she terms a “race-specific yet race-free prose.”



UNIT 14

SUMMARY OF *THE BLUEST EYE*

Nine-year-old Claudia and her older sister, ten-year-old Frieda MacTeer, find themselves residing in Lorain, Ohio, during the challenging era of the Great Depression. Within their humble abode, where their diligent parents prioritize financial stability over indulgence, a profound sense of love and security envelops the family dynamics. The MacTeers generously open their home to a boarder named Henry Washington and a young girl named Pecola, whose father's desperate actions have left her teetering on the brink of despair. Claudia and Frieda, empathetic beyond their years, extend their compassion towards Pecola, who, captivated by the beauty of Shirley Temple, grapples with a distorted self-perception shaped by societal standards of whiteness and beauty.

Pecola's return to live with her family not only signals the beginning of a tumultuous chapter in her life but also acts as a catalyst for unveiling the deeply entrenched issues within the household. The strained dynamics are palpable, with her father's escalating drinking habits serving to heighten the already palpable tension, while her mother's aloof demeanor only adds to the overall atmosphere of unease. Episodes of violence erupting between her parents only serve to exacerbate the already challenging circumstances, creating a volatile environment that threatens to implode at any moment. Sammy, her brother, repeatedly resorts to fleeing as a temporary escape, a visible manifestation of the family's underlying struggles and the desperation for relief. In the midst of this chaos, Pecola desperately clings to a profound belief that the possession of blue eyes would miraculously bring her the love and acceptance she so fervently craves, holding onto a glimmer of hope for a transformative metamorphosis of her entire being. Yet, tragically, she is constantly bombarded with experiences that mercilessly reinforce her deeply ingrained self-perception of ugliness and unworthiness. From being deliberately overlooked by the grocer to enduring derision from boys and enduring taunts even from a peer who briefly extends friendship, each encounter serves as a painful reminder of her marginalized existence. The false accusation of

killing a boy's cat and the vicious racial insult hurled at her act as additional layers of rejection and isolation, further deepening Pecola's profound sense of alienation and despair.

In "*The Bluest Eye*," we come to understand the challenging backgrounds of Pecola's parents, thereby shedding light on the dynamics within their family. Pauline, Pecola's mother, is depicted as a character burdened by physical and emotional struggles. Her limp serves as a symbol of her isolation and feelings of inadequacy, perpetuating her belief that she is unattractive and unworthy of love. Her immersion in movies acts as a form of escapism, reinforcing her negative self-image and idealization of beauty. Notably, she encourages her husband's violent tendencies, perhaps seeking to solidify her position as a self-sacrificing figure. Interestingly, Pauline appears most fulfilled when occupied with domestic work in a white woman's immaculate house, exhibiting a stark contrast between her disdain for her own living environment. On the other hand, Cholly, Pecola's father, traverses a troubled past marred by abandonment and early exposure to humiliation. Raised by a great aunt who offered some semblance of stability until her passing, Cholly's experiences left him disoriented and detached. A pivotal moment involving public shame at the hands of white men distorts his understanding of intimacy and underscores his fragmented self-identity. Despite seeking familial connections, Cholly faces rejection from his own father, fueling his aimless and reckless behavior. By the time he crosses paths with Pauline, Cholly is portrayed as a restless man grappling with the constraints of marriage and a pervasive sense of disillusionment towards life.

Cholly's return home on a fateful day leads to a traumatic encounter as he discovers Pecola diligently washing dishes before committing a horrendous act of sexual violence against her. The aftermath of this horrific event unfolds as Pecola's mother, upon discovering her unconscious daughter, responds with disbelief, compounding Pecola's anguish by subjecting her to physical abuse. In a desperate quest for acceptance and validation, Pecola seeks solace from Soaphead Church, a charlatan posing as a mystic, in the hope of transforming her appearance to realize her deep-seated desire for blue eyes. Tragically, instead of providing the guidance she



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seeks, Soaphead Church callously exploits Pecola's vulnerability, manipulating her to carry out a disturbing act of cruelty by enlisting her to kill a dog he harbors disdain for.

Claudia and Frieda, upon discovering the devastating truth that Pecola has been impregnated by her own father, make a heartfelt decision that sets them apart from the rest of the neighborhood - they choose to fight for the life of Pecola's unborn baby. Showing immense compassion and selflessness, they draw on their hard-earned savings designated for a bicycle and instead invest it in planting marigold seeds, convinced that the flowers' growth will somehow safeguard the fragile life of Pecola's child. Despite their unwavering hope and belief in the power of the flowers, the tragic outcome unfolds as the marigolds stubbornly refuse to bloom, sealing the fate of Pecola's premature baby. The turmoil deepens as Cholly, the perpetrator of unspeakable acts against Pecola, meets a tragic end in a workhouse, leaving a trail of destruction in his wake. Pecola, the innocent victim of unimaginable trauma and cruelty, is left to grapple with the unbearable weight of her shattered dreams and the descent into madness. In a poignant and heartbreaking twist, she succumbs to her delusions, finding solace in the distorted belief that her once-desired wish for *the bluest eyes* has finally been granted, highlighting the profound tragedy and loss that permeates her existence.

Critical Study of *The Bluest Eye* and Toni Morrison as a foremost Black Author

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is a seminal work that examines themes of race, beauty, trauma, and identity through the poignant narrative of Pecola Breedlove, a young Black girl who longs for blue eyes to be perceived as beautiful and deserving of love. Morrison's oeuvre is notable not only for its literary excellence but also for its profound exploration of Black identity, history, and the psychological ramifications of racism. Morrison, as a prominent Black author, significantly impacted literature beyond this novel by continually amplifying marginalised voices and transforming the American literary landscape.

UNIT 15

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF *THE BLUEST EYE*

1. The Detrimental Impact of Internalized Racism

A primary issue in *The Bluest Eye* is the destructive effect of internalized racism. Morrison reveals the psychological harm caused by a society that venerates whiteness as the ideal of beauty through Pecola's terrible journey. Pecola associates blue eyes with affection, acceptance, and value, illustrating the early instillation of racial self-loathing in Black persons. The omnipresent impact of media, shown by Shirley Temple, white baby dolls, and Hollywood blockbusters, perpetuates the notion that Blackness is undesirable, resulting in self-loathing and social estrangement. Morrison further exemplifies this through characters such as Pauline Breedlove and Geraldine, who internalize white beauty standards and manifest their self-loathing within their own communities. Pauline reveres the white family she serves and neglects her daughter's needs, whilst Geraldine protects her son from what she perceives as the "unclean" elements of Blackness. The intergenerational perpetuation of internalized racism intensifies the cycle of oppression.

2. The Connection Between Observation and Visibility

Pecola's yearning for blue eyes transcends mere superficiality; it embodies a profound need to be perceived differently by society. She contends that had blue eyes would result in others treating her with love and respect. The motif of perception and visibility permeates the narrative. Claudia, the narrator of the novel, notes that beauty and value are determined by external perception rather than inherent attributes. Morrison's critique of perception of the society beyond mere physical appearance, encompassing the ways in which Black individuals are viewed within social and cultural contexts is a significant feature of her writing.

In Toni Morrison's "*The Bluest Eye*," Pecola Breedlove's tragic descent into madness serves as a poignant illustration of the damaging impact that internalizing societal prejudices can have on an individual's sense of self-worth and identity. As the narrative unfolds, Pecola's fixation on obtaining blue eyes, a physical trait associated with mainstream beauty standards and whiteness, intensifies her already profound feelings



of alienation and worthlessness. Morrison skillfully exposes the heartbreaking consequences of a culture that perpetuates the devaluation of Blackness, highlighting how the relentless quest for unattainable ideals can lead to devastating outcomes for those who are marginalized and oppressed. Through Pecola's harrowing journey, Morrison powerfully critiques the pervasive influence of racism and Eurocentric beauty norms, urging readers to confront the insidious ways in which systemic injustices erode the humanity and dignity of Black individuals.

3. The Function of Stories and Narratives

Morrison organises *The Bluest Eye* as a collection of interconnected pieces, each presenting distinct viewpoints on Black existence and adversity. Claudia's narrative encapsulates the story, offering a contemplative and empathetic contrast to Pecola's anguish. Morrison's narrative method underscores the influence of stories in constructing reality. Certain characters, such as Pauline and Soaphead Church, fabricate self-serving tales to rationalise their acts, but Claudia attempts to reclaim and honour Pecola's narrative, emphasising the significance of storytelling as a form of resistance.

Major Themes

Whiteness as the standard of Beauty:

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* provides a profound and sad examination of the effects of whiteness as the beauty standard on Black girls and women. The novel illustrates how internalized racism and colourism influence personal identity, self-esteem, and interpersonal dynamics through its characters and their experiences. Morrison attacks a society where whiteness is both protected and idolized, establishing an unreachable ideal that results in self-loathing and, in severe instances, psychological devastation.

The Prevalence of Eurocentric Beauty Standards

Morrison underscores the omnipresent influence of white beauty standards in American culture throughout the novel. This is apparent in the white baby dolls provided to

Black girls, the veneration of Shirley Temple, and the persistent depiction of whiteness as attractive and desirable in films and commercials. Claudia MacTeer, a narrator, reflects on her anger about receiving a white baby doll for Christmas, questioning the expectation of her affection for it. In contrast to her contemporaries, who uncritically embrace these emblems of beauty, Claudia initially contests the idea that whites are superior.

The character of Maureen Peal further illustrates the dynamics of colourism within the Black community. Maureen, possessing lighter skin and green eyes, receives acclaim and preferential treatment, so reinforcing the notion that proximity to whiteness correlates with beauty and value. The disparity in her treatment compared to Pecola Breedlove, who possesses dark complexion and is deemed unattractive, exemplifies the detrimental consequences of this internalized prejudice.

Parental Impact and Continuation of Aesthetic Norms

A particularly tragic element of the novel is the manner in which mature women, having internalized these beauty standards, transmit them to their offspring. Pauline Breedlove, the mother of Pecola, exemplifies this detrimental cycle. As a young lady, Pauline is shaped by Hollywood films that portray white women as the ideal of beauty. Gradually, she perceives herself as unattractive and undesirable, prompting her to seek comfort in her employment as a housekeeper for a white household. Her preference for the little white girl she nurtures above her own daughter highlights the profound internalisation of these beauty norms within her psyche.

Geraldine, another character, demonstrates such internalised racism. She instructs her son to disdain “unclean” Black children and preserves an emotional detachment from any reminders of her own Black identity. Upon encountering Pecola, she externalises her own self-loathing onto the youngster, perpetuating the notion that those with darker skin tones are undeserving of love or compassion.



Pecola Breedlove: The Archetypal Victim

Pecola Breedlove endures the most profound suffering under the oppression of white beauty standards in *The Bluest Eye*. Pecola is informed of her ugliness from a young age, leading her to internalise this concept and associate beauty with love and acceptance. Pecola, believing that blue eyes will enhance her beauty and thus her desirability, undertakes a fervent pursuit to acquire them. Her desire is fulfilled in a tragic and ironic manner—she succumbs to lunacy, convinced she has obtained the blue eyes she coveted. This illusion further isolates her, rendering her unable to engage with reality.

Pecola's narrative serves as a poignant critique of the psychological consequences of internalised racism. Her fixation on blue eyes transcends mere aesthetics, reflecting a deep human desire for recognition, appreciation, and affection. In a society that associates whiteness with value, Pecola's dark complexion renders her imperceptible to those who ought to safeguard and nurture her.

Claudia's Defiance and the Aspiration for Transformation

In contrast to Pecola, Claudia initially opposes the veneration of whiteness. She interrogates the expectation for Black girls to cherish white dolls and the persistent association of beauty with fair skin and light eyes. Although Claudia's young innocence protects her from completely absorbing these detrimental notions, the narrative suggests that as she matures, she may also yield to society pressures. This indicates that racial self-loathing is not innate but acquired—a consequence of cultural training rather than an inescapable destiny.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Pecola

Pecola is the protagonist of *The Bluest Eye*, but despite this central role she is passive and remains a mysterious character. Morrison explains in her novel's afterword that she purposely tells Pecola's story from other points of view to keep Pecola's dignity and, to some extent, her mystery intact. She wishes to prevent us from labeling Pecola

or prematurely believing that we understand her. Pecola is a fragile and delicate child when the novel begins, and by the novel's close, she has been almost completely destroyed by violence. At the beginning of the novel, two desires form the basis of her emotional life: first, she wants to learn how to get people to love her; second, when forced to witness her parents' brutal fights, she simply wants to disappear. Neither wish is granted, and Pecola is forced further and further into her fantasy world, which is her only defense against the pain of her existence. She believes that being granted the blue eyes that she wishes for would change both how others see her and what she is forced to see. At the novel's end, she delusively believes that her wish has been granted, but only at the cost of her sanity. Pecola's fate is a fate worse than death because she is not allowed any release from her world—she simply moves to “the edge of town, where you can see her even now.”

Claudia, Narrator and foil to Pecola

Claudia narrates parts of *The Bluest Eye*, sometimes from a child's perspective and sometimes from the perspective of an adult looking back. Like Pecola, Claudia suffers from racist beauty standards and material insecurity, but she has a loving and stable family, which makes all the difference for her. Whereas Pecola is passive when she is abused, Claudia is a fighter. When Claudia is given a white doll she does not want, she dissects and destroys it. When she finds a group of boys harassing Pecola, she attacks them. When she learns that Pecola is pregnant, she and her sister come up with a plan to save Pecola's baby from the community's rejection. Claudia explains that she is brave because she has not yet learned her limitations—most important, she has not learned the self-hatred that plagues so many adults in the community.

Claudia is a valuable guide to the events that unfold in Lorain because her life is stable enough to permit her to see clearly. Her vision is not blurred by the pain that eventually drives Pecola into madness. Her presence in the novel reminds us that most Black families are not like Pecola's; most Black families pull together in the face of hardship instead of fall apart. Claudia's perspective is also valuable because it melds the child's and the adult's points of view. Her childish viewpoint makes her uniquely qualified to register what Pecola experiences, but her adult viewpoint can correct the childish one when it is incomplete. She is a messenger of suffering but also of hope.



Cholly Breedlove

Cholly is Pecola's father, who is impulsive and violent—free, but in a dangerous way. Having suffered early humiliations, he takes out his frustration on the women in his life. He is capable of both tenderness and rage, but as the story unfolds, rage increasingly dominates.

He defines himself as a “free man” because not only does he function on the periphery of society as other blacks are expected to, but he also lives outside the society of the black community and is the constant source of their gossip. He is responsible for the destruction of his family's home through a fire that he carelessly starts, yet he doesn't care that the community looks down on him for this act.

Cholly fights with his wife in front of his children, neglects his family for his social life, and doesn't provide even the barest of necessities for them. He is the despicable absentee father, an outcast in his own home. As a father, he is the antithesis of Dick and Jane's flawless white father. He abuses his wife, Pauline, then deserts her as he retreats into a world of alcoholic chaos. In a confused state of love and lust, fueled by drunkenness, he rapes his daughter, Pecola, and leaves her on the kitchen floor. Eventually he dies in a workhouse.

Conclusion

In Toni Morrison's narrative, Morrison skillfully crafts a counter-narrative by portraying Claudia's unique perspective, challenging and subverting the common discourse surrounding beauty standards. Through Claudia's deeply empathetic and authentically candid storytelling of Pecola's struggles, she endeavors to challenge the conventional notions of Black identity tethered to whiteness. Claudia's voice serves as a bold declaration of resistance, steadfastly ensuring that the devastation Pecola faces is not dismissed or ignored, but rather acknowledged and underscored to highlight the injustices and struggles faced by Black individuals in a society ingrained with biases and prejudices.

The Bluest Eye serves as a poignant critique of the influence of white beauty ideals on the lives of Black girls and women. Morrison illustrates the destructive impact of internalised racism and the influence of cultural expectations on self-worth through

characters such as Pecola, Pauline, and Claudia. The novel compels readers to acknowledge that beauty transcends aesthetics, including power, belonging, and humanity. Morrison advocates for a redefining of beauty that encompasses Blackness in its whole and upholds the dignity of individuals who have historically been deprived of it by contesting these harmful stereotypes.

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is a profound analysis of race, attractiveness, and self-esteem, providing a candid critique of the societal norms that subjugate Black folks. Morrison, via her intricate characters and compelling storyline, underscores the destructive effects of internalized racism while simultaneously validating the significance of Black narratives. Morrison's legacy as a prominent Black novelist persists via her dedication to prioritizing Black realities, contesting prevailing literary conventions, and employing fiction as a vehicle for social and cultural commentary. Her contributions are essential in the persistent fight for racial and literary fairness, guaranteeing that the voices of the marginalized be heard and esteemed.

Toni Morrison as a Prototypical Black Author

Prioritising Black Experiences

Toni Morrison is a preeminent Black novelist in American literature, renowned for emphasizing Black voices, history, and culture in her writings. In *The Bluest Eye* and her subsequent works, Morrison eschews Eurocentric literary conventions, emphasizing the intricacies and depth of Black existence. Her narratives frequently emphasize the realities of Black women, providing them with depth and autonomy that mainstream literature typically denies.

Morrison's works attacked stereotypes and reinvented Black identity beyond the limitations of white-dominated narratives. She primarily wrote for Black readers, deliberately avoiding the inclination to elucidate or interpret Black cultural experiences for a white audience. This methodology underlined the significance of Black literature as an autonomous and self-sustaining legacy.

The Historical and Cultural Context of Morrison's Literature

Morrison's literature is profoundly anchored in the historical and cultural contexts of Black America. Her works explore themes including enslavement (*Beloved*),



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community and folklore (Song of Solomon), and institutional racism (*The Bluest Eye*). Morrison, an editor and researcher, diligently endeavoured to conserve and enhance Black literature, acknowledging its vital contribution to the formation of American cultural identity.

Her work examines the psychological ramifications of racism, illustrating how historical oppression emerges in both individual and collective trauma. Morrison's literary style—characterized by lyrical prose, nonlinear narrative, and profound psychological insight—enables her to portray the lived experiences of Black folks with emotional and historical profundity.

The Legacy and Influence of Morrison

Toni Morrison's influence transcends her novels; she transformed American literature by contesting the literary canon and promoting enhanced representation of Black voices. As the inaugural Black woman to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature (1993), she dismantled obstacles and forged a path for subsequent generations of Black authors.

Her work is crucial for comprehending race, gender, and power in America.

Morrison's examination of identity and injustice remains pertinent, as modern dialogues on race and representation are grounded in her foundational work. Her focus on storytelling as a means of cultural preservation and resistance establishes her as a transformative literary character.

Points to Remember

1. *The Bluest Eye* explores racism and beauty standards through Pecola Breedlove's desire for blue eyes.
2. The novel is set in 1940s America, highlighting the impact of societal ideals on Black identity.
3. There are multiple narrators, including Claudia MacTeer, to provide different perspectives.
4. Themes in *The Bluest Eye* include self-hatred, internalized racism, and childhood trauma.

5. The symbolism of the marigolds represents Pecola's doomed hope for transformation.

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. What is the time period of *The Bluest Eye*?

A. 1920s

B. 1930s

C. 1940s

D. 1950s

2. What is Pecola Breedlove's paramount aspiration?

A. To attain wealth

B. To possess blue eyes

C. To relocate to the South

D. To pursue a career in teaching

3. Who are the narrators of the novel?

A. Claudia and Frieda MacTeer

B. Pecola and Cholly Breedlove

C. Pauline and Cholly Breedlove

D. Soaphead Church and Pecola



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